Soft workfare? Re-orienting Toronto’s social infrastructure towards employment

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ABSTRACT

This research tracks the emergence of ‘soft’ workfare in Toronto. This refers to a set of attitudes and practices apparent in the delivery of welfare-to-work programs through the Ontario Works framework, which use compulsion to push people towards employment while simultaneously encouraging limited and specific practices of individual choice. Research findings are derived from eight interviews and relevant policy reports, focusing on the experiences of three non-profit agencies and the City of Toronto, who provide employment assistance and financial assistance through Ontario Works, respectively. These findings indicate that grassroots organizations pioneered employment services for social assistance recipients, and, alongside the municipal government, had been calling for active employment programs. They made use of the distance between policy rules and their own programs to alleviate the most punitive features of OW, but judge compulsion as a means to meet a necessary end. This demonstrates how disciplinary tendencies reside within liberal governmentalities.
Acknowledgements

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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ...................................................................................................................... iii

Table of Contents ......................................................................................................................... iv

List of Acronyms .......................................................................................................................... vi

Chapter 1: Introduction ............................................................................................................... 1  
‘Soft’ workfare: a consensus 10 years in the making? ................................................................. 1  
Workfare states ............................................................................................................................ 3  
National welfare to local workfare: Scales and networks .......................................................... 5  
Government and governance: The role of civil society ............................................................... 6  
Defining and understanding neoliberal workfare ....................................................................... 7  
The role of workfare in Toronto ................................................................................................ 11  
Summary .................................................................................................................................... 12

Chapter 2 Literature review: A genealogy of employment and income assistance .............. 14  
The House of Industry: exploring local roots of regulation in social assistance arrangements  ........................................................................................................................................ 14  
The rise and fall of the welfare state: nation, citizenship and work ......................................... 20  
Local workfare resurgent: the re-scaling of welfare ................................................................ 23  
Understanding workfare: neo-Marxist perspectives ................................................................ 26  
Understanding workfare: post-structuralist perspectives ......................................................... 29  
The poor need help finding jobs: Myths workfare depends on ................................................. 30  
Workfare and the city ................................................................................................................ 32  
Local workfare and civil society ............................................................................................... 34  
Summary .................................................................................................................................... 38

Chapter 3 Methodology .............................................................................................................. 42  
Assumptions and rationale for qualitative methodology ........................................................ 42  
Participant recruitment ............................................................................................................. 44  
Interview format and procedure .............................................................................................. 47
Data analysis procedures and verification methods ................................................................. 48
Summary .................................................................................................................................... 49

Chapter 4 Analysis of findings ................................................................................................. 50

Introduction ............................................................................................................................... 50
‘Grassroots’ welfare-to-work: a historical perspective .............................................................. 52
Ontario Works, phase 1: Getting on board ............................................................................... 58
Making it work: Enhancing and integrating employment services .......................................... 62
From punitive to ‘soft’ workfare? Experiences of Ontario Works evolution ............................. 70
Positioning themselves: Strategically delivering OW in Toronto .......................................... 79
The City takes it on: New directions in municipal employment services ................................. 84
Soft workfarism: Characteristics of social assistance in 21st century Toronto ....................... 89
Summary .................................................................................................................................... 90

Chapter 5 Summary and conclusions ...................................................................................... 94

Bibliography ............................................................................................................................ 105

APPENDIX A: Administrative information letter and consent form ........................................ 113
Administrative information letter ............................................................................................. 113
Administrative consent form ..................................................................................................... 116

APPENDIX B: Participant information letter and consent form ............................................ 117
Participant information letter ................................................................................................. 117
Participant consent form ......................................................................................................... 119

APPENDIX C: Sample interview guide ................................................................................... 120
List of Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BEGIN</td>
<td>Pre-employment program delivered by ENTRE&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>CNS</td>
<td>Community and Neighbourhood Services (Toronto)</td>
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<td>EI</td>
<td>Employment Insurance</td>
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<td>ESP</td>
<td>Employment service provider</td>
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<td>HOI</td>
<td>House of Industry</td>
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<tr>
<td>LSR</td>
<td>Local Service Realignment Act (Ontario)</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAH</td>
<td>Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (Ontario)</td>
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<td>MCSS</td>
<td>Ministry of Community and Social Services (Ontario)</td>
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<td>MTCU</td>
<td>Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (Ontario)</td>
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<td>Nongovernmental organization</td>
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<td>Ontario Works</td>
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<td>ODSP</td>
<td>Ontario Disability Support Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPO</td>
<td>Service providing organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>TESS</td>
<td>Toronto Employment and Social Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>TSS</td>
<td>Toronto Social Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>UI</td>
<td>Unemployment Insurance</td>
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List of non-profit organizations profiled<sup>2</sup>

- ENTRE
- SEC
- Spruce Way

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<sup>1</sup> Program name has been changed.

<sup>2</sup> All names have been changed.
Chapter 1: Introduction

‘Soft’ workfare: a consensus 10 years in the making?

In Ontario, social assistance recipients must show they are making an effort to enter the waged labour market in order to obtain social assistance benefits. Conspicuously named ‘Ontario Works’, what is commonly known as ‘welfare’ or ‘social assistance’ is a two-pronged program involving financial assistance alongside employment assistance (MCSS, 2008). Ontario Works (OW) was the oeuvre of Conservative Premier Mike Harris, dating from 1998. The OW Act tellingly summarizes its policy mandate:

The Act establishes a program that:
- recognizes individual responsibility and promotes self-reliance through employment;
- provides financial assistance to those most in need while they meet obligations to become and stay employed;
- effectively serves people needing assistance; and
- is accountable to the taxpayers of Ontario. (MCSS, 2008)

Ample debates have transpired regarding Ontario Works and social assistance provision in Ontario in just over ten years since it was implemented, and Harris’ tenure was followed by two consecutive Liberal government terms, led by Premier Dalton McGuinty. Nonetheless, the model of social citizenship embodied in OW remains remarkably strong. Its basic philosophy and values emphasize individual responsibility, self-reliance, ‘the taxpayer’, obligation, and employability. The role of the ‘taxpayer’ is used prominently in OW reviews and policy directives. Firstly, OW programs should accountable to ‘the Ontario taxpayer’ (MCSS, 2008). Secondly, a primary goal of OW should be to help recipients on the path to becoming full
‘taxpayers’ (Matthews 2004: 6). It espouses the need to use OW as a means of meeting labour market demands, as well as to meet the temporary financial needs of low-income people (Matthews, 2004).

Despite the uproar over perceived OW’s inefficiencies and unjust nature in the late 1990s and early 2000s, there remains remarkably little dissent over the underlying philosophy and overall framework of the program (Peck, 2001a). Indeed, in a review of OW’s employment assistance programs conducted by Ontario’s Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) in 2004, Matthews conducted extensive and earnest consultations with over 200 community-based organizations across the province of Ontario. Based on these conversations, the report provided extensive recommendations for improvements to the OW program and outlined amendments to eliminate its most punitive features, especially those that contradicted its employment objectives. From a significant list of recommended reforms, five policy rules were amended in 2005. They were: “(1) altering the way earned income is deducted from a client’s benefits while they are on assistance; (2) providing a new employment start-up benefit for clients who leave assistance to take full-time employment; (3) increasing the monthly amount clients are allowed for informal child care, and; (4) extending health benefits including prescription drugs, eye glasses and dental care for up to six months after a client leaves assistance for employment” (TSS, 2005). Yet, paradoxically, the Review of Employment Assistance Programs in Ontario Works report concluded that “there is an enormous willingness (...) to work within the current social assistance framework” (Matthews, 2004: 6, emphasis added). Furthermore, the program will again undergo re-scaling over the next decade, as financial assistance is being uploaded to the provincial level in incremental steps (MAH, 2008). This raises important questions about
how and why a consensus around workfare programming has become embedded and naturalized both within hegemonic and oppositional political struggles.

**Workfare states**

The shift in social policy from entitlement- and rights-based social policy to obligation- and responsibility-based policy is a trend that can be traced across the US, the UK and Canada (Peck, 2001a). Generally referred to as a *workfarist* tendency in social assistance policy, it refers to the delivery of unemployment and social assistance benefits by the state contingent on the recipient working for wages and/or making evident personal effort and willingness to enter the labour market. Workfare approaches to welfare reform span a wide geographic spectrum according to provincial and state jurisdictions in the U.S., U.K. and Canada. These include radically coercive experiments with workfare in New York in which welfare recipients were obliged to complete labour in order to receive their (sub-minimum wage) social assistance payments, to programs that oblige or encourage recipients to participate in welfare-to-work activities. Welfare-to-work programs are characterized by policy frameworks in which it is the legal responsibility of individuals in receipt of social assistance to pursue employment and/or increase their employability, depending on their needs, skills and abilities. For example, the policy directives for Ontario Works (2008) describe the “roles and responsibilities” of “participants”:

- Provide information to verify initial and ongoing eligibility for financial assistance;
- Participate in approved employment assistance activities;
- Make reasonable efforts to pursue other financial resources; and
- Seek and obtain sustainable employment.” (MCSS, 2008)
While Ontario Works used to be the exception in Canada in terms of representing the most coercive Canadian example of workfare, it has since evolved into the typical model of 21st c. Canadian *workfarism*, in which benefits are attached to employment-related activities and recipients are not literally forced to work for benefits.

Defining workfare and its meaning within the genealogy of Keynesian and post-Keynesian states’ economic and social policy remains quite challenging. On the one hand, workfare distinguishes itself from a broader range of active labour market attachment programs insofar as it requires compulsion, as Shragge (1997) argues. For Shragge, a program can only be dubbed as ‘workfare’ if compulsion is present. Conversely, perhaps the emergence of workfare can be defined more broadly, as programs, or even attitudes, that mobilize individuals’ labour market attachment as criteria for citizenship. For Cowen (2008), the logic of workfare:

>[P]osits everyone as a producer and consumer in the economy rather than a member of a political collective. Certainly post-war ‘worker-citizenship’ was also organized around a logic of political and economic belonging through work; however, it was a collectivized notion where risk and security were nationalized. Within a workfare framework, responsibility is rescaled. Individuals are expected to serve their community in exchange for support. With workfare, the logic of being an individual ‘employee of the nation’ is laid bare. (252)

Under such a definition, workfarism is a far more extensive and diffused phenomenon than it may seem at first glance. Perhaps Harris’ version of Ontario Works represented its most explicitly radical variety, yet in many ways workfarism infuses most post-Keynesian social, cultural and economic forms, which demand individuals’ labour market attachment in order to be considered citizen.
**National welfare to local workfare: Scales and networks**

Beginning in 1998, the Local Service Realignment Act (LSR) downloaded the responsibility for delivering and funding OW onto municipalities (Lightman et al, 2006: 135-6). Welfare reform and the rise of workfare in Ontario thus involved a general downward restructuring of social assistance policy and delivery, both from federal to provincial through the elimination of the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP)\(^3\), as well as from provincial to municipal, through the LSR Act. A fiscal and political imbalance emerged insofar as the province retained control over the policy directives and overall framework, while municipalities struggled to implement and fund the new OW Act (Lightman et al, 2006). Further re-scaling occurred as municipalities unevenly subcontracted their newly acquired responsibility for employment assistance delivery to local non-profit agencies. As geographers have identified (Jessop, 2002; Peck, 2001a), scalar restructuring of government has been an integral aspect of workfare states’ development. In the re-scaling of welfare, this research seeks to examine how and why particular urban institutional and political networks were disrupted, mobilized, and (re)constructed. Considering both the re-organization of political scales and institutional networks, my research asks how the workfare state has emerged in and through particular urban and suburban governance traditions. I seek to answer:

- How did the restructuring of welfare in Ontario through the OW Act interact with the political attitudes and social service mandates of both the municipal government and non-profit employment service providers in Toronto?
  - What employment services were Toronto’s community-based organizations offering to social assistance recipients prior to the OW Act of 1998?

\(^3\) The implications of the elimination of the CAP in 1996 are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, pages 30-31.
What were the experiences of the non-profit community of employment service providers in Toronto? What specific or general points of political consensus or conflict have developed between the City of Toronto and community-based organizations in relation to the delivery of Ontario Works at the local level?

Did these relationships have an impact on the genealogy of workfare over the next decade at the municipal-level and/or the provincial scale?

What is the future for welfare/social assistance in the city, based on current City of Toronto (TESS) and provincial (MCSS) policy plans?

To explore these questions, I focused on three non-profit organizations which had a history of providing employment services to low-income Torontonians prior to the implementation of the OW Act, and who subsequently solicited Toronto Employment and Social Services contracts to deliver OW employment services between 1998 and 2003. I interviewed five respondents from these three organizations. These participants pointed me to other key informants on the recent history of Toronto’s municipal- and non-profit delivered employment services, and I subsequently interviewed three individuals with experience in non-profit consulting, the municipal government and the provincial government. Finally, I considered relevant policy documents from the municipal and provincial government to contrast and supplement interview findings.

**Government and governance: The role of civil society**

A principal objective of this research is to critically investigate the re-constituted local governance relationships between civil society, the labour market and the state that form the basis of social assistance programs under the OW mandate. While the Keynesian welfare state had centralized disciplinary and regulatory influence over individuals, especially those who
depended on financial assistance through welfare programs (Piven & Cloward, 1971), the inclusion of non-state agencies (whether non-profit or for-profit) in the provision of services once solely fulfilled by central state governments has marked a shift in the U.K., U.S. and Canada from Keynesian government to neoliberal governance. A new geography of social assistance provision means that nonstate institutions have significant influence over people’s lives, without facing the same measures of accountability and transparency to which state institutions are, at least in liberal theory (Harvey, 2005: 76-8, 177). Illogically, the proliferation of nongovernmental-governmental partnerships in the delivery of social services, and proliferation of nongovernmental organizations in general, has occurred just as the concept of civil society has ascended to a position of opposition vis-à-vis the state; this is certainly not a new phenomenon per se, but one that has been re-energized in recent decades within the history of liberal practices and thought. As the borders blur between nonstate and state in neoliberal governance structures, both liberal (Tocquevillian) and critical (Gramscian) concepts of civil society merit consideration. Within the context of this research, is it appropriate to distinguish a marked shift from government to governance? How have civil society organizations been involved in the OW delivery model and what are the implications of their role?

**Defining and understanding neoliberal workfare**

The recent resurgence of workfarism must be understood within the context of neoliberalism. Workfare, and other welfare ‘reforms’,

(... can be called neoliberal to the extent that they continue – indeed intensify – classic liberal claims of individual freedom and state restraint (usually in the form of a celebration of the market), while they downgrade or ignore claims of equality, moral obligation, and the constitutive state. (Staeheli & Brown, 2003: 772)
David Harvey identifies neoliberalism:

(...) in the first instance [as] a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. (Harvey, 2005: 2)

Here both neo-Marxist and poststructuralist perspectives are useful to consider, and Wendy Larner’s (2000) seminal article comparing neoliberalism as policy, ideology and governmentality serves as a beginning point. For Larner, each of these interpretations has different implications for how we understand processes of welfare state restructuring, and by extension, the political strategies we want to employ to promote social justice (6). Larner combines theoretical perspectives, ultimately defining neoliberalism as “both a political discourse about the nature of rule and a set of practices that facilitate the governing of individuals from a distance” (6).

Indeed many depictions of workfare have positioned policy makers and politicians as its principal agents, who downloaded an unfair and punitive system on its victims, effectively destroying the great achievement of the welfare state. Many scholars, across disciplines, engage in questions of whether or not workfare ‘worked’ (Quaid, 2002; Lightman, 2005b) and whether it was normatively right or wrong (see Carpenter et al, 2007 for a human rights perspective). These contributions often fail to understand how, despite strong opposition to workfare, it been so popular and sustainable internationally. How has it survived, been normalized and embedded in our social and political forms? Geographers have contributed extensively to understanding workfare as a political economic phenomenon, within the school of neo-Marxist regulation theory, especially Bob Jessop’s (2002) framework of the Schumpeterian workfare state and
Jamie Peck’s exploration of the workfare state (2001), as well as Meghan Cope (2001). These scholars mobilize the social control framework established by Piven & Cloward’s *Regulating the poor* (1971), positioning neoliberal workfare as something more salient than a policy trend, one which disciplines and structures a range of institutions to bolster the economic and moral advantage of particular groups and classes. Conversely, theorizing workfarism and the workfare state from poststructuralist perspectives (in geography, see Staeheli & Brown, 2003; otherwise Dean, 1999; Rose, 1996; McDonald et al; 2005) utilizes Foucauldian concepts of governmentality to highlight how the means and subject of government have been reconfigured based on regimes and rationalities of ‘the self’. This brief review simply underlines the broad theoretical spectrum according to which workfare can be understood.

Furthermore, each of these perspectives has specific strengths and weaknesses that are relevant to the questions posed in this research. Geographers and other scholars in social control and regulation schools acknowledge a more encompassing political terrain out of which welfarism and workfarism emerge within material circumstances, offering direct insight into the ways that specific groups and classes organize themselves to accumulate material wealth and advantage through capitalist structures. They take into consideration oppositional forces as well as hegemonic ones in the intersecting genealogy of governance, scale and policy. For example, Cope’s (2001) qualitative study of agencies charged with delivering welfare to work programs reveal that they are seemingly wedged ‘between work and welfare’, acting as a labour supply for local employers as well as genuinely seeking better lives through employment for their clients. Cope acknowledges the important regulatory role of civil society organizations, but fails to answer deeper theoretical questions about the possibility for local resistance to workfarism and
the development and future of the workfare state within neoliberalism’s micro-structures of governance. This research will attempt to push this theoretical gap to explore how local relationships of hegemony and opposition, re-organized through new networks of workfare delivery, have been integral to the endurance of neoliberal workfarism in Toronto.

Discourse, according to poststructuralist thought, is “not simply a form of rhetoric disseminated by hegemonic economic and political groups, nor as the framework within which people represent their lived experience, but rather as a system of meaning that constitutes institutions, practices and identities in contradictory and disjunctive ways.” (Larner, 2000: 12, emphasis added). The governmentality literature on neoliberalism points to the ways in which social policy reforms have been linked to “a new specification of the object of governance”: “not only [are] firms to be entrepreneurial, enterprising and innovative, but so too are political subjects” (Larner, 2000: 13). These analyses permit deeper insights into the way that discourse, facilitated and disseminated through new technologies of power, generates new ways of understanding ourselves and the world around us, especially in terms of what problems we identify and the solutions to them (Rose, 1996; Dean, 1995). Workfare exemplifies both the disciplinary and governmental manner in which advanced liberal rule produces neoliberal subjectivities – though the OW framework’s principal objective is that of individual responsibility and self-governance, it requires state authority and discipline to mobilize such objectives. Activating the concept of social citizenship reveals the way in which both the criteria for belonging and the historical- and place-contingent set of rights, entitlements, obligations, and identities that characterize these criteria are process-oriented and contested rather than being universal, unchanging and legalistic (Isin, 2008: 11). In contrast to scholars using a political
The principal weakness of poststructuralist scholarship is that it often, but not always, fails to acknowledge the material advantages and benefits accrued by particular groups and classes through neoliberal reforms and rationalities, as identified so poignantly by, for example, David Harvey in *A brief history of neoliberalism* (2005).

