

AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

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Rising energy costs coupled with the diminishing incomes associated with rural economic restructuring leave an increasing proportion of rural households faced with the heat or eat dilemma—where families must choose between meeting one basic need over another, such as putting food on the table or keeping the heat on. Effective and sustainable energy relief programs are needed to move low-income families beyond the heat or eat dilemma and toward greater self-sufficiency, particularly in economically depressed rural areas. Over the past two decades, devolution has placed a greater emphasis on local solutions to social problems, yet the capacity in rural places to delivery critical services is often constrained by geographic distances, economy of scale priorities, limited organizational capacity, and community ideologies related to poverty and the poor. Using a case study approach and Lipsky’s (2010) theory of Street-Level Bureaucracy as a framework, the failed implementation of Program Power was examined. Program Power, a novel rural Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), was designed as a holistic intervention and proposed the use of intensive case management as a means for moving low income families toward greater energy security and eventual self-sufficiency. This study makes use of existing qualitative data gathered during the *EmPowering REAL Families* (ERF) implementation study. In-depth interviews and observations with

Program Power participants, staff, and community collaborators were examined. The analysis revealed how limited resources (too little time and money) and an organizational ethos about poverty that prioritized individual efforts (motivation and goals) for families who presented with complex needs created work place conditions conducive to the use of case manager discretion, while at the same time also made it difficult for case managers to respond to families using an individualized intervention. We document, in particular, how case managers, in response, used their discretion to make a series of changes to the program model. Findings thus provide insights into the ground-level challenges faced during the implementation of a rural social support program. Recommendations for policy and program changes are also discussed.

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Beyond Heat or Eat: Street-Level Bureaucracy in Rural Oregon Energy Relief

by

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I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

Jennifer J. Maguire, Author

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CONTRIBUTION OF AUTHOR

I took the conceptual lead on this analysis and in the preparation of this dissertation. I have been involved in every aspect of the larger study, EmPowering REAL Families (ERF), on which this analysis builds. I helped to develop the original research design and the interview instruments. I functioned as the lead field researcher conducting most of the interviews and I assisted in analysis and preparation of the ERF Final Report. I initiated the reanalysis of the ERF data using Lipsky's (2010) Street-Level Bureaucracy as a theoretical framework. Dr. Katherine MacTavish played a significant role as the Principal Investigator for the ERF Study, in collecting and managing the data, and in providing guidance during the reanalysis and dissertation preparation phases. Dr. Mark Edwards and Dr. Leslie Richards provided guidance on the application of theory to my analysis.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my amazing husband Jason, and our three clever, creative, and comical children Jaden, Josephine and Juno.

Beyond Heat or Eat: Street-Level Bureaucracy in Rural Oregon Energy Relief

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

I went in with my expectations way too high for the amount of time that I was actually able to put into the program...I thought that clients would call me at least two times a week to get help from me. I thought I would teach them to be goal driven, but more realistically we only have time to be crisis driven...I expected that we were going to have more time to work with clients and more money, but there is not enough time in the day” (Program Power case manager).

The above excerpt from an interview with a Program Power case manager foreshadows the troubled implementation of what was thought to be a sound rural low-income home-energy assistance intervention. The interview was conducted with a Program Power case manager. She was one of three case managers who helped deliver Program Power between the Fall, 2010 and Spring, 2011. Program Power, a pilot home-energy assistance intervention, employed a holistic approach in an effort to alleviate pervasive material hardship among low-income rural families. By coupling economic assistance with intensive case management and access to an array of social and economic resources, Program Power aimed to move families beyond the *heat and eat dilemma*—that is the need to choose between paying the home-energy bill or feeding the family—and toward a place of self-sufficiency wherein they would no longer need home-energy assistance.

Effective interventions that help families increase energy security are critical in light of emerging evidence which links energy insecurity with a host of “unhealthy consequences” including increased housing insecurity and homelessness, food insecurity and hunger, increased incidence of developmental delays and emergency room visits for children (Cook, de Cuba, March, Gayman, Coleman, & Frank 2010) and poorer health for adults (Snyder, 2008). Effective home-energy supports are all the more critical in a rural context where economy of scale

approaches and geographic distances challenge the social safety net (Milbourne, 2010) just as significant economic restructuring has heightened the need for such supports (Smith & Tickamyer, 2011). By examining Program Power as a case study we identify underlying processes that lead to this program's troubled implementation. Findings from this study might aid with the development of more effective rural social service approaches, in general.

The following sections provide background on Program Power and the *Empowering REAL Families (ERF) Implementation Study* upon which this study builds. An introduction to street-level bureaucracy, a theoretical perspective used to guide the current analysis is also provided.

Background

On average, roughly 30,000 low-income Oregon residents receive government home-energy subsidies every year from the Low-Income Home-Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), a welfare program funded by the United States Department of Health and Human Services. In Oregon, that funding is at the rate of approximately \$33 million annually (LIHEAP Clearinghouse, 2013) namely in the form of standard home-energy subsidies. While these subsidies play a critical role in helping to support low-income families, they do little to change the economic prospects of a household. In recognition of the importance of finding long-term solutions, LIHEAP reallocates a portion of its annual federal budget to the Residential Energy Assistance Challenge (REACH) grant. REACH was designed to encourage the implementation of innovative home-energy interventions. These innovative approaches move beyond merely providing financial energy assistance payments to low-income households toward approaches that will reduce overall home-energy use, eliminate arrears and “shut-offs,” and help families move toward greater self-sufficiency. Program Power originated from REACH funding.

In 1996, Oregon Housing and Community Services (OHCS), which manages LIHEAP funds in Oregon, was awarded a REACH Grant and charged with selecting non-profit community action agencies to implement pilot home-energy assistance programs (LIHEAP Clearinghouse, 2013). One of the community action agencies selected was CAA (a pseudonym used to protect confidentially), the parent organization for Program Power. CAA's service area spans rural counties in part of Oregon; both have been characterized by significant economic decline over recent decades. The initial CAA REACH program was implemented between 1996-1998.

In 2008, a decade after the original REACH funded program came to a close, it came to be viewed as a more sustainable approach to meeting home-energy needs for low-income households over providing only energy assistance subsidies, energy education, and weatherization (which were the current practices at that time). The program was redesigned to feature comprehensive case management as central to a holistic approach to home-energy assistance, which also included home visits, personal goal planning, incentives for making progress on personal goals, financial literacy training, and referrals to community resources. Program Power was re-launched in fall 2009; however, it was without REACH funds. Flexible language in the federal guidelines for LIHEAP and Oregon Energy Assistance Program (OEAP) funding allowed for Oregon community action agencies to choose how to spend some energy assistance dollars ensuring that alternative programs like Program Power were able to be funded through traditional energy assistance funding mechanisms (Oregon Housing and Community Services, 2012). The intention of CAA staff was to demonstrate that positive program and participant outcomes could be achieved even without formalized financial support and with evidence of program success, future funding could be secured.

Serendipitously, while the vision for Program Power was forming, conversations between OSU research faculty and CAA administrators were taking place that would eventually lead to the EmPowering REAL Families (ERF) implementation study. CAA has a strong interest in supporting research related to their programming and in 2008 its representatives began conversations about potential partnerships with interdisciplinary faculty from the Oregon State University (OSU) Rural Studies Program (RSP). Dr. Kate MacTavish, one of the RSP faculty members who participated in the study's conversations, recommended I apply for RSP summer internship funding and work with CAA on an applied study related to rural Oregon poverty. In initial discussions we hoped to conduct a study examining a rapid rehousing program, but the CAA's grant proposal for that project was not funded. As an alternative, the CAA Executive Director suggested working with Program Power because OCHS had an interest in Program Power as a model of rural home-energy assistance service delivery. CAA and OCHS staff worked with Dr. MacTavish to design and develop a funding model for an implementation study of Program Power. If the program demonstrated promise, it was believed, the implementation study would provide details needed to duplicate the program in other rural Oregon CAAs.

With funding from OCHS, the OSU EmPowering REAL Families (ERF) Study—an implementation study of Program Power—was launched in 2009 and headed by MacTavish. I spent the summer of 2009 as a RSP-funded intern providing onsite technical assistance for staff working on the design of the Program Power Program and as a research team member planning the methods for the study's data collection. Although Program Power began recruiting families in the fall of 2009, it was over a year before OSU approved the study contract and the IRB approved the project. Actual data collection began in the fall 2010 and ran through the spring of 2011. During that time, I served as the lead field researcher funded by a GRA appointment

through the study. The potential for the ERF data to be used for my dissertation study materialized about six months into the ERF data collection when we realized the program was being implemented in ways that appeared to vary significantly from the Program Power Logic Model.

Program Power's Logic Model (See Figure 1.1) reflects the holistic philosophy of REACH programs more generally. According to Kevin Nehilla (2013), the Oregon REACH Coordinator, all of Oregon's REACH programs, including Program Power, were designed with the assumption that case management is the best approach to achieving long-term energy self-sufficiency. This is done in three ways: a) by helping clients to coordinate resources and community supports so that their energy bills would be effectively lowered and more manageable and energy subsidies could be used to offset actual energy costs rather than pulling families out of crisis; b) by assuming that with energy education and weatherization, energy-burdens would be further reduced; and, c) by realizing that even though clients all need energy-assistance, the reasons determining their need may differ and letting clients drive the process to create personal plans with case managers and working together toward energy self-sufficiency is essential. Overall, the comprehensive case management model assumes that long-term relief is possible when clients are supported by a case manager to learn to manage resources efficiently, utilize energy-saving products, practice energy-saving behaviors and have their homes weatherized to reduce energy costs.

The Program Power Logic Model represents the program in its ideal form. The logic model was designed by Program Power staff and identified how the program would theoretically work by linking investments to results. The *Inputs* column in Figure 1 identifies the resources, contributions and investments that go into the program. Here staff roles and staff time, funding

streams, collaborators and support resources (i.e. office space and transportation) are listed. The *Outputs* column identifies activities, services, events, and products that reach Program Power participants, as well as a general description of the target population—in short, what Program Power does and who they intended to reach. Details related to case management and energy education activities, as well as links to weatherization services, are identified. In the top half of the *Outcomes* column expected *short-, medium-, and long-term* results or changes are identified. In the bottom-half of that column, the logic model identifies how program *results* would be assessed.

INPUTS			FAMILY OUTCOMES		
ORCCA	ACTIVITIES	PARTICIPANTS	SHORT TERM RESULTS 0 – 6 months	MEDIUM TERM RESULTS 6 – 12 months	LONG TERM RESULTS Post intervention
Energy director (.2 FIE) Case manager (1 FIE) Receptionist (.2 FIE) Energy dollars for crisis Outreach site coordination/ referral Research and best practices home visits Community Partners ORCCA \$ OHCS, LIHEAP, OEA \$ Housing for researchers Office Space OSU Research and Evaluation Principal Investigator (.2) HDFS GRA (29) MPP GRA (2) Office Space	What we do Comprehensive Case Management to include: participation selection plan development and needs assessment education advocacy & resource brokering life skills, budgeting assistance, and problem solving guidance home visits interactive skills incentives for follow through Energy Education to include: dwelling assessments small group classes energy conservation products Provide direct payment assistance Weatherization Program Evaluation Research Media Brochures/posters out to the community	Whom we reach 26 – 52 households who have shown pattern of need for energy assistance funding and are motivated to move toward energy self- sufficiency	Energy crisis resolution Participation in energy education and case management education to increase awareness of relationship between behavior and energy consumption Weatherization assessment Referrals and education about CRN Clients form plan for family self-sufficiency	Greater self-sufficiency among households Change in energy use behavior to decrease energy use Weatherization-reduced hh energy burden, payment program established & improved energy payment history Increased use and access to CRN Increased ability to manage income and household resources Equipment is available and operates	Reduced or eliminated need for crisis energy assistance Fewer households experience energy crises within community Households make energy payments consistently Fewer energy dollars spent on crisis funding Decrease vulnerability as a result of developing sustainable resource network Sustainable energy self-sufficiency plan in place Households maintain continuous, safe, and affordable energy service.
			OUTCOME MEASURES		
			1. Areas and shut-off notices 2. Energy burden 3. Access to hh energy needs 4. Housing quality 5. Family budget 6. Access to community resource network (CRN) 7. Outcome Matrix	1. Energy bill histories show a 83% reduction of utility shut-off notices and 20% reduction of late and partial payments 2. Consumers increased hh energy efficiency by 10% within 1 year (selected meter usage) 3. Consumers self-report (ROMA comprehensive assessment) a decrease in at least one cutback of a hh necessity per month to make energy payments 4. Consumers pass the HUD Inspection Checklist 5. Consumers participate in money management workshop & submit 80% of the monthly budgets 6. Consumers increase the # of CRN accessed by 2 agencies or programs 7. 85% of consumers move above the prevention line on 3 identified categories on the outcome matrix	1. Energy bill histories show 60% of participants have an 83% reduction of utility shut-off notices and 20% reduction of late and partial payments 2. 60% of consumers increased hh energy efficiency by 10% for 1 year. 85% of consumers self-report (ROMA comprehensive assessment) a decrease in cutbacks of hh necessities to make energy payments 4. 85% of consumers pass the HUD Inspection Checklist 5. 85% of families participate in money management workshop & 85% of families submit 80% of the monthly family budgets 6. 85% of consumers increase the number of CR accessed by two agencies or programs that move the consumer toward greater self- sufficiency 7. Increase # of families above the prevention on outcome matrix

Figure 1: Logic Model: Program Power Program

The EmPowering REAL Families Implementation Study was designed to collect very comprehensive data in order to: a) examine how the actual implementation of Program Power compared to the planned program model; b) identify specific opportunities and challenges

associated with Program Power program implementation in remote rural as compared to more urban locations; and, c) examine the potential for Program Power to move low-income rural families toward greater self-sufficiency and away from dependence on continued home-energy assistance. Interviews with staff (n=3) and participant families (n=13) documented both program expectations and experiences. Observations made in the context of CAA and in participants' homes along with administrative records (case notes and a record of activities) provided additional information on program delivery.

The findings from the ERF study demonstrated that there were significant gaps between the program's logic model and how it was implemented on a day-to-day basis. The study also identified barriers that largely prevented the program's implementation, specifically demonstrating impediments to case management as the core of these discrepancies, with funding and organizational demands posing significant barriers:

Our evidence shows perhaps most strongly the challenges of implementing the program. Limited financial support for the program and significant organizational demands meant the program was never fully implemented. The case management component, really the heart of the intervention, in particular suffered. As core to the intervention, when the case management component fell short, effects were felt throughout the program (ERF Final Report, 2013).

What we observed in the ERF study were case managers' making decisions, often in response to organizational and funding constraints that reshaped program delivery. In the ERF study we made note of such decisions but did not systematically evaluate surrounding processes nor did we document the impacts they had on Program Power. For example, when home visits became difficult, the case manager decided to move to a model of monthly mandatory focus group meetings at CAA. Program Power families were required to attend, thus shifting the model of service delivery in profound ways. The current study sought to better understand those

discrepancies by making use of the existing ERF data to examine case manager practices in the context of rural social processes and organizational constraints.

Theoretical Framework

Michael Lipsky's theory of street-level bureaucracy provides an ideal framework for the study. Lipsky's *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the individual in public services* was first published in the 1970's. The book was reprinted in 2010 because Lipsky's observations about bureaucracy are as relevant today as they were then. His (2010) theory of street-level bureaucracy (SLB) assumes that to understand policy effectiveness researchers must look at where policy meets the public; in other words, the researcher must examine the efficacy of a given policy by understanding it first at the street-level. Lipsky argues that street-level bureaucrats (i.e. teachers, police officers, and case managers) use their own discretion to make important decisions about how public programs are delivered and this leads to a significant influence over implementation and outcomes. In making use of a SLB framework, this analysis is focused on particular on understanding the circumstances and consequences of Program Power case managers' use of discretion in a rural context.

Specifically, the study drew on the ERF data and made use of an SLB framework to address the following aims:

Aim 1: Characterize moments of case manager discretion as they emerge in the rural context of Program Power's implementation.

Aim 2: Identify specific rural social and organizational processes associated with the use of case manager discretion in Program Power.

Aim 3: Determine the extent to which rural case manager discretion shaped the implementation of Program Power in either positive or negative ways.

The Researcher

As the lead field researcher in the larger EmPowering REAL Families study, I conducted most of the interviews and spent many days in the organization and the community observing what happens in the course of a day. I sat in the living rooms of participant families and listened to their stories. Often, life carried on while I was there: friends stopped by, couples argued, and children needed tending. I spent many hours with the staff watching them work, attending staff meetings, touring multiple target communities, going to dinner at local restaurants and “watering holes”, and meeting their families.

Prior to my arrival at OSU to pursue a career in research and teaching, I spent six years as a professional social worker implementing social services in economically vulnerable rural communities. I observed staff across the service system struggling to implement effective interventions. I noted that service models, often traditional and more urban in design, were frequently a poor fit for interventions in rural settings. Policies and professionally-recommended best practices were recurrently disconnected from what actually happened in the field in ways that compromised social workers’ abilities to effectively assist program participants. These experiences sparked my initial interest in coming to Oregon State University to pursue a doctoral degree program that integrated applied research and policy.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the 1970's, the national dialogue about energy policy has changed dramatically due to climate change, higher energy-demands in industrialized countries, and reduced availability of fossil fuels. Developing efficient energy practices and sustainable energy alternatives has become a regular topic of public discourse. For example, home-energy efficiency for low-income Americans in rural places is part of the national agenda announced by President Obama. In his (2011) *Blueprint for an Energy Secure America*, President Obama includes reduced residential energy costs for Rural America and for low-income Americans. At the state level, home-energy for low-income Oregonians is included in Governor Kitzaber's (2012) "10-year Energy Action Plan" where he states, "more needs to be done to provide low-income Oregonians access to energy efficiency and conservation programs" (p. 25). Broad attention to low-income home-energy speaks to the timeliness of the current study.

