

# **reThinking unEmployment: Client Follow-up After 12 Months**

T<sup>3</sup> Associates  
159 Gilmour Street  
Ottawa, Ontario K2P 0N8  
613-236-4188



*January 2000*

Prepared by:  
Frank J. Porporino, Ph.D., Alex P. Stringer, M.A. & David Robinson, Ph.D.

# reThinking unEmployment:

CLIENT FOLLOW-UP AFTER 12 MONTHS

---

## *Introduction*

**reThinking unEmployment** is an innovative approach to provision of services for some of the most difficult to serve clients in the employment field. It focuses on a wide range of interpersonal and problem-solving skills that have been shown as critical to getting and keeping employment. The program is a structured curriculum-based approach that combines cognitive skills training for participants with goal-directed instruction that guides them on how to market their capabilities to prospective employers.

The cognitive skills training focus borrows from other developments within educational and psychological services where there is mounting evidence to suggest that such techniques are powerful mechanisms for client change in a variety of behavioural domains. In the **reThinking unEmployment** program, these successful cognitive techniques were adapted specifically for the employment context with clients who have had a long history of difficulty accessing and/or maintaining employment.

The skills are intended to help them better market themselves and to understand how they can be a solution to the employers problems. Hence, the program attempts to promote the marketing skills that clients need to locate appropriate opportunities. The cognitive dimension attempts to give them the “thinking” skills that they need to survive in employment situations – getting along with employers and other workers, learning to problem-solve in the employment context, contributing to the success of the work organization, and maintaining the motivation necessary to want to work. The skills training components are used in concert with a job development approach whereby participants are assigned to job development professionals who assist them in locating suitable job placements. The job development phase is considered critical to helping these difficult to place clients obtain employment opportunities in which they can actually demonstrate the skills they learned in the program.

The program is intensive and designed to be delivered over a period of 8-9 weeks. Generally, participants attend the program on a daily basis and maintain session hours that are roughly similar to a normal working day. The



program is intended for individuals having a history of chronic unemployment problems. In the agencies in which the new program was piloted in the province of Ontario, candidates were drawn from a pool of unemployed clients for whom all other sources of employment programming had been exhausted. Generally, these were the toughest young and older clients who had not succeeded in any other programs available in those agencies.

## ***Our Methodology***

---

The pilot implementation of ***reThinking unEmployment*** was evaluated initially in terms of the program performance of participants and evidence of change in work attitudes, motivation and ability to complete a job trial. Results were generally encouraging. Clients indicated that they benefited from the program, showed positive change on measures of mood and affect and expressed greater optimism about future employment and greater confidence in their ability to handle people and situations in the work setting. Instructors rated clients as having moved significantly in their ability to communicate with others, take responsibility and initiative, work as part of a team and sustain a positive work attitude. Finally, evidence of behavioral change was suggested in that a majority of the clients successfully completed an initial job trial.

Considering the range of employment barriers that these clients faced, we were encouraged but not convinced by these short-term results. Often, immediate program gains can dissipate quickly, particularly with clients confronting a range of real-life obstacles and barriers. We were interested, therefore, in documenting whether short-term gains could be sustained and turned into any more permanent changes in clients' employment experiences.

The present follow-up of clients was conducted in six of the seven agencies where the ***reThinking unEmployment*** program was originally piloted.<sup>1</sup> Of the 39 clients who completed the program, we were able to track and document employment experiences for 33 clients over the period of 12 months following program completion. Telephone interviews with employment counselors from the six participating sites were completed for each client who completed the pilot program. Counselors were asked to review their case files in advance and each of these 33 clients was discussed individually with their respective counselors following a structured interview protocol. The interview consisted of questions related to employment

---

<sup>1</sup> Staffing changes in one agency made it impossible for us to conduct an effective follow-up survey.



barriers, a chronology of the employment status of the client within the last year, and questions asking the counselor to rate the job readiness of the client before and after program completion, and at the time of the 12 month follow-up interview. As well, the counselor was asked to rate the level of impact they thought the program had on each client, and to explain their rationale for this rating. A copy of the interview protocol is attached to this report.

## ***The Follow-up Results***

---

The original candidates for the ***reThinking unEmployment*** program were drawn from a pool of unemployed clients for whom all other sources of employment programming had been exhausted. These were generally unmotivated young clients (with some older long term social assistance recipients) with little if any employment experience of note in their histories, who had relied on social welfare assistance for lengthy periods, and who had not responded to any other programs available in the agencies. The range of difficulties presented by these clients is reflected in the fact that 31 out of the 33 clients were rated by their counselors as having had 10 or more employment barriers before participating in the program. Further, when counselors were asked to rate the “job readiness” of these individuals before the program, over 90% of the group was rated at the very low end compared to other clients (i.e., below the mid-point on a 10-point job readiness scale).

When we examined the chronology of employment experiences for clients after ***reThinking unEmployment***, we noted results that were clearly encouraging. The follow-up interviews documented a range of positive outcomes for the majority of clients.