**The role of workfare in Toronto**

This research indicates that local workfare delivery models problematize and discipline particular groups and classes in Toronto, and that this process has a spatial character. It attempts to historicize and theorize urban governmentalities by studying local genealogies of welfare and workfare. How does neoliberal workfare represent both continuity and a break from broader historical patterns? This research also suggests that workfare’s legitimacy and sustainability was contingent on urban governance relationships existing in Toronto between the municipal government and community-based agencies. Furthermore, while OW has been reformed from its original and most coercive form, its lasting impacts will be felt unevenly in the city as it has produced physical effects on the City’s municipal government, re-orienting its social service infrastructure towards employment. This re-orientation is occurring through specific programs targeted at the most disenfranchised neighbourhoods in the city, formally addressed through the ‘priority neighbourhoods’ discourse.

Focusing attention on the roots and effects of OW at the level of the urban is not arbitrary and neither should it exclude acknowledgement of the roles of other government scales. In particular, the OW framework represented a key moment in the history of Ontario municipalities’ responsibility for social government. More generally, scholars have suggested that cities play a crucial role in the remaking of political economic space, where restructuring has
occurred with particular intensity (see Brenner & Theodore, 2002). While literature on the workfare state often refers to the residual and restructured nature of the centralized welfare state, it also underlines that the orientation towards workfarism across jurisdictions has energized rather than curtailed the dominance of the nation-state as a territorialized political form. However, this literature also indicates that the political struggle over social citizenship is performed in a decentralized and diffused fashion at sub-national and trans-national scales. It also prompts researchers of welfare/workfare states to question ‘the nation’ that welfare and workfare states produce and reproduce territorially. How is ‘nation’ reformulated through new forms of social government? Is it even possible to speak of such a thing?

**Summary**

While, in general, both the City of Toronto and non-profit organizations strongly opposed the workfarist form of social assistance restructuring in Ontario, its genealogy over the past decade has been surprisingly anti-climactic. Beginning in 1998, Conservative Premier Mike Harris’ government drastically overhauled the province’s welfare framework, replacing the General Welfare Act with Ontario Works, a program that linked financial to employment assistance through compulsion, as well as re-scaling this new program at the municipal level through the Local Service Realignment Act. Later, in 2005, due to heavy criticism of Ontario Works by employment service providers and anti-poverty activists, the Liberal government of Dalton McGuinty attempted to ameliorate the framework through five policy amendments. The latter smoothed over only a few of program’s most punitive edges. This introductory chapter has shown that while Harris’ framework has remained in place, the question of whether its workfarist essence has been preserved or eliminated has yet to be answered. This question must take into
consideration various definitions of workfarism. Is workfare exceptional among labour market attachment programs due to the use of compulsion? Or can it be distinguished as a program, policy, attitude or practice, or combination thereof, which lays obligation and responsibility on the individual to fulfil him or herself within waged employment, and by extension, as an ‘employee of the nation’, or citizen. Without diminishing the salience of the explicit use of compulsion to push social assistance recipients into employment, this study seeks to deploy a much more general understanding of workfare, one which is mobilized within a range of social and economy forms and policies, one that is at the basis of post-Keynesian social citizenship in Canada.

This study seeks to investigate the experiences of the non-profit employment service providers (ESPs) who were crucial to the City of Toronto’s delivery of the employment assistance component of the OW program. What employment programs were offered to social assistance recipients in Toronto prior to Ontario’s workfare policy implementation, and by whom? What were the sources of consensus and conflict between the municipal government and non-profit ESPs with respect to the OW program? How did the local governance relationships affect the genealogy of the OW framework? These questions guided this project. In this introductory chapter, I have provided a brief theoretical backdrop for this research. I engage with the question of local workfare within a historical perspective and situate its emergence in a neoliberal context of reregulation of the social fabric, a process which necessarily involves the reshaping of citizenship forms, political scales, and governance networks. This research attempts to identify new forms of the individual and the social that have congealed through local workfarism in Toronto.
Chapter 2 Literature review: A genealogy of employment and income assistance

This literature review reflects the topics of urban governance and social citizenship within the context of a provincially-mandated and municipally-delivered workfare policy. I will trace its local genealogy, moving back and forth between trends occurring in and between other scales and jurisdictions, and using relevant theoretical contributions to highlight local and broader policies and processes. I have characterized this genealogy as a series of shifts and continuities. I begin with a historical perspective, which will highlight how local relationships of class crystallized through early workfare/welfare ‘solutions’ to industrial poverty (Heroux, 2008; Little, 1998; Hardwick; 1998; Wolch et al, 2001), which are still apparent in the philosophy, form and location of services for Toronto’s poor today. Subsequently, I attempt to show how neoliberal workfarism has been produced and reproduced unevenly in Toronto, taking into consideration histories of national welfarism, which reflect particular political, social and cultural struggles. In this sense, I draw attention to a range of agents and forces – both state and nonstate – which have shaped workfarism in the city today.

The House of Industry: exploring local roots of regulation in social assistance arrangements

As Toronto industrialized, beginning in the 1850s, large numbers of working class people began migrating to the city, establishing homes and communities in areas proximate to factories. Since industrialization put significant downward pressure on urban social conditions, devising policies to address poverty and unemployment became the subject of much debate, and a pretext for the development of systems and institutions to address these conditions. Gaetan Heroux’s (2008) history of relief and resistance in Toronto’s downtown east area, where many services for
the city’s growing poor have been historically concentrated, is an insightful portrait of the political landscape through which welfare and workfare policies have evolved. The specific history of the Toronto’s House of Industry (HOI) – a protestant charity that provided indoor (a shelter) and outdoor relief (distribution of alms) for over 100 years to poor Torontonians – highlights the dynamic, agonistic relationships constituting local governance and social citizenship that are deeply embedded in contemporary welfare and workfare policies within capitalist societies. The following description of local relief policies in pre-war Toronto is based principally on Gaetan Heroux’s historical monograph and public lecture (2008 & 2009), but see also Hardwick (1998) and Little (1998) for the Ontario context, and Wolch et al (2001) or much of Michael Katz’s seminal scholarship on the history of poor relief in the U.S.

For over a century, Toronto’s homeless and poor were dependent on “the charity and benevolence of churches and wealthy philanthropists, many of whom were rich industrialists” (Heroux, 2008: 12). Because England’s Poor Laws were rejected by the Upper Canada legislature in 1792, state administrators did not have any responsibility for the poor, opening a space in 19th century Ontario in which locally-based religious and voluntary organizations provided charitable relief. Because there was such fear and prejudice in Upper Canada towards the poor stemming from the perceived dependence encouraged through the state-run poor house model in Britain, only four poor houses were established in Ontario, including two in Toronto, known as the House of Industry (Protestant) and House of Providence (Catholic). The House of Industry (HOI) was directed by a voluntary cadre of trustees, managers and ‘Ward Visitors’ among whom numbered the city’s burgeoning industrial elite: George A. Allan, Rev. Arthur H.

4 Though there were Houses of Industry across England, and to a lesser extent, the US and Canada, I will refer to Toronto’s House of Industry as simply ‘the House of Industry’
Baldwin, R.T. Gooderham and Samuel Trees. They were leaders in advocating for a series of ‘reforms’ throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries including the establishment of the poor houses themselves (2008: 14). Ward Visitors were responsible for visiting families in want of ‘outdoor relief’ and deciding if and how much coal, food and/or wood they deserved. Heroux states:

The primary role of the Ward Visitors, most of whom represented the values of Toronto’s wealthy upper class, was first and foremost to guard against creating a class of paupers. The House of Industry believed that idleness, laziness and drunkenness were a major cause of poverty. Ward Visitors were involved in more than just the allocation of relief. They were instructed to encourage habits of industry, frugality, temperance and good living to those poor families whom they were visiting (...) and to seek to stimulate habits of temperance, providence, economy and cleanliness. (2008: 15)

George A. Allan also advocated for ‘labour tests’, or making relief recipients perform manual labour in return for their soup, coal and sometimes lodging. By the 1860s, as demand for relief sky-rocketed, the HOI began forcing able-bodied men deemed fit to work to cut wood in return for their relief. This ‘test’ failed to meet its objectives of decreasing relief rolls. In addition, the HOI often had more cut wood than they had the capacity to use. The HOI Board of Directors required the services of the Elias Rogers Coal Company to bring in wood to be cut and taken away in the 1880s. By the mid-1890s, a more rigid forced labour regime of stone-breaking was implemented, which the HOI declared should be “more unpleasant than work”. However, over two thirds of those receiving relief refused to cut stone. Heroux argues that this suggests recipients were strategically organizing against the policy. Until the 1920s, though the elite
philanthropist volunteer core had been replaced by paid workers, recipients were still required to perform ‘labour tests’ to be eligible for relief.

For several scholars, the resurgence of workfare is so evocative of pre-welfare relief forms that it has been characterized as ‘new poor laws’ (Wolch & Dinh, 2001; Shragge, 1997). Through the early example of Toronto’s House of Industry – an antecedent to the attitudes and policies at the heart of both national welfare and neoliberal workfare states – two principal continuities in the regulatory roles of pre-war relief require discussion. This theoretical framework of ‘regulatory continuities’ at the core of evolving welfare schemes will structure further discussions in this review, of the rise of national welfare and the subsequent resurgence of local workfare. In Regulating the poor: the functions of public welfare, Marxist social theorists Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward (1971) identify two principal roles of welfare both at the national, state-led level in the post-war era as well as prior workhouse/poorhouse forms of welfare dating back to Elizabethan Britain in 1601. Piven & Cloward have had consistent influence on scholarship exploring the role of social assistance in capitalist societies (see Peck, 1996 & 2001a; Cope, 2001), arguing that ‘relief arrangements’ regulate both the social order and the labour market. Relief expands in order to quell disorder caused by mass unemployment, while it subsequently contracts as social turbulence subsides, expelling those deemed ineligible or undeserving into the bottom-end of the waged labour market in more prosperous economic times. Rather than entirely disappearing, relief functions rather effectively to discipline those employed in the low-end labour market into remaining employed rather than face the miserable conditions maintained through social assistance arrangements (Piven and Cloward, 1971: 3).
Relief is therefore a secondary and supportive institution that seeks to resolve the inherently destabilizing relationship between the social order and the labour market. For feminist sociologists, ‘the social’ and the labour market are not mutually exclusive spheres: “Employment is one of the major institutional mechanisms for regulating different sectors of society. As such it is a site for documenting how the dynamics of gender, race and class get produced and reproduced” (Neysmith et al, 2005: 96). In geography, Jamie Peck’s Work-place (1996) seeks a “conception of the labour market as a socially-constructed and politically mediated structure of conflict and accommodation among contending forces... that is systemically structured by institutional forces and power relations” (4). A far cry from neoclassical theories of the price allocation mechanism as the principal organizing force of labour markets, Peck argues that labour markets are socially regulated, principally at the local level. At this scale labour is mobilized and reproduced through the infrastructure of the everyday – the fabric of community and culture from which “generations of workers” are cultivated, and “woven into the landscape of labour” (Storper & Walker, 1989: 157, quoted in Peck, 1996: 11). For Polanyi (1944/2001), labour, like land and money, is ‘peculiar’, a fictitious commodity, socially produced and inalienable from its social bearings. In the case of labour, the problem of governing the flow of workers onto the market is an intractable regulatory dilemma (Peck, 1996: 27). Social and institutional mechanisms are required to make people want to jump into the labour market willingly and to clearly delineate terms under which nonparticipation in the labour market is permitted, in order to maintain a proper proportion of waged and unwaged segments of the population (27). Relief is one such mechanism, which functions through “defining and enforcing
the terms on which different classes of men [sic] are made to do different kinds of work” (Piven & Cloward, 1971: xv).

In all its incarnations, workfare programs were made possible through ‘radical localizations’ at level of the body, city, region, or province (Peck, 2001a & b; MacDonald et al, 2005). Couched between workfarist forms of relief over the 400 year history of social assistance in Western nation-states, national welfare appears as somewhat of an exceptional political state form. Although the quality of national welfare varied widely between Western states, it nonetheless enshrined the social rights of its citizens based on need *de jure*, rather than utilize social relief as a mechanism for sorting and sifting citizen from non-citizen. Of course, while in practice this was rarely achieved, as a principle and scale used to mobilize and govern society, it was unprecedented.

Scalar and spatial transformations of government are integral to shifts in social and political landscapes. For Janine Brodie (2008) *le problème social* emerged in discourses in order to make sense of, and to govern, industrial society – firstly on the part of local elites, philanthropists and authorities, and later as the focus of centralized state government. Social governance appeared as a strategy of liberal government “to construct and enforce a particular model of societal and institutional pluralism and, at the same time, develop reflexive strategies of intervention to sustain this model” (29). This has less to do with the social problem itself than as a way of *representing* “both the reformable and the reformers, as well as *intervening* in processes of social reproduction” (26, emphasis added).

Where does local neoliberal workfare become possible within the shifting sites, methods, and scales of government practices? As these shifts occur, what social order (of citizens,
workers, etc.) is underwritten? Carol Bacchi (1999) argues that government’s ‘problems’ tell us less – or even nothing – about a particular process, rather than illustrating a particular way of understanding relationships of power. Whose perspectives, issues and voices are raised, and whose remain silent or are silenced? Indeed, “social policies (...) address conditions that, at some time or place, are identified as a ‘social problem’ and they may be more or less successful in ameliorating that problem (...) these same policies also construct and embed particular representations of what citizenship means and what it means to be a good citizen” (Brodie, 2008: 32). Within Nicolas Rose’s concept of advanced liberal strategies of government (1996), both the site and method of social intervention is radically individualized. The individual is positioned not as problem but as possibility. Each of us is both reformer and reformable – of ourselves, others and the entire social body. Instead of a disappearing ‘social’, as has been argued is occurring through neoliberal transformations of citizenship and governance, the social is thoroughly refigured.

The rise and fall of the welfare state: nation, citizenship and work

While the workhouse model of workfare relief was abruptly abandoned in the post-war era, some of its key features were reproduced through welfare state forms of social assistance. On the one hand, its delivery model shifted upward, to be administered and overseen at a federal scale in a centralized fashion: “The charity model with its arbitrariness and discretion, which was administered by municipalities or by private agencies, was taken over by provincial administrations and administered by bureaucratic structures” (Shragge, 1997: 23). The Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) provided the framework for a federally-administered welfare program enshrining the provision of social assistance based on need, in the form of federal to provincial
transfers. The centralized administration of welfare officially prohibited workfarism across the country. It was in the 1960s, not in the 1930s-40s as is commonly believed, that the CAP became the basis for a federal expansion of social security, based on the 1937 Rowell-Sirois Royal Commission. The latter advocated for the reorganization of the federal-provincial relationship through a system of equalization transfers. Governmental responsibilities and social service benefits would be equally distributed to bolster the national income, creating a national wage and welfare benefit ‘base’ (Peck, 2001a: 225; Shragge, 1997).

With this scalar shift upward, welfare, alongside other universal social programs, became important building blocks in constructing Canadian nationhood, citizenship and identity (Brodie, 2003). It emphasized objectives of universality, equality, collective responsibility and social rights based on need, thus forging a ‘modern nation’ – an ideal that would permit a sustainable social order, prosperity and well-being. Following the Great Depression, the welfare state’s range of universal social programs had as their guiding assumption that the market alone could not provide for people’s social well-being in capitalist societies and that the state must step in to both regulate the market, as well as create a social security net. Pat Armstrong explains:

There was an understanding of the universal needs of the population at large, in which everyone was at risk, even though not everyone would suffer (...), that very few had the kinds of incomes that could offer the financial protection necessary if ill health or unemployment hit (...), [that] the market could not provide and individual effort was not enough. (1997: 52).

While the values of “caring and sharing” became an important part of the Canadian national identity (Brodie, 2003; Armstrong, 1997: 52), post-war Canadian public policy principally encouraged individuals to meet their needs through market mechanisms, supported by
a social security net and income transfers on the basis of need (Esping-Anderson, 1990).

Feminist scholars show how the figure of the ‘normal citizen’ forged during this period was of the white, heterosexual, able-bodied man who provided for his family through steady, waged work. Thus, the hegemony of paid work as the only legitimate form of work symbolically and materially subordinated the reproductive and caring work of women, as well as those excluded from the waged labour market such as racialized and disabled people (Young, 1990; Neysmith et al, 2005: 12).

For those who could not meet the hegemonic model of ‘normal he-citizen’, the social assistance system could hardly be characterized as ‘caring and sharing’. The surveillance and policing of social assistance recipients that was so integral to the poor-house and pre-welfare forms of relief continued to be an integral aspect of national welfare programs. Moreover, the tradition of distinguishing the deserving from undeserving poor was preserved. This tradition determined and enforced societal terms for which groups and individuals should or should not work for wages, and who did or did not merit state support. Thus, the regulatory apparatus of social assistance and the mainstream labour market were fundamental institutional mechanisms for governing ‘the social’, with major social cleavages (according to ability, race, gender, sexuality, etc.) congealing through this system. In a Ms magazine article, Johnnie Tillmon (1971) catalyzed this sentiment and mobilized the welfare rights movements:

I’m a woman. I’m a black woman. I’m a poor woman. I’m a fat woman. I’m a middle-aged woman. And I’m on welfare. In this country, if you’re any one of those things (...) you count less as a human being. If you’re all of those things, you don’t count at all.
In many ways, the contradictions of nationalized universalism produced through the welfare state led to the attack against it by the late 1970s, both by its neoliberal critics and equity-seeking groups on the political left (Harvey, 2005: 41-42; Armstrong, 1997).