At the federal level there is a long history of efforts to alleviate energy insecurity. The Low-Income Housing and Energy-Assistance Program (LIHEAP) is a federally subsidized energy-assistance program that has been in place since the 1970's. It is currently the second largest welfare program aimed at reducing energy insecurity for low-income households (Weatherization programs funded through the Department of Energy are the largest). In FY2012, \$3.68 billion was allocated nationally for energy assistance programs largely representing the payment of subsidies to low-income households (LIHEAP Clearinghouse, 2013). This level of federal investment is warranted as energy insecurity is tied to a bundle of other insecurities (e.g. food, housing and health care). Not having enough to pay the power bill leaves low-income families faced with the hard choices characterized as the 'heat or eat dilemma.' When needs go unmet, such choices have cumulative adverse effects on individuals and families (Frank et. al.,

2010). Identifying what drives energy insecurity in a rural context and its relationship with other life domains is paramount to understanding the significance programs such as Program Power hold as a poverty-reduction strategy.

This chapter begins with a discussion of why home-energy is a significant aspect of poverty. The cumulative and adverse effects on health and development associated with home-energy insecurity are then highlighted as a rationale for the significance of examining energy-assistance as a particular approach to poverty-reduction. What has been termed “the rural disadvantage” is placed within the context of rural economic restructuring and rising energy cost burden to illuminate how it connects to rural energy insecurity. I then consider how rural economic hardships associated with energy insecurity are compounded by a set of unique challenges to rural social service provision brought on by geographic distances, economy of scale priorities, limited organizational capacity, and community ideologies related to poverty and the poor. Finally, I make the case for how a focus on social service delivery at the street-level is imperative if we are to move toward more effective models of rural social service delivery.

Home-energy security as a significant aspect of poverty

In the last decade, the economy in rural Oregon has been characterized by a dramatic loss of living wage jobs associated with the rise in global competition for manufacturing and processing of natural resources, flat remunerations, and job growth in low-paying service jobs (Oregon Employment Department, 2013), making it harder for rural families to make ends meet. Further, rural households tend to live in homes that are older and more often moderately to severely substandard compared to suburban and metropolitan areas (HAC, 2010), which means they are often less energy-efficient. The combination of these factors contributes to rural Oregonians paying a higher proportion of their incomes for home-energy than the average North

American household. When households use such a high proportion of their monthly income towards home-energy and housing costs, they do not have the flexible cash needed to pay for other basic needs such as food and health care. These trends are associated with an increased need at the household level for government supports with energy bills.

Energy security goes beyond households having to negotiate barriers to access utilities and has been associated with a variety of negative outcomes such as food insecurity (Cook, et al., 2008; Nord & Kantor, 2006; Frank, et al., 2006), housing instability (Cutts, et al., 2011), higher health and safety risks for children (Frank, et al., 2006; LIHEAP, 2008; OHCS, 2012), and poorer health outcomes for adults who receive LIHEAP subsidies (Snyder, 2008). Following is a breakdown of some of the adverse effects on families associated with high home-energy insecurity.

To begin, *food insecurity* is seasonal and increases with the cost of home-energy in the winter when households often must choose between paying power bills or buying food (Frank, et al., 2006; WHO, 2011; USDA, 2005). A 2005 study by the USDA found that when low-income families could not meet their survival needs (food, housing, heating, transportation, etc), food budgets were sacrificed first. Food insecurity in Oregon is very high; it has the fourth highest proportion of the state's population that participates in the use of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in the United States (FRAC, 2012). With food insecurity, individuals report reducing the quality, variety, and/or desirability of their diet and/or report multiple times of having disrupted eating patterns or eating reduced amounts of food (USDA ERS, 2006). Researchers have identified the adverse effects of food insecurity on child health (Cook et al., 2008; Frank et al., 2006). These include higher risk for developmental delays, poorer overall health, and higher rates of hospitalization for young children (Frank, et al., 2006).

Housing instability is also associated with high home-energy insecurity. Unpaid utility bills create significant cost barriers to home-energy access, for example, exorbitant fees (e.g. reconnection and door hanger fees) and high deposits. High-energy cost burdens result in unpaid energy bills, arrearages and utility disconnections that can lead to eviction and homelessness (Cutts & et al., 2011).

Adverse health outcomes have been strongly correlated with energy-insecure households (Frank, et al., 2010; Cook, et al., 2006). Dannefer (2003) argues that income inequality tracks similarly to health inequality. Over time, cumulative hardships resulting from managing multiple, partially-unmet essential needs (e.g. food, energy, housing and health care) were associated with a higher risk for developmental delays, poorer health, and higher rates of hospitalization for young children (Frank, et al., 2010; Cook, et al., 2006). Regular healthcare for children is often forfeited to pay for other essential needs, as well. Moreover, Snyder (2008) established that energy security is also critical for adult health. Using a national data set collected by The National Energy Assistance Directors' Association (NEADA), Snyder discovered that almost half the LIHEAP recipients surveyed had asthma, emphysema, heart disease and stroke and skipped paying for prescriptions to pay their utility costs. Almost a fifth of the people surveyed also reported needing electricity for medical equipment; furthermore, of those surveyed nearly a quarter reported being ill in the previous year from living in a home that was too cold (Snyder, 2008).

Energy insecure families also have significantly *increased safety risks*. Smith and colleagues (2007) found that through the winter, energy insecure families have reported using ovens, fireplaces, propane cook stoves, and kerosene lamps to heat and light homes and cook food that increases risk of house fires, carbon monoxide poisoning, and burns. Ironically, they

found that more affordable housing pushed families into unhealthy conditions because it was often substandard. Specifically, faulty insulation, inadequate heating, ventilation and air conditioning appliances, and outright dilapidation cause substantial leakage of already expensive home-energy. What's more, substandard housing further complicates a family's challenges because it can result in excessively high-energy costs from inefficiency. Mold, rodents and pest infestation, water leaks and lead poisoning are among other issues associated with living in an energy insecure household. All of these factors exacerbate the troubles faced by low-income families, and in particular those living in rural communities that are a distance from welfare assistance program offices.

While welfare programs like Program Power that make up the social safety net are designed to buffer vulnerable people from the risks associated with these cumulative insecurities, in rural places there are well-documented challenges associated with social service delivery.

Rural Disadvantage

Public policies are sometimes 'place-blind' to economic and community conditions related to *rural disadvantages* in ways that may impact the effectiveness of public program interventions (Weber, 2007). Disadvantage can be defined as the outcome of a person's inability to fully participate in society, in other words, their ability to have or do things that most people have or do (Commission for Rural Communities, 2006). In rural Oregon, disadvantage is related to employment patterns associated with recent rural economic restructuring and rising energy costs that cause energy to make up a disproportionately high share of many low-income rural households' cost of living.

Rural economic restructuring. In *Forgotten Places: Uneven Development in Rural America* (1993), Thomas A. Lyson and William W. Falk, bring together a group of rural scholars

to explain how and why rural poverty has persisted in the U.S. Together the contributing authors make a case for explaining rural poverty as a historical process of uneven development. In many rural places, people are not able to find employment that would bring them into the economic mainstream because middle-class job opportunities are few when compared to the number of available qualified workers. In rural communities factories have long ago closed their doors to reopen in other nations where remunerations are even lower and workers are less organized. More recently, rural scholars note that jobs local to the area are more likely to be low-paying service-oriented jobs without benefits, which are insufficient for raising a family (Smith & Tickamyer, 2011). Migrating to work in urban regions is less of a viable opportunity as it has been in the past because on-going shifts in the geography of employment beginning with deindustrialization (i.e. on-going recession in the automotive sector in the Midwest) along with technological specialization (i.e. fewer people needed to do the same amount of work) have contributed to entrenched urban geographic joblessness (Wilson, 1987). It is more complex than presented above, but these works provide a backdrop to the theoretical notion that deep-rooted poverty is part of a larger issue of uneven economic development.

Processes of rural restructuring are reflected in rural Oregon where declining extractive industries associated with globalization, environmental politics and technological innovations are driving forces behind rural economic restructuring. Robbins (2005) writes, “Where logging, mill, and cannery employment once defined Oregon’s work life, there is now a scramble for jobs and an exodus of people” (p. 180). In economically disadvantaged rural Oregon towns, most job alternatives are limited to the low paying service industries, “people who drive the busses and shuttles, labor in restaurants, work as carpenters, landscape heavily watered lawns and flower gardens, and clerk in local retail stores” (Robbins, 2005, p. 200). Oregon had one of the highest

rates of under- and unemployment in the nation (26.4%) (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013), where in 2011, 9% of Oregon children lived in a family in which no adult had full-time and year-round employment (Kids Count Data Center, 2012). In rural Oregon, such restructuring has left whole communities increasingly vulnerable and poverty more intractable because good jobs with living wages and benefits are disappearing, high school diplomas no longer translate into employment that covers the cost of living (Findeis & Jensen, 1998), and as the population ages, more rural residents depend on fixed incomes (i.e. social security) (Etuk, 2008).

Economic hardship from rural restructuring is coupled with challenges of rising energy costs. Nationwide, the cost for home-energy needed for heating, cooling and other household activities was projected to climb 43% between 2001 and 2012 (*Annual Energy Review*, 2011). Poor households pay a much larger proportion of their incomes on home-energy, representing a substantial draw on their home budgets. Between 2001 and 2012, the proportion of monthly income a family needed to pay its home-energy bill went up 78% for families earning less than \$10,000 per year (American Coalition for Clean Coal Electricity, 2012). In 2011, low-income rural Oregon residents were paying over 50% of their incomes toward home-energy costs (Fisher, Sheehan & Colton, 2011), while the average family nationwide was only paying 3% (Powers, 2011). Furthermore, Oregon is ranked number six in the nation for households (45%) that spend more than 30% of their income on housing (Kids Count Data Center, 2011) in which a large portion is accounted for by home-energy costs. In the end, rising costs for energy and housing, combined with limited local opportunities for earning a living wage, make it extremely challenging for social service providers to help families work towards home-energy self-sufficiency.

In addition to disadvantages faced by rural residents, a range of other factors complicate rural social service delivery. Edwards and colleagues (2009) identify how the “challenges of geography, culture and organizational context” may be related to how rural communities respond to local social issues. These factors provide a useful framework for understanding the existing literature related to rural disadvantage in terms of social service provision.

Challenges of Rural Social Service Provision

Distances and economies of scale. Challenges related to rural geography have the potential to influence whether a welfare policy may even be fully implemented. Geographically, rural communities are isolated in unique ways. For example, when rural communities are located a significant distance from an urban center they are likewise distanced from community resources and jobs (Heflin & Miller, 2011). In addition, access to public transportation leading in and out of rural communities is often insufficient or non-existent (Heflin & Miller, 2011; Moulding, 2005). Economies of scale (an increase in the cost of providing rural social services brought about by a lower population density and greater distances of travel) amounts to fewer social services in rural communities (Amundson, 2001), too. This array of challenges unique to the rural context often presents barriers to individuals in need of social services. In the end, rural geographic factors create a distinct set of challenges for social workers and contribute to the successes and challenges of social service implementation overall.

Cultural processes

Underlying social and cultural processes may also be linked to a person’s social networks and their prospects (in other words “life chances”) for accessing institutionalized pathways out of poverty. Some research points to poverty-reduction outcomes that are related to a person or family’s social networks and how they interact with a community’s unique set of values and

beliefs about people experiencing poverty. Family names and histories, for example, can linger long in small towns and contribute to an individual's social capital and ability to gain access to a job (Debertin, 1996) and other needed resources. Socio-cultural processes potentially have implications for developing notions of who belongs, who does not, and ultimately who "deserves" assistance (Sherman, 2009; Salamon, 2003; Duncan, 1999). The values and beliefs of a rural community regarding how poverty is perceived and who should receive services potentially shape how case managers use their discretion to deliver services and allocate resources. Underlying social processes may influence how rural communities experience poverty and develop and implement approaches to resolve it.

In *Worlds Apart: Why Poverty Persists in Rural America* (1999), Cynthia Duncan compared three economically disadvantaged rural communities and focused on how community social organization can shape the provision of support and the persistence of poverty. To do so, she examined social class and how it is culturally constructed. In her analysis of one rural community in Kentucky, she described the social construction of who "belongs." In this community, social classes were separated by the "owners" and the "workers." She used ideas rooted in social structuralism to argue that poverty was a result of social and economic imbalances that restricted opportunities for some and enhanced opportunities of others and that these processes were controlled by the owners. For example, a family with a history of generational drug addiction, crime, and/or receiving welfare may have found it more difficult to get or keep a job (Duncan, 1999). Social groups gain power through the monopolization of goods or control of social institutions, and "seek to maximize their rewards by restricting others' access to resources and opportunities" (Iceland, 2006, p. 79). In Duncan's (1999) case study, the local economic elite (i.e. mill and/or store owners) used stories that stigmatized individuals and

families to help justify paying low wages and offering few benefits to employees. Additionally, a lack of anonymity and privacy in small towns can lead to gossip, stereotyping and stigma for people who need community resources (Manning & Van Pelt, 2005).

Similar to Duncan's work was Jennifer Sherman's (2009), *Those Who Work, Those Who Don't: Poverty, Morality, and Family in Rural America*. However Sherman's data collection takes place much closer to rural Oregon. Sherman's ethnographic study focuses upon a rural Northern California community experiencing economic decline from the closure of a local mill. As a result, many residents were left without a job. Sherman examined how *moral capital* influenced an individual's perceived worth in the absence of dependable employment. She found that it was largely determined by how a family gets by (i.e. low-wage work, assistance from extended family, subsistence hunting and fishing, and/or government assistance). Sherman found that there was acute stigma associated with receiving welfare (although unemployment and disability insurance were viewed as acceptable) and this kept many of the study participants from applying for public assistance. It also shaped how community members helped one another, for example, by finding a job or sharing resources (i.e. food or wood).

In the context of recent rural economic restructuring, particularly in communities where demand exceeds the supply for jobs and for social services, case managers may serve as "gate keepers" simply by deciding who receives services and the amount of resources allocated.

Organizational Processes

In an era of personal responsibility (Harvey, 2010), individuals are expected to provide more for themselves. At the same time devolution has created an environment where a greater share of the burden for reducing poverty falls on the shoulders of local organizations and service providers (Swaminathan & Findeis, 2004). This has the potential to work both for and against

attaining positive outcomes for families who need services. While many view these changes as positive, they also create challenges for maintaining an effective rural social safety net (Swaminathan & Findeis, 2004). Direct-service providers have more discretion, which needs to be followed with supports like training and education. Rural human capital and community capacity (Chaskin, 2001) along with devolution (Perez-Koenig & Rock, 2001) shape the way organizations can serve their users.

Rural places often have few people qualified for filling human services positions that require special skills for working with rural clients. The availability of qualified human service providers in rural areas creates barriers to effective service implementation (Merwin, Hinton, Dembling, & Stern, 2003). Burkemper (2005) explains that education, experience and training prepare professionals for rural issues related to dual relationships, conflict of interest, confidentiality, and rural culture. Without this preparation, or without the resources to entice qualified social workers to deliver services in such communities, rural energy-relief programs are challenged to succeed.

The ability of an organization and a community to respond to poverty often depends on the capacity for the organization to coordinate and deliver services. Chaskin (2001) refers to this as *community capacity* and defines it as:

The interaction of human capital, organizational resources, and social capital existing within a given community that can be leveraged to solve collective problems and improve and maintain well-being of a given community. It may operate through informal social processes and/or organized effort (p. 295).

An important piece of community capacity occurs at the organizational level. This would manifest in an organization's capacity to respond to community needs in an effective and efficient way. For example, *low* community capacity diminishes a CAA's ability to connect to

the larger system of actors and processes and represent the needs of locals experiencing poverty and leverage inter-organization collaboration along similar aims to reduce poverty.

Duncan's (1999) work is useful here too because it provides an example of a community with the capacity to respond to local need versus one that does not. In her New England case study community, Duncan found that the community came together around a common aim of nurturing a healthy educated class of workers, and community members were willing to invest in local schools and unions to make sure that happened. Grassroots organizations were supported in working together towards poverty-reduction and were considered positive social networks to be civically engaged in, what Putnam (1995) refers to as *social capital* where organizations invested in schools and positive youth development organizations. Chaskin (2001) views the investments of service and funding from local economically diverse people and organizations as a significant aspect of increasing community capacity.

A case study of rural human services in Humboldt County, California, was conducted by a panel from the Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI) and provides an admirable model for discussing best practices for rural service delivery (Gutierrez, et al., 2010). Humboldt County is a rural county that struggles with many of the same issues observed in the ERF case study communities (e.g. long-term unemployment, steadily rising need for social services, and devolving and decreasing funding). A strategy aimed at reducing these barriers involved developing locally and regionally-based client-centered systems by using local and existing hubs to develop service integration and leadership development along with coupling essential services in proximity to the communities that needed them (Gutierrez, et al., 2010). Social services hubs were the foundation for building community capacity and over time led to extraordinary positive outcomes (e.g. caseloads decreased by 8%, placement of foster youth in group homes was

reduced by 82%, recidivism in mental health and alcohol and other drug treatment centers went down by 78%).