In reporting these outcomes, we will deal with two key employment issues: access (i.e., did people get jobs) and retention of employment or personal development (i.e., did people stick with their job or go on to invest more in education to open up more employment prospects for themselves).

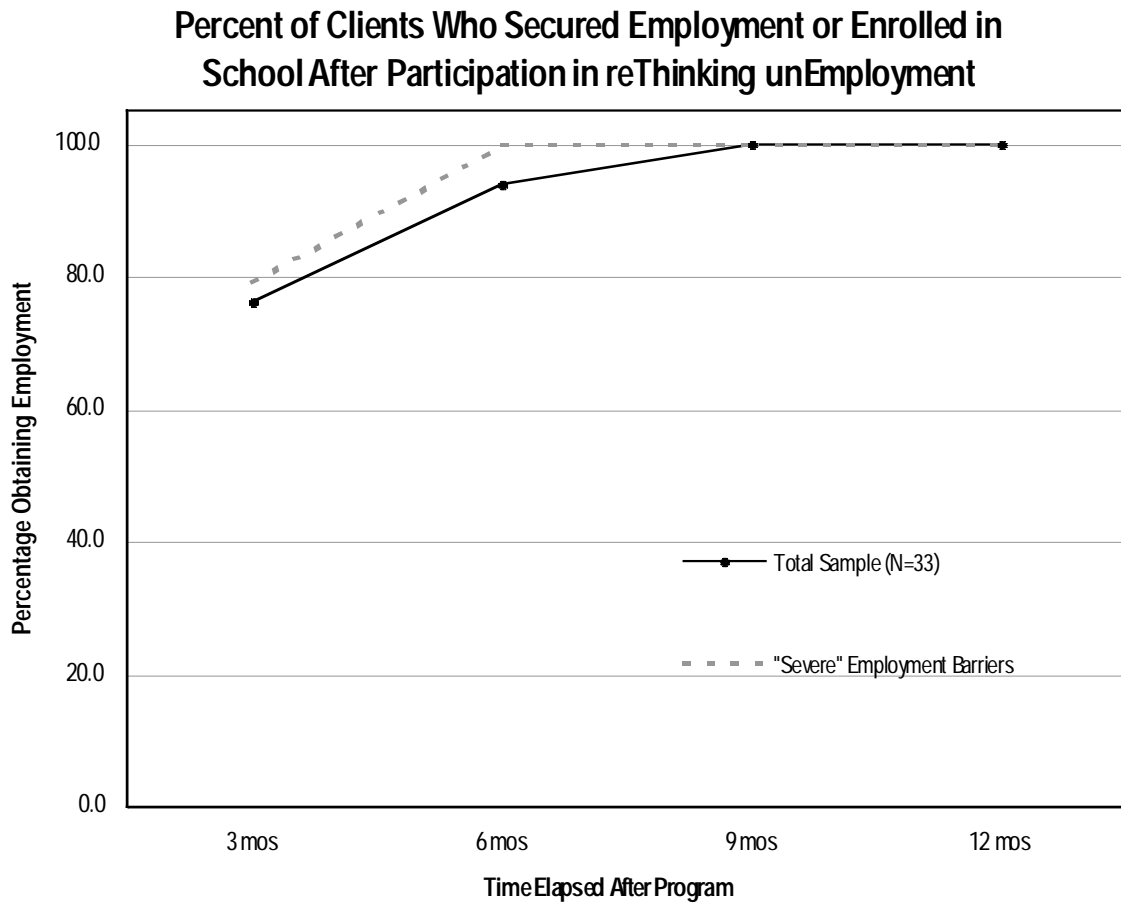
With regards to the outcomes relating to access to employment, it was found that all but one of the 33 clients had found full-time employment at some point during the 12 months following completion of ***reThinking unEmployment***. We also examined *how long* it took individuals to access employment or to return to school.

- The percentage of individuals who had obtained employment or had enrolled in school within 3, 6, 9 or 12 months following completion of the program is shown in Figure 1 on the following page.

- Within 3 months, 76% of the clients had been able to obtain employment or had enrolled in school.
- By 6 months, 94% of the clients had found work or had enrolled in school.
- By 9 months, 100% of the clients had found work or had enrolled in school, and there was only one client of the group who was unable to find work within 12 months.



**Figure 1**



The outcomes that we noted with regard to retention of employment or personal development were also quite positive:

- Only 4 of the clients were ever dismissed or fired from a job during this period of follow-up.
- Out of the 33 clients, 24 held jobs for 6 months or more and 12 of these people held jobs for 9 months or more.

Clearly, these clients found jobs and retained those jobs. Moreover, the level of effort these clients exerted, and the evidence of change in their behavior was also clearly recognized by employment counselors. Counselors repeatedly acknowledged that the clients had changed and were able to give specific employment-related examples that captured evidence of this change. Generally, when asked to rate the “difference this program had made for their

clients”, the mean response of the counselors was 7.9 on a 10-point scale ... where ten was anchored as “A huge difference”.