Despite the fact that it attempted to govern in the name of ‘the social’, that is, society at large, by using redistributive mechanisms, it in fact privileged certain citizens and groups over others, as exemplified in the labour market, employment and social assistance policies. In summary, the welfare state set in place a paradoxical framework for social citizenship that enabled its restructuring. This system included both continuities and shifts in its form and philosophy from pre-Keynesian traditions of poor relief. During the post-war Keynesian period, for those Canadians able to access them, paid jobs were relatively effective in providing a source of human security, both due to the expansionary economic factors as well as state policies that encouraged full and secure employment. Such policies broadly acknowledged that one’s ability to participate in the labour market was a matter of both supply and demand, rather than the inherent deficiencies of the individual – a notion which we shall see later has greatly influenced the rise of workfarist public policy and governance. Exploring some of the nuances of the Canadian welfare state allows us to observe that while collective well-being and equality became state objectives, a pattern of individual reliance on employment as the principal means of security was forged, one which was reinvigorated through neoliberal workfarism precisely at a time when most employment has transformed into a source of insecurity.

**Local workfare resurgent: the re-scaling of welfare**

Geographers from the neo-Marxist regulation school (Peck, 2001a; Jessop, 2002) have advanced an empirical and theoretical understanding of state forms emerging through the
restructuring of the welfare state, identifying ‘workfarism’ as a trend that heavily pervades these forms. Influencing scholars in other disciplines (see Lightman et al, 2006, for an example), Peck and Jessop have captured cross-jurisdictional patterns in which social assistance programs are not only increasingly oriented towards active labour market attachment, but that almost invariably involve a downward scalar movement. Nonetheless, this has occurred in highly uneven ways. They argue that this phenomenon is not the backdrop to transformations of political rationalities, state forms and the exercise of citizenship, but that it makes these possible. Furthermore, capitalism is produced and sustained through territorialized and scaled social, political and cultural forms, which contain and regulate its contradictions and allow for its reproduction. One of the most significant features of the workfare state form identified by Peck is the way in which workfare programs were made possible through federal amendments and mandates in the US, UK and Canada.

Workfare has only in rare instances manifested itself in its pure form, that is, public work for the dole. For Peck (1996: 188; 2001a) workfare refers to a broader political economic tendency which includes discursive representations, institutional forms and restructuring strategies (2001a: 11). Peck’s analysis is a critical piece of scholarship because it shows how workfare – as political project and a policy tendency – has been a tangible feature of welfare state restructuring throughout Western European and North American countries. Beginning with local experiments in the U.S., workfare was translated to other scales and jurisdictions through what Peck calls ‘international policy cross-pollination’. He identifies workfarism in several forms, including increasing market selectivity in access to welfare; reductions in welfare support and eligibility; the application of compulsion mechanisms to induce participation in education,
training, ‘make-work’ programs or waged employment; increasing the policing and surveillance of welfare recipients; the imposition of stringent requirements on recipients in order to receive benefits; and the privatization and deregulation of job training.

In countries around the world, but most prominently in Canada, the US and the UK, policy transformations that residualize welfare (as income transfers) and promote employment have involved a downward scalar shift from national welfare to local workfare. Indeed, in this context, Peck argues that one of the most important ways that workfare differs from welfare is that it finds “coherence in fluid, unstable and multi-scalar regulatory configurations”. This has given new meaning and new responsibilities to specific administrative agencies and institutions at the local level: “[F]ront-line offices are now themselves engaged in the process of policy development” (2001a: 15). As local workfare became permissible and was implemented by counties, cities and state- and provincial-level governments, their ‘experiments’ informed public policy development in other scales and jurisdictions. As a regulatory mechanism of the labour market, workfare aggressively mobilizes workers for the lower-end of the labour market: “Under conditions of falling wages, chronic underemployment, and job casualization, workfarism maximizes and effectively mandates participation in contingent low-paid work” (2001a: 12). In the context of a precarious labour market, workfare produces and reproduces a compliant labour supply. Finally, Peck argues that workfare programs cast a governmental shadow beyond its targets, “shaping the norms, values and behaviours of the wider population and maintaining a form of order” (2001: 23).
Understand workfare: neo-Marxist perspectives

The revival of local workfare can be discussed within two theoretical contexts: on the one hand, workfare can be understood as a set of locally-variable political practices developed to solve crises in the accumulation of capital. On the other hand, workfare can be understood as a means of government through technologies of advanced liberalism. In the case of the former, later work by Piven & Cloward (2001) argues that, “the propelling force behind the workfare campaign arises not from some quasi-mystical postindustrial economic imperative but from neoliberal politics, from political ideas and political strategies conceived by political actors” (xv). David Harvey conceives of neoliberalism, similarly to Piven & Cloward’s characterization of workfare. Rather than a utopian ideal – in which “human well being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (2005: 2) – neoliberalism in practice is a “political project to re-establish the conditions of capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites” (19).

Here it is worth detailing Harvey’s argument, which posits that neoliberalism originated as a set of practices to accumulate wealth and re-establish class power, which was pioneered through coercion, as in the case of Chile in 1973.. To understand this, Harvey argues that we must look to the everyday material conditions of life under capitalism in the 1970’s (2005: 41). In this context, both the economic and social fabric of Keynesianism was in crisis, creating a space in which political transformations were inevitable. With high unemployment and ‘stagflation’ (low growth and high inflation), investors were making little or no profit on their capital (19). Moreover, social tensions were high, with equity-seeking groups calling for greater
individual freedom and recognition thus bridging a tense alliance between groups calling for increasing individual freedom, albeit for different reasons.

As state coffers across various scales and jurisdictions fell into or neared bankruptcy, financial agencies and elites flexed their muscles, refusing to roll over New York City’s municipal debt, for example, unless the City government agreed to privatize and deregulate its massive public infrastructure (services, unions, etc.) For Harvey, “the management of the New York fiscal crisis pioneered the way of neoliberal practices both domestically under Reagan and internationally through the IMF in the 1980s” (46). Local experiments with neoliberal management of fiscal crises, in which business classes began acting in coordination to advance their interests, set a precedent that was a radical departure from Keynesian public policy: where human well-being and financial integrity are in conflict, the latter should be privileged. Supporting the full employment of and basic needs of citizens, once the most important objectives of Keynesian public policy, was increasingly viewed as too expensive and consequently displaced. Conditions for workfarism were thus forged. At the national level, Paul Volcker, under President Jimmy Carter’s administration, dramatically overhauled the monetary system, abandoning policies guaranteeing full employment in favour of a policy that would quell inflation, no matter the human consequences. By 1979, states Harvey, public policy at the national level in both the US and UK was discernibly ‘neoliberalized’.

The concept of accumulation by dispossession is worthwhile considering in terms of neoliberal practices in general, and workfare in particular. David Harvey revives Karl Marx’s notion of accumulation by dispossession as those ‘primitive’ mechanisms of capitalist growth which utilize coercive, violent measures to ‘open up’ new sites of investment through various
means. Workfarism aggressively mobilizes the lower-end of the labour market by creating downward pressure on wages. In neo-liberal theory, unemployment is voluntary. Labour has a reserve price below which it will not work, which is regulated and protected through welfare rates. Unemployment arises as a result of a high labour reserve price (2005: 54, 168). The manner in which workfare puts downward pressure on wages was one mechanism enabling the incredible amassing of wealth by a slim few during the 1980’s, 1990’s and into the new millennium. Studies by the Canadian Council for Policy Alternatives (Klein et al, 2001) link the rise of workfare policies in Canada to the flat-lining of wages during an expansionary economic period (the late 1990s). A study from the US by the Tufts University Centre of Hunger and Poverty (discussed in Kodras, 2001: 499) uses maps to explore the political aim of welfare reform – to improve the economic well-being of recipients – in contrast to its results, in which 37 states who adopted such policies actually worsened the economic security of their poorest households. Harvey states that,

The incredible concentration of wealth and power that now exist in the upper echelons of capitalism have not been seen since the 1920’s. The flows of tribute into the world’s major financial centres have been astonishing. What, however, is even more astonishing is the habit of treating all of this as a mere and in some instances even unfortunate by-product of neoliberalism. The very idea that this might be – just might be – the fundamental core of what neoliberalism has been about all along appears unthinkable. (Harvey, 2005: 119).

Similarly, though not explicitly acknowledging Marxist influences, Eric Shragge (1997; see also Wacquant, 2001 and Soss et al, 2008 for analysis in the U.S. context) argues that Canadian workfare programs represent an ideology for ‘a new underclass’. In this sense, capitalist economic expansion has produced new forms of social dislocation and marginalization.
Subsequently, mainstream calls for policy solutions to address the social conditions faced by the new underclass, positioning their emergence as exogenous to flexible processes of accumulation. Others, from empirical (like Klein et al, 2001) or theoretical viewpoints (Prashad, 2003), like Harvey, specifically point to workfare as a means of squeezing additional capital from labour surpluses.

**Understanding workfare: post-structuralist perspectives**

According to poststructuralist understandings of social, spatial and political transformations in recent decades, these are less related to the rise of neoliberalism as a political and ideological force, than to the “emergence of a way of thinking about government and its enactment that we can consider as an ‘advanced’ form of liberalism: one that underpins the programmes and policies set out by forces of almost all political persuasions” (Rose, 2000: 96). Advanced liberalism is a governmental strategy guiding the conduct of conduct at a distance, compelling and cajoling individuals to govern themselves. Therefore, unlike structural perspectives on workfare and welfare state restructuring, power is not only associated with domination and oppression, nor absolutely held. Rather, power is diffuse and circulated, enacted, performed, and productive. Through a multiplicity of practices that promote the formation and reformation of the capacities and attributes of the self, argues Dean (1995), new social assistance and unemployment programs “engage ‘clients’ in their own government by demanding their complicity in these practices of self-shaping, self-cultivation and self-presentation” (567). In the abandonment of universal, monopolistic welfare programs the hegemony of paid labour as the only form of legitimate work is carried forward and reinvigorated. Individuals are positioned as self-sufficient, autonomous beings, who, bearing the appropriate human capital and skill set can
“fulfill our potential in contemporary liberation movements” (Dean, 1995: 565). Welfare programs are subsumed under employment programs that attempt to ‘fix’ the deficient worker, who, finally ‘fixed’ is expected to find sustainable work and provide for her family.

The poor need help finding jobs: Myths workfare depends on

A large body of feminist and anti-racist scholarship especially from political studies, sociology, adult education and social work, address myths about the behaviour of the poor, the labour market, and human security which are legitimated by and perpetuated through workfare programs. Although both welfare and workfare programs mobilize countless fears and prejudices of the middle- and upper-class and other dominant groups vis-à-vis the poor, the three myths isolated and discussed here relate specifically to employment. Across Western European and North American countries, but especially in Canada, the US and the UK, workfare mobilizes and produces varied, though broadly similar politically and ideologically constructed ‘problems’ and solutions to these. These have been crucial in creating consensus around the need for workfare, and have permitted its survival. As Jamie Peck argues (2001a), there is a great deal of debate and contention around how welfare reform needs to happen, and whether workfare is effective or not, displacing more important debates about the flawed philosophy and myths that they are based on. Firstly, there is the ‘problem of dependency’ that workfare attempts to ‘correct’. Dependency is invoked in two ways: specifically, that the poor, rather than anyone other group in welfare state forms, was ‘too coddled’ by the state through income transfers, tangentially inferring that middle- or upper-class citizens were conversely ‘independent’ of state support and gained all their wealth by virtue of their own hard work. Jean Swanson, a Canadian
welfare rights activist, mockingly deconstructs some of these myths in a series of rhetorical questions:

Applying social policy newspeak phrases to the wealthy shows how ridiculous they really are: Are wealthy people ‘dependent’ on tax breaks? How could we reform the tax system to make the wealthy more ‘independent’? (...) Would the wealthy have more self-esteem if they worked for their money, rather than inherited it? (Swanson, 1997: 156)

Secondly, there is the myth that welfare recipients ‘don’t work’, a fiction whose roots are two-fold. In the first sense, it builds on the idea that paid, wage labour is the only legitimate form of work; and in the second, that social assistance recipients are literally not involved in waged labour. This myth corresponds to age-old fears of idleness and its social ills, a constant source of public apprehension of the poor since the Elizabethan period. Orstein’s (1995) and Hardina’s (1997) scholarship shows that most social assistance recipients (in US and Canadian contexts) combine seasonal, temporary and/or ‘under the table’ employment with welfare. For Piven & Cloward, quoted in Hardina (1997), people trapped in the ‘secondary labour market’ – the precarious or lower-tier of the hour-glass labour market – often combine welfare with work as they cannot survive on only one or the other of these as adequate sources of income. For Hardina, this naturally leads her to question the workfarist emphasis on compulsory education, job training, job search programs in order to ‘get clients off’ the welfare system:

At best, these programs assist people who generally combine welfare with temporary, seasonal, or part time jobs to find work faster than if they had not enrolled in these programs. The research evidence we do have tells us that in fact most people who receive welfare do work. (1997: 144)
Thirdly, workfarism is contingent upon the myth that work is a source of material security and autonomy. In a large-scale qualitative project documenting the impacts of welfare restructuring on individuals and households in Ontario, Neysmith et al (2005) argue that income security among middle- and lower-income people today depends largely on their housing and social/family supports. They state, “Contrary to claims that jobs are the best route out of low income security, household experiences suggest that social networks that offer access to things like housing are more important to income security” (47). Paradoxically, just as social policy increasingly emphasizes active labour employment policies, rather than other supports (such as housing, childcare, or direct income transfers) as a means of assuring Canadians’ well-being, paid employment is increasingly unreliable in sustaining income security. Embracing supply-side employment policies and residualizing other social supports depends on the ideological (re)production of all three of these myths, among others.

Workfare and the city

This study is broadly concerned with the conditions that made workfare possible in Toronto. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the Canada Assistance Plan was a 50-50 cost-sharing agreement between the federal and provincial levels that prohibited workfare and welfare-to-work programs until 1996. Through its federal oversight, CAP mandated five standards across provinces: 1) the right to income based only on need; 2) a right to income that would meet budgetary requirements; 3) a right to appeal welfare decisions; 4) the right not to work in exchange for welfare; and 5) the right to income regardless of province of residence. When replaced by the Liberal federal government in 1995 with the Canada Health and Social Transfer, a block transfer grant, the standards vanished. Provinces could thus use federal funding
to implement workfare programs (Peck, 2001a). As the Ontario Conservative government of Mike Harris amalgamated cities into mega-regions, the Ontario Works Act of 1998 set out a framework in which recently restructured cities were charged with funding and implementing workfare, through the Local Service Realignment Act (Lightman, 1997; Peck, 2001a).

Workfare therefore became necessarily a matter of experimental, urban government: “The Ontario government downloaded increased responsibilities and flexibility to municipalities to design ‘local solutions’, as Lightman, Herd & Mitchell argue (2006: 120). However, these authors emphasize, local solutions were only possible insofar as the specific provincial framework and policy constraints would allow. In this scenario, federal and provincial governments retain utmost control. There was little option for local administrators in Ontario municipalities but to pursue “short-term, low-cost, workfarist strategies”. Lightman et al (2006) thus infer that in devolution, lay possibility; that local solutions presented an opportunity for more humane implementation of workfare. Instead they show how local implementation was relatively uniform (in their study of Ottawa, Toronto, Niagara Region and Peel Region).

Conversely, for Peck, the urban politics of workfare are often as varied and uneven as workfare strategies themselves (2001b: 497). More broadly, scholars have attempted to understand how ‘the urban’ or ‘the city’ act as a local/translocal interface of economic, political and social transformations – sites that are both result of and the reproductive heart of globalization, post-modernization and capitalism itself (Sassen, 2002; Isin, 2000). The phenomenon of the urban localization of neoliberal workfare is one that has been explored relatively little.

This is the most important gap in the literature of the re-scaled resurgence of workfare in Toronto. How did the downloading of responsibilities and flexibility in Toronto interact with
existing governance networks of social provision providers, both public and non-profit? What points of contention and consensus emerged between various nodes of this network and the provincial government? What did the local implementation of workfare mean for the series of reforms to Ontario Works in 2005? And what does this mean for the future of workfare in Toronto and in the province?

Local workfare and civil society

The role of ‘community’ in the restructuring of the welfare state is a matter of significant empirical and theoretical debate, lauded as both saviour by scholars such as Amitai Etzioni and Robert Putnam, and as a problem by the likes of Bob Jessop and Seyla Benhabib, for different reasons (Defillipis et al, 2006). Without necessarily conflating concepts such as civil society and community with the institutional apparatus of the non-profit sector, there is an undeniable relationship between these, whether in theory and/or empirically. This relationship must be examined and interrogated. Hall & Banting (2000) state that,

The non-profit sector appears to be emerging as a chosen instrument of collective action in a new century. Government retrenchment in the 1990’s has led to reductions in many community and social services and a renewed interest in the potential role of non-profit organizations in filling the resulting gaps in our social safety net. Such retrenchment has often been accompanied by a call for communities to do more on their own through voluntary action. (2)

Simplistic understandings of neoliberal shifts in governance and citizenship in which responsibility for social provision is downloaded from the national state onto community and civil society fails to capture the complexity of both the shifts themselves as well as the nature of categories of civil society, the market and the state. Furthermore, neoliberal social policy in
Canada has emphasized and reified the social body in entirely new ways, often localized and using targeted mechanisms, delivered through the taxation system, to invest in specific areas, groups and communities which seem to have trouble ‘making it’ in the ‘new economy’ (Brodie, 2008: 40). Taking as an example the case of workfare in Toronto, as the newly amalgamated municipality struggled to implement Ontario Works both financially and pragmatically, it turned to hundreds of non-profit, community-based employment service providers who had the expertise to move hundreds of thousands of welfare recipients into employment. Therefore the re-scaling of welfare challenged and adjusted local governance relationships in multifarious ways, drawing in certain non-state agencies and disengaging others.

In fact, the role of non-profits has been focus of analyses of welfare reforms in the US (Cope, 2001; Alexander et al, 1999). For Alexander et al, the devolution of responsibility for implementing workfare and the ‘marketization’ of social services disables the advocacy, or political functions, which non-profit agencies traditionally provided within the civil society sphere. As they become increasingly responsible for social reproduction rather than political advocacy due to structural changes in governance and the economy, Cope’s qualitative study positions non-profits as new regulatory bodies, of both the marketized social order and the labour market. Therefore, for Cope, they perform contradictory functions as both enforcers of work norms and advocates for the poor. Alexander et al, on the other hand, employ a liberal concept of civil society as the root of democratic citizenship – elaborated de Tocqueville, and later Hannah Arendt – lamenting that the pressures of welfare reform on non-profits transforms their mandate as politically-oriented agencies into socially-focused ones. This, the authors argue, dampens America’s liberal democratic roots. Despite divergent theoretical points of reference, Cope and
Alexander et al acknowledge the centrality of non-profit organizations in the process of welfare state restructuring, yet in the same instance, they mystify the history and nature of civil society’s relationship to market and state. Furthermore, they also neglect to address how non-profits become entangled in coercive branches of the state in the fulfilment of program goals. Is it even accurate to consider a non-profit organization in the realm of civil society if such is the case?