Without community collaboration, multiple organizations serving the same target population risk being ineffective. Edwards and colleagues (2009) found that in a rural Oregon community, when varied organizations serving homeless youth (i.e. government, non-government, social service agencies, public schools, church-supported volunteer organizations) were not communicating and collaborating successfully, the social safety net left youth unprotected because the service system was too confusing.

The transfer of power from the federal government to the states (Oregon Joint Legislative Audit Committee [JLAC], 1998) and from states to the county level as well (Gutierrez & et al., 2010) defines devolution. Proponents of devolution argue that block grants are an effective model of funding because they are flexible and sensitive to the unique needs of place by virtue of proximity between the CAAs that are allocated the funding and the communities in which they are located (Finegold, Wherry & Schardin, 2004).

Critics of devolution argue that, although it creates flexibility and autonomy because it allows states more latitude in choosing how to spend their money locally, it also creates barriers to meeting the needs of its low-income citizens because less funding is allocated. There have been a number of legislative amendments that place restrictions on discretionary spending for state programs (Kaiser & Pulsipher, 2003). For example, block grants have unfunded mandates, and restricted and decreased funding that leaves the state responsible for footing the bill of programs no longer covered (JLAC, 1998). Moreover, the block grant funding does not change with the environment; for example, funding is not increased during economic hard times or by place where becoming self-sufficient is closely tied to the local economic conditions.

Devolution creates greater discretion for street-level bureaucrats along with greater expectations and fewer resources when conducting their jobs on a day-to-day basis (Latimer & Colyer, 2010). One study that compared the delivery of social service policy between a rural and urban community found that the structure and function of an organization as it was shaped by devolution in a rural context influenced how the family policy was delivered (Wornell, 2012). Wornell's (2012) work showed that perceptions of service providers about their community partners were shaped by the availability of financial resources, which were a reflection of local service community priorities. Further, the rural community, networks were shaped by personal relationships rather than by formalized networks as in the urban community. Of particular interest, was the finding that a high level of policy ambiguity in both the rural and urban community led to flexible policy implementation that allowed for the communities to utilize their strengths to surmount potential policy flaws.

In 1994 the reauthorization of LIHEAP added a new section to the existing statute (Section 2607 [b]) which provided an optional initiative called the Residential Energy Assistance Challenge (REACH) grant. The funding was taken from LIHEAP leverage incentive program funding (up to 25%) (LIHEAP Clearinghouse, 2013). REACH programs were intended to "minimize the health and safety risks that result from high energy burdens on low-income Americans, prevent homelessness as a result of inability to pay energy bills, increase the efficiency of energy usage by low-income families, and target energy assistance to individuals who are most in need" (LIHEAP statute, Section 2607[b] [2], 1994). Although Program Power was not a formal REACH Program, it was redesigned from a previously implemented REACH Program within the same CAA. Based on publically available evaluations of REACH programs nationwide, pilot energy assistance programs which spanned a variety of communities along the

rural-urban continuum, demonstrated diverse implementation strategies (LIHEAP Clearinghouse, 2013).

Devolution helps explain the variation of REACH programs. The REACH policy was ambiguous and local organizations attempted to create implementation strategies that fit the need of their communities. However, funding shortfalls also presented challenges to implementation. Learning more about the processes that create the potential costs and benefits of a policy's ambiguity in rural social service delivery created by devolution versus having access to big government funding from the case manager and family perspective offers insight into how devolution, organizational structure and local culture creates strengths and weaknesses in rural social service delivery.

Public policies are not always sensitive to how they may be 'place blind' to local and economic and community conditions (Weber, 2007). However, in an effort to identify geographic, cultural and organizational processes that shape rural poverty-reduction, there is the potential to support local leadership to produce more effective institutionalized pathways out of poverty. Street-level bureaucracy provides a framework for examining how these factors shape case manager discretion and the way rural programs are implemented.

Street-Level Bureaucracy

In 1970, Michael Lipsky, introduced the notion of Street-Level Bureaucracy (SLB) as a theoretical framework for understanding how public policy was being implemented. An important topic that received focused attention was the use of discretion among public servants as a means for examining public program and policy delivery. He defines street-level bureaucrats as the public servants (teachers, public health workers, judges, social workers and case managers) who are the interface between citizens and government. Examining policy and

program delivery at the front lines is critical because it is at the discretion of the street-level bureaucrats to make decisions that have a significant influence on the outcomes of the public policies. Following is a quote that captures the level of discretion street-level bureaucrats have across professional contexts:

Street-level bureaucrats have a considerable amount of discretion in determining the nature, amount and qualities of benefits and sanctions provided by their agencies. Police officers decide who to arrest and who to overlook; teachers decide who is teachable; social workers on who is socially salvageable; healthcare workers on whose life is worth preserving... ” (Hudson, 2005).

Street-level bureaucracy is a useful framework for understanding how the power of discretion can influence the outcome of public policy.

Lipsky argues that street-level bureaucrats often must fulfill the demands of their jobs with inadequate time and resources and while possessing only a vague understanding of the program and/or policy as policy-makers outlined it. This is especially discouraging for human services workers, helping professionals who value being responsive to people in need. However, when organizational factors limit their capacity to be responsive, then coping strategies develop as a way to adapt to the structure while trying to still be effective at the individual level. As a result, street-level bureaucrats use their own discretion to develop unique practices to try and meet the requirements of their jobs while serving their clients; the two aims not always aligned. Lipsky further explained that street-level bureaucrats tend to favor easily accessible and resourceful clients that are in better positions to care for themselves placing less of a priority on clients with higher needs so that their work appears to be more successful than it actually is. When clients do have higher needs and require more care, Lipsky argues that they will choose to pass them on to other service providers rather than work with the client towards a solution. According to Lipsky's theory, street-level bureaucrats tend not to follow prescriptive standards

of practice making service provision inconsistent. He states that over time, street-level bureaucrats become cynical about the ability of clients to make progress, and they begin to modify the policy implementation.

Lipsky argues that SLB's have distinctively influential roles in the policy implementation process (Lipsky, 2010). Meyers & Vorsanger (2007) conducted a recent literature review of implementation research and point out the contradictory evidence in the literature that portrays SLB's from varied positions. At times, bureaucrats are presented as powerless workers who fall victim to the will of higher-level bureaucrats, at other times as loyal public servants in pursuit of the common good even if rules and regulations need to be "bent" or modified, and at others they are described as overworked employees who choose poor coping mechanisms to fulfill demanding jobs in negative ways that aggravate those who created the policy (Meyers & Vorsanger, 2007). Meyers and Vorsanger conclude that contradictory portrayals of street-level bureaucrats actually helps to explain the complexity of the implementation process and drives the need for more sophisticated theoretical models to help explain the process. They add that uniqueness in the local political and organizational structures among other characteristics of policy delivery environments make it difficult to define a single standard for implementation success (Meyers & Vorsanger, 2007). Additionally, they state if contextual factors that influence how frontline workers do their jobs fail to be acknowledged, then there is a risk of mis-assigning responsibility of policy outcomes to them instead of looking towards policy design, organizational structure or other potential significant influencing factors (Meyers & Vorsanger, 2007).

Latimer and Colyer (2010) wrote one of two articles that reflect a rural perspective on street-level bureaucracy and found that cultural and organizational structure largely shaped what

they termed *rural road bureaucracy*, in other words, rural social service implementation in rural Appalachia. The authors found that case managers daily work experiences were sandwiched from the bottom-up by the unpredictable, immediate and insatiable needs of families they worked with (rural community culture) and from the top-down by the inflexible bureaucratic administration (organizational structure). Based on the rural community culture, the authors found that case managers saw themselves as taking a greater and closer interest in the lives of the clients they served because they knew each other, saw each other in the community regularly and that created a weightier obligation to serve the families they worked with. They found that the organizational structure often left case managers without enough time, resources and/or supervision to implement the program as designed. As the only work focused on rural, this piece has particular relevance. The other paper was focused on special education in a rural context (Capper, 1989).

Still there is little known about how social processes in the context of a rural organization structure shape rural program implementation. Maynard-Moody & Musheno (2003) studied how urban street-level bureaucrats assigned identities to the people they served and used these to account for their own decisions and actions. The current study provides an opportunity to examine how assigning identities to clients effects service delivery and unfolds in a rural context. Additionally, it all addresses the question of how does case manager discretion in the context of an economically vulnerable rural community not only present challenges to program delivery, but also create opportunities for innovative implementation strategies to develop? Lipsky's SLB provides a theoretical framework from which to reconsider these factors from a rural lens.

Contingency theory argues that different conditions might need different implementation

strategies (Ingram, 1990; Matland, 1995) and there is an important observation from this perspective to note. There is no single best implementation strategy, the most relevant approach is based on the context, there is no “holy grail” of program implementation and policies will need to be adapted to fit the local policy context (deLeon & deLeon, 2002). Meyers and Voranger’s (2007) perspective supports idea,

We need to develop more full integrated theories of how these political, organizational, and individual factors channel street-level discretion into specific directions through policy design, organizational features, and professional norms and culture (p. 159).

Using Street-Level Bureaucracy to study the policy implementation process is an occasion to observe how low-income energy assistance policy is being adapted in a rural setting. In light of diminishing federal resources and an expanding set of responsibilities for local social service organizations, examining how these modifications emerge and what drives their manifestation at the street-level holds promise for fully utilizing the resources and interventions that are in place.

Given that we know rural places have different organizational capacity, different local culture, and problems of geography, etc., street-level bureaucracy may be even more significant when applied to a rural social service setting. Lipsky’s (2010) work emphasized universal assumptions that could be applied across a variety of fields that could be characterized as government bureaucracy. He used empirical examples and secondary literature that did not focus on building a conceptual framework specific to rural places. Employing Lipsky’s framework with data collected in a rural setting has the potential to provide new theoretical insights to understanding rural street-level bureaucracy.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This study makes use of existing qualitative data gathered during the *EmPowering REAL Families* (ERF) implementation study. These data, comprised of in-depth interviews, observations and program records, provide an ideal opportunity for examining policy and program implementation at the ground level. Data were collected over eighteen months of program operation at the ground level. Data were collected over eighteen months of program operation between the September of 2009 and March of 2011. Field study began in August of 2010 and ran through March 2011. Data by design captured multiple perspectives on Program Power including those of program staff, participants and collaborators. Specifically, these data will allow me to pursue the following specific aims:

Aim 1: Characterize moments of case manager discretion as they emerge in the rural context of Program Power's implementation.

Aim 2: Identify specific rural social and organizational processes associated with the use of case manager discretion in Program Power.

Aim 3: Determine the extent to which rural case manager discretion shaped the implementation of Program Power in either positive or negative ways.

There are several compelling reasons for using the ERF data for this study. First, implementation research is focused on understanding the processes associated with program delivery rather than lending a focus to outcomes, as is the case in evaluation research (Patton, 2008). This study is not a *formative evaluation* (Worthen, Sanders, & Fitzpatrick, 1997). In other words the study was not directly intended to be used to provide agency staff insightful information for improving Program Power, which is what took place in the ERF Study. However, these data, by design provide multiple perspectives (e.g. staff and participant) on program implementation processes and how they unfolded over time. Second, although we identify Program Power as having been unsuccessful at the implementation level, we did not

collect the data knowing that would be the case but rather operated from the assumption that the program was being fully implemented. It was not until late in the data collection that we realized the large discrepancies between how the program was actually being delivered and the planned model. Likewise, we did not approach the data collection with a Street-level Bureaucracy theoretical frame in mind. Rather, the potential of SLB emerged as we sought to make conceptual sense of the troubled implementation after our report was completed. Program implementation is often ignored and seen as external to the process of policy design (Elmore, 1978). Conducting rural policy and program implementation analysis grounded at the street-level has enormous potential for developing recommendations that inform practice in meaningful and practical ways.

Study Design

To document the patterns and processes of the Program Power implementation we employed a study design that included multiple sources of data. We collected original qualitative data from several sources to gain a multidimensional understanding of program implementation including data from program families (n=13) and program staff (n=3). Below I describe how we selected and recruited each study sample and the kind of data collected.

Program Power Staff. CAA staff most closely associated with Program Power were invited to participate in in the study. Three of four staff members agreed to take part; two of three case managers and the energy director. Staff recruitment began with written introductions that briefly outlined the research procedures. Initially we planned to conduct a focus group with Program Power staff. However, limited staff and difficult work schedules made it challenging to find a time that worked for everyone, which resulted in conducting individual interviews as an alternative. Face-to-face interviews were scheduled at a time agreeable to staff. Before

interviews began, study team members reviewed the informed consent document reminding staff of the purpose of the study and why they were being contacted, provided an overview of study procedures including the scope of the time commitment, explained risks and measures to ensure confidentiality, as well as reassured staff that participation in the study was voluntary and not a condition of their employment with the agency or the program. To further ensure that participation was voluntary, staff were assured that no report would be made to administration regarding which staff agreed or declined to interview.

In-depth staff interviews (lasting approximately 60-120 minutes) were conducted and digitally recorded so that they could be transcribed. Interviews captured data about staff roles at the agency, expectations and experiences working with families, challenges and supports, successes, and suggestions for program improvement. All staff interviews were conducted in December 2010. The full interview protocol can be found in Appendix A.

Over the course of approximately nine months, the study team visited the study counties four times for periods of 2-4 days at a time and completed observations of program activities during each visit. These observations (observed energy assistance community outreach in remote rural location, observed energy intakes, attended staff meetings and the annual Christmas Party) and the conversations included further contextualized what we heard in interviews. Detailed field notes were recorded during and after formal interviews with staff and directly following observations of program implementation.

Program Power Families. All families who met the program eligibility guidelines were provided with information about the program when they came into the agency seeking home-energy assistance. To be eligible for Program Power, families needed to have a pattern of receiving energy assistance payments, missing utility payments, and/or the inability to make full

payments, and be “motivated and ready to make positive changes.” A staff member who conducted the intake interview for determining energy assistance determined whether the applicants’ level of motivation warranted a referral to Program Power. Eligible program families were promised an extra energy assistance payment (up to \$800) as an incentive for enrolling in the program.

Recruitment for the study began with program staff making initial contact with families enrolled in Program Power. They explained the study and asked families if they were willing to meet with the OSU study team. They also provided families with a copy of the recruitment letter (Appendix B). All seventeen families indicated they were willing, and staff scheduled an initial appointment with the OSU study team. The OSU study team then attempted to meet with interested families. Despite multiple attempts by phone and in person, we were never able to coordinate a meeting with four of the seventeen enrolled families, meaning that we had a final sample of 13 families.

During the initial meeting with each family, OSU study team members reviewed the informed consent document for study participation and explained the purpose of the study, why the family was being contacted, provided an overview of study procedures which included the scope of the time commitment, explained risks and measures to ensure confidentiality, as well as reassured families that participation in the study was voluntary and not a condition for receipt of program services. Study team members then formally asked household adults if they were interested in volunteering to participate in the study. If individuals agreed, informed consent documents were signed and the initial family interview began. All thirteen families contacted agreed to take part.

We attempted to complete a series of three interviews (initial interview, daily life interview and exit interview) with at least one household adult (although there were often two) from each ERF family over the course of 9 months (Appendix C). These interviews were designed to document the following:

- 1) Initial family background (detailed residential, education, and work histories allowed us to develop a fuller understanding of enrolled households);
- 2) Daily life (day-to-day access of resources, patterns of interaction, levels of social and economic support, geographic considerations, and daily decisions relevant to household self-sufficiency);
- 3) Perceptions of Program Power experiences (interest in the program, engagement, expectations, and outcomes from participation); and
- 4) Expectations for the future (aspirations and expectations related to education, work, and place of residence).

Thus, over the course of nine months we spent on average 3-6 hours with each of the 13 families. Interviews typically ran between 1-2 hours and were conducted in participants' homes, which allowed for observation of household dynamics and living conditions. If program participants agreed, interviews were audio recorded for later transcription by the study team. Additionally, we recorded detailed field notes following each interview and observation.

Families were not always available to interview when we were in town and others could not be contacted by phone; additionally, there was attrition in the program participation. Given the vulnerable nature of the families, full participation in the study was not to be expected. Below Table 1 identifies which interviews they were able to complete with each family.