We also looked in another way at whether the effects of **reThinking unEmployment** had been enduring. We noted above that almost all of the clients had found employment at some point or another during the 12 months of follow-up. However, we were also interested in determining how positive the final outcomes were for these clients at the end of the period of one year of follow-up. Were clients still employed or committed to some form of employment-related self-improvement (i.e., school or training)? If unemployed at this point, was this of long duration or only a temporary setback. Our analysis of these final outcomes at 12 months following **reThinking unEmployment** was again quite positive.

A majority of the 33 graduates demonstrated successful outcomes, including:

- A full **70%** of the clients were either employed or enrolled in school or a training program.
  - 20 graduates were still working as of the twelve month follow-up
  - 3 graduates had chosen to return to school
- 3 of the graduates, or **9%**, had lost their jobs at the time of the 12 month survey but were actively engaged in job search activities

In summary, then, we can safely say that positive employment related outcomes were enduring for 26, or **79%** of the 33 graduates.

For the remaining 7 participants, there were clear reasons for their not being employed, as follows:

- 1 graduate had been diagnosed with severe short term memory problems and was going through appropriate training \*
- 1 graduate had been identified with a severe learning disability and was involved in new services catering to this learning disability \*
- 1 graduate was having seizures and had been placed on disability pension \*
- 1 graduate had inherited a family fortune and had chosen not to continue with working
- 1 graduate had left working and returned to welfare

- 1 graduate had been incarcerated after the training for offenses committed prior to taking the reThinking unEmployment training
- 1 graduate had left work and returned home to be with her child but was not collecting welfare

\* These 3 individuals had either left the area or were no longer being tracked by the agency.

## ***Targeting the Hardest-to-Serve***

---

The findings of the follow-up survey reflect quite definitive evidence of the positive and enduring impact of ***reThinking unEmployment*** on the majority of clients. Most of the clients were able to secure employment and hold on to it for longer than they had ever done before. Immediate program effects seem to have been turned into new employment experiences for most individuals that could be expected to continue to benefit them over time.

But despite this positive picture for ***reThinking unEmployment*** participants generally, one could dispute whether the program actually impinged significantly on those individuals who were the most difficult to serve in the first place. We were interested in documenting any such evidence of “differential” effects on clients; or whether the program worked better for some clients than others. The approach we took was to look at whether the initial “job readiness” of clients, and the level of employment barriers that were evident, had any measurable impact on employment outcomes.

We looked at only those clients who were rated initially by counselors as very low in “job readiness” ... defined as a rating of only 1,2 or 3 on a ten point “job readiness” dimension. There were 20 out of the 33 clients that fell into this category. Despite the initial more pessimistic assessment of these clients as low in “job readiness”, this group did not differ from the total follow-up sample in the time period required to obtain employment. A similarly impressive 75% of these clients had obtained employment or had enrolled in school within the first three months after the program. Further, 80% of this group were rated as “high” in job readiness after completion of ***reThinking unEmployment***.

We also looked at clients demonstrating severe employment barriers, defined as having 15 or more distinct employment barriers that were documented by their employment counselors from a listing of a possible 53). There were 24 out of the 33 clients in this category. Of this group, 17 of the cases were also in the “low” job readiness group.





Again, as also illustrated in Figure 1, this group did not differ from the total follow-up sample in the time period required to obtain employment or enroll in school after the program. Seventy-nine percent of this group had obtained employment or had enrolled in school within the first three months after the program. The average amount of time these “severe” employment barrier clients held employment during the 12 months follow-up period was 7 months. At the time of the interview, 16 (67%) of the 24 clients in this group were either enrolled in school or employed.

## **Conclusions**

---

The follow-up statistics we have summarized are convincing in suggesting that **reThinking unEmployment** was successful in effecting very positive employment outcomes, even with those clients who had the disadvantage of a range of apparent employment barriers.

But statistics speak to some and not to others. As part of the follow-up interviews with employment counselors, we asked them to comment on changes they had noted in their clients. The following is a sampling of those comments.

- All of the counsellors emphasized that they did not initially expect such across-the-board positive results. It was striking for them what reThinking unEmployment was able to achieve with difficult to serve clients where previous interventions had failed.
- More than three-quarters of the counselors noted that the program had greatly increased their client's self-confidence and problem-solving skills.
- It was emphasized that the program brought out abilities in the client that were needed for employment.
- "The program exceeded my expectations" was a common refrain ... "we still keep in touch with each other to this day".
- The clients still talk about the program often, even after a year has passed.
- The program has completely changed the client; he/she is a totally different person now, and has a positive attitude about life and the world.
- The client never had any meaningful employment until taking this program.
- The program helped especially in getting the client to set reasonable goals and a plan to achieve them.