Both liberal and critical theories of civil society are an attempt to make sense of society in relation to the development of capitalism (Goonewardena et al, 2004). One the one hand, for Marx and Hegel, civil society referred to a sphere of the social that was distinct from the state, but not from the economy. Conversely, Alexis de Tocqueville, in Democracy in America, also from the 19th century, argued that civil society is explored as a social space separate from both the liberal democratic state and the capitalist economy, and composed of voluntary associations like families, churches, neighbourhoods and a free press (119). Similarly to Hegel and Marx, scholars such as Calhoun (1993) and Polanyi (1944/2001) position the market as a socially produced phenomenon, emerging from civil society. Calhoun claims that the,

Idea of civil society emerged in political philosophy and social theory as a way of describing the capacity of a political community to organize itself, independent of the specific direction of state power. [Unlike absolute authority of feudal and monarchic society] the state no longer defined the political community directly, for its own legitimacy depended on the acquiescence or even support of an already existing political community. (1993: 270-1, quoted in Goonewardena, 2004)

Civil society is often seen as a source of social inequality. For socialist theorists (such as Marx) the political emancipation between ‘citizens’ that becomes possible within the liberal democratic state allows the reproduction of strikingly unequal relationships within civil society
at large, that is, through market society. This is in direct contrast to liberal (de Tocqueville) and communitarian (Etzioni) theories of civil society which see it as an inherently democratic space that keeps both the market and political state in check.

According to Leslie Pal, the welfare state was, in many respects, an unprecedented system of governance that managed civil society through various policies (1997: 90). Therefore, it is difficult to characterize civil society in welfare states as a self-organizing sphere, “independent of the specific direction of state power”, in Calhoun’s words. Pal argues that alongside shifts in state forms, civil society and the power relations it contains, equally undergo changes. Pal argues that the ways that nongovernmental organizations participate in and affect the policy process have undergone a process of re-alignment that included disengagement, re-engagement and displacement. Until the 1980s, state-NGO relations in Canada were characterized by ‘clientelist politics’, in which NGOs worked in segmented policy fields, relied on government for their core funding, and were relatively few in number, with clear dominance of some groups relative to others. For various reasons, this system began eroding by the 1980s. Therefore, argues Pal, as a new governance system between NGOs and government emerged, it is not the intensity of NGO-government interaction which is of concern, but rather the site of interaction which has been displaced. For a range of reasons, both in terms of changes in parliamentary politics, fiscal pressures and public policy making, governments turned to NGOs both to partner in the delivery of services and in order to ‘consult’ on matters of policy and governance. As the numbers of NGOs grew, their capacity to analyse and absorb constantly shifting economic and social policy at the international level was sought after by government. NGOs that were volunteer-led, seen to nurture ‘social capital’ and provided services to rather
than simply ‘representing’ communities were seen by Pal as organizations that would receive support from government within the context of a restructured welfare state. Advocacy organizations would no longer receive the support they once had – not disappearing, but forced to seek support elsewhere, for example in exchanging financial support for the provision of services. A competitive grant-based funding environment became *de rigueur*; and organizations that would be able to show that they have the potential to contribute to social capital formation and support fundamental community values would be supported, “especially if they do this through a judicious mix of voluntarism and professionalism” (102).

Significant fissures in understanding the concept of civil society emerge from both empirical and theoretical points of view. As the restructuring of welfare programs and the rise of workfarism have increasingly either outright downloaded and/or provided incentives for localized state and nonstate agencies to delivery employment programming – how does this constrain the political advocacy role of civil society (from a liberal perspective)? On the other hand, for critical social theory, how does this phenomenon simply represent a re-articulation and continuity of the role of civil society in sustaining and reproducing social forms such as the market?

**Summary**

Through examples from Toronto’s experience, this review attempted to outline a local genealogy of the coercive linkages between relief and employment policies, taking into consideration the role of urban governance and social citizenship in its unfolding. It assesses workfarism as a regulatory continuity to welfare and pre-welfare relief programs; as a political
economy tendency; and as a strategy of advanced liberal government. Finally I assess some empirical and theoretical perspectives on the role of civil society in trends towards workfare.

From a historical angle, this review details the pre-welfare forms of relief in Toronto, which share clear geographical similarities with revanchist neoliberal workfare, most evident in the local scale and delivery of relief (Wolch et al, 2001; Shragge, 1997). While in Britain the state acknowledged its own responsibility for the poor as early as 1601, relief in Ontario – then Upper Canada – was delivered as an imperative of voluntary elite reformers through charities. Due to the urban poverty that grew during Toronto’s industrialization in the 19th century, voluntary social services flourished, led by the city’s industrial leaders. They pioneered Toronto’s first experiments with workfare, programs that were often stymied through organized opposition by recipients. By the late 1920s, these voluntary workfare programs were eclipsed by the Great Depression and the rise of the welfare state (Heroux, 2008).

The relatively small body of literature within geography that identifies the more recent emergence and characteristics of ‘workfare states’ suggests that though localized, coercive relief programs have proven to be a persistent, cyclical phenomenon in Western states over several centuries, in which workfare is mandated by centralized, territorialized state governments (Jessop, 2002; Peck, 2001a). Workfare is an aggressive regulatory continuity of the functions of relief that have existed for centuries, in the way it structures both the labour market (by pushing recipients into its lower-end during expansionary phases) and the social order (by providing for people during periods of high need) (Piven & Cloward, 1971). Since the labour market is socially and institutionally maintained, partly through relief arrangements (Peck, 1996), feminist sociologists argue that it is a key site for understanding the production and reproduction of
inequalities across gendered, racial and class lines (Neysmith et al, 2005). For Esping-Anderson (1990), in Canada, the US and the UK, relief has been so residual and tied to moral regulation that it fails to ‘de-commodify’ the lives of its citizens; that is, to offer a genuine escape from the often perilous task of selling oneself in a labour market. As such, the role of relief is less of a source of security than a secondary social and institutional force shaping the terms around who should and shouldn’t work, who deserves financial help and who does not, and generally provides a ‘floor’ for wages and social conditions under capitalism. Indeed, the social problems which welfare and workfare policies almost always attempt and fail to correct tell us less about the problem itself than how we see ourselves as individuals within a social body, especially in terms of who belongs and who does not (Brodie, 2008; Bacchi, 1999). Finally, it has been argued that ‘the social’ rather than disappearing under advanced liberal/neoliberal government, is instead radically individualized and displaced from the state scale. As such, the individual is responsible for her own fate, positioned not as problem but as possibility (Rose, 1996).

Accessing the appropriate programs and charged with a competitive skill-set, barriers to employment are seen as personal obstacles than people need to and can overcome through their own innovations and behaviour (Dean, 1996).

The traditions of both pre-war relief schemes and neo-liberal workfare differed from centralized state welfarism in several important ways: relief became a federal mandate, upheld through the Canada Assistance Plan beginning in the 1960s, which guaranteed the provinces’ ability to provide income assistance based on people’s needs, and squarely prohibited any program that tied work to financial assistance. Through the provision of universal social standards across the country, the Canadian government provided one of the most important
sources of nationalism and collective identity (Brodie, 2003). However, as Esping-Andersen and feminist scholars argued, the ‘universality’ espoused therein was modeled according to the image of the male bread-winner who seeks independence through waged labour. All other bodies were subordinated to this image of the ideal citizen, and the many fault-lines (according to gender, race, class, ability, etc.) between those ideal and non-ideal citizens crystallized through welfare programs.

This review reveals contradictory findings and important lingering questions relating to the urbanization of workfare in Ontario, suggesting that it both led to increased unevenness of work/assistance programs (Peck, 2001a & b) and conversely, that the provincial straightjacket in which it was mandated continues to make necessary local innovations impossible (Lightman et al, 2006). Who implemented workfare in the city, how did they do so and why? What kinds of continuities or ruptures in governance practices and citizenship forms occurred through this process? Furthermore, considering it was one of the most controversial aspects of the Harris regime and despite this has remained intact as an overall framework for social assistance in the province, what is the future of workfare in Toronto?
Chapter 3 Methodology

Assumptions and rationale for qualitative methodology

In his overview of human geography research methods, Guy Robinson (1998) states:

“Qualitative techniques are essentially descriptions of people’s representations and constructions of what is occurring in their world” (409; see also Demeritt, 2004: 232). Person-to-person dialogue provides a very rich source of data, allowing the researcher – unlike the physical geographer or scientist – to ask the research subject why they are doing something and why:

“Talking with research participants provides one of the richest and most interactive means of generating information available to human geographers” (Bradshaw, 2004: 207). I have used qualitative methods for two principal reasons (following Dunn 2000). Firstly, this research is concerned with the variations in experiences of individuals managing and delivering welfare-to-work programs for non-profit organizations in Toronto, under the mandate of the Ontario Works Act. Secondly, the often highly political relationships that have developed under Ontario Works between non-state (non-profit employment service providers) and state (City of Toronto, MCSS/Government of Ontario) agencies at the urban level cannot be captured through quantitative data. I used semi-structured interviews as a way exploring the types of governance relationships that have developed through OW’s workfare mandate, as well as the non-profit ESPs perception of their own regulatory roles. I have used key textual and literary sources where relevant, to complement or contrast qualitative data; for example, the Ontario government’s 2004 Review of employment assistance programs in Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program, and the City of Toronto’s 2008 report Starting in the right place: a new approach to employment and social services in Toronto, and 2005 report Changes to Ontario Works
announced by the Minister of Community and Social Services, among others from the City of Toronto.

Qualitative methods have become very popular in geography, and its rise has elicited a fruitful debate on the tension between applicability and verifiability in the pure sense of ‘science’ on the one hand, versus ‘creativity’ on the other (Baxter & Eyles 1997, 1999; Bailey et al. 1999). This debate seems to have at least proved that the division between science and creativity in qualitative research is a false dichotomy: all scholarship requires some degree of reflexivity, adaptability and creativity while more creative approaches must be methodologically conscious and conspicuous. This debate has also shown how different research methodologies rest upon varied epistemological foundations, which often remain unspoken and unacknowledged. In order to avoid this trap, I position this research as phenomenological in its attempt to build an argument and representation of a reality from the narratives of those I interviewed, reflected against a body of literature and situated within specific theoretical frameworks.

In using qualitative methods, it is also important to acknowledge the process of interpretation that occurs through ‘dialogue’ between the researcher/subject of research. This is a mutually constitutive practice. Where applicable, I try to acknowledge the ways that my own experiences are necessarily present in and have effects on resulting findings and analysis (Demeritt, 2004: 235). Indeed, if it was not for my own personal curiosity in and experiences involving the role of the ‘third sector’, neo-liberal governance, and urban geography, I would have never pursued this topic in the first place. Post-structural feminist geographers have argued (not uniformly) that as a process of interpretation, research has to employ reflexive strategies that acknowledge contradictions, silences, uncertainties and gaps in meaning that emerge throughout
the research process, both on the part of researchers and the research subject (Hyams, 2004; Rose, 1997). For Rose (1997), this remains only an aim, rather than a fully achievable endeavour (285-286).

**Participant recruitment**

Recruitment for interviews has focused on three non-profit organizations whose principal mandate is providing employment services to individuals with barriers to employment in the Toronto region, as well as three stakeholders from the City of Toronto, the Ontario MCSS, and a private employment consultant with non-profit experience. I have changed the names of the organizations, as well as the individuals interviewed, for confidentiality purposes. Through the process of negotiating informed consent at the individual and administrative level, ENTRE and I formally agreed that the interviews could only be conducted and included in the research analysis if the organization name remained confidential. For the sake of simplicity, I have chosen not to publish the identity of all participating agencies. Within two organizations, I spoke to two staff members and with the third organization I interviewed one. At SEC, this included a front-line worker engaged in a variety of capacities (Sara), as well as the Executive Director (Patrick), both who had worked with the organization for over a decade. At ENTRE, I spoke with an employment counsellor (Harriet) and senior manager (Cheryl) who ran a pre-employment program for women on social assistance. At Spruce Way, I interviewed an employee with over 15 years of experience in community-based employment services for women on social assistance (Anita). I also expanded my interview recruitment criteria beyond these three organizations, based on my own evolving research needs, and the easily-made contacts provided by participants at SEC and ENTRE. I sought more information relating to employment service provision at
broader levels to which I could compare with the non-profit agency-level interviews. I was provided with excellent references to three appropriate participants: an independent consultant who has worked on various employment projects for low-income people in Toronto (Terry), a long-time City of Toronto employee who managed the City’s employment services sub-contracts with non-profit agencies (Jennifer), and an MCSS policy analyst who describe the specific evolution of OW at the provincial level (Kris).

SEC\(^5\) is located in Toronto’s former suburbs. It was formed initially in the mid-1980s to fill a need for community-based childcare, but quickly recognized that unemployment would be one of the greatest challenges facing their neighbourhood and surrounding communities. Offering training programs to Unemployment Insurance (UI) clients – and later Employment Insurance (EI) clients – through federal funding, SEC blossomed. Today they offer a highly integrated array of services including literacy, skills and professional training (including certificates in industrial fork-lifting, childcare and project management), childcare facilities, and an employment centre that offers job searching, job matching, resume building and interview skills, and which maintains a direct relationship with specific employers. Finally, they have established a fund for individuals who are ineligible for EI or OW, but who wish to use their services nonetheless. Often there are hundreds of people being served each day at SEC, 80-90% of which are OW clients.

Spruce Way is located in downtown east Toronto, beginning as a soup kitchen 80 years ago. Like SEC, it established employment programs in the mid-1980s, one of which geared towards single mothers on social assistance, called Career Moves. Today Spruce Way offers

\(^5\) The names of all individuals, programs and organizations have been changed.
services in literacy and computer literacy, an employment matching program for homeless people, youth employment programs, programs for children and seniors, and housing and shelter services, and much more.

ENTRE differs from Spruce Way and SEC in goals and origins. It is not neighbourhood-based, and does not primarily serve social assistance recipients – it focuses on meeting the career goals of new Canadians, who form 80% its client base, and of which most are internationally trained professionals. Most clients require information on job searching, employment counselling and other related services. They also partner with organizations specializing in language training and other services. Therefore, their main focus is on job and employment services for people over 24. Therefore, unlike SEC and Spruce Way, they do not offer the same range of integrated services for a variety of needs and ages. Located in the heart of downtown Toronto, their catchment area is large drawing many clients from North York. Little under a decade ago, ENTRE submitted a proposal to TESS to implement a program called ‘BEGIN’. Since then, they have successfully run BEGIN every year, a pre-employment program for women receiving Ontario Works benefits “who face multiple barriers to returning to school or gaining employment” (Harriet).

The recruitment process faced challenges, and was frequently frustrating. Stepping back from the process, these obstacles afforded insights into the politically-tense relationships I was exploring. Some obstacles encountered during recruitment were frustrating, yet understandable. The links between non-profits, TESS and OW/MCSS in relation to employment services depends on an incredible amount of collaboration and cooperation, but due to the trepidation that some organizations expressed at the prospect of speaking openly to this relationship, it is obvious
that it is a tense and deeply political one. As many potential interview recruits explained – both in agreeing to participate or in clarifying why they could not – non-profit agencies with TESS/OW contracts are in a vulnerable position, if only vis-à-vis their dependency on the funding it supplies.

**Interview format and procedure**

I conducted conversational, semi-structured interviews which were each approximately 1½ hours in length. I had an interview guide with topics to cover as well as specific questions to address. However, interviewees were usually very forthcoming in the information they provided, and usually addressed many of my questions without having to be asked directly. This allowed participants a certain degree of control over the topic and how it was represented and provided me with a fuller and more nuanced picture of the phenomenon I was researching than my initial one (Robinson, 1998: 413; Dunn, 2000). The core questions asked during interviews related to the role and work of the respondent within a particular organization; the latter’s general history, clients and target groups; the history and experience delivering OW programs funded by TESS; the proportion of organization clients who are OW participants; the ways that the organization recruits or are referred OW clients; the history, objectives, outcomes, experiences and rationales for delivering employment services to social assistance recipients prior to the OW Act of 1998; reasons and experiences for delivering OW programs and the way these have changed over the past decade; the way they have affected the organization overall or other programs and services it offers; relationships to employers; how the organization or program defines ‘success’; descriptions personal and professional challenges or frustrations in delivering OW programming; descriptions of its positive or satisfying aspects; experiences of shifts in policy rules and
regulations over the past decade; as well as experiences and opinions of the feature of compulsion and how this has shifted or changed. Issues or problems highlighted by one organization or participant would explicitly be introduced to another in order to contrast against their own experience. Again, interviews were fairly informal – characterized by their conversational character rather than being structured. Questions were open-ended and guided the themes I wanted to cover. With research participants’ informed consent, I audio-recorded interviews and transcribed them afterwards, concealing the identity of organizations and individuals in the process of interview analysis.

**Data analysis procedures and verification methods**

Thus, without formally coding or transcribing my interviews, I gained a sense of the major themes and contradictions that my dissertation would eventually highlight. As I transcribed and read over the interviews more carefully, these themes and contradictions became more nuanced and detailed. Therefore content analysis, though guided by the themes reflected in my research questions and literature review process, was equally inductive, insofar as it revealed the more unexpected issues introduced by participants. Where two or more interview participants described similar experiences or opinions, or conversely, where their experiences or opinions remain distinct from one another, I established themes and codes based on these similarities or divergences in experience. Where salient details that did not formerly figure within my research themes and questions appear in the interview process, I acknowledge these in the content analysis process.
Summary

This chapter outlined the methodology used to explore how the Ontario Works Act interacted with already existing, non-profit based employment assistance programs for social assistance recipients in Toronto. I briefly outlined the rationale for using a qualitative research format, based on my interest in exploring the attitudes, relationships and politics that infuse the local provision of employment services. I follow by positioning this research within key debates in human geography on qualitative methodologies. I utilized a reflexive process that continuously compared findings to process, and based my analysis on a critical comparison of the experiences and opinions provided by interviewees. I explained how and who I recruited to participate in this research, principally focusing on individuals with substantial experience delivering employment services to social assistance clients through non-profit agencies, through both OW funding and otherwise. I also expanded my recruitment criteria based on additional information I slowly realized would be critical to this research. These secondary stakeholders were provided through referrals by primary participants. After outlining some of the ways that this research shifted in both topic and format, I explained the procedure for gathering various narratives and policy documents into a coherent whole. The themes highlighted in the chapter on my findings compare and contrast the experiences of participants, in their own words.
Chapter 4 Analysis of findings

Introduction

The qualitative data analysed here tracks the emergence of ‘soft’ workfarist practices and attitudes in Toronto among non-profit employment service providers (ESPs). Soft, or ‘benign’, workfarism, according to respondents, refers to an active labour market social assistance program in which employment activities are compulsory; yet the process of compulsion is couched in specific practices of individual choice. It can be contrasted against work-for-welfare programs, in which recipients are literally forced to work in return for income benefits. Advocacy by groups who were responsible for delivering OW employment programs directed at the provincial-level led to formal reforms of the Ontario Works Act in 2005, in which the overall framework of compulsion, accountability and obligation to participate in employment activities in return for income assistance remains in place, while specific changes to the harshest rules and regulations have been implemented. These were pioneered by both non-profit ESPs and the municipal government.