Program Power Families	Interview Date		
<i>Family Code</i>	<i>Initial</i>	<i>Daily</i>	<i>Exit</i>
ERF 101	8/26/2010	12/10/2010	3/10/2010
ERF 102	8/25/2010	-	-
ERF 103	8/26/2010	12/10/2010	3/10/2010
ERF 104	8/20/2010	12/10/2010	3/15/2011
ERF 105	10/8/2010	12/9/2010	12/9/2010
ERF 201	8/25/2010	-	3/10/2011
ERF 202	8/25/2010	-	3/10/2011
ERF 203	8/25/2010	12/8/2010	3/10/2011
ERF 204	8/26/2010	-	-
ERF 205	8/26/2010	12/8/2010	3/11/2011
ERF 206	8/27/2010	12/9/2010	3/11/2011
ERF 207	8/27/2010	12/9/2010	3/11/2011
ERF 208	10/8/2010	12/28/2010	-

Table 1: Program Power Household Data Collection Summary
Note: "-" indicates that participant was not interviewed

Administrative Data on Program Power Families and Program Activities. Agency and Program Power staff, as part of the general program record keeping, documented on-going interactions with ERF families through electronic and hand-written case notes and kept detailed records of program participation. In all, program records provided general demographic characteristics (household composition, employment, education, residential tenure, and income), measures of economic stability/vulnerability (income to expenses ratios, energy cost burden, patterns of delinquency on bills across time), patterns of public assistance use over time, comprehensive case notes that document intake interviews, family goals, staff contacts, home-energy assessment results, and resource use (classes attended, resources utilized, etc.). All of the above information was released to the study team in an identifiable format (names included). These data thus provided us with detailed historical information about the families and their

interactions with the agency's energy division and Program Power that supplemented our interview and observation data.

Archival Records & Census Data. Data from the US Census and community archives (in the form of local newspaper called *The Globe* and local place specific webpages) was used to extend and corroborate interview, observational and administrative data.

Data Analysis

In qualitative approaches, analysis often starts at the beginning of data collection and endures throughout the writing process (Charmaz, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Morse, 2000). In the case of the ERF data, we have already worked through an analysis of the program's implementation primarily focused on describing how the program was implemented and identified barriers to that process. I employed a grounded approach to the re-analysis of that data using Lipsky's (2010) street-level bureaucracy as theoretical framework that guided my focus on the use of case manager discretion.

Specific Analysis Strategies for Aims

Aim 1: Characterize moments of case manager discretion as they emerge in the rural context of Program Power's implementation.

Lipsky's (2010) SLB identifies case manager discretion as paramount to understanding program implementation. As a first step toward analysis, I drew on interview transcriptions, field notes, and program records to identify 'moments of discretion'—that is, points at which case managers made decisions which affected program implementation. For example, in the ERF Final Report a table of administrative data [Appendix E] identified how home visits trailed off over time. We learned through case manager interviews and program observations that monthly group meetings were added to the program requirements to meet the face-to-face requirement

without having to drive out to homes. As a first step in analysis, I drew on our multiple data sources to map how these moments of discretion emerged over time. The criteria I used to establish the initial characterization of these moments included moments when case managers systematically acted outside of the logic model during implementation.

Aim 2: Identify specific rural social and organizational processes associated with the use of case manager discretion in Program Power.

Once moments of discretion were identified, I examined co-occurring social and organizational processes. Dunier's (2001) principle of following the data provided a practical guide for this part of the analysis. Triangulation using multiple sources of data proved very helpful in confirming patterns. For example, the administrative data show that home visits trailed off. Based on interviews with case managers, we learned that the energy season brought intensified demands for the small staff at CAA. CAA did not have enough staff to meet the acute rise in demand and Program Power staff were often recruited to conduct intakes for energy assistance during the time they were to have made home visits. Energy season lasts for approximately four months and seemed to have a ripple effect on Program Power services. When untenable decisions had to be made, I examined how case managers used their discretion to make choices. I coded for co-occurring organizational processes that lead me to identify the conditions surrounding case manager discretion.

Aim 3: Determine the extent to which rural case manager discretion shaped the implementation of Program Power.

This aim provided an opportunity to fully utilize the family interview data. To meet this aim, I reviewed and coded the family interview data to examine how moments of case manager discretion shaped the experiences and expectations of Program Power families. For example,

during data collection we observed a discrepancy between families' expectations of Program Power and the services they actually received. As home visits trailed off, case managers decided to implement monthly meetings they termed "focus groups." Program Power families were required to attend such meetings. Nonattendance was viewed as non-compliance and families were told they would be dropped from the program. Interviews with Program Power families reveal the impact of this shift on their capacity to be engaged in the program. Transportation and child care struggles, along with work schedule conflict made focus group attendance difficult for some families even when they wanted to attend. Examining how Program Power participant experiences intersected with case manager discretion provides another level of understanding about how rural social service delivery is shaped and reshaped.

Chapter 4: Program Power Families

Families served as a critical component in the Program Power logic model. The program design called for serving 25 households who: 1) evidenced a pattern of on-going need for energy assistance, 2) were motivated to move toward greater energy self-sufficiency, and 3) resided in both central and more remote areas of the two study counties. These criteria were logical given the philosophical underpinnings of the program that assumed home-energy insecurity is only one issue in a host of others related to the larger problem of poverty. In addition, the final criterion was in response to the intent to evaluate Program Power as a model for reducing home-energy assistance and promoting greater self-sufficiency in rural as compared to urban Oregon. Program Power enrollment grew from an initial two households in December of 2009 to a total of 17 families by September 2010.

This chapter documents how the 13 of 17 families who participated in the ERF study met Program Power enrollment criteria and then tracks how the expectations of families match with the program experiences they report. The other four families could not be reached. The first family did not live at the listed address, the parent in the second family was having chronic health issues, the other two families did not return recruitment phone calls. Program records including intake data and case notes are combined with data collected from interviews with individual families. A general understanding of Program Power families as well as a glimpse into their experiences in the program provides important context for understanding the circumstances under which the program implementation took place.

Criteria 1: Needing help, again.

An initial referral to Program Power indicated a household having exhibited a chronic pattern of energy assistance. Indeed, by the time families reached the referral process for

Program Power, most were financially on the edge. Three of the thirteen families interviewed were in-crisis at the time of referral, having 24-hour shut-off notices from the power company. Another five had past due bills, and three more had no way to pay their current bill in full. Some owed in excess of a thousand dollars in past due energy bills. Rent, car payments, insurance and medical bills were often overdue and growing as well.

As part of the intake process, CAA staff asked families to report on their current status across six domains included in the Results Oriented Measurement Approach or ROMA, an instrument used nationally by community action agencies (See Matrix in Appendix X). Families' responses in that interview reveal the level of need underlying an energy crisis within Program Power households (See Table in Appendix X).

All 13 households met the official federal poverty guidelines with over half (7 of 13 or 46%) experiencing *deep poverty* having incomes less than 50% of the National Poverty Threshold. Household incomes averaged under \$800 per month, but ranged from no income (3 of the 13 or 23%) to earnings of approximately \$1800 per month (2 of the 13 or 15%). Incomes resulted from full-time, year-round work in only two households and from part-time work among three more. Adults in the remaining households were unemployed. In three households, adults were currently out of the labor market and in school full time.

Employment patterns were indicative of the "new rural economy" where low-paying service sector jobs occupied primarily by women prevail (Smith, 2011), and living wages jobs once held mostly by men in the timber and fishing industries have declined (Lichter & Graefe, 2011). Work included entry-level positions in health care, a call center, and service and tourism related jobs, usually without benefits. Wages that topped out at 12 dollars an hour did not move the family out of poverty. Further, only one job across the full sample offered access to benefits

such as health care. Employment histories showed that while adults in half of the households have at some point maintained a job for more than 6-months (an indication of the capacity for job stability) long bouts of unemployment characterize the situations of at least one adult in half (7 of the 13 or 54%) households. Chronic health concerns (for 5 of the 7 or 71%) most often explained periods of limited work or unemployment. In one such household, a mother had steady employment until two years prior when a health condition requiring surgery and an extended recovery period meant leaving her position. Health challenges have persisted and she has not been able to return to work. On top of the loss of income from her job, the family faces significant medical debt from her health conditions. Thus, Program Power families' overall financial stability was complicated by patterns of unemployment and underemployment in a local job market characterized by the perpetual decline of living-wage jobs (i.e. in the natural resource extraction industries).

In the context of unstable employment and inadequate incomes, beyond energy expenses, housing costs emerged as a significant draw on family incomes. Four of the 13 were living in housing that is unaffordable, substandard and/or they are homeless (this can also mean living doubled up with family or friends). One of the four was in the process of trying to buy a home through a contract sale from a relative, but by the end of the study, they were losing their home because they could not make the payments. For eight more households, housing consumed more than 30% of their monthly budget making them officially *housing-cost burdened* even before utility costs. Only one household lived in housing that would meet the classification of adequate meaning it was affordable (subsidized), safe and adequate to the family's needs (MacTavish, Ziebarth and George forthcoming). None of the families interviewed had attained the "American Dream" of conventional homeownership.

There were a cluster of other factors that complicated the family budget. Only 8 of 13 families had an adult in the household who had earned a high school degree. In a move to raise their prospects, three of the mothers (of the eight adults with a high school degree) were full-time students at the local community college at the time they entered the program. Transportation represents another area of high need among the households interviewed, where over half (7 of the 13) of the families had an adult in the household who lacked a driver's license, insurance and/or access to a reliable vehicle. For three more, their current form of transportation (car payments, gas and insurance) was unaffordable and/or unreliable. Only one household interviewed had affordable, reliable transportation along with a valid driver license and insurance. Of the ten households who needed childcare, three used Head Start, six had a family member who provided childcare and 1 mother provided in-home care for friend's children so that she could stay home with her own children. Parents who lacked education, reliable transportation, and affordable childcare faced major obstacles to moving toward self-sufficiency or even stability.

Without adequate means to pay the bills, most families were faced with hard choices. As an additional part of the intake interview, Program Power staff asked families what they were already doing to cut back on their energy use. During one of our interviews, a mother was quick to recount what she had included as energy-saving strategies:

“All the kids all sleep in footy pajamas...the kids (there are four) bath together to save on hot water costs...[My husband] skips showers, he only takes one every other day and he hates this, but heating water just costs too much, and we try not to use the heater unless we have to.” (ERF 201, 8/25/2010)

One of the families interviewed was living in a house that had previously been condemned. The owner of the house was a good friend of the husband's ex-employer (who we

heard in the interview was regretful about laying him off from a “good job” in the agriculture industry). The friend let this family move in for a bargain, \$800 per month for a big house on over an acre, with the agreement that the family would fix-up the place. The couple recounted how they had put a lot of work into the house, “when we moved in the house was falling down, it had been vacant for ten years, and a lot of vandalism had been done. We completely renovated it ourselves.” The family has been living there for over 8 years. Both adults in the home had gone from working full-time to being unemployed (she lost her job for health-related issues and he because of the decline in demand for labor in the agriculture industry). Their income disappeared but their power bill remained high—between \$100-260 per month. Even though the house was large, five bedrooms and two bathrooms, when the field researchers were given a tour, the mother explained they did not use most of the house because it cost too much to heat. She said,

“It is a very drafty house that needs insulation and window replacements. The walls are stucco and peeling, the windows are all single pane, the sub-flooring is covered by carpet with no padding and is ripping up in some places” (ERF 205, 3/11/2011).

She also emphasized that they did not have cable or internet and only recently had their phone reconnected after a long disconnection. She explained that usually they cut out every non-essential expense in order to just meet their basic needs. She said sometimes it comes down to decisions such as what is more important “toilet paper or shampoo?”

Combined, these data make it clear that the families enrolled in Program Power not only evidenced a chronic need for energy assistance, but most faced a set of significant and complex challenges in reducing that dependence and moving toward greater self-sufficiency.

Criteria 2: Being motivated

The second criteria for program inclusion asked that families show a motivation to move toward greater self-sufficiency. Assessing motivation proved trickier than establishing chronic

need for energy assistance. Program Power staff explain how motivation was conceptualized.

One staff explained:

“Number one is that they have a goal, we don’t care what the goal is, I mean, part of being a motivated person is being a dreamer. You gotta dream to get somewhere, so if you have a dream that we can help you get to, and then being willing to, well, I think when we present Program Power, it is important they understand that it is dependent on them to do something. That is the motivation we are looking for...It is that they are willing to take a look at their situation and take control, and instead of control being in our court, it is back in their court” (ERF staff, 12/10/2010).

Another reported:

“We want people who take pride in their accomplishments and who are making goals already...for example are they having thoughts that go beyond, ‘I’m going to Wal-Mart tomorrow’ or do they have unrealistic expectations like ‘I am going to start college someday’ without any type of plan...we are looking more for people that are like, ‘I had a plan but I was derailed’ or that are very young and don’t know what they want to be yet” (ERF staff, 12/10/2010).

Yet while shared ideas about what constituted motivation were clear in the words of staff and generally included people having goals and expressing a willingness to work toward them, determining who met the criteria seemed an individualized practice. A case manager offered the following insights on how she determines motivation:

“It is really hard to make a call about whether the family is suitable for the program. It is part instinct, I look at their eyes, some people are very animated, but some others are quieter and need to be listened to. It is one of those things with case management, figuring out if the families are going to follow through, because we are investing a lot of money and time into them. Sometimes ones (families or households) we thought were going to be great aren’t, while others who we would have thought won’t succeed do. People who understand what Program Power is and what is required ahead of time will be successful because they know what they are getting into. People who just want the extra crisis payment won’t want to do the work required” (ERF staff, 12/15/2010).

The above case manager acknowledges that determining motivation is a bit risky in that sometimes you may get it wrong. Still, referral notes from case managers to program administrators deemed all thirteen families as motivated. All families were described using the

word *motivation* or some other similarly descriptive term of phrase. For example, on one referral it was written, “she is very motivated and knows what she wants to do with her life” (ERF 206, 7/21/2010). On a referral for another family the case manager wrote, “[she] is highly motivated. She wants to find employment and be financially secure” (ERF 208, 5/5/2010).

In our own interviews with families, we documented motivation as well. All the families shared that they were motivated to some degree by the extra energy assistance payments that were promised and this made sense given that all the families were financially “strapped.” In speaking about assistance with an overdue bill totaling over \$1000, one mother expressed a common sentiment saying, “That [the direct assistance payment] provided this window of time...it gave me a reprieve- that’s the word...a hold, so I didn’t need to panic” (ERF 101, 3/10/2011). Families made clear the value of a break; a moment to catch their breath, to have something seemingly unmanageable taken care of.

Yet most families (9 of 13 or 69%) spoke of a motivation to have their lives change in bigger ways. Gaining full time employment (5 of the 13), owning a business (5 of the 13), returning to school (4 of the 13) and becoming financially better off (3 of 13) were identified as hopes for the future. While hopes were clear, families readily acknowledged that attaining such dreams would not be easy. A single mother of four explained,

“I wanted to go back to school it is just that I am finding it really hard right now...to try and work because I won’t have any money if I don’t work and go to school at the same time, it is just really hard...I need to do it because I am already 30 and I want to be an RN and that is a lot more money to be an RN...I wasn’t expecting to have another baby. I was waiting until my kids were old enough to be in school all day like they are now because it would be much easier, but then [and she looks down at her youngest son sighs] ya know. Eventually I will. There is a guy the same age as me who just got his RN and is making \$38 per hour at the hospital. I don’t ever see myself doing anything different [than healthcare], eventually I will go on. I am 30 now and I just don’t want to do it when I am 40” (ERF 105, 12/11/2010).

Her hope in enrolling in Program Power was that she might find some immediate help in managing past due bills while she waited for an easier time to return to school.

Still, there were two families among the thirteen that seemed to face too many barriers to think about realistically overcoming them. They had largely given up hope that their financial lives would ever be any different. When the researcher asked if she was ready to exit the program she said,

“ I would like to say yes, but everything is still so unstable...I would like to see [my husband’s] job be stable and to be caught up on our bills...but I don’t know, we are never going to have enough, we are poor, that is just who we are” (ERF 201, 3/10/2011).

Program Power families, for the most part, thus exhibit the kind of motivation or goal-based thinking defined in the second criteria.

Criteria 3: Being rural and more rural

As a third criterion, the program sought to recruit families from both the more central areas of the counties as well as from more remote locations. This criterion in particular reflected the desire to have this program operate as a model for promoting greater energy self-sufficiency in rural and remote areas. While just over half of the households (7 of the 13) resided in the central areas of the county, another five lived in more remote locations being more than a half hour’s drive from the CAA offices. Two such households lived in very remote communities which were essentially holdover settlements from former timber camps. Reaching such locations on narrow winding roads required a significant investment of time. Figure 2 shows the geographic distribution of the sample relative to the CAA offices.

The distribution of Program Power family participation across towns represented in the study was sometimes comparable to the population densities of those places. For example, 33% of the total county population lived in the two adjoining towns that were within 1-6 miles from

the CAA and 8 families (62% of the sample) lived in these two towns at the onset of the program. In the town approximately 15 miles from the CAA approximately 6% of the county's population resided there, and 7% (1 of 13) of the families living there participated in the program. In the town that was approximately 25 miles from the CAA, the population was just over 3,000 people (5% of the county's population) and there were three families (23% of the sample) from the study lived there. In the town that was nearly 50 miles from the CAA, there just over 650 residents (about 1% of the total county population) and one family that participated in the program (7%).

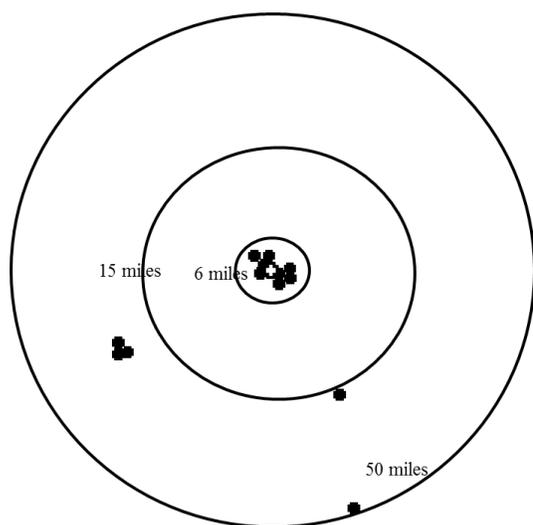


Figure 2: Miles from Program Power Office to ERF Family Homes

While the numbers were a bit lower than expected (17 families who participated in the program versus 25 that were expected to enroll), Program Power appeared to have enrolled families who met their program criteria: a) they evidenced an ongoing or chronic need for energy assistance; b) appeared motivated; and, c) represented the geographic dispersion of the local rural population.