While the City of Toronto and partners in the non-profit sector initially opposed OW, for a variety of reasons their concrete experiences delivering the program provided a source of compatibility with the OW framework. Today, both analyses of City of Toronto policy documents and experiences of ESPs show that there is agreement that OW can function adequately if it is reformed into the effective employment program it is intended to be. Interestingly, while the aspect of compulsion was one of the primary causes of resistance by ESPs, today it is largely seen as an effective component of an employment-focused social assistance system. However, non-profit ESPs and the City of Toronto are adamant that in order
to deliver an excellent employment assistance program, income assistance rates need to be more humane, and the delivery of a range of ‘support services’ (e.g.: childcare, literacy, etc.) need to be integrated. OW clients struggle to meet their daily material needs, especially in Toronto, due in most part to extremely low benefit rates (TSS/CNS, 2003b), which are still contingent upon participation in employment-related activities. Often clients are obligated to participate in incredibly dynamic, specialized employment services, while more basic needs – food, rent, transportation – are residual and only provided as supports to employment activities. Furthermore, many non-profit ESPs have been successfully integrating how they offer employment and support services to social assistance clients. Currently, the City seeks to build on this ‘integrated’ model of service delivery, and take the lead in Toronto’s employment services by establishing employment-focused social service ‘hubs’: “[t]he work being done in TESS Employment Resource Centres is laying the foundation for future employment-focused hubs”, which are “one-stop access points located in local communities” (TESS, 2008: 14).

These grassroots, neighbourhood-based employment programs for social assistance recipients, delivered by non-profit organizations, paradoxically laid a foundation upon which locally-delivered welfare-to-work was possible and sustainable in Toronto (Lightman et al 2007: 17-18). OW has left an indelible imprint on Toronto’s social service infrastructure, physically transforming it into an employment-oriented system. OW’s investments in compulsory employment programming allowed 28 municipal Employment Resource Centres to be established (TESS, 2008). It also supports plans for employment service ‘Hubs’ – highly specialized, integrated, and community-based centres offering a range of services to support employment. It is unclear at this point how the 190 non-profit employment service providers
Currently, community-based non-profit organizations provide a broad range of specialized employment assistance programs to Toronto residents. There are approximately 190 community-based partners hired by Toronto Employment and Social Services (TESS) to provide employment services to Ontario Works (OW) clients. They are known as service providing organizations (SPOs). This study focused on the experiences of three of these partners – SEC (Sara and Patrick), ENTRE (Harriet and Caroline) and Spruce Way (Anita) as well as three individual stakeholders who are and were involved in employment assistance with the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services (Kris), the City of Toronto/Metropolitan Toronto (Jennifer) and as a private consultant (Terry), respectively. The following paragraphs will demonstrate the diversity of employment programming by giving a brief overview of the three organizations considered in this research. These organizations will be referred to generally as ‘employment service providers’ (ESP). The experiences of the ESP organizations profiled herein – three among 190 others in Toronto – offers a glimpse into the variety of employment services offered to social assistance clients in the City.

‘Grassroots’ welfare-to-work: a historical perspective

Welfare-to-work programs for social assistance clients in Toronto prior to the implementation of Ontario Works emerged through dynamic, ‘grassroots’ relationships between various levels of government and community based civil society organizations. In fact, according to research by Lightman et al (2006), Toronto, in comparison with other municipalities, was well
equipped to implement OW on account of their history of providing employment services to low-income people. Two of the three study organizations developed welfare-to-work programs in the mid-1980s. One source of agreement between the City of Toronto and its partners is their consistent recognition that social assistance should be an active labour market adjustment program rather than a passive one (TSS/CNS, 2003: 2). While opposing the punitive and constrained manner in which OW was implemented, they strongly supported its orientation towards labour market attachment, and have sought to reform OW in this direction: “Based on hands-on experience delivering Ontario Works and its analysis of the program’s strengths and shortcomings, TSS is proposing that the Province move forward in its efforts to support the employment focus of OW, particularly with [clients who face significant barriers to finding and sustaining employment]” (TSS/CNS, 2003: 8). The succeeding paragraphs will attempt to outline the history of ‘hands-on experience’ in welfare-to-work programming pre-dating OW through the voices of people who piloted Toronto’s employment programs for social assistance recipients. Beginning in the 1980s SEC and Spruce Way were both leaders in this regard.

Specific community needs provided the original basis for early welfare-to-work programs. Sara, who has worked with SEC for the last decade, describes this process: “(...) there was a need for childcare at that time. And then jobs, and all the programs that we had, there was need. Jobs Ontario, [the] Centre for Employment back then, LINC, the training that people needed, the construction program (...) So those programs started then as SEC programs and got larger and then we took at look at what the labour market was looking for and looked at training (...)”. Anita, from Spruce Way, echoes the theme of need:
We’ve always worked with women and just started with men, in terms of employment and training.

[Interviewer] Why?

Because the need was there for women, especially the need for the appropriate supports [e.g.: childcare, transportation, etc.]. We felt that we had the experience to do that, knowing some of the challenges they would be facing, trying to implement and put in supports for them to be able to succeed.

The pre-amalgamation municipal government, Metropolitan Toronto, played a strong role in supporting these grassroots programs. Jennifer has had a thirty-odd year career with the municipal government’s social services, most of which was operational and at project management-level. One of her two most important project areas was developing skill training programs with non-profits, and to a much lesser extent, with the private sector. She states: “I developed the city’s ability to purchase services, and worked with the federal government too.”

While there was room for municipalities to experiment with money for employment assistance beginning in the 1960s, Jennifer’s leadership position spearheaded a tripartite relationship between non-profits (who had full reign in delivering welfare-to-work programming), the municipal government and the federal government (who provided funding). This relationship flourished in the 1980s. Jennifer explains:

Municipal employment programs started at different stages, different times, with different funding, allowing municipalities across the province to look at expanding more [programs for social assistance recipients] than just income assistance. We used small pots of money to really try and get some programs on board. [We] started way back before I started, to try to find programs.
It is Jennifer who first characterized this pre-OW period of employment assistance programming for social assistance recipients as ‘grassroots’, a term which she uses to describe positive, effective and successful programs that were delivered ‘close to the ground’ by neighbourhood based agencies. “Municipalities were trailblazers in terms of innovating some programs to get people out of welfare”, she said. However, while the municipal government played an important role in these emerging programs, early support for employment programs for social assistance recipients came largely from individual municipal employees:

Those people really believed in this. It was frontline and middle management who took interest. The organization as a whole couldn’t care less until there was money dangling in front of them in the 1990s with Harris. It was only at that point that the mandate and language and attitude started changing. (Jennifer)

At this time, there was no overall directive to develop employment services. “There was a line in the mandate from the province to ‘help people’, and so we latched onto that little line to be able to start and develop employment programs for people on social assistance.” Arriving at the tail-end of this period, Jennifer was involved in a program for single mothers, developing and initiating a number of activities such as job counselling and resume preparation. “Most of it was delivered ‘in house’ [by the municipal government itself] with the exception of two women’s organizations that were miles ahead in terms of providing employment assistance to women. We had to take them under our wings and help. That started in the late 70s. This program was a Cadillac service for women. If a woman wanted to get a biology degree from a university, we provided a whole range of service for her to do so”. But by the early 1980s a more engaging policy mandate emerged, the Municipal Employment Program.
For non-profits and municipalities committed to active employment programs for social assistance clients, this period was fruitful, characterized by few bureaucratic inefficiencies, an openness to and ability to meet individual client need, as well as a healthy delivery model that lent both financial support and independence to non-profit agencies. Metropolitan Toronto, as well as other municipalities, had elbow-room to deliver innovative programs which they positioned as an improvement to federally-funded ones, which many at the municipal and agency-level saw as ‘degrading’. Jennifer describes this period:

This was the first funding stream to municipalities, it was aimed at ‘helping everyone’, a free-for-all. That’s when I really got involved... the joy of it. I remember how wonderful it was, but everything now is so bureaucratic. I wrote my proposal to the [Ontario] Ministry in ½ page and started with $4 million dollars that was all for purchases [of employment services]. That increased to $8 million. My idea was that I saw our role [at the municipal level] as assessing and referring and building support within the community. I copied very much what I did from the feds, who were doing the same. I had a pot of money for social assistance and purchasing services from non-profits and community colleges. I built on the same model, but the loophole was that the federal government had purchased very elementary job services and it was very degrading for clients because we had clients who were ready to move ahead. I started to purchase industry services such as in accounting, industrial and food preparation, childcare, elder minding, and truck driving. That’s where we really opened. This was in 1985.

While those interviewed who had direct involvement in delivering or funding employment programs through Toronto’s non-profits state that the social assistance system
required reform, there seems to be agreement that the decade immediately prior to Harris’ reforms and the emergence of Ontario Works was the ‘golden age’ for social assistance clients who wanted employment-related help. Both Anita (Spruce Way) and Jennifer (Metropolitan Toronto) felt that programs were well funded, well implemented and well attended. In 1992, at Spruce Way, single mothers in receipt of social assistance could enrol in a comprehensive 9 month program, funded by the federal government. A version of the program, Career Moves, funded through OW in later years, was trimmed to 6 months, then 4 months, then 4 weeks and then up to 6 weeks again. Anita believes that the success achieved during this period was due to a healthy flow of money and the small number of people who actually were accessing the programs: “Back then there was money and there were less people on the system. The more people on the system the less amount there is to fund it”. So, despite the fact that the non-profit employment service providers interviewed here agreed that the system required reform, in terms of implementing quality programs, it was a relatively rosy epoch. Jennifer also describes this, from the municipal perspective:

The feds had about $30 million for us in preparatory courses and we made an agreement with them to start looking at a variety of services. They had flexibility to carry someone from initial time right through employment, a very holistic program, which for many of our programs was more suitable. (...) We really worked together: I would turn to the feds with a list of people [organizations]. There

6 There were in fact far more individuals in receipt of social assistance prior to Ontario Works than after. Since eligibility rules and benefit rates were drastically squeezed under the OW Act of 1998, the total number of recipients diminished by half by 2000. However, employment assistance providers would have had many fewer clients prior to OW and many more after, due to the fact that clients were obligated to participate in them. Thus they would have perceived there to be ‘less people on the system’, as Anita states here, in the early 1990s.
were some really great courses that were very expensive, like with IT, computers, engineering; they cost $10 000 per person and I got funding from the feds for that. That was the golden age for programs for people on social assistance. I had the whole federal financial backing and that continued until 1996-97.

*Ontario Works, phase 1: Getting on board*

A complex political field had emerged in the decades leading up to Mike Harris’ Common Sense Revolution and the implementation of Ontario Works. Harris catalyzed a broad range of sentiments, from fervent support to abhorrence. Indeed, some unified political attitudes towards the social assistance system, irrespective of ideological persuasions – that welfare as we knew it had to go – allowed Ontario Works to become and indefinitely remain a fixture of Toronto’s and Ontario’s worfarist social security system. As we will see, the reactions and strategies of the non-profit employment service providers profiled herein are extremely broad. I also consider and compare the reactions and strategies of the City of Toronto, through Jennifer’s experiences with the City of Toronto/Metropolitan Toronto and various policy reports.

It is worth noting that the Harris government’s search for consent to OW, and eventual implementation, required a tense period of consultation with non-profits. It was clear that newly amalgamated municipal governments did not have the infrastructure to get social assistance recipients into work, volunteer and work-related activities (Lightman, 1997: 92). Harris’ policy analysts had drafted their initial workfare proposal under the assumption that non-profit organizations would necessarily deliver employment programming and that employers would be prepared to hire recipients. “The government was slowly recognizing that the politically popular perception that welfare would be intuitively easy to reform was quite incompatible with a very
complex reality; had welfare been easy to reform, both the NDP and the Liberals before them, would have acted” (Lightman, 1997: 97). Ernie Lightman’s fascinating, brief account of the lead-up period to Ontario Works exposes the political anxiety wrought by initial promises of work-for-welfare to the electoral base, subsequently broken by the Minister of Community and Social Service, David Tsubouchi, as he realized that workfare would be extremely expensive, requiring ample supports (e.g.: childcare, training, transportation, etc.) It seemed that non-profits refused to implement it unless they could do it well and humanely. The United Way of Greater Toronto, for example, who funded countless agencies in the city, formally decided that any of these which participated in OW’s volunteer placement program would not be considered for funding (Jennifer). Likewise, as Harris approached volunteer organizations such as the YMCA and Kiwanis Club, proposing that they hire OW recipients to participate in their projects, these organizations unsurprisingly refused, arguing that it would destroy the spirit of volunteerism at the heart of their agencies (Lightman, 1997: 93).

While SEC, Spruce Way and ENTRE initially adopted very different political positions and concrete strategies towards Ontario Works, by 2003, all three agencies were delivering OW-funded employment programs. The following paragraphs explore the period between 1998 and 2003, in which all three organizations either immediately or eventually ‘got on board’, and the implications of this process. For the executive director of SEC, Patrick, there was much discussion and debate within the non-profit community regarding OW, and he noted a high degree of suspicion in these debates for imminent “chain-gangs down the 400 [a thoroughfare]”. He went to SEC’s clients to discuss how the organization should approach the new welfare policy. They reacted positively, arguing that “anything is better than what we have now”. Patrick
characterizes the organization’s position as “pragmatic”. With his colleagues, SEC drafted a proposal to Toronto Social Services (now TESS), based on the model of integrated service delivery they had pioneered, where an individual client could be assessed and access pre-employment (e.g.: life skills courses, etc.), ESL and literacy services, childcare, skills training, volunteer opportunities and/or employment programs, depending on their needs. They were successful in their bid, and SEC implemented a major OW employment assistance pilot project involving several hundred clients. Sara, who has been working for SEC in a variety of ways for over a decade, describes the program:

They came in various stages. If they needed training they would go to training. Once they had finished training they would go to the employment placement part. Ones that didn’t need the training would just come to the job search. So they would come in and be assigned a counsellor and then they would go to a call centre, in the morning and the afternoon. We had real success. We had a lot of jobs back then, because, well, there were a lot of jobs. I think we had a 60% success rate.

Among the three organizations consulted, SEC received OW most positively, and was able to adapt to a constrained funding environment for skills training, and unlike many organizations engaged in similar work, survived through OW.

While ENTRE had been assisting new Canadians with their career development since the mid-1980s, they argued in a proposal to TSS for OW funding that their expertise in employment programming for people with higher barriers to employment would lend well in working with people in receipt of social assistance. From there, ENTRE successfully won contract competitions each year to deliver the program BEGIN, a pre-employment program for women on
social assistance. Harriet, program coordinator, describes it: “They [TESS] pay us a fee for service payment. For each person there’s a tuition fee unlike our other programs which we receive funding for, mainly from MTCU [Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities]. BEGIN is unique in that it brings revenue in”. While BEGIN is the only program funded by OW at ENTRE, it welcomed OW as a source of funding, and saw how it could translate expertise honed in other employment programming for social assistance clients.

Spruce Way’s reaction differed from the two other organizations profiled; it initially took a strong strategic and political stance against OW. Consulting with its clients and staff, Spruce Way had a different reaction from SEC. They strongly opposed it, considering it exploitative in various ways. Anita, who has been involved for just under two decades with Career Moves, an employment program for women on social assistance, explains:

Our agency and our board members decided that they didn’t want to be part of work-for-welfare, so we didn’t sign up for that to work with the City at that time. We kept our funding with the federal government. We thought it [OW] was exploitative of clients at the time. It was new. We wanted to make sure that [exploitation] didn’t happen. Plus we’re a unionized environment so we didn’t want that [volunteer/employment placements] to impact on our unionized workers.

Several years later, more favourable consultations with the same stakeholder groups eventually turned Spruce Way to solicit OW funding from TESS. Anita continues:

After the years, that changed when we realized that it was more inclusive and the right supports were given to the clients. And that’s when we decided to get funding from the City.
As Anita (Spruce Way), Patrick (SEC), Harriet (ENTRE) and Jennifer (Toronto) explained, the non-profit community of employment service providers was the site of intense political positioning in the years leading up to and beginning the delivery of OW. For SEC, Ontario Works significantly altered their client base, which shifted from mostly EI clients to mostly OW clients due to tightening of eligibility for EI and the influx of social assistance recipients required to participate in employment activities. Since Spruce Way had formally refused OW-funded contracts, challenges arose due to the fact that the neighbourhoods’ needs were largely those of social assistance clients, rather than EI clients. The bulk of funding from the federal government that kept Spruce Way alive did not apply to their principal neighbourhood needs. As will be discussed below, as an organization they had to devise creative ways to advocate and survive. However, by 2003, while OW was the object of continuing criticism and would soon be the subject of a significant ministerial review (MCSS, 2004), many organizations who had initially refused to participate in funding or delivering OW had shifted their stance, and had come on board. At this point, while SEC and ENTRE experienced OW funding and program more pragmatically, able to use the program (despite flaws) to their clients’ and overall organizational advantage, Spruce Way reluctantly turned towards OW.

Making it work: Enhancing and integrating employment services

Those consulted in this research practiced a series of strategies and identified reforms required to make Ontario Works ‘work’. The most common strategies employed were to both create and find labour markets, to integrate a range of human services that help move clients away from the social assistance, and to make services more accessible and attuned to successes in meeting program targets – that is, getting clients off ‘the system’ or helping them towards this
goal. Non-profit employment assistance providers and the municipal government – charged with
delivery of OW – are able to innovate with respect to employment activities. However they also,
rather vociferously, recognized that to make OW the active labour market program it is intended
to be, financial assistance had to be improved. Yet the provincial government retains complete
control over benefit rate structures. In this regard, municipalities and non-profit ESPs can only
advocate for improvements. Ironically, OW clients can access dynamic, highly specialized
programs to help them find and keep the job of their dreams, while they live in absolute poverty.7

Women who face high barriers to gaining employment who are on social assistance can
be referred by their municipal caseworker to BEGIN, a ten-week pre-employment program.

Harriet describes the program and what has made it ‘work’ in the past nine years:

We have it at two locations, and we have a 100% success rate
which is rare for pre-employment programs. So we’ve added
enhancements and that’s why it’s successful. We’ve added yoga
and wellness, so breathing exercises, things to help develop
concentration and learning. We also have an image consultant who
talks about dress and body language and how people can perceive
us and project ourselves in interviews and that sort of stuff. Those
are enhancements in the last year. We have teachers who teach
computer skills like how to use Office. I teach life skills. Then we
have employment counsellors and job developers who offer a
session on cold-calling, resume writing and personalized attention
throughout the 10 weeks.

7 The basic OW benefit rates for a single adult are $572 per month (incorporating two costs: $216 for
basic needs and up to a maximum shelter allowance of $356). Exceptions to rates are slightly more
generous for clients living in remote areas in Northern Ontario (MCSS, 2009: 9).
Harriet’s description of BEGIN highlights the range of program activities and the enhancements and improvements that are made to the program to make it more likely to meet its targets. In BEGIN’s case, “Success is measured in four months after each group graduates. So we have to do a four month follow up and report on are they engaged in an activity related to their action plan and can we back in up with documentation. So are they employed, in school, volunteering, etc?” Harriet also describes changes that were made to the program to make it more accessible and open to any woman who needed it or was referred: “The program used to just be for single women and that changed about two years ago (...) I think the major reason for the change was just to make it more open (...) Now we get more referrals and a wider range of people who can complete the training”. The theme of openness to client need, and innovating programming so that the program can both meet its targets in addition to those of clients, is one of the ways that employment service providers (ESPs) have been able to make OW work more efficiently and humanely.

One of the most important ways that ESPs are able to meet their program targets is to create or find labour markets for clients. The labour market was booming in the late 1990s and early 2000s – at SEC, for example, high demand for jobs in manufacturing, security and call centres enabled their OW pilot project to be highly successful in finding clients jobs. But different areas of non-skilled or semi-skilled labour shift, organizations struggle to find viable, sustainable employment for clients. Both SEC and ENTRE create a sizeable quantity of internal positions so that clients can either find employment or volunteer positions within the

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8 ‘Targets’ will range from program to program and organization to organization; however, it generally refers to meeting an employment goal according to their contract with TESS. It usually encompasses clients finishing the program successfully (according to a range of criteria), whether it be by finding work, receiving a certificate, making a final presentation, and/or regular attendance.
organization. The intent here is altruistic – wanting clients to do well and succeed personally – while also seeking to enhance their own program targets with respect securing future funding (in this case, TESS). Sara at SEC describes this process: “That’s why skills programs are so successful, with the various certificates the clients receive (...) We met our targets for success rates for TESS clients [in 2007], for industrial and for childhood assistant skills, because we run so many daycares around the city. Once they graduate and finish their placements they [can work] in our daycare centres”. Harriet describes a similar practice with BEGIN:

At this stage we just work on keeping them engaged actively, participating in another program, like a volunteer placement. For people who are really slippery, we know are going to slip by, we say ‘come by and volunteer here and help us’(...) So we’ll do that for people who I know really need to be here just to keep them going, some one-on-one support. That could be for a woman in recovery, who really needs the structure and the time until the next step happens. Or for a woman in an abusive [situation], I don’t want them to stay at home, [I try to] keep them busy. That’s the biggest fear, is that, ‘I don’t want this to end, it’s going well, I’m around other people’. What happens next when the program ends and we have to say ‘see you later, goodbye, here’s your certificate, get out there and hustle’. Even beyond the four months, because that’s where we have to capture the success stories to continue getting funding.

Ontario Works funding for education and skills training is limited to 6½ months and under. It privileges, through its funding structure, shorter skills courses leading to specific certificate-based programs. Harriet explains: “A program that would increase their [a client’s] employability would be sixteen weeks, twenty-two weeks; something like that. It could be
culinary food safety, basic culinary skills. Something that would give them a certificate”. The often short-term and employability-focused orientation of OW leads to contradictions, requiring strategies to be implemented by ESPs, such as the internal creation of jobs and volunteer positions.

Another strategy used by ESPs to make OW work is to do labour market research and match the programming they offer to specific employer needs, guaranteeing clients a job once they have graduated from programs. Sara explains, “A lot of the manufacturers in industry require fork-lifting jobs, which became very popular in the past ten years, and because having a forklift license came into legislation [we offer that]. So there are different certificates, because right now health and safety is a big thing. So having your first aid, health and safety [certificates] might not land you that job for fork-lifting; there are other areas that you can use that to your advantage”. She also described situations where labour markets boomed, the organization designed their programs around them, and before long the labour market had significantly contracted: “We did have the personal support worker [PSW] [training program], but because there were so many people taking it, there were no jobs. It was like IT [information technology] at one time, there was so much need but the labour market evaporated at the end, like the PSW programs. And TESS saw that with the outcomes of job search programs, so they decided to fund people through OSAP. So they’re not funding early childhood assistant or PSW programs, they [clients] have to get an OSAP loan through a college”. Harriet, at ENTRE, explains their strategy for finding jobs in an unfavourable context:

The teachers and clients do a lot of labour market research. Like if a client says, I want your job or I want to make $20 an hour, we
say, ‘Cool, let’s see what we can find’. Here’s what qualifications you need and here’s how you get them. We try to act like it’s not impossible but it’s absolutely achievable. And networking is really important because it is about who you know.

But simply researching and finding the low-skill and mid-skill jobs that the OW funding structure privileges present some problems for ESPs in the mega-City. Sara, at SEC, explains that the local employers which used to hire their clients are now located outside the City of Toronto limits, in the 905 area code suburban belt. “They’re [jobs] in Concord, Brampton and Mississauga. A lot of companies moved out there because of taxes. We’re finding our clients don’t want to pay an extra fare. Some of them will. It does deteriorate the client, especially in the winter. I think it’s a split. Some of them will do it to keep their job. Some of them say it’s too far. You can’t have someone going from Scarborough to Concord, Mississauga or Brampton unless they drive. And those places are growing.”

Harriet’s quote above, which highlighted labour market research as a means of achieving employment program goals and client needs, was followed by her thoughts on how behavioural and attitudinal changes at the client-level are required to meet the same ends.

Some people are new, they don’t know anyone, and they don’t know the business culture that we have, so we teach that. And also the importance of networking, meeting people, talking to people, beginning to think about yourself as a product and selling yourself. Whether you just don’t understand that culture or don’t buy into it or don’t get it, or think, ‘That’s bullshit, I’m not kissing someone’s ass to get a job’. Let me reframe that... There’s a job for everyone. Everyone fits in somewhere. So trying to reframe it in a positive way. We do teach, a lot of the jobs are in the service field and they
do pay low. You have to look at the labour market and go, where’s the money, if you’re motivated to make money.

It seems that the concrete ‘on-the-ground’ experiences delivering ‘work-first’ employment assistance to OW clients in the period between 1998 and 2003 purged the welfare rolls of a sizeable quantity of clients. However, it also revealed another group of people who faced high barriers to employment, for whom education and skills training would not necessarily lead to a job (Lightman et al., 2005; Toronto Community and Neighbourhood Services, 2002). Academics and government, based on the experiences of frontline employment assistance providers, called for more specialized services for the latter group.

As such, ‘pre-employment’ programs have become a legitimate activity in which OW clients can participate, if deemed appropriate to their needs, to address the steep barriers which a decent proportion of marginalized people face in becoming part of the mainstream workforce. BEGIN, offered by ENTRE, is a formal pre-employment program for women on social assistance. Harriet explains:

It’s curriculum that addresses all aspects of adult learning, it’s very experiential for people. It allows people to reflect not just on the content but on the emotional experience. As adults we learn a lot through emotion. It would include stuff like active listening and teaching a strategy to help people build their communication skills. There’s a formula called WIN. It’s used to speak assertively and express yourself. So it’s trying to find strategies for people to increase confidence, a technique, communication skills, budgeting, and financial literacy. It’s nine modules that increase people’s knowledge about budgeting that can be empowering. So that when I do get a job I can manage my money. We do a little bit of
everything. It’s personal and professional development. There’s something for everyone.

While SEC’s pilot project, Spruce Way’s Career Moves and even some of Toronto’s early experiments with grassroots welfare-to-work programs in the 1970-80s do not officially label themselves ‘pre-employment’ programs they carry many of its characteristics: providing a work-like environment for clients (e.g.: 9 to 5 hours, appropriate dress, etc.); providing a supportive, communal while still professional environment; inculcating and teaching appropriate work-like behaviour and positive attitudes towards work.

Some people just need a lot of help and support to get off. When you’ve been on the system for a long time, it’s very difficult, because you’re in that rut. When we started with the OW project [in 1998] we had clients who were on the system for five or six years. So we’re talking about people who were.... and all of a sudden you have to do something. You can’t let them sit anymore. It’s hard! All of a sudden you tell someone, ‘you have to look for a job’ or ‘go into training’. I think clients that have been on assistance for a while need personal support, pre-employment and life skills. They need life skills before training or job searching. (...)

You have to [create] a group where you’re not pointing the finger. Just getting up in the morning and doing something, ‘Now I can do something’. Workshops are just on daily life. Sometimes people need that, just motivation. How do you motivate a client that doesn’t want to do anything? It’s hard. But you can.

Jennifer describes “excellent attempts” in the 1970s by the municipal government itself, in which social assistance recipients were taught and given small tasks such woodworking or sewing, especially for people who showed interest. Jennifer stated that this was, “to try to get
people out of the house to do something. It was to emulate a work environment, not as much giving them a hard skill. There were excellent attempts”. Sara describes why SEC’s pilot project was a positive experience:

I mean, seeing them come in, it was great. They met other people, interacted with other people. It gave them some confidence to say, ‘Yeah, I can do something’. You didn’t see that with everybody, but with some, [you could see] that were glad that they had this and had something to do. So there were friendships formed. (...) It gave them that push that they needed and wanted, but they just didn’t know how to go about it. You know, like a support group.

While this early OW employment project did not formally deem itself a pre-employment program, it carried its features. Many of these features were the heart of integrated, enhanced programs that ESPs used to achieve successful targets when implementing OW programming.

In this way, non-profit ESPs used a certain amount of room within their employment service delivery role to innovate with programming and meet their program goals to move recipients off assistance and into work. This included providing a range of human supports, creating and finding labour markets, and being attuned to specific clients needs. This is especially obvious in the prevalence of ‘pre-employment’ programming offered to many individuals who are deemed to be neither education- or job-ready.

From punitive to ‘soft’ workfare? Experiences of Ontario Works evolution

For the first time in Toronto’s history, welfare-to-work programs became a bureaucratized provincial mandate. According to Jennifer, “The grassroots initiatives – do-it-as-you go – went out of the window. They then became very bureaucratized and regimented”. It
infused the relationships between the municipality and its non-profit employment service providers with policing and surveillance functions. While municipal social service caseworkers were always obliged to oversee and monitor clients under the General Welfare Act (pre-1998), employees in non-profit settings were subsequently pushed into a complicated system of surveillance and reporting around client participation in employment activities, involving copious paperwork and hours of phone tag.

More money was poured into the purchase of services. But programs became more rigid and the relationships changed. Before, they [clients] were referred internally, screened by a selected number of counsellors who knew the fit between client and training. But when OW came along, municipalities chose to have every welfare staff assess clients. There were mass referrals, and no real matching. The results suffered and community services could no longer provide expert service like they had in the past. At that time, the economy was getting better and a lot of people were absorbed in the labour force. People who were left behind were really disadvantaged. In the past we would have noticed and changed [the programs] dynamically. But because it was so rigid and highly administrated, the programs didn’t meet their needs as much and some people were set up for failure. But the relationship between non-profits and city became very regimented: in Toronto and other municipalities all our staff had to do two functions, both the financial assistance, which was punitive, and the employment assistance which was supposed to be friendly and supportive. That mix of roles happened at municipal level: that doesn’t work.

(Jennifer, City of Toronto/Metropolitan Toronto)
[The City of Toronto] had little experience with employment assistance/services. Their job was to police people – their orientation was not to support employment. So they primarily had a financial and policing function. OW ramped up the employment expectation, and ramped up policing function. For me, that is a schizophrenic function for people: we’re going to be supportive and help you get a job, but we want to reduce the welfare rolls and throw you off welfare. (Terry, employment consultant)

In Jennifer’s opinion, the enduring negative impacts of OW are the fact that it has bureaucratized the grassroots relationships that once existed between non-profit ESPs and the municipal government, rather than its workfarist orientation. In her words, OW has developed into a ‘benign’ form of workfare in which clients are given a choice of employment activities. Jennifer identifies this evolution as the result of advocacy by non-profit ESPs and the delivery model used by the City of Toronto. Eventually, a series of provincial amendments to OW’s rules formally softened some of the Ontario workfare regime’s roughest edges.

We’ve made workfare really benign; [by offering] people a range of options such as volunteer/work/training/school/literacy. Workfare becomes innocent and it no longer was an issue. As Harris was moving out between 2004 and 2006 we practiced it from that perspective: we tried to soften the image of workfare. The YWCA, when workfare was being introduced, they had very strong feelings; they said ‘Jennifer, we can’t work with this’. We became much softer and hardly anyone was kicked off of welfare in the last few years. I don’t see that as the issue. What I think what impacted on the relationship was that it became bureaucratic both in the funding and the relationship itself. Everyone misses this piece, it was here that the municipality became the head-honcho;
they saw it as a way of getting more money in their purses. There was a personality of leadership and some pure lack of knowledge and what works. You’ve got to realize that municipalities don’t really know and that non-profits like SEC and YWCA have been delivering this for years. (Jennifer)

However, in conversations with two out of the three organizations consulted in this study, the question of OW developing into a ‘softer’ or more innocent form was not agreed upon. They contested this notion with a list of problems. Overall, frontline staff, from SEC and ENTRE, indicated that the contradictory and unintended effects emerge when people use an employment-focused program in order to access basic needs, rather than employment needs. The problems faced by individuals charged with delivering OW’s employment assistance activities suggest that workfare reform has not eliminated its punitive and contradictory nature. Firstly, because most additional benefits (transportation, clothing, childcare, etc.) are tied to participation in employment-oriented programming, clients often enrol in programming simply to receive a specific grant or benefit. This causes problems for staff with ESPs who must begin to deliver a program only to realize that a certain proportion of participants are not motivated or willing, need to be removed from the program and referred back to their caseworker: “Some of them will take advantage, they just want transportation, they get an extra $100 dollars and $250 start up for grooming, clothes and stuff like that” (Sara).

The second problem identified by ESPs was the continued struggle for daily survival that impedes effective participation in employment programs, pushes clients into precarious and abusive living conditions (especially women), and diminishes clients’ overall quality of life. In addition to participating in employment programs, many are working ‘under the table’. ESP staff
are legally obliged to report this to municipal caseworkers, which can result in suspension of benefits due to the fact that this amounts to ‘welfare fraud’.

(...) forcing people, taking away some of their benefits, it doesn’t work. It’s making the client more frustrated. The caseworkers are making demands, ‘you have to do this and that’. It causes problems with people working under the table. Cutting their benefits just made them turn around and start working under the table for cash. And I understand that. (Sara)

Most of them [clients] are in unhealthy relationships with people.... I’ve had clients say, ‘I don’t care if he [male partner, husband, etc.] beats me, if he buys me stuff, I can deal with that’. (Harriet)

In fact, OW re-invigorated a long history of the welfare system’s impact on worsening violence against women by male partners. Recent community-based and scholarly research into the specific effects of OW rules and regulations on partner abuse by men against women and children documents many of the same phenomenon that Sara revealed about her clients in the BEGIN program: that meeting one’s daily needs cannot be solely fulfilled through OW financial assistance; therefore reliance on male partners becomes all the more prevalent, and escaping such situations, especially if they turn violent, all the more difficult. Identifying many trends outlined in Welfare is a women’s issue (Tilmon, 1971), recent reports such as Walking on Eggshells: abused women’s experiences of Ontario’s welfare system (Mosher et al, 2004) and Woman abuse and Ontario Works: Rural women speak about their experiences with Ontario Works (Purdon,
2003) reveal the disproportionately precarious and violent impacts that the OW framework has on women and their children\(^9\).

While those interviewed never laid blame on individual caseworkers for what could be qualified as systemic paternalism, the theme of tension-filled relationships between ESPs and caseworkers was recurrent in all narratives. Non-profit service providers position themselves as advocates for and providers of their clients’ needs, and perceive that the role of TESS caseworkers, conversely, is to apply rigid eligibility criteria to individuals in order to restrict applicants. Since OW funding contracts with ESPs obligate staff to regularly report back to caseworkers (e.g.: clients’ attendance, etc.) to assure they are complying with program rules, ESP staff often characterized their relationships with TESS caseworkers as a fruitful partnership, but one in which differences in philosophy and approach, miscommunication and lack of consistency of knowledge of policies (both between caseworkers and between ESP staff-caseworkers) are the source of significant tension. In one case, Sara needed her clients to receive judicial pardons in order to participate in a training program:

> We’re here to support the client in any way that we can help them.
> There are some issues with some of the caseworkers. I’ll be honest,

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\(^9\) The key findings underlined in Mosher et al (2004) are that: “Benefit levels are wholly inadequate to meet real costs of rent, food, accommodation, transportation and other living expenses; women are staying in or returning to abusive relationships because of inadequate welfare rates; women are not supported in their desire and efforts to become employed; women are required to pursue child support in situations that put their safety at risk; abusive partners use the threat of welfare fraud charges to control and intimidate women; critical information about benefits, rules and entitlements are not disclosed to women; the vague, complex definitions of ‘spouse’ and ‘same-sex partner’ make women wary of forming new relationships; and that women find their experiences on welfare to be similar to their experiences of abuse.”
I don’t know what’s going on. That makes it frustrating (...) I’ll give you an example. Yesterday I had a client come to me and say that in the area office he comes from his worker told him they’re not paying for pardons [of criminal records] (...) She was saying that her office doesn’t. Well I thought that was very strange so I called one of my contacts and asked him if something had changed. I find that the offices are telling their clients different things and then when it comes back to me I call and I’ll say look, ‘I don’t know what’s going on, but you guys need to have your rules straight’. What you’re telling your clients has to be across the board. And that’s what I find to be a big challenge.