Program Expectations and Program Experiences

In our interviews with families we asked them about their expectations for program enrollment. Most families related that they initially had high expectations for what participation in Program Power would mean. All families were very direct in saying they expected program enrollment would mean access to additional supports. A young mother stated,

“When I went in they said I should sign up because they can help me with more things than normal people...they told me that they were gonna help me get my driver’s license and insurance, she[the case manager] told me they would help me pay for my insurance.” (ERF 105, 12/11/2010).

A few participants (4 of the 13) wanted help with household budgeting, to be able to pay for essentials without running into monthly financial crises. One hoped the program would mean a major change, “I thought they would help me get out of the area (remote rural community in the county) move [near the CAA] and get started in school” (ERF 206, 3/11/2011).

It is clear in the words of the families that most were hoping for more than the kind of support just energy assistance would provide. Participants were hoping for case management and often looking forward to it. These expectations came through most clearly as they talked about program experiences

Program Power case managers were able to enroll a sample of families who met their desired criteria, an ambitious task given the level of commitment enrollment entailed. Where the implementation seemed to unravel was in the actual delivery of services. The next chapter, examines why a seemingly well-intentioned, well-designed program fell apart during implementation at the street-level.

Chapter 5: Case Manager Discretion in Program Power

The previous chapter established how families who participated in Program Power met the established criteria for enrollment and highlighted the discrepancies between the program model and on the ground delivery. The gaps between Program Power participants' expectations and the reality they experienced reinforce that, despite good intentions and a seemingly sound design, Program Power broke down in implementation. The case manager's words about her expectations for the program mentioned at the opening of this dissertation—that she went in with her expectations way too high—far exceeding what was possible with the limited time and resources she had confirm that perception. As detailed in Chapter 3, Street-level Bureaucracy (SLB) as a theoretical framework suggests that policy and program implementation is best understood at the street-level (Lipsky, 2010).

This chapter presents findings from the analysis of the day-to-day practices associated with the Program Power's implementation. Specifically, in an effort to explain how Program Power fell short of expectations, we trace how moments of case manager discretion appear to be associated with workplace conditions that were shaped by two larger forces within the organization. (See Table 2).

A host of discretionary moments (identified in the right hand column of Table 2) occurred during program implementation. Moments of discretion naturally clustered together around two organizational constraints, limited resources and an organizational ethos. Other explanations for case manager discretion might be explained by the varied backgrounds and experience of case workers, lack of supervisions, or organizational capacity, but my analysis sticks to what was available in the ERF data. As mentioned, case managers made decisions that lead directly to the diminishment of the home visitation model over time eventually replacing it

with a group service model. They allocated resources such as advocacy and incentives unevenly across Program Power families. Goal setting, another central means for individualizing program services, operated in a standardized fashion. Each of these instances of discretion could be traced back to a set of work place conditions (Central Column of Table 2) that challenged case managers' capacity to fulfill their job. The remainder of the chapter is focused on explaining the dynamics between larger structural forces in CAA and the day-to-day actions of case managers.

Organizational constraints within CAA	Work place conditions	Case manager discretion
Limited resources- most profoundly observed in the limited case manager FTE allocated to Program Power	Case manager sense that there is 'not enough time in the day' to get their work done, especially not during energy season	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home visits become minimal • Collaboration with housing in an effort to make sure families are getting some kind of services • Home visits are eliminated in favor of efficient group services model
Organizational ethos reflected in program model emphasizing motivation, goals and earned supports	Case managers led to view families through lens of motivation and goals versus a more humanistic perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone is motivated- "rubber stamped" selection • Goals 'cookie cutter' • Supports are unevenly distributed to those who have earned (complicated by limited resources)

Table 2: Organizational Structure of Findings

Limited Resources or 'There's not enough time in the day'

The organizational constraint that most profoundly shaped the implementation of Program Power was observed in the inadequate full-time employment (FTE) assigned to the case managers. This was primarily explained by the limited resources that the Community Action

Agency (CAA) was able to allocate to the program implementation. As previously discussed, Program Power was essentially unfunded. An energy division administrator explained why,

“If we show that progress is made without adequate funding, then if adequately funded we can show that we can really make a difference... I know that unless we have data to show why this program should be funded then [the state agency who disperses the funds] doesn't have the information needed to get it funded” (12/10/2010).

The notion that program funding would come if the staff could make the program work put pressure on case managers, and this becomes apparent in the actions of the case managers.

However, limited resources had a much more direct effect on the implementation. It meant that the CAA struggled to fully staff the program which evolved into the case managers' shared narrative for day-to-day work that “there's not enough time in the day” to get the job done.

The initial plan was that as Program Power enrollment increased, case manager FTE would grow, but that did not happen. For the first three months of the program, case manager 1 enrolled only 2 families. Case manager 2 took over in December 2009 and worked through September 2010 when the rest of the families were enrolled (a total of 17). Unfortunately, case manager 3, was not able to be interviewed because she was dismissed before the ERF research team had a chance to interview her. However, the ERF data make it clear that case manager 3 did not enroll any families or make home visits. We saw enrollment go up in the spring with case manager 2, when the energy season was coming to a close. At its high point, 17 families were enrolled, however case manager 2 was still only assigned approximately .2 FTE or 10-12 hours a week.

However, even with that assignment, the time actually dedicated to the implementation of Program Power was often inconsistent and unpredictable and it never rose to approximate full time. By necessity, the case manager fulfilled multiple other roles in the larger energy assistance

program. The competing demands of these other roles often left little time for the actual implementation of Program Power. One case manager in particular told how she juggled multiple roles over the course of a week. She explained that she was assigned 12 hours per week as Program Power case manager, but was never able to work the full 12 hours because of her competing responsibilities. She included her estimation of how much time was spent on average in each of the roles:

a) *Standing manager* where she covered for the energy director, the energy supervisor, and/or the housing case manager when they were not in the office (she estimated this role took approximately 15 hours per week).

b) *Resource room coordinator* where among many other things she greeted incoming clients, answered the phone, and negotiated appointments between clients and energy intake workers (she did not estimate the number of hours this role may have consumed in a week). However, it is important to note that her desk was located in the front of the resource room where she was the “go to” person and where certain would suggest she spent a significant amount of her time fulfilling that role.

c) *Energy intake worker* where she assessed clients’ need for energy assistance, made referrals for needs outside of energy assistance and maintained case notes (approximately 12 hours per week). It is important to clarify that there seemed to be a natural ebb and flow between the roles of energy intake worker and *Program Power* case manager with unclear delineation between the two roles.

d) *Program Power case manager* where case managers were expected to deliver the services outlined in the logic model (approximately 12 hours per week). She explained that she was never able to work the full 12 hours assigned to the role of case manager because of her competing responsibilities.

The same case manager stated energy intakes took up most of the hours in a work week,

“Energy intakes is the number one time sucker, you are on the schedule today because somebody is sick or they are not available. I am not in control of my time. That and data entry, not only do you do all those intakes, but then you have to go back and enter all the case notes for them and that takes up more time than you would actually think. So on one day when I am supposed to be working on Program Power, I spend 6 hours catching up on all the data entry for the energy intakes that I wasn’t supposed to be doing in the first place because I was supposed to be working on Program Power” (ERF staff, 12/10/2010).

The height of energy season meant that there was not enough staff to cover core program functions like energy-assistance intake. That meant that case managers were needed to help screen whether families applying for energy assistance met the minimum requirements to receive the subsidies. Since the energy assistance intake department was short on staff, the division pulled from Program Power staff to provide extra support. In fact, all of the Program Power case managers had previously worked in the core home-energy assistance program, which may have made it challenging to refuse helping out when the CAA office became strained. A case manager who had been recently reassigned to Program Power expressed her frustrations about not having enough time to implement the program.

I expected that we were going to have more time with the clients...but there is not enough time in the day...If you are going to do intensive case management they need to be more than just a name and a number in a file. You know I had a Program Power client walk in the office the other day and I didn't even know who she was and that is pathetic. (ERF staff, 12/10/2010).

In the end, the reassigned case manager found that there were not enough hours in the day during the energy season to make home visits, which was essentially when they vanished. The last recorded home visit occurred on September 30, 2010, just as families were beginning to be most in need of case manager support.

Restricted FTE had a significant effect on the workplace conditions that shaped the case managers' use of discretion. The sense that "there's not enough time in the day" to get work done, led case managers to adapt their practices in several ways. Discretionary moments seemed to emerge when case managers felt "squeezed" between the high needs of families and the organization's needs. The "squeeze" was associated with *un*-delivered and *under*-delivered

services. One of the case managers explained how she experienced the sense of limited time at work,

“I really only have time to deal with their (client) crises. You know, I don’t have enough time to sit and work on their goal plan. My expectation I think was to have more time to you know, in the program and to have more finances running it, more money ...I had went a couple times to [the supervisors] and said that, ‘hey I have this client and their need is this and [they said] we can’t make that [work] with the parameters in our program’” ...she explains “the funding was limited, how we use the money, and so I would talk to clients about, we’re gonna help with this and its gonna offset your cost for that hopefully...I think for me the big disappointment...there’s not enough time in the day. Um, you know, and you’ve gotta prioritize and when I have somebody standing in the lobby whose gonna be shut off in, you know, that afternoon, I’m not so concerned about my client’s long-term goals. I don’t have time to be. (ERF Case manager, 12/10/2010).

A perception of not having enough time in the day affected almost every aspect of service delivery including home visits, the allocation of support services, and finally the redesign of the program model.

Case managers were the first to identify that *home visits*, the first noted ‘moment’, were not going as planned,

“I think in-home visits are way more important than office visits and that has really fallen by the wayside. We are going to have to set a schedule” (ERF staff, 12/10/2010).

An accounting of home visits confirms that services did not approximate what we might expect at any time of the year, energy season or not. Table 3 is a timeline that shows which case managers worked when and how many home visits were made each month. It also shows when the field study took place (August of 2010 through March of 2011). During the duration of the implementation, families received an average of 2.4 home visits each, or a total of 31 home visits across 13 households. The administrative ERF data show that most visits occurred at program enrollment and trailed off or never occurred again. The number of home visits each family received varied. One family received six home visits while three had only one home visit on

record and two households had none. It is also notable that most of the home visits took place before and at the onset of the ERF field study. This is telling because variation in home visits had much to do with the individual case manager.

	Sept 09	Oct 09	Nov 09	Dec 09	Jan 10	Feb 10	Mar 10	Apr 10	May 10	June 10	July 3	Aug 10	Sept 10	Oct 10	Nov 10	Dec 10	Jan 11	Feb 11	Mar 11
1	0	1	1	0	3	0	8	3	11*	2	0	0**	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Case worker 1																		
	Case worker 2															Case worker 1			
	Case worker 3															Field study			

Table 3: Home visits conducted by case managers and the ERF field study timeline
 *Many of these home visits appeared to be made to schedule research team appointments with Program Power families.
 ** Case worker 1 shifts the program model from home visits to focus groups in December 2011.

Families made their dissatisfaction clear about not being able to connect with their case managers during interviews. In the next quote, the young mother who the case manager did not recognize in the quote above, talked about the difficulties she had trying to connect with her case manager. She explains her frustration about missed connections and finally going into the office to find the case manager herself,

“I seen a case manager probably 3 times, but she cancelled with me so many times...it wasn't like it was just me, she cancelled her appointments with me all the time. So I ended up just going in [to CAA] and filling out a paper and leaving. I remember one time when I had to bring him [she looked at her one-year-old son who was playing on the floor] in [to CAA] - which it is impossible to bring this kid anywhere. I actually had to bring in a big bag of food so that he would be quiet because he was going nuts. It is not easy to make appointments, do classes, and do all that kind of stuff when you have to do everything yourself. To find a babysitter on a day I am not working is impossible. My mom can't handle kids so pretty much I just have a babysitter and she only does it when I am at work so I am on my own” (ERF 105, 12/11/2010).

Another participant who was interviewed nearly seven months after the energy season began expressed how she felt:

“I really haven't seen the program do nothing. We did see the case manager when we first signed up but otherwise you're all we've heard from [the ERF researcher]. You've been here what like three times but we haven't seen any one else...” (ERF 103, 3/10/2011).

Their words describe a paradox that exists at the epicenter of the implementation break-down. On one hand, the program is organized around home visits and individualized services, and on the other hand, there are clients seeking out case managers (rather than the reverse, which is what we would have expected).

Collaborating with Housing. As an attempt to cope with the “squeeze”, one case manager began to work more closely with staff from the CAA housing program to help offset the limited time they had available and provide some level of resources and services. One case manager

expressed her belief that only a combined effort would help Program Power succeed. The interviewer asked her, “given the limited staff and resources, is it realistic to implement Program Power successfully?” After a long pause she responded with,

“at this stage of where we are as an agency, if we respond as a whole then yes and if I am trying to do it by myself, then no. If the housing case manager and I are able to combine our case management strategies and pool our resources and get a little more support then yes. Will it ever be as successful as I thought it would be in the beginning, no” (ERF Staff, 12/10/2010).

The case manager had a history of partnering with the housing case manager. They had worked together on an informal basis with five families. Two families had benefitted tremendously from this informal collaboration. In the field notes for one of these families it was written, “Program Power helped [the family] move out of public housing and find a place of their own with a yard that provided a good play space for their four young children” (ERF201, 3/11/2010). Another family member explains how she experienced the informal collaboration, she says that

“working with two case managers is helpful, I see [my housing case manager] each month, but know I can call my Program Power case manager when I need to.” Program Power paid her past due utility bill, her utility deposit on her new place, made sure she had an approximately \$150 credit on her power account”. She went on to say that “‘Program Power’ connected her to the [CAA] Housing Assistance that paid her deposit and rent for the last year (she expects that her rent will be covered for the next year as long as she stays in school). She said, “all I pretty much had to do was see the vacancy sign, call [my Program Power case manager] and pretty much walk into the [apartment rental] office and sign the lease” (ERF 206, 3/11/2010).

Speaking of how a more formal partnership with housing might work in the future, the case manager explained:

That is the beauty of combining the programs because that way when she sees a problem like that she can go to the housing program and say ‘we need help moving this family’ so instead of living in a place that is just sucking their money through the walls they can get weatherized or move to a better place...For families, once they achieve certain milestones in the Program Power then, we’ll, ah...get their house weatherized” (ERF staff, 12/10/2010).

Energy- and housing- assistance departments planned to pool resources and play “tag-team” sharing case managers among clients, which meant theoretically that the individual case managers only had to make face-to-face contact half the time. Two families benefitted tremendously through consistent access to energy and stable housing in an unplanned collaboration that occurred earlier in the year. A partnership between the energy and housing case manager thus showed potential in the context of limited resources.

To further complicate the shortage of time, there was high turnover among case managers and within their roles in Program Power [See Table 1.8]. There were three staff members who rotated through the Program Power case manager position during the 11 months of the study. The first case manager was assigned to Program Power in Fall of 2009 just before the energy season. The second case manager became the leader manager for the majority of the period of the study (11 months), and then ultimately left the program to work in a different department. This case manager was in the position the longest and she worked with the families more than any of the other case managers. The third case manager worked for about three months in the program, but an interview with another staff member explained that she was “let go” because funding was unexpectedly cut, although it was rumored that she was not really doing her job. However, given the context of the work environment, it is easy to imagine that she may have also just been overwhelmed by the work and given up on trying to do the job. The first case manager was reassigned to the program when the third one was “let go”; this was just as the energy season hit in 2011. High case manager turnover made it challenging to deliver the program in consistent ways and further diminished the relationship between managers and clients.

One final moment of case manager discretion associated with limited resources emerged from the housing and energy case manager collaboration. In December, 2010 the reassigned case manager 1 used her own discretion to make a program change in an attempt to meet what she perceived as the untenable demands of her job. She altered the program model that stipulated meeting individually with families in their homes to a revised model in which group meetings would take place in the agency offices. Prior to making the transition from home visits to office visits, the case manager described how limited time and high demands in the office have caused her to not have the time for home visits.

“I just bought a planner the other day and we just have to set it in stone to make it happen. If they want me to do this [Program Power home visits] and do it right, I am just going to have to get up and walk out of the office and when they go ‘we have three people waiting [in energy intake]!’ I am just going to have to tell them ‘figure it out!’ You either want me to put the time in [in Program Power] or you don’t. And I really think that the people that have so far been enrolled in Program Power have really been shorted on time” (ERF staff, 12/10/2010).

She is clearly upset that she has not been able to make it out to family homes and feels compelled to do things differently in any way she can. However, her frustrations never lead to being able to complete home visits with families after the energy season, which is when she decided to try something different.