Furthermore, Harriet and Sara explained the relatively low prevalence of benefit termination, yet highlighted how the threat of benefit suspension was a shadow that loomed over clients’ everyday lives, to the extent that clients often cannot participate fully in programs.

I’ve noticed sometimes people in the program will come in freaking out, ‘Oh my gosh, my worker called me, I have to go in, I’m [going to have to] miss class this day’. I’ll say, ‘Well, can you re-schedule with them, or can I call on your behalf? How do you want to handle this?’ They’ll [caseworkers] call them in for a review. In my opinion, if they’re [a client] already enrolled in a program, you [caseworker] had to authorize the training, the tuition, for them to come here. Why would you plan a meeting in the middle of a program instead of after the program is finished? So sometimes I wonder about that. And I’ve seen letters [saying], ‘If you don’t show up to this meeting your funds will be suspended’. I’ve seen a lot of women upset, crying because they’re funds have been suspended and they can’t continue or we’re scrambling for tokens, because when you’re on OW we can’t give them any. And
[we are often] trying to find a way for them to walk to school.
(Harriet)

It has to be a very severe case [for a benefit termination]: if you’re trying to get a hold of a client [and can’t] or if a client disappears. They [caseworkers] can put a hold on the file. I’ve heard of some cases where the client has been cut off completely. It’s confidential so they [caseworkers] don’t tell me. If they don’t comply, their cheque can be put on hold. That bothers me. If I have a client who I’m trying to get a hold of I have to contact their worker and say, ‘I can’t get a hold of this person’, they have to put a hold on their cheque. Do they have to go to that extreme? The majority [of clients] will call back and say, ‘Oh, Sara, I’ll be right in!’ Of course you’ll be right in because your caseworker just called and threatened you. (Sara)

These paragraphs reveal the paternalism that is encouraged through OW in the caseworker-client relationship, which ESP staff reveal is a significant barrier to effectively delivering their programs. While the official focus of the program is on individual responsibility, the use of withholding benefits unless clients comply with whatever behaviour, norm or rule is desired of them grants caseworkers the power over clients’ physical and material life. Harriet highlights issues of miscommunication, caseworker churning and inconsistency in eligibility rules that often arise in her work:

Caseworkers change quite often, over the course of a ten-week course you might have a client saying, ‘My caseworker changed and I don’t know who they are anymore’. So I have to call and figure out who is the new caseworker. Because I need this person to be able to send all the forms and assessment reports at the end of
their action plan. So those things are very frustrating (...) It’s frustrating because women are eligible to receive transportation supports and a clothing allowance when they’re enrolled in a full time ten-week program. It’s frustrating on my end the fact that some of the women get in right away up front and some don’t. One caseworker will say ‘No, they’re not eligible’. Well, yes, they are. And it’s difficult for me because I don’t work for the City but I know that they’re eligible.

Anita, with Spruce Way, on the other hand, signalled that the reason that the organization eventually decided to solicit funding from and deliver OW programming was derived from its perceived ‘softening’.

Clients didn’t feel like they had a choice. That’s why we were defensive about getting involved. Now it’s much different. It’s still a work in progress. But it’s much different. Clients know they’re rights and know they have choices. And they also know they have obligations if they’re on the system.

So, like Jennifer (City of Toronto) and Terry (private employment consultant), Sara agrees that OW ‘works’ more efficiently and humanely than it did in its first phase, for a variety of reasons. Following a period prior to 2003, where Spruce Way’s board and staff body decided against participating in the OW program, Anita now characterizes OW as a ‘work-in-progress’ meaning that though it is rife with problems, Spruce Way receives OW funding and delivers employment programs without compromising the organization, staff or clients’ needs, values and goals. In fact, she sees the direction in which OW has moved – preserving the overall framework of
‘accountability’ while eliminating several of its punitive components – as a positive phenomenon.

**Positioning themselves: Strategically delivering OW in Toronto**

The City of Toronto, as well the three Toronto non-profit ESPs profiled in this research, strategically delivered OW, both at the everyday, micro-level and at broader organizational and urban levels. At the everyday, micro-level, staff with ESPs explained that they were more likely to learn about clients lives and develop closer relationships with them due to the frequency with which they would work together – generally, on a daily basis for weeks or months. Obligated to police clients with respect to a range of OW rules, ESP staff members often face legal and moral dilemmas vis-à-vis their clients, but also can use this position in favour of clients. It underlines the ‘benevolent dictator’ role into which both TESS caseworkers and ESP staff are cornered – fully able to both save and punish. They spoke about the difficulty following mandated rules, and the freedom they take to discreetly avoid them in some cases.

If they’re working under the table, I can’t prove that they’re working, but I know that they’re working. (...) By law, I have to tell their caseworkers that they’re working under the table. Unfortunately, if I can’t prove it, then they can only be aware of it. On the flip side, am I taking away their benefits? (...) But like I said, I’m obligated to tell them [caseworker]. (Sara)

Sara continues:

It’s in the book. It’s in the legislation that you can only miss three days of training or more if you have a doctor’s note. And I am lenient because I feel that if you have issues, you have to take care
of them. But you have to help me too. So it goes 50-50 in the relationship.

Harriet spoke about frequently writing letters and calling caseworkers and other support workers on behalf of clients to get them what they need to participate in employment programs.

Often we’re writing letters and advocating saying, ‘This person’s accepted, can you please find them a daycare spot, so they can come’. So we have to do a lot of letter writing and phoning on their behalf and I’m really curious why that isn’t dealt with under the case management.

I’ve also received feedback from caseworkers where I’ll report on something and they’ll say I had no idea, like mental health issues, addictions or abuse. But we have a closer relationship with the client; we get to see them every day for ten weeks. So often we get to know a lot more about them and report that back to the caseworker.

In the case of Career Moves, empowering OW clients by providing them with a ‘safe’ OW information session is built into the very program. Anita invites an OW worker so that program participants can ask questions in a non-threatening, anonymous and transparent environment. She describes the session:

[It’s] not like when they go into see their caseworker alone they’re thinking, ‘Oh, I can’t ask them certain questions, because if I do, she [or he] will know about my file.’ This way they don’t feel threatened and if they ask a general question, or even about themselves, the worker doesn’t know their name, and can’t go and check their file. So in that way it becomes safe for them to be
informed and ask questions. More and more they’re getting that, ‘This is my responsibility and this is their [caseworkers’] responsibility to support me’. You still have resistance from clients, like, ‘Why does my worker have to ask me this’, and you still have caseworkers with the old way of thinking, which is that, ‘OK, you’re getting something from me so you should just do it without question’. That’s happening less now, which is a good thing.

As an organization, Spruce Way’s explicit evasion of OW during its early years both made an impression on municipal and provincial bureaucrats and policymakers that they were not happy, and would not be until changes were implemented. It also galvanized the non-profit community – especially those implementing employment programs for social assistance recipients – to use a common voice to advocate against OW.

[Interviewer:] It wasn’t a financial problem not have adequate training funding and refuse OW funding?

It is always a reality with a non-profit where any funding is cut or where you take a stand on something. We just had to be creative and one of the ways we tried [to be creative] was to ask the federal government to include [funding for] OW clients, because it [the federal funding] was meant only to be for EI clients. So, the people we would have had if we’d taken work-for-welfare [OW funding], now they’re included in the HRDC programs [federal funding]. So that was one way we combated not having funding from OW. And they knew how we felt about it. We didn’t take the part with the job
placement, but we did participate in the skills training part. That way the client is coming in for a service, not to do work for us. That was how we did it. So that was one way of getting around it, and making a stand.

Furthermore, a perceived shift to a less punitive delivery of OW by the municipality and the province coincided with a move by OW officials to more seriously consult with employment service delivery partners. Spruce Way describes these consultations, and the effect it had on ‘the shift’:

It happened when community agencies came together in 2003; when people started to advocate as a group, as opposed to just one organization. I remember we had meetings and we met with OW workers and labour market managers so we could give our feedback. They were noticing that many organizations didn’t want to buy into the work-for-welfare programs and they wanted to know why. So by getting feedback from a group of agencies they realized that they had to make the shift. And then once they began shifting stuff and we heard from clients that it was getting better – then agencies came on board. Slowly and cautiously we came on board.

At the municipal level, Jennifer explained, more abstractly, how the City’s longstanding ‘liberal’ tradition towards marginalized and low-income people influenced their ‘soft’ interpretation of the OW Act. In the following statement, this ‘liberal’ municipal attitude is partly attributed to pressure from community-based advocacy groups.
The City has always been defender of the poor and liberal in its thinking. Whether in practice or not, it was always been our flag. There has been a lot of that [attitude/philosophy] and that’s why we were softer with workfare. If we hadn’t done that, the advocacy groups would have been down our throats. Whether it happened at the political level or at the social service level there were a lot of reasons why we didn’t take this route [of more punitive workfare]. City politicians didn’t want to be associated with that.

In sum, a range of governing bodies – from ESP staff and TESS caseworkers to individual employment programs and organizations as a whole, such as non-profits and the City of Toronto – have used the little elbow-room available to them in their OW delivery roles to strategically manoeuvre urban workfarism into a more benevolent and less punitive program, while preserving the features of compulsion, accountability and obligation through specific practices. Non profit ESP staff see themselves as ‘closer’ to the client and therefore able to make strategic decisions based on their knowledge of the person, usually abiding by the OW rule book strategically in order to implement and sustain their employment programs. At the organization level, both individual and through strategic partnerships, a rather tenuous consensus was built around the OW features that were admirable and progressive (active labour market attachment focus, emphasis on accountability and obligation), those that were simply acceptable and could remain in place (overall framework of compulsion), and the ones that had to be
fought, resisted and eliminated (work-for-welfare, and especially harsh and punitive rules\textsuperscript{10}). This consensus was based on a varied spectrum of political attitudes towards low-income people, which had developed in different times and places within the city.

\textit{The City takes it on: New directions in municipal employment services}

Genuine municipal commitment to employment services only became a reality when the Ontario Works Act came into effect: “[T]he organization as a whole [the City of Toronto] couldn’t care less until there was money dangling in front of them in the 1990s with Harris. [Only then did] the mandate and language and attitude start changing” (Jennifer). Due to the fact that this research only took into consideration the narrative of a single individual municipal employee – albeit with ample and relevant professional experience – the following paragraphs examining the City of Toronto’s evolving attitudes towards and delivery of OW and employment services are derived from a series of policy reports over the last decade. In 1998, the newly amalgamated City lacked the infrastructure to effectively involve OW recipients in employment assistance activities or find them work. Non-profit employment service providers became important partners in this regard, producing a system of employment services to social assistance clients based on integrated human service delivery, targeted need-based service provision, partnerships between organizations and government, and the engagement of

\textsuperscript{10} Several OW rules and regulations that non-profits and municipalities argued should be eliminated are outlined in recommendations put forward in the \textit{Review of Employment Assistance in Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program} (2004). These are described in the Introduction, on page 2.
employers. Today, in contrast to a decade ago, the City positions itself as the most effective organization and level of government to deliver employment services to Torontonians, seeking to use this position to build a municipal infrastructure of active labour market employment assistance through the support of the OW and broader social support system. This urban ‘employment-focused’ infrastructure utilizes the model pioneered by non-profit ESPs – integrated service delivery, adequate supports, employer engagement, partnership, and targeted need-based provision – yet locates itself as the leader in both building and using this infrastructure.

To begin, OW provided the City with the mandate and support to initiate the development of a municipal employment service infrastructure: “On the positive side [of OW], there was the development of resource centres in each of our offices which very accessible to clients where they could use the computer and prepare their resumes” (Jennifer). By 2003, the City was advocating for the reform of workfare, based on five years of OW delivery, which it saw as both inhumane and generally ineffective as the active labour market attachment program it sought to be. Furthermore, it saw itself as the most appropriate organization and level of government to implement an employment-focused social assistance program, if it was given the appropriate support, especially in terms of the provincial-municipal funding structure (TSS/CNS, 2003a & 2003b): “The Province can capitalize on Toronto Social Services’ longstanding experience and expertise in managing the delivery of employment programs in Toronto, thus better ensuring its employment assistance policy objectives and program outcomes are realized” (TSS/CNS, 2003a: 6).
Due to the fact that the social assistance caseload in Toronto is unique, the City began positioning itself and its non-profit partners as experts in meeting OW’s employment objectives under constrained circumstances. Toronto’s particular social assistance caseload is shaped by the needs of people with substantial employment barriers, people with little or no education, language and/or work experience, the city’s complex and competitive labour market and high costs of living (TSS/CNS, 2003a: 7; 2003b). Municipal policy reports further advocated that the City’s challenge to deliver OW in Toronto has helped them hone expertise, develop technologies and establish support systems for which they deserve recognition. This includes the development of technology tools to gather information about employment-related client assets and barriers and systems to manage contracts and service agreements over 190 service providers which are not supported by provincial technology (TSS/CNS, 2003: 8). Starting in the right place (TESS, 2008), the most recent blueprint of plans to build employment and social services at the City-level, has a vision of municipal service ‘hubs’. The OW framework allowed the City to eventually develop an employment services mandate and focus, eventually taking a great deal of control of employment assistance following the preceding decades of ‘grassroots’ non-profit led delivery. Having already established Employment Resource Centres in its social service offices across the city, it looks to expand the progress made through such centres and create service ‘hubs’ that would combine and integrate access to both employment and social provisions. These would offer more comprehensive employment programs (like the ones offered by non-profits) ‘in-house’ – that is, by the City itself. The rationale for such plans are that employment services are under-developed and ineffective, and that they must be complemented by other City programs. Furthermore, the practice of ‘integrated human services’ emerged to improve access to
programs, signifying that instead of being assessed for employment services in municipal offices and then referred to different places, locations, programs and organizations around the city, clients could meet as many of their needs in one place, reducing client frustration, transportation costs and overall lack of accessibility.

The move towards City-led employment services, as highlighted in the plan for ‘hubs’, is viewed with a mix of both apprehension and support by the non-profits interviewed in this research. For one, non-profit ESPs also position themselves as ‘experts’, and while they mostly see the City as a crucial partner, they are uneasy about the leadership position it seems to be taking with the establishment of ‘hubs’. Harriet, though emphatic that ENTRE and the City have a healthy relationship based on partnership, states that only recently has the City begun delivering similar work to its non-profit ESP colleagues. Her observations lead her to reflect on the expertise that ENTRE has, that the City does not:

They’re [the City] starting to do similar work. Because people want a job, but the trick is, it’s not just about a job, it’s about all the other stuff that we have to work through first. People just walk in and say, ‘I just want a job’, and we say, ‘Well, there’s a process’. It isn’t that easy, otherwise you’d be out there working. Then we design an action plan to help them. Our organization does a lot of mentoring and employer events so they can ask, ‘What kind of skills do you need? What do you look for?’

She continues:

We just look at it as a continued partnership, and they have a lot to learn from us as well. And they’ll always contract out training because they can’t take it all on. They’re managing people’s
accounts mostly, as caseworkers, and then to get someone into training or a job search program is, takes a lot of work, and to them, they’re more than happy to say, ‘Oh you’re referred here, great, go’. Our expertise is well developed. And again, look at partnering, that’s what we do to keep that harmonious community and working relationship strong.

Terry, a private consultant who has worked with various community-based employment projects in Toronto, identifies other sources of expertise that non-profit ESPs possess and have honed over the past decade through the OW program – employer engagement. All three organizations profiled in this research also pioneered employer engagement as a more effective way of getting clients jobs.

We come into the 1990s, and the best way to get people off welfare is to get them into a job. Let’s forget training programs. But the labour market had changed so much that OW didn’t work because the time was wrong. All the services offered are around how to get people a job, interview, and perfect their resume. Everything was focused on the unemployed individual. We were just getting people a resume to displace the next worker in line. We had a blind-spot to what was happening in the labour market and what employers needed.

Starting in the right place (TESS, 2008), while it does toy with employer engagement, is still too client-focused, according to Terry, who feels that demand-
side interventions are still direly neglected in the City’s plans for employment services.

**Soft workfarism: Characteristics of social assistance in 21st century Toronto**

A new consensus between employment service providers (ESP) and the City of Toronto has coalesced around a social assistance system of ‘soft’ *workfarism*, which foregrounds active labour market attachment through targeted and integrated services and programs to support sustainable transitions into work. OW provided a system of accountability and obligation, both on the part of administrators and of clients, that ESP staff feel is a positive move forward in social assistance provision.

Before all you had to do was just write on a form that you had submitted a resume here or there. They weren’t hardcore about it. It wasn’t a formal job search. The caseworker would call them and ask them where they were, what they’d done. Not like it is now. Now they have to have accountability. (Sara)

The City of Toronto’s Employment and Social Services policy reports (Herd, 2006; TESS, 2008) show how initiatives to reform social and employment assistance by the City are, for the most part, aimed at the 13 City-designated ‘priority neighbourhoods’. This adds another important dimension to the emergence of employment-focused social services in Toronto. In their own words, these reports aim to focus on the ‘most disadvantaged in the labour market’, granting specialized programming and increased outreach in order to help them access Toronto’s dynamic labour market. Examples of targeted, integrated social and employment programs for individuals on social assistance are the pilot projects Investing in Families (TESS, 2008: 23),
Neighbourhood Action Teams and Neighbourhood Action Partnerships (IIF, NATs, NAPs) (TESS, 2008: 22). These aim at service alignment and partnerships between a range of stakeholders in priority neighbourhoods. Specific priority neighbourhood pilot projects that merge employment and social services are often targeted at designated groups that characterize ‘priority neighbourhood’ categorization, for example, ‘at-risk youth’ or single mothers who are seen as extremely removed from the labour market.

Plans for expanding municipal Employment Resource Centres into employment and social service ‘hubs’ outlined in these documents underlines how social inclusion has transformed into an urban economic imperative, partially determining the city’s competitive edge in a global era. According to the City’s Agenda for Prosperity (2008), economic prosperity depends on the inclusion of marginalized residents into the urban fabric. In this context, reducing social exclusion and increasing the City’s competitiveness are not mutually exclusive goals, and neither is urban economic competitiveness seen as a causal factor behind increasing social and neighbourhood exclusion and inequality (City of Toronto, 2008; TESS, 2008; 8). Under these circumstances, the City has ‘rolled out’ infrastructure in the form of Employment Resource Centres, and will use these as a foundation for future employment and social service ‘hubs’.