Toward the end of the study period, after case manager 1 was reassigned, she decided that the model of offering home visits should shift to bringing families into the CAA offices for what she called “focus group” sessions (she had previously attended a focus group the ERF research team held for community groups and liked the phrase so well that she used it as a name for the new office visits she implemented). She explained the purpose and function of the focus groups:

“Right now another case manager (from housing – another department within the same

organization) and I have started doing focus groups... We are so short on time that the housing case manager and I are working together with clients. I think we are going to get to a point where my case managed clients are going to call the housing case manager instead of me, we're going to see that at one point here real soon. We're working on that one" (ERF staff, 12/10/2010).

The case manager made focus groups mandatory and while it was more efficient for Program Power case managers to meet with families this way, it was very inconvenient for the families. In an interview recorded from a field researcher's notes, one mother explained the challenges of trying to attend the focus groups:

What was challenging were the classes and focus groups. She said, "these things were pointless, we were never able to go, it was unrealistic to expect us to go...and now that I work all the time, my schedule doesn't really allow me to go and if I am home I want to spend time with my kids, I am working 50-70 hours, and I miss my kids" (ERF 201, 3/10/2011).

Many families who had expected that they would have regular home visits were vocal about their disappointment with the unexpected program change. Participant families did not understand why the program shifted and why focus groups became mandatory when that was not an original criterion for participation in Program Power. Another program participant expressed impatience with the program case managers. The researcher's field notes reveal her frustration:

[The client] said that she was hoping to visit with the case manager every month; she said "I feel like I signed up, I'm in, I want to see someone every month, but every time I call no one returns my phone call. I did get a letter from [case manager] that said I have to go to a mandatory focus group, but I didn't get the notice until after the group happened. I did get another notice for another focus group, but we couldn't make that one. I get that they are busy... maybe when things slow down they will be able to come back out again" (ERF 205, 3/10/2011).

Although the case manager was in many ways being creative when she created the new model for visits and was trying hard to make it work for families, implementing mandatory focus groups created confusion and unfortunately further diluted the service delivery model. Lipsky (2010) argues that street-level bureaucrats may choose to pass clients that require more care on

to other service providers rather than work with the client towards a solution. Partnering with housing to run a focus group may have been an attempt to do so.

In the end families were frustrated that the program was not what they expected. We frequently heard from Program Power families, like the mother with four children above, how home visits were consistently missed or rescheduled and how that created more of a problem than a solution. Field notes from another interview with a family portrays her disappointment in the program and confusion about the purpose,

The program did not meet her expectations in any other parts of her life which was different from what she originally perceived the program would provide. She explains that she has not met with anyone from Program Power since October – almost 6 months- and is actually confused about what the purpose of the program is and how it works. Her experiences have not really matched with her expectations. She thought she was going to meet regularly with a case manager and get support for working toward her personal goals – that is not what she has experienced (ERF 207, 3/11/2011).

Not having enough time shaped discretionary decisions that left families and case managers feeling frustrated and overwhelmed. One case manager empathizes with the position that families are put in because of their limited time, “when you are asking clients to move towards more stability and the program is not stable, that is tougher” (ERF Staff, 12/10/2010). It was a paradox expecting families to move towards self-sufficiency when the program did not have enough time or resources to “get by” or be self-sufficient either.

Organizational Ethos or ‘Number one, you gotta have a goal’

The logic model’s emphasis on motivation and goals reverberated through Program Power. Motivation as selection criteria was intended to allow Program Power to select a client-base not only in need of services, but ready to change. These motivated participants were then to work with their case manager to establish goals that would help them move toward greater self-sufficiency. Incentives, another program input, were available to support progress toward goals.

While seemingly sound in theory, the use of motivation and a goal orientation proved problematic in a program serving high-needs families. This kind of approach promoted a kind of achievement ideology, the notion that an individual is able to pull themselves up out of poverty alone, an idea so common in the US. Motivation as criteria for program eligibility while good in intent assumes a certain model of change, it prioritizes goals as paramount to achievement, and sees the use of incentives as valuable rather than providing supports. This type of ethos left case managers in a position where they had to essentially view clients as motivated and then evaluate them using progress toward goals. In reality a more humanistic approach was needed. Where we observed case managers using discretion to ascribe motivation to families was in writing goals for families, and evaluating families based on these goals. Those seen as motivated but weren't all the participation families deemed "motivated" were offered more supports. A closer examination of the program's focus on motivation and goal planning reveals how in the absence of resources to support a program vision and lack of clarity about how to consistently determine motivation, the organizational culture unintentionally manipulated the program in ways that diminished the effectiveness of it.

Motivation, a "rubber stamp". Apart from their chronic need for energy-assistance, case managers had to 'rubber stamp' everyone as motivated to meet enrollment eligibility – this is the fourth 'moment'. That motivation was central to defining who was "in" reflects the cultural climate of the CAA. The case managers' treatment of the program families was shaped from the beginning by the need to define them as "motivated".

The hope was that screening for motivation would promote selection of clients with the most potential for successful change. Case manager 1, who initially helped redesign the program, made it clear during an informal conversation with the researcher that she was interested in

serving families who were not on a fixed income (such as Social Security Retirement or Disability) and who appeared to have the capacity to get a job or go back to school. She pitched these characteristics as “motivation,” however these were not reflected in the formal program eligibility criteria. During an interview she described informal eligibility criteria when asked about determining how she decided who was a good fit for the program.

“That one’s kind of easy. Really, I mean, you know of course we’re looking at income levels...I pick some of my assessments apart when I get referrals. I look at them for, it sounds crazy, but even just the English and the grammar... it gives me an idea of their skillset before I ever even talk to a client. And I don’t mean that to say a bias, but I can without ever even talking to them, look at [their application] and say this is [someone] we can work on” (ERF Staff, 12/10/13).

These criteria were part of the unspoken process of selecting clients who were seen as having the ability to be successful, the organizational catch-phrase used was “motivated”.

The goal of Program Power was to help participant families become independent of a need for future services. While good in theory, the necessity to assess motivation of others without structured guidance left case managers to use their own judgment. We heard often that the determination was based on ambiguous criteria such as a ‘look in their eyes’. Essentially, case managers *had* to say a family was motivated in order to enroll them, when in truth, as we have seen in a fair number of families, many appeared more motivated only by the extra energy payment. One mother makes clear why she enrolled, “what drew me to Program Power was the extra energy payment I would get for enrolling (ERF 203, 8/25/2010). Another woman shared how she and her husband went to the CAA looking for energy assistance and were initially denied, but after agreeing to enroll in Program Power they were given an even bigger energy assistance payment (ERF 204, 8/25/2010).

Case managers became aware of the consequence of providing extra energy-assistance

payments as an inducement for enrolling in Program Power. The field researcher recorded a discussion with one case manager:

“The challenge we ran into was when we were looking at getting people part of that 2nd crisis payment then we got people who weren’t really that vested in the program. We got people who were invested in getting their energy payment.” I asked if those are the people we are seeing closed out. She affirmed with a nod (ERF Staff, 12/10/2010),

This staff member went on to explain, “The challenge is that people haven’t been asked to be a partner in moving up the ladder...we basically give money out the door instead of getting clients to participate in the program.” Using energy assistance dollars helped households get out of crisis, but it also meant that sometimes families who seemed “motivated” may have appeared that way to access needed funding for home-energy bills.

“Cookie-cutter” goals. The emphasis on motivation and personal goal development within the Program Power model speaks to the cultural perspective of the CAA. While its philosophy and the Program Power model were based the idea that energy independence could best be achieved when approached holistically through individualized services, as we observed in an earlier quote, the belief that “number one, you gotta have a goal” resonates throughout the day-to-day interactions between case managers and clients. Perceiving their role in this reductive way was anathema to Program Power’s original, holistic design. Goal setting was intended as only a portion of the overall model of this implementation. Because of constricted time, it became a prime framework for case managers’ decision making, not only about admission to the program but also as a rubric for deciding who would receive financial incentives, which had its own effect upon program retention. The words of the program administrator described how the organization ideology had power to define the interactions of the staff with the clients.

“The real strength of this program is that it is individualized. I want the program to help

individuals come up with what their future is, then the case manager to help design the goals and put the services in place, the case manager brings it all together.”

The agency philosophy was that personal goal development was a primary factor in moving families towards stability, even though they had no consistent guidance to assess them. Two of the three case managers had high hopes for this part of the program during the early implementation. The second case manager, more recently assigned to the program, expressed her optimism:

“I have high expectations for the program because I know it is worthwhile and benefits a lot of people because it does assist individuals to better their circumstances by working towards goals and steps to reach goals. In addition, it helps them think about energy bill and how to live within their means or bring their income up or their spending down...They had to make three goals when they first came in and were at first excited by them, it shows when they made progress. They may have had the goals on their own, but we helped them write-up the steps” (ERF staff, 12/10/2010).

This quote reveals much about how the organization conceptualized goals. It describes the organizations beliefs that it is largely the responsibility of individuals to have goals and learn how to make progress toward achieving them. There is the assumption that if families just change their behaviors and learn how to ‘live within their means’ they can become energy self-sufficient. The program administrator talked about the role of goal planning as part of a holistic case management intervention and then despaired that it was not happening:

“Everybody needs to be doing their goal plans, coming up with them on their own, and really able to just name them off the top of their head. I want them to know them, to really own them. You know if you write some goals on a piece of paper and then do not look at them for 6-8 weeks then you’re really not connected to them. But, if I am able to call you in a week and say have you been working on that list of things we came up with in your goal plan, then that alone really increases follow through with them and they are not getting that right now” (ERF administrator, 12/10/2010)

At the same time, families and case managers acknowledged goal planning was not working. In practice, that translated to case managers writing what amounted to standardized goals for

families, instead of *with* them, and then using those goals to define a families' progress within Program Power.

Of the 13 families who participated in the study, there were 10 with goal plans (76%). The others did not have goal plans in their files at the time the files were scanned. Similar language about desired outcomes in personal goals was commonly seen (See Table 4). Goals were usually related to developing skills in money management (8 of the 10) for which a class was offered in the community, furthering education at local community college (5 of the 10), and gaining employment (8 of the 10). Half of personal goal plans were dated the same day as the home visit, suggesting that at least those plans were developed with families in their homes.

Summary of ERF Personal Goals						
<i>Financial fitness/money management</i>	<i>Employment</i>	<i>Education/college</i>	<i>Transportation (DL or auto related)</i>	<i>Find affordable housing or relocate</i>	<i>Reduce energy use</i>	<i>Health related</i>
*8/10	*8/10	*5/10	*4/10	*3/10	*1/10	*1/10
80%	80%	50%	40%	30%	10%	10%

Table 4: Summary of Personal Goals from the ERF Administrative Data

In Table 5, personal goal plans are transcribed directly from the forms contained in case files and all were in the case manager's handwriting, although purportedly one adult from each household helped design the goals. The similarity of goals across families reveals that personal goal development was more staff-driven than client-driven. Yet, the program model prescribed that the personal goal plans would be developed collaboratively by the case managers and an

adult in the family. Notably, only half of the goal plans were signed by a participant family member.

<i>ERF Family and goals</i>	<i>Goal 1</i>	<i>Goal 2</i>	<i>Goal 3</i>
ERF101 6/24/10	Complete the financial fitness class on 7/23/10.	Find employment. She worked at Wal-Mart in the past and would like to go back there.	Complete her adult education.
ERF 102	No goals listed.	-	-
ERF 103 4/8/2010	Complete college.	Employment.	Money management.
ERF 104	No goals listed.	-	-
ERF105 6/3/2010	Contact vehicle loan company to find out if the due date can be changed.	Take financial fitness class on 7/23/10.	Full-time employment with benefits.
ERF201 4/15/2010	Find employment.	Money management.	Relocate housing.
ERF202 7/21/10	Money management (attend financial fitness).	Find full-time employment with benefits.	Pay fines and get driver's license.
ERF203 1/20/10	Complete education.	Become employed and self-sufficient.	
ERF 204	No goals listed.	-	-
ERF205 6/28/2010	Husband find employment.	Husband finish GED and wife finish prereqs for nursing school.	Attend financial fitness 7/23/2010.
ERF206 6/14/10	Relocate to [town with the most services].	Attend [community college].	Get driver's license.
ERF207 6/23/2010	Financial fitness.	Reducing electricity use.	College.
ERF208 6/24/2010	Financial fitness.	Employment.	Affordable housing.

Table 5: Program Power Families Goals

Notes: ERF data from administrative files kept on participating families

Further, developing goal plans was originally intended to inspire and support families while they worked toward self-sufficiency. However, when case managers chose goals from a

seemingly pre-selected list of “one size fits all,” families became disconnected from the change process intended in this aspect of the program’s design. For example, there was a family who disclosed very real and complicated needs during interviews; however, the goals developed with their case manager were not reflective of these conversations, nor what they hoped for in their future. In field notes the researcher reported what the family members said about their desire to go back to school as a way to gain access to a job with which they might work their way out of poverty:

The wife has her GED and husband has not graduated high school. He tried to get assistance studying and passing his GED, but was told he was too far behind for that to be a realistic goal. The husband said he reads at the 3rd grade level. [This was confirmed in a discussion with their Program Power case manager who told the researcher that he was too far behind and she believed he had some undiagnosed learning disabilities that affected his capacity to make progress.] The wife would like to go to cooking or cosmetology school someday, but has no current plans to do so (ERF 201, 8/25/2010).

Instead of goals that captured their hopes and fears, their plan stated simply that they would: “1) find employment; 2) money management; and 3) relocate housing”. In the ERF data, we saw abundant standardization (cookie cutter goals that gave little consideration to family’s individual situation) in instances when human responsiveness was needed. The couple shared passionately back and forth about what they thought of the goals the case manager had designed related to participating in community service programs such as the money management class and finding work:

The couple explains that the community doesn’t need any more services, it needs jobs. When the couple reviewed their Program Power goals, they were half-hearted about ever completing them because they explained they were in a cycle where one barrier created the next. For example, the first goal was for the husband to get a job, but first he needed reliable transportation. His truck needed a transmission, but even if it worked the fuel was too expensive to drive it anyway. Public transportation did not have a route near their house, so they were living in the best place they ever lived, but did not really have

access to the town without walking a few miles which included going over a bridge with no pedestrian or cyclist pathways (ERF 201, 8/25/2010).

This family's experience with the personal goal development is similar to that observed in the other families. That is, a sense that standardized goals seemed devoid of consideration for family circumstance. For other families, accomplishing goals seemed nearly impossible, too. The following case notes illustrate the need for human responsiveness rather than superficial goal setting:

The barriers to attaining their goals are big. They are financially in "the hole" and she needs serious medical attention [before she is well enough to go back to school] and they have no insurance...[She] wonders if she will be able to be successful even if she is able to make it there...They need to claim bankruptcy before her husband's business can really take off so his equipment won't be repossessed...They currently have liens on everything they own that [the husband] needs for the business, so it could be taken at any moment and that would cut deep into their monthly income. ...Not having enough money creates barriers to all their goals. They hope to achieve their goals over the next five years, but when they talk about this they exchange glances, [the husband] looks a bit "checked out" and [the wife] has deep furrows between her eye brows, they are working against a lot right now (ERF 205, 8/26/201).

Goals were listed for this family as, "1) husband find a job; 2) husband finish GED and wife finish pre-reqs for nursing school; and, 3) attend financial fitness", but there was a disconnect between the goals and the family's reality described in the case notes quote. His income is dependent on equipment that could be repossessed any day. She wants to go back to school, but the same health problems that cost her job also keep her from going back to school. Requiring this family to attend a class about financial fitness at a time when they do not have any finances seems inhumane. These kinds of disconnects were commonly observed throughout the data. At its worst, the third case manager wrote the following about a client who had violated the organizational expectation that she work towards her goals, goals she also had trouble meeting because they were disconnected from her reality:

“I feel [the client] is not motivated to work with program. She has completed only 1 of her 3 goals. [She] appears not to be motivated to move forward with goals that are not completed. [She] will not respond to phone messages or letters. [She] has cancelled appointments to complete home visits. [She] has not made monthly payments on [the power bill]... I recommend [she] be terminated from Program Power” (ERF Staff, 10/19/10).

Ironically, this was the same client described earlier in the study who was so eager to participate in services that she came into the office to meet with the case manager when home visits proved seemingly impossible.

Without a deep and personal connection that can only be developed between a case manager and a family by spending time together, impersonal goals that were largely unrealistic about the real conditions families were facing emerged. In the end, case managers willingly assigned goals to families without discussion and used standardized methods to create them. This was evidenced by a lack of signatures on half the goal plans and goals with only limited relevance to clients' lives.

Allocation of supports. Supports were used to help families make progress on their personal goals and there were a variety of ways in which this happened. Referrals were made for services that went beyond what the CAA could offer, such as to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Case managers advocated for some families to qualify for other services when they might not have otherwise. For example, advocating with the CAA housing department case manager for housing relocation assistance or with DHHS case manager to help a family qualify for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Some families were offered energy-assistance payments a second or third time. Other supports were referred to by the Program Power case managers as “incentives”. Incentives might commonly be thought of as rewards, such as a gift card to a restaurant or movies tickets for completing a goal. However, in

Program Power incentives usually came in the form of gas vouchers, money to get a car fixed and or pay for prescription medication, items needed to support families in moving forward toward accomplishing their goals. To get incentives, families had to earn them by making progress on their goals. This was somewhat counterintuitive because what case managers were calling “incentives” were actually more of supports needed to move forward, like transportation to make appointments and look for a job, and medication for a health issue. Since incentives had to be earned, families perceived as unmotivated may have missed out on receiving needed supports that were essential for them to move towards their goal.

It was with the use of incentives where we frequently observed case managers engage in discretionary practices. Only four families of thirteen (31%) received incentives for moving forward on their goals; one family on two occasions, and three families on one occasion [See Table 6]. Case managers had a stake in providing some families incentives to help them complete their goal plans because they needed to show that the program could be successful. When program families did receive support for making progress on their personal goals, the narratives were positive. One family shared how incentives helped them to move forward finding work:

“Program Power helped out a lot more than anyone else...they did help us get back on our feet, they helped us get our rig fixed, gave us gas vouchers to look for a job and now me and [my husband] are working. It is not perfect, [he] is on-call to fill in as a gas station attendant and I work longer hours than I would like at the call center, but at least we have enough money to get the basics, like food and paying the rent” (ERF 201, 3/10/2011).

Another mother who received incentives summed up her experience:

“Program Power has taught us how to adjust. We know what to do if we run into trouble. We don’t have to freak out. There are resources out there that can help” (ERF 206, 3/10/2010).

Families	Referrals Beyond Agency Services	Advocacy Beyond Agency Services	Energy Assistance Beyond Standard & Crisis Payments	Weatherization	Relocation Assistance	Housing assistance	Auto Repair	Rx Payment	Gas Vouchers	Help Filling Out FASFA	Legal Assistance	Total
ERF101	X		X									2
ERF102	X					X						2
ERF103	X							X				2
ERF104	X											1
ERF105	X					X					X	3
ERF201	X		X		X	X	X		X			6
ERF202	X											1
ERF203	X	X	X		X	X						5
ERF204	X			X								2
ERF205	X											1
ERF206	X	X	X		X	X				X		6
ERF207	X			X								2
ERF208	X											1
Total	13	2	4	2	3	5	1	1	1	1	1	34

Table 6: Summary of Supports for Program Power Families

Program Power’s design included incentives to help households to accomplish their personal goals. There were supports for families to be able to put into place an important piece that they did not have access to on their own. One case manager explained how the flexible funding available through the program was intended to support participants in achieving the personal goals.

“Through the Program Power program if they could show expenses were to help them be successful in their goals, then Program Power could pay. The goals are goals that the family has chosen so they are happy about that. I could help with things like GED class and testing costs, college entrance exams, and driver’s license fees” (ERF staff, 12/10/2011).

What she left out, and probably was not aware of, was that she was asking families to “earn” something they needed. This same case manager explained:

“Funding is very tight and [supervisor] would not always say yes. [Supervisor] might ask, ‘how are they following through and have we given them money recently?’ More money would help families reach their goals, but it is better if they contribute some of their own money so they can see their own potential, then folks realize that they have to follow through and we are able to assist them” (ERF staff, 12/10/2011).

It seems that the organizations views these ‘supports’ (a.k.a. incentives) as money that they are

giving the family and not as a step in helping the family access the resources they need to make the next step in working towards their goals. Another case manager concurred that the incentives worked well, but identified some aspects of the current set up, particularly around the lack of clarity that made use of incentives challenging:

“From my end of things when we were able to use the incentives, they were wonderful. I don’t know what, as far as incentives, has been done since then. It has been difficult to manage this part of the program because I didn’t know how much money was in the budget for this, what were the incentives that were allowed with this funding and who to ask to use it...what I would like to be able to use it for would be for car repairs and other types of support until we are able to help them build up their community support network” (ERF staff, 12/10/2011).

It makes sense that the case manager incentives were “wonderful” because families were acquiring more of what they needed. It seems families were willing to “earn” what they needed which also served as a pathway to being viewed by case managers as being motivated.

Ambiguity about incentives is reflected in the family data where most families did not receive them or know what they were. The sentiment is reflected in the field notes regarding one family in which the mother tells the interviewer that “incentives seem important, but I don’t know what they are and have not received any yet” (ERF 205, 8/26/2010).

The social processes that determine whether a client was viewed as motivated shaped the distribution of incentives and ultimately contributed to the client’s ability to change and develop because the types of resources case managers allocated were vital to families who had no other way to access them. Case manager discretion is exercised in the act of interpretation of a client’s presenting a problem. A case manager’s interpretation of a client through the organizational culture that preference families with perceived goals and motivation as a priority for receiving services might disqualify some families from essential services, resources and benefits needed to move forward.

Lipsky (2010) describes how SLB's perception of clients shapes these processes. He explains this as a heuristic for interpreting client virtue as either a "good person getting in trouble" or a "rotten apple" and how that might significantly change resources and services allocated or referred (p.61). For example, a case manager describing a family who received multiple home visits, service referrals and incentives said, "[The client] appears to be very motivated. She said it is not easy to ask for help" (ERF 101, 6/22/10). Case managers were making determinations about clients that had a very uneven effect on the amount of advocacy and resource brokering allocated to families. The inequity was driven by the social processes behind incentive distribution shaped by the CAA's focus upon goal progress and demonstrations of motivation.

Organizational constraints significantly shaped a work environment that put case managers in a position to make decisions that often compromised the full model in an attempt to deliver some services. Concessions delete extra space had to made about which essential aspects of their jobs should be performed at the expense of other important tasks (like meeting with a few families individually in their homes or potentially meeting with all families in a group setting, but losing the individualized quality of one-on-one time). Ultimately, it was this "squeeze" between the competing needs of the organization and the clients that pushed case managers to use their discretion in an attempt to lighten their workload and provide opportunities for clients to be better served. These moments of discretion created barriers to implementation, but theoretically also opportunities to conceive of ways to reshape rural social service delivery more effectively.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This study examined the implementation of Program Power, a single home-energy assistance program offered by a Community Action Agency (CAA) that served only a handful of rural communities. The program was modeled after the holistic philosophy of REACH programs more generally, which regarded home energy insecurity as only one aspect of poverty. Though limited in scope, the depth of the examination provided an opportunity to closely observe several fundamental aspects of rural social service delivery in action. While Program Power was originally intended to be a demonstration program for rural home-energy relief in Oregon, it was a surprise and disappointment that it never managed full implementation. However, the close observation and analysis of the troubled implementation revealed several important factors that have the potential to lead to more effective home-energy policy and programming.

Two organizational constraints emerged as significant for shaping work place conditions that were conducive to the use of discretion. They were limited resources (too little time and money) and an organizational ethos about poverty that prioritized individual efforts (motivation and goals) for families who presented with complex needs. Work place conditions made it difficult for case managers to help families using an individualized intervention, which was the aim of the program – to use flexible funding to be responsive to local need. High case manager turnover also made it challenging to deliver the program in consistent ways and further diminished the implementation.

We observed case managers who made choices that were not supportive of the program implementation. Lipsky (2010) argues that overtime street-level bureaucrats become cynical about the ability of clients to make progress and then begin to modify the policy implementation. As Program Power case managers tried to cope with these conditions, their discretion emerged in

response to organizational constraints that occurred throughout the implementation. In this study, these events of discretionary decision-making are referred to as “moments,” and accounts of these discretionary moments ultimately reveals just how problematic the Program Power implementation became—a compromised program that left everyone frustrated.

Limited resources. An organizational constraint that profoundly shaped the CAA workplace conditions was a lack of resources observed in the limited full-time employment (FTE) assigned to case managers. The lack of resources seemed to be tied to devolution of funding and power where local organizations had greater freedom to define how money was spent but fewer resources with which to execute the plan. From one direction, limited resources created a work environment of scarcity where case managers developed a sense that “there is not enough time in the day” to get work done, especially during the energy season. In contrast, the insatiable needs of families, made worse by the realities of the declining economy of the rural Oregon communities in which they lived, pressured case managers further. Case managers were “squeezed” into making tough choices about how to implement services and allocate resources. Increased flexibility and declining resources led to work conditions that required case managers to use greater discretion in order to find ways to implement programs, while at the same time there were simply not enough resources. Patterns were most apparent in ‘moments of discretion’ associated with home visits and inter-departmental collaborations.

We watched home visits, never strong, diminish over time. Lipsky (2010) argues that street-level bureaucracies typically require clients to make their own way to the organization’s office for services. It is largely a matter of efficiency, providing rural social services are ever more costly given rural economies of scale. The cost of providing services rises dramatically when bureaucracies pay for SLBs to go into the community, instead of community members

coming to SLBs (p. 120). Flexible language in the federal funding directives made it possible for the CAA to design more individualized services that included home visits, despite the fact that it was not cost effective. Home visits made sense given the tremendous challenges faced by rural low-income residents in terms of their chronic need, distance to travel, lack of reliable transportation and child care. Across the board, families shared about the value of home visits and most families desired more of them. Evidence demonstrated that although the funding purpose was flexible, it was also scarce which made it difficult to pay for the staff time needed to conduct home visits. The geographic distances between the offices and residences made it even more so because it would take a case manager a whole day to visit with less than a handful of families. Eventually the burden of performing home visits was greater than the benefits they enabled and case managers had to stop doing them.

To adapt, a case manager changed the home visiting model to a group-oriented meeting at the main offices. SLBs view a group visiting model as more efficient and better for meeting organizational demands. We observed Program Power case managers' attempts to not only have clients come to them at the offices, but also to do so all at once as a group. In theory, this is ideal in terms of the organization's needs for efficiency. But, the data revealed how unrealistic this model was, particularly in a rural setting. Even when incentives were offered to help families attend the group meetings (gas vouchers and child care), most families found it was still too inconvenient based on the distance required to travel, that there was no reliable transportation and that families were just tired from working and surviving day after day. Though not intended to be so, this had the impact of being a "bait and switch" tactic because families were told that they would have home visits that seldom materialized.

Collaboration with the CAA housing department was initiated in an attempt to share the burden of care with other social service providers. Lipsky (2010) argues that street-level bureaucrats may choose to pass clients that require more care on to other service providers rather than work with the client towards a solution. Partnering with housing to run a group visitation model may have been an attempt to pass on clients whose complex problems seemed too great. We observed the case manager work with the housing department in an effort to reduce the responsibility for monthly face-to-face visits and increase the resources available for the clients. For families needing to stabilize their housing situations, this proved to be a promising use of discretion and provides a compelling argument for supported reliance upon street-level bureaucracy in a rural social service setting. For SLBs in a rural context where services are fewer and farther between, collaborations may be even more critical for helping people access the rural social safety net.

Organizational ethos. The second organizational constraint that shaped the CAA working conditions was the organization's ethos that reflected a program model of motivation and making progress on goals to earn supports. The agency philosophy was that personal goal development was a primary factor in moving families towards stability, even though they had no consistent guidance to assess them. An organizational ethos of motivation and goals led case managers to view families based on their willingness to pursue and make progress on goals versus a more humanistic and responsive perspective. Viewing families through a lens of motivation and perceived capacity to make progress on personal goals led to another series of case manager discretionary moments. In the end, case managers resorted to labeling all Program Power clients as 'motivated', developing standardized goals in place of more individualized goals, and utilizing

supports (i.e. gas vouchers and housing relocation costs like deposits) in ways that clients had to earn them.

‘Moments’ of discretion included a rubber stamp approval that everyone was motivated compelled by a lack of structured guidance about program goals. Labeling all clients as “motivated” fit the organizational ethos of individuals being responsible for moving themselves forward. Case managers were also concerned about working with families who had a higher likelihood of success and sought out clients who were not on a fixed income and who met a subjective criteria of being competent enough to return to school or get a job.

Personal goals, though intended to reflect the unique needs of the families, turned out to be ‘cookie cutter’ and disconnected from their complex day-to-day circumstances. What SLBs think they do may have little connection to what clients think is happening (Lipsky, 2010, p. 60) and how clients perceive them. The “squeeze” led to case manager-driven goals for families that were ultimately unrealistic and ineffective.

Program Power was being implemented by case managers unprepared for the complexities of the job, and with little guidance from supervisors. In order to make the program work, they used their discretion to adapt in any way that they could. Lipsky (2010) referred to this discretion as a way “to cope” with the squeeze, and in the case of Program Power, it led to uneven distribution of supports to those who had “earned” them by being motivated and making progress on goals. Eligibility is usually “cut and dry”, but discretion was used to determine services and resources offered for the individual situation. Determining the difference between a “rotten apple” and a “good client in a bad situation” has implications for the resources offered to a family. Decisions about which clients were defined as “in” were based upon a case manager’s subjective judgments about who was motivated and making progress on goals, a circular

argument not rooted in structured or even equal distribution of resources. Some families benefitted more than others and this perpetuated the cycle of privilege within the social service system.

Program Power Families. The life circumstances of families that led to home-energy insecurity were often tightly woven into the fabric of the communities in which they lived and were essentially ignored in exchange for case managers' hyper-focus on "you gotta have a goal" and subjective determinations of motivation, which were both tied to the amount of resources client families "earned". If clients appeared to be "motivated" and made progress on their goals, then they were given more "incentives" (a.k.a. supports), which ultimately increased their likelihood of continuing to be viewed as motivated because "incentives" were often integral in being able to make it to the next level (i.e. getting a car fixed so looking for a job was possible).

Recommendations. The data clearly show how case managers struggled to fulfill job expectations, and perhaps that made them more susceptible to structural conditions when working all alone. More support is needed for rural case managers. A team approach to case management would reduce the time an individual manager needs to deliver services and increase the information known about a client because two people would be gathering information. Supervision would provide a level of accountability; the fact that home visits were not getting done seemed to slip by administration. Although we did not document case manager qualifications, it was clear they did not have formal degree or training. Professional training aimed at increasing case managers' use of best practices and keeping them current on the most up-to-date research would be wise. In addition, assisting case managers in identifying where their services intersect with others and support building a network of promising collaborations is needed.

The agency used a very good tool for assessing the family's level of need and movement toward or away from stability across multiple life domains; it was called the Results Oriented Measurement and Accountability (ROMA) tool. It was helpful for describing the life circumstances of families in Chapter 4. However, it was problematic that after intake, case managers never consistently used the instrument again. Developing a process to integrate the ROMA into practice has the potential to create greater equities in assessments of families early on and service delivery outcomes over time.

Helping families set goals and make steps toward home-energy security and positive life changes is desirable; however, as identified in the original Program Power logic model and in the lives of the families in the program, home-energy insecurity is just one aspect of the larger poverty reality. Building programs that stay focused on the economic circumstances of families in the context of a rural community, and taking note of families' human needs and experiences will make it easier for case managers to deliver services that are compassionate and more clearly defined in the context for which the program is being delivered.

This study in some ways provides a moral message for those who shape home-energy policy and those responsible for implementing it. With devolution came greater freedom to use funding to experiment with novel ways to address an aspect (energy security) of what is part of the complex problem of poverty, but with it also came a responsibility on the part of the CAA. Perhaps this CAA should have been more cautious about taking on initiatives for which they did not have adequate resources. It is honorable to have a larger vision of long-term home-energy security for low-income rural families. However, the CAA could have more realistically assessed their capacity to offer such a program and taken steps to shore up the resources needed to give it a real chance at being effective.

The rural disadvantage, what we saw as hopelessness among some of the families, seemed to stem from the realization that local prospects for jobs are limited even if they give their best efforts to change. We need to rethink the whole model of intervention. Certainly we would support programs that are intended to help move families toward greater stability but perhaps given the reality of the new rural economy, we should rethink whether folks in places like this will ever be able to be self-sufficient. Early on the CAA Director asked, “Are we better off giving folks the subsidy or can we make a difference by helping them move to a place where they might not need assistance anymore?” The data suggests that subsidies are extremely important, perhaps even vital, to ensuring that families are not faced with choices inherent to the heat or eat dilemma. The modest level of financial support offered families breathing room that seemed necessary to begin to think beyond the day-to-day struggles. Eventually, we are going to have to think about reducing the cost of energy for low-income folks by doing something radical like providing solar panels or other forms of more energy-efficient housing that will save energy and money. In the meantime, energy assistance subsidies make it possible to have light and heat in the home, and food on the table – all on the same day.

There are important recommendations that can be made from this work. First, rural social service providers need to take caution in the creation of initiatives for which there are not adequate resources. Second, home-energy subsidies are needed to continue to support more holistic energy insecurity relief in rural Oregon. Identifying intersecting services related to energy security, such as housing and weatherization, have potential for more sustainable, efficient, and effective solutions. Third, rural CAAs might consider making use of the ROMA instrument as a tool for defining eligibility and measuring progress. Fourth, a team approach to case management or at least greater training and supervision is needed to provide oversight and

accountability for service delivery. Finally, more sustainable solutions to rural home-energy insecurity are desperately needed and radical approaches aimed at alleviating dependence on power companies for high cost energy must be investigated.

Limitations. One of the strongest aspects of a qualitative case study approach is the potential to collect rich and comprehensive data in a natural setting (Creswell, 2012). However this can also be its weakest aspect because there are many times where there are situational constraints during the data collection process (Denzin, 2000). For example, the family sample was selected by case managers in the course of their daily work routine. We were unable to determine how Program Power eligibility criteria potentially excluded participants from the study because our data did not include documentation on families not referred to Program Power. The focus of the data collection in the ERF Study was on clients rather than case managers. At the time, it was unknown how critical it would be to this analysis to know who the case managers were. In the end, we still were able to interview over half of the staff, but it would have been more desirable to speak formally with all case managers. Although sampling in this case study may not have always been ideal, what we have are multiple sources of rich data that can be triangulated to provide detailed and authentic storylines.

Reflections. The existing data used in this study were not collected with the anticipation of using Lipsky's (2010) theory of Street-Level Bureaucracy (SLB) to frame the analysis. Analyzing data not collected for this purpose, specifically as SLB practices were adapted to a rural context, may have resulted in diluted findings as they related to rural street-level bureaucracy in a rural social service organization. This study does provide emerging evidence to conduct future research designed to gather data that may determine whether there are aspects of SLB exclusive to rural social service delivery. Future research would include a larger sample of

case managers, their backgrounds, shadowing their work over the course of a day, and asking questions specific to the use of discretion in rural social service delivery. What shapes discretion used in rural social service delivery might also be an effect of geographic isolation, where the in- and out-flow of knowledge and resources within an organization are lower, thus creating a unique organizational ethos when compared to organizations in more densely populated regions. Future work that takes these possibilities into consideration in the design of the study will be useful for informing how rural organizational culture contributes to rural street-level bureaucrats' decision-making.

A larger question is what do these findings say about our nation's ability to serve remote rural communities? In the absence of more innovative interventions the findings point to recommending home-energy assistance subsidies continuing so families are able to survive. I make this recommendation in hopes that over time the public will find ways to support more sustainable interventions (such as affordable energy-efficient housing, community gardens, and food preservation). These are the types of interventions that have the real capacity to lift the rural poor out of impoverished circumstances and work toward improving rural family and community health that are not wholly dependent on personal and government subsidized income.

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PROGRAM POWER STAFF

I have been asked by “CAA” to talk with the staff program staff members about the *Program Power*.

As many of you know, my name is XXX and I will be asking you some questions today. My colleague YYY will be operating the recorder, taking notes and keeping track of time so we finish by xyz o'clock.

I will be asking for your opinions about three general areas:

1. Your expectations and experiences with the program during this past year.
2. Structural or policy considerations related to the implementation of Program Power.
3. Potential opportunities that might make the Program Power more effective.

As we proceed, we want you to be aware of 5 things:

- ✓ **First, it is important that you feel free to say what you really think.** There are not right or wrong answers. All of your experiences and opinions are important.
- ✓ **Second, while participation is voluntary,** we would like to **hear from everyone.** If you feel more comfortable talking one-on-one we will be happy to meet with you after this session or at another time.
- ✓ **Third, everything that is said in this discussion will be completely confidential.** No names or other identifying information will be used in any reports. However, some aspects of confidentiality are out of our control and dependent on your ability to keep what is discussed confidential. We ask that what's said in this room stays in this room.
- ✓ **Fourth, we are using an audio recorder** so we can correctly capture all of your ideas. After our discussion today, the recording will be transcribed and then erased. Your answers will be combined with the information we gain from others and reported to “CAA” later in the month.
- ✓ **Finally, “CAA” will use the information to help improve its** services to families seeking energy assistance and participating in the *Program Power*.

Before we really start the conversation I would like to quickly go around the table and have each of you introduce yourself giving your name and your current role in the program.

1. YOUR EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

I want to understand more about your expectations and experiences with Program Power during this last year.

- ✓ *What were your **expectations** for the program?*

- ✓ *How do these expectations match up with your experience this year? Can you give us a specific example?*

2. STRUCTURAL and POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Any program working with low income families encounters challenges. I want to talk about the specific challenges you might have encountered with:

- ✓ *Recruitment of families to the Program Power?*
- ✓ *Engagement of families in the Program Power? Any special challenges around:*
 - *Intake and eligibility?*
 - *Home energy assessments?*
 - *Case management?*
 - *Family participation education classes (energy and budgeting)?*
 - *Families' use of resources (light bulbs and information)?*
 - *Other?*
- ✓ *Retention of Program Power families? Why did families leave the program? What strategies were used to retain families?*
- ✓ *How could efforts to serve Program Power families be organized or structured to better meet these challenges in your program? What would your program need to effectively make these changes?*

Here is a list of additional services families have been offered in the program. What is your impression of how families made use of these services?

- ✓ Energy education
- ✓ Weatherization –Energy saving products,
- ✓ Energy bill subsidy
- ✓ Financial education
- ✓ Incentives
- ✓ Goal setting Case management
- ✓ Service referrals Other

How effective, in your view, were these services?

What changes, if any, did you note resulting from families' use of these services? Can you provide a specific example?

3. POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES

Below are lists of strategies other energy assistance programs have identified as effective in helping reduce energy costs and move families toward self sufficiency. [Show list including all below]

- ✓ Offering childcare and snacks during education classes – childcare and food is always good. All clients that have children need to make arrangements so this would be. Funding dependent.
- ✓ Providing timely (within 24 hours) follow-up for homebound persons and other households who are unable to maintain adequate home temperatures. If there is an emergency we have a very short turnaround –most people come in before lights re turned off. Pwer company referes to CAA for a crisis.
- ✓ Establishing higher LIHEAP benefits for vulnerable populations.
- ✓ Lowering or eliminating co-payments to vulnerable households during the crisis period of the LIHEAP program
- ✓ Sponsoring special service days just for elderly and other vulnerable LIHEAP recipients.
- ✓ Creating a crisis program especially for vulnerable populations.
- ✓ Providing blankets and throws.
- ✓ Providing a second issuance of regular assistance during the current program year, at least for persons at the lowest end of the income guidelines without additional application, particularly for those with "high energy burdens."
- ✓ Providing year-round services (also helps prevent rush at one time of year).
- ✓ Linking benefits to fuel costs.
- ✓ Providing education to partner agencies about each program's services.
- ✓ Serving in advisory roles about development of education campaigns, program design, and emergency plans.
- ✓ Providing client referrals to partner programs.
- ✓ Providing intake functions for partner programs.
- ✓ Conducting program outreach for partner programs.
- ✓ Providing services to each other's clients.
- ✓ Merging of multiple funding sources to accomplish a common goal.

What strategies do you see as potential opportunities for your program? What would your program need to be able to employ these strategies?

Conclusion

What would you say is the biggest lessons learned from this past year of providing Program Power services?

Are there any other thoughts you would like to share about this past year of the Program Power?

Thank you for your time. If you think of other things you would like to say later, please give us a call or send an email. Here is our address (give out OSU business cards).

Thank you again!



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Summer 2010

Dear Program Power Participants,

We would like to invite you to share your experiences about Program Power with an Oregon State University Study Team. Program Power is a pilot program of “CAA” Services. Researchers from Oregon State University are conducting a study of the program. What we learn from you will help shape approaches to reducing the energy costs of rural households across Oregon.

If you decide to take part, you can expect three different interview sessions with the OSU Study Team (about 1-2 hours each). The first session will cover family background, your expectations for the program, and your own sense of well-being. The second session will cover household economics, daily life, as well as stress and how you cope. The last session will give you the opportunity to talk more about your experiences with Program Power. You will also have some checklists to complete between interview sessions.

Again, thanks for considering taking part in the study! We look forward to talking with you soon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Katherine A. MacTavish".

Katherine A. MacTavish, PhD
Associate Professor
Department of Human Development and Family Sciences
Oregon State University



EMPOWERING *REAL FAMILIES*

INITIAL HOUSEHOLD INTERVIEW

INTRODUCTION: I WOULD LIKE TO GET TO KNOW A LITTLE BIT MORE ABOUT YOUR HOUSEHOLD. I'LL BE ASKING YOU SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT YOU AND YOUR HOUSEHOLD, YOUR RESIDENTIAL AND WORK HISTORY, YOUR PERCEPTIONS OF YOUR COMMUNITY, AND YOUR EXPERIENCES WITH THE *PROGRAM POWER*.

RESIDENTIAL EXPERIENCES- First, we are interested in knowing more about your current living situation.

Who currently lives in your household?

For each:

- First name?
- Relationship?
- Age?
- Gender?
- Describe?
- Education?
- Work?
- When did they join the household? Why?
- Shared activities?
- Support/ Exchanges?

Overall, how satisfied are you with your current living situation (type of dwelling, location, who you live with)? Why?

What is the best and worst thing about living here?

Do you think of your living situation as long-term or temporary? Why? How long?

Now I would like to know about the places you have lived during the past five years. Let's start with the place you lived before where you live now and work our way back from there.

For each residence:

- Community/location?
- Type of housing? (apartment, mobile, house, etc.)
- Owner/renter status?
- Length of time?
- With whom?
- Full-time/part-time?
- Overall, how satisfied were you with that living situation (type of dwelling, location, who you live with)? Why?
- What was the best and worst thing about living there?
- Did you think of this past residence as long-term or temporary? Why and why moved?

You have identified ___ moves in the past five years. Is that pattern typical across your life span?

When you think about your future, what is your "ideal" housing situation (type of dwelling, location, who you live with)? Has that changed over time? How likely is it that you'll achieve this ideal housing situation in the next year? 5 years? Ever? Why?

FRIEND AND FAMILY NETWORK: NOW I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW A BIT MORE ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE WHO ARE NOT CURRENTLY IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD. LET'S START WITH YOUR RELATIVES.

FAMILY- First, tell me about your **parents**.

For each:

First name?
 Relationship?
 Age?
 Gender?
 Where live?
 School completed?
 Work?
 Shared activities (primary location)?
 Supports/Exchanges?

NOW TELL ME ABOUT YOUR GRANDPARENTS.

For each:

First name?
 Relationship?
 Age?
 Gender?
 Where live?
 School completed?
 Work?
 Shared activities (primary location)?
 Supports/Exchanges?

Are there **other family members** that are/were important to your household?

For each:

First name?
 Relationship?
 Age?
 Gender?
 Where live?
 School completed?
 Work?
 Shared activities (primary location)?
 Supports/Exchanges?

FRIENDS- NOW I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW A LITTLE ABOUT YOUR FRIENDS, FEEL FREE TO USE THEIR FIRST NAME OR INITIALS TO KEEP THEIR IDENTITY CONFIDENTIAL.

For each:

First name?

Age?
 Gender?
 Where live?
 How met?
 How long known?
 Shared activities (primary location)?
 Support/Exchanges?

Others: Are there other people important to your family/household?

For each:

First name?
 Age?
 Gender?
 Where live?
 How met?
 How long known?
 Shared activities (primary location)?
 Supports/ Exchanges?

WERE THEIR PEOPLE IMPORTANT TO YOUR HOUSEHOLD WHO ARE NO LONGER A PART OF YOUR LIFE?

For each:

First name?
 Age?
 Gender?
 Where live?
 How met?
 How long known?
 Shared activities (primary location)?
 Support/Exchanges?
 Why interaction ended?

When you think about your friend and family network, how satisfied are you with the level of support you have? Why?

When you or your family need help or support, who would you turn to first? Second? Third?

When you look back, how has your life been the same as your parent's? How has it been different? What do you hope your kids will do the same or differently from you?

WORK EXPERIENCES- Tell me about your work experiences over the past five years. Let's start with your current or most recent job and work backward.

For each:

Type of job?
 Location?
 When hired and duration?
 Full-time/ part-time? Hours/ schedule?
 Pay/ benefits?
 How did you get the job?
 Best/worst thing about that job?
 Short or long term, step on a career path?
 Why left?

Overall, how satisfied are you with the work opportunities you have had?

How do you get by when there is no work?

When you think about the future, what are your work-related aspirations?

What would it take for you to achieve those aspirations?

How probable is it that you will achieve these aspirations in the next year? 5 years? Ever? Why?

COMMUNITY EXPERIENCES- Now I want to ask you some questions about your experiences in this community.

Were you or anyone in your household born in this community?

If not, what kind of community did you grow up in (rural, small town, city, etc)? How did you come to live in this community?

What area do you consider to be your community? (Show satellite map) Why that area?

What is the best/worst thing about your community?

How do people in your community relate to each other?

Do you feel like you belong? Why/why not?

What, if any, social or recreational activities have any members of your household been involved in the past year? Where located? If not, what is the main reason for not participating?

What, if any, volunteer activities have any members of your household been involved in the past year? Where located? If not, what is the main reason for not participating?

How long do you plan to remain in your current community?

If you left, what would be the main reasons? Where would you go?

Do you think your children will remain in the community when they grow up? Why or why not?

PROGRAM EXPERIENCES AND EXPECTATIONS- Now we would like to know a bit about your experiences with the *Program Power* and your expectations for the future.

How long have you been enrolled in the program?

How did you first hear about the program?

The program offers many different services [energy education, weatherization, energy saving products, energy bill subsidy, financial education, incentives, goal setting, case management and service referrals]. Which services are you most/least interested in for your household? Why? Which are you least interested in? Why?

Which services have you made use of so far? How?

What about Program Power has helped you the most?

What support services do you use from other sources in your community? (Food bank, South Coast Business Employment Corporation, public transportation, etc.)

What services do you and your family need that aren't available in your immediate community?

What do you do to access those services? Or do you "skip" that need (for example, going to the dentist) or make do some other way?

In your conversations with *Program Power* staff you have identified the following as goals [refer to family goals from case notes].

For each:

What will it take for you and your household to reach that goal?

What could stop you from achieving that goal?

How likely do you think it is you will achieve that goal in next year? 5 years? Ever?

FAMILY HEALTH AND WELLBEING- Because the Program Power works to affect change in many areas of family life including health and wellbeing we would like you to complete three questionnaires. The first, HEALTH PERCEPTIONS, measures how you and your doctor perceive your general health, times you have been to the hospital, and health conditions you may have experienced in the last year. The second, MOOD RATING, asks you to report your moods for the last week. The third, FEELINGS AND THOUGHTS, asks you to report on your feelings and thoughts.

I want to assure you that all of your personal information will be kept completely confidential. As you can see there is no name attached to the questionnaires-only a code. Please complete all three within one week. Feel free to call if you have **ANY** questions or concerns – I will leave you with my business card and contact information. When you have the forms done, you can mail them to me in this postage-paid addressed envelope. Otherwise, I can pick the questionnaires up on my next visit.



EMPOWERING *REAL FAMILIES*

DAILY LIFE INTERVIEW

INTRODUCTION: IN THIS INTERVIEW I WOULD LIKE TO GET TO KNOW A LITTLE BIT MORE ABOUT DAILY LIFE IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD. I'LL BE ASKING YOU SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT A TYPICAL DAY IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD AND ABOUT HOW YOU MANAGE FAMILY FINANCES AND COPE WITH STRESSFUL EVENTS WHEN THEY COME UP.

TYPICAL DAY- First, we would like to know more about what a “typical day” is like for you and your household. We’ll start from when you wake up in the morning and end when you wake up the following morning.

Imagine a “typical day” and start from when you open your eyes in the morning. Tell me how you feel (mentally and physically), what you hear, what you smell, what is the first thought that comes into your mind, what is the first thing you do? Now walk me through your day including as many details as possible.

FAMILY ECONOMICS- We are interested in knowing how your family manages financially.

How are household budget decisions made for:

- Daily purchases (such as groceries)?
- Paying the bills?
- Kids school expenses?
- Making major purchases (like appliances or vehicles)?
- Paying for entertainment/ vacation (like cable TV, dining out or travel)?
- Buying on Credit/ Loans?
- Savings/ investment plans?

What are your methods for handling.....?

- Minor money emergencies like car repairs or broken appliance?
- Major money emergencies like a significant medical emergency or a disaster?
- Unexpected medical costs?
- Relatives in need?
- Retirement?
- Children’s future?

How/ when did you acquire your....?

- Home (if owned)?
- Furniture?
- Appliances?
- Vehicle(s)?
- Computer?
- Other?

Do you have... ?

- Checking account?
- Savings account?
- Charge accounts (like department store, gas)?
- Major credit cards?
- Children’s saving accounts?

Investments?

Do you have... ?

Medical insurance?

Dental insurance?

Long Term Disability insurance?

Life insurance?

Child Life insurance?

What is your biggest worry today

STRESS AND COPING- I would like to know how you cope with the stress of daily life.

First I want you to think about a stressful event you recently experienced. This might be not having enough resources to make ends meet or it might be some other event. What comes to mind?

There are many ways folks cope with stress [show card]. As you think about how you handled the situation you just described, did you use any of the ways listed on this card?

Card to include:

- Asking for help
- Accepting help offered
- Taking a new perspective
- Turning to spiritual support
- Waiting out the situation
- Accepting there was nothing you could do
- Ignoring the problem



PROGRAM POWER *REAL FAMILIES*

EXIT INTERVIEW

PROGRAM EXPERIENCES: In this interview, we would like to ask you about your experiences participating in the Program Power.

What were your expectations for taking part in the Program Power?

How have your experiences matched with your expectations?

How, if at all, has your household life changed as a result of taking part in Program Power?

[Probes: Have you reduced your energy costs? ...connected with new resources? ...set and made progress toward goals? ...become more self sufficient?...feel better ability to manage income and household resources? Please describe how]

What aspects of the Program Power were most helpful? [show card to include: energy education, weatherization, energy saving products, energy bill subsidy, financial education, incentives, goal setting, case management and service referrals]

Now let's talk about next steps. Do you feel ready to exit the program? Why/why not?

What are your hopes and dreams for the next year for yourself?

... for your kids?

How, if at all, will your experiences with Program Power help you move toward these goals?

How about hopes and dreams for life 15 years from now for you?

... for your kids?

How, if at all, will your experiences with Program Power help you move toward these goals?