**Summary**

The findings outlined in this chapter explain how Toronto’s community-based social infrastructure has been significantly re-oriented towards employment services, the result of physical and symbolic investments provided through the OW framework. A preliminary overview of the three employment service providing organizations interviewed in this study reveals the dynamic range of integrated, specialized employment programs offered to social
assistance clients through the OW framework and TESS-awarded contracts. Toronto’s non-profit led employment services are qualified as ‘cornucopia’ to characterize how well-developed, specialized and dynamic they have become since the 1970’s but especially so in the past decade. Organizations faced what they often acknowledged as highly politicized decision to either accept or deny OW contracts through TESS, whether on financial or ethical grounds. By 2004, all three organizations were ‘on board’ and, for the most part, improved financial and ethical position vis-à-vis the OW framework.

In the decades leading up to the OW Act, City of TO and its partners had called for ‘welfare reform’, specifically demanding that it be overhauled into an active labour market attachment program. Based on ‘grassroots’ programming delivered through localized partnerships prior to OW, beginning in the late 1980s, have continually sought to reform OW based on these early experiences, which they deemed highly successful in moving social assistance recipients into sustainable waged work. An ‘integrated’ approach to employment services arose based on adapting to local, community needs. The municipal Metropolitan Toronto government played a strong impromptu role supporting many of these programs, though there was no official mandate to do so. In fact, there was very little incentive or official support for welfare to work programs until the OW framework provided a financial incentive to support these. However, the City’s capacity to deliver the welfare-to-work component of OW when it was mandated to do so was strong due to the decades-old grassroots partnerships that had been built with non-profit organizations, who possessed significant expertise and skill in delivery employment services. Furthermore, prior to the passing of the OW Act of 1998 the City never positioned itself as a leader in employment services for social assistance recipients. In contrast to
current developments, the City/Metropolitan Toronto saw itself as a facilitator of ‘community-based’ (civil society-led) employment services, rather than a delivery agency itself. All those interviewed distinguished the decade leading up to 1998 as the ‘golden age’ of employment services for social assistance clients.

Who would do the work of workfare? An especially tense political lead up to and early years of the OW Act challenged non-profit ESPs financially and ethically. Two out of the three organizations profiled engaged in meetings, consultations and debates as an agency whether or not they should deliver OW employment services. By the early 2000’s all three organizations had come ‘on board’, as much of the initial apprehension in doing so had subsided. This was due in most part to a variety of on-the-ground practices developed by organizations’ to mitigate some of the most cruel and ineffective aspects of the program, advocacy at the provincial level, and subsequently, the formal amendments to the most punitive regulations. Moreover, many organizations saw the OW framework as enabling of the grassroots employment goals and objectives they had been calling on in the decades leading up to 1998. Indeed, their ‘worst nightmares’ did not come true, and the high tension in the non-profit community had also cooled.

To make Ontario Works ‘work’, non-profit ESPs devised a range of strategies including creating and finding labour markets, integrating a range of human services to increase the likelihood that clients would find and keep jobs, and making services more accessible and attuned to successes in meeting program targets – that is, getting clients ‘off the system’ or helping them towards this goal. However, while they had control and room to ‘innovate’ in this regard, they continuously recognized that the program would not be truly effective – in moving people to employment – unless clients received more human financial benefits.
Respondents could not agree on whether the workfarist nature of social assistance in Toronto has developed into a ‘benign’ or ‘soft’ program, one that still retains its overall mandate of compulsion, but whose roughest edges have been softened. Some were adamant that it had, while others were not. This depended on their position and experiences. Non-profit ESP staff describe how both the provincial level reforms based on widespread consultations with stakeholders and micro-level subversions, or ‘rule-breaking’ on behalf of clients, as well as organizations’ strategic implementation of program directives, have led to the emergence of a program that resembles an effective active labour market attachment program. The City of Toronto also implemented OW as ‘softly’ as it could. In many ways these individual-, organizational- and municipal-level practices influenced the ministerial reforms of 2005. However, problems stemming from the program’s workfarist framework continue to hinder clients’ goals, including the framing of basic needs as ‘employment supports’, the continued shadow threat of benefit termination, the struggle for daily survival, and the policing role employment service providers and their colleagues are obligated to adopt.

While the municipal government sought to foster labour market attachment of social assistance clients by supporting community-based programming, and was vehemently opposed to the OW framework, it has utilized the investments in employment programming over the past decade to inject its social services with an active labour market focus. For the first time in the history of welfare and workfare in Toronto, the municipal government seeks to lead employment services in targeted communities using the integrated human service model pioneered by local non-profit employment service providers.
Chapter 5 Summary and conclusions

A cursory, policy-focused glance over this decade would reveal two major shifts in social assistance at the provincial scale. First in 1998, with Conservative Premier Harris’ major overhaul of Ontario’s social assistance system, welfare was effectively transformed to workfare, and was re-scaled at the level of municipalities, who were responsible for its funding and delivery. Secondly, in 2005, following extensive community consultations, Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty’s government passed five amendments to the OW framework, which sought to make clients’ transition from assistance to employment more efficient and less punitive\(^{11}\).

Despite significant political opposition by the City of Toronto and its non-profit partners towards the OW framework, the degree to which workfare has been normalized at the urban level over only one decade is remarkable and surprising. While civil society organizations in Toronto have been delivering both welfare-to-work and work-for-welfare since the 19\(^{th}\) century, it is only in the past decade that the municipal government has mobilized its mandate to lead the delivery of a coercive active labour market attachment program for social assistance recipients, embedding it at the heart of its social services and facilities. The findings presented in this research show how the political terrain upon which OW unfolded resulted in the place-specific ‘rolling out’ of neoliberal forms in Toronto – quite literally, the building of a new workfarist urban infrastructure.

Social control and regulation theories on workfare (Piven & Cloward, 1971; Jessop, 2002; Peck, 2001a) while providing an excellent macro-level account of political economic and disciplinary tendencies of the post-Keynesian era – the aggressive mobilization of individuals

\(^{11}\) Please see page 2 for a list of these five policy changes.
and groups to fit labour needs and behavioural and social norms – fails to capture the specific historical citizenship models and governance relationships which have been equally important in the neoliberal restructuring of government and urban forms. Perhaps a useful antidote in this regard is the lens of governmentality. A grassroots, community-based group of employment service providers arose in Toronto as the post-war expansionary economic period deflated, manufacturing collapsed, and welfare rights were increasingly eclipsed through the re-structuring of the universal social system. Attuned to the local needs of clients, grassroots employment services paved a foundation upon which the revanchist Ontario Works program could capitalize, survive and ultimately be considered a legitimate and appropriate financial assistance program. It is difficult to imagine who could have had the skills, capacity and expertise necessary to deliver welfare-to-work programs with such high success rates if not for this grassroots history. Those coming from a state theoretical or political economy perspective see workfare programs as a disciplinary shadow that extends beyond its targets, “shaping the norms, values and behaviours of the wider population and maintaining a form of order” (Peck, 2001a: 23) the governmentality literature suggests that workfare, while acting as a governmental technology, is equally an effect or a reflection of the collective norms and values of individuals, an effect of a system of government that has developed from the ground-up. It was not simply that workfare was ‘downloaded’ onto Ontario municipalities, but rather that it appealed to particular micro-level rationalities, practices and attitudes which had already been cultivated by particular groups and organizations, and in several ways, including the municipal government itself. In this way, the OW policy appealed to a local system of government between individuals and groups in Toronto. Government for Foucault was “an activity that undertakes to conduct individuals throughout
their lives by placing them under the authority of a guide responsible for what they do and for what happens to them” (Foucault 1997: 68 quoted in Rose et al, 2006: 83). As will be explored further, while many of these groups specifically opposed the mandatory nature of the program, its legitimacy developed by meeting the goals and ends that they had previously been calling for. In many ways, the ends, or effects, of the program justified and legitimized the means.

Conversely, it is necessary to equally consider the structural or systemic ways that the restructured welfare state cornered non-profits in state workfarism. There were indeed little alternative options for non-profit organizations, whose advocacy capacity was seriously undermined and whose need to secure funding turned them towards employment programs, where funding was plentiful. Nonetheless, though this pattern was addressed in interviews, respondents rarely acknowledged it as a principal reason for their continued delivery of state welfare-to-work programs.

Within the context of this research, is it appropriate to distinguish a marked shift from government to governance? How have civil society organizations been involved in the OW delivery model in Toronto and what are the implications of their role? As several respondents revealed, partnerships between non-profit employment service providers and various levels of government (municipal, provincial and federal) had existed for years prior to the implementation of OW. Both the City of Toronto and non-profits engaged in employment assistance had called for the social assistance system to be transformed into an active, employment focused program. Therefore, while civil society organizations were previously engaged in, and quite effective at, local employment service provision, any government support they received during this time was generally exogenous to formal provincial and federal social assistance mandates. As the OW
framework was implemented, the partnerships between state and nonstate became technical, bureaucratic and formal. However, as the City is poised, for the first time in its history, to take a leadership role in the provision of employment services, we see two phenomena: One, that non-profits are threatened by this move, both financially and in principle, in the sense that they feel it undermines the effort, expertise and legitimacy they have earned as the more appropriate delivery agents of urban employment services. Secondly, that neoliberal workfare practices and attitudes, while involving downward restructuring, both to City-level and outward to non-profit community agencies, is now experiencing an ‘upward’ movement, as the City seeks to take a leadership role and utilize the OW mandate to incorporate an employment focus at the core of its social service infrastructure, moving away from nonstate towards municipal delivery and leadership.

The process of bureaucratization of the relationships between state and non-state agencies that occurred through the OW framework surfaced as a result of policy directives provided by higher levels of government, both provincial and federal. It is therefore precedent setting that workfarism has emerged as the directive of centralized state governments, capitalizing on the models of employment assistance practiced and honed at the local level. As mentioned throughout this study, workfare is not novel per se, as it is over 400 years old; it is in the scale at which it has been revived, that is, through formal state mandates, in which its resurgence has been unparalleled. In this context, the state’s monopoly over the legitimate use of force is required and utilized. Indeed, like formal institutional control mechanisms (the policies and rules enforced through state and market) non-profits organizations possess a ‘left hand’ – that is, beneficent tools of control. Unlike them, non-profit organizations possess no ‘right hand’, or
coercive means of control (Bourdieu, 1998 and Fording, 2001 in Soss, 2005). Non-profits could not provide the element of compulsion that was necessary to catalyze change in the social assistance system, the attitudes of recipients, as well as assistance providers. In the words of several respondents, the use of compulsion permitted the development of a sense of responsibility both on the part of the recipient (the responsibility to utilize financial assistance to stabilize their lives and become independent and contributing citizens), and providers and caseworkers (the responsibility to help clients become independent, not simply dole out cheques).

Certainly, all of these concerns, among others, guaranteed that OW would provoke much opposition and criticism. The City of Toronto was in a paradoxical place: on the one hand, it had a well-developed, community-based history of employment services for people on social assistance dating back to the 1970s. Appalled at the idea of implementing workfare, the City sought a ‘made-in-Toronto’ version of OW, that would be “strikingly different” from the provincial framework (Lightman et al, 2006), whose municipal delivery principles were to “make participation voluntary”, “to provide meaningful and relevant opportunities through job creation” and “to treat the program as part of an overall economic strategy that ensures jobs are available” (TSS, 2004 in Lightman et al, 2006, emphasis added). Thus the strengthening of OW’s legitimacy, especially among the non-profit community, is all the more mystifying. Hardt & Negri’s theories of war and of the evolving ways in which violence is justified may seem far from the topic pursued here; however, in their book Multitude, the authors state that: “Violence is legitimated most effectively today, it seems to us, not on any a priori framework, moral or legal, but only a posteriori, based on its results” (2004: 15). This is not to suggest that physical
violence is involved in the OW framework, but rather to point to state coercion, compulsion, policing and surveillance as *types* of violence. To explain Hardt and Negri’s quote further, for the majority of research participants the fears and opposition they may or may not have had towards the aspect of force when considering or initially delivering OW’s employment assistance activities faded over the last decade. There seems to be clear – but not unanimous – agreement that these means, despite their problematic nature, led to the ends they had been calling on for decades in moving social assistance towards employment. Therefore it was only through the program’s results – was it effective in meeting employment goals? – that the use of coercion was ultimately judged based on its successful outcomes.

It is also important to note that, as Leslie Pal (1997) argued, the perceived ‘downloading’ of state responsibility onto the shoulders of non-profits oversimplifies a much more complex phenomenon in which the nexus between state-nonstate responsibilities were re-organized through neoliberal reforms. If mechanisms of coercion and compulsion have been adopted by civil society organizations through state sanction and mandates, and if both state and nonstate institutions intentionally and unintentionally act as a means of regulating the ‘free’ labour market, the theories of civil society and markets as self-organizing entities are further weakened by the results of this research. Furthermore, though neoliberal social assistance programs may have entailed the dismantling and restructuring of the Keynesian welfare system, the institutional structures of governance built through the welfare state were equally *mobilized*, or ‘re-engaged’ in Pal’s words, as they drew in and funded non-profit organizations whose work in employment services had been ignored during the decades in which formal workfare was prohibited *de jure*. Indeed, the view of a clear shift from government to governance through neoliberal reforms does
not seem to characterize what should be more as aptly discerned as a shift in the type of governance, the extent to which coercion and the ‘right hand’ of the state permeate it, and the type of organization which is either drawn in or rejected from the formal governance network. Civil society organizations offering those services and developing practices which meet, reflect, and nurture those attitudes and values in tune with current rationalities of government play a strong role in contemporary systems of government and governance.

The individual voices profiled herein show how at an organization-level, both the City of Toronto and non-profit ESPs used the little elbow-room they could find within the limiting parameters of the disciplinary OW framework to soften the most draconian features of its policy directives. For some, these practices formed the basis of advocacy at the provincial level. This led to a series of amendments to OW in 2005. It is therefore possible to characterize the provincial framework of ‘soft’ workfare as one that emerged from localized practices and attitudes. Soft workfare has evolved from a practice into a policy framework that incorporates key elements of choice and voluntarism within a program whose essence is one of obligation to participate in employment or employment related activities. Equally, the space with which ESPs were provided to implement employment programs allowed them to hone and develop specialized, integrated human services. In many ways, these integrated, human service delivery models – highly à la mode in post-Keynesian social policy circles – are precisely the model upon which the City wishes to build its employment and social service hubs. These hubs would be a ‘one-stop shop’ clients seeking municipal social and employment services, in which the City would guide and begin delivering employment services. There is resentment among those non-profit ‘pioneers’ of these models, who, without seeking to lay claim or ownership over the
delivery of employment services for social assistance clients, feel that the City should continue to build its employment assistance capacity through funding and partnership building with the non-profit community rather than seeking to lead the delivery of such programs.

However, in line with the growing socio-spatial disparities in Toronto region and its ‘priority neighbourhood’ discourse, the City now formally positions itself as the leader in the delivery of urban employment services. Its new employment and social service infrastructure, both existing and in the planning stages, is aimed at areas where residents are perceived to be furthest removed from the labour market, as well furthest removed from certain social and cultural norms encouraged by the city’s dominant groups. Indeed, one of the most important questions emerging from this research is the spatiality of soft workfare in Toronto. Evidence of such patterns can be detected in the rolling-out of employment infrastructure by the municipal government, which is heavily targeted at ‘priority neighbourhoods’. The City of Toronto seeks to integrate labour market attachment programs with other social programs (literacy, parenting, etc.) through the OW framework to address high levels of marginalization and perceived social ills in such neighbourhoods, including greater proportions of single parents (mostly women), racialized groups, and immigrants alongside high unemployment, low income levels and other socio-economic indicators. These integrated services and programs will be offered in and directed at such neighbourhoods, raising important questions as to the nature of employment services in regulating the urban social body through particular spaces.

What is the meaning of ‘benign’ or ‘soft’ workfare? And what are its implications? The following discussion will focus on how and why such a phenomenon was experienced and its significance both in terms of theory in geography and politics, as well as for social justice and
resistance to workfare. In research interviews, respondents presented contradictory experiences as to the use of compulsion embedded in the program. For some it was only present at the policy level, while it was delivered ‘at street level’ in a much more voluntary way. This suggests, as several scholars have, that there is a vast gulf between policy directives at a bureaucratic level and the ‘street-level’, and that the micro scale must be given more consideration than it currently is: it “needs to be looked at as a form of policy making not an afterthought” (Wright, 2003 quoted in McDonald et al, 2005). For others, though the program has changed significantly, transforming from its early form as a highly punitive program into something less so, they argue that it still retains its coercive nature. The case of soft workfare in Toronto symbolizes how advanced liberal rationalities of government instrumentalize ‘freedom’ through relationships of authority and power, which can involve state violence. To be free is to be gainfully employed, in full control of one’s individual destiny through waged labour. State coercion is vital, not necessarily to discipline but to ‘help’ those who cannot achieve their own freedom. Indeed, it can be seen as a ‘practice of freedom’ as defined by Rose (1996), in which “the agonistic relation between liberty and government is an intrinsic part of what we have come to know as freedom” (62). At the heart of practices of freedom under advanced liberalism lies “a relation to authority in the very moment as it pronounces itself the outcome of free choice” (59). However, as disciplinary and punitive as it is ‘governmental’, this contradiction begs the question whether advanced liberal regimes can truly ‘govern at a distance’ if not for the ‘right hand’ of the state. Furthermore, perhaps ‘soft’ workfare is more insidious than in its draconian forms. Soft workfarism can be discerned as a feature of Third Way neoliberalism, both at the provincial and municipal levels, in Ontario and Toronto. The fact that soft workfarism is seen by many – service
providers, politicians, etc. – as one of the only ways forward, strikes quite a chord within the
tradition of neoliberal advocacy, that it is a ‘natural’ form of human organization. It becomes all
the more challenging to organize politically against workfarism, and allows for its own
legitimacy and accompanying values and attitudes, to be reproduced and embedded within both
symbolic and material structures.

An area that requires further investigation is the distinction between demand-led and
supply-led labour market strategies within literature on employment and social policy in the 21st
century. In contrast to the Keynesian macro-economic policies that upheld full employment as a
primary state objective, the workfarist inflection in social assistance programs put full emphasis
on intervening in the labour supply, that is, the individual. In order to make employment services
more effective, recent policy directions in Toronto (TESS, 2008; Herd, 2006) propose a ‘dual-
focus’ that engages both clients and employers. These documents call for demand-led strategies
in addition to supply-focus ones. However, qualified as ‘employment engagement’ and
‘industry-specific projects’, they fail to adequately meet the definition of a labour demand
intervention, which should ideally regulate, control and adjust the labour market. It is disturbing
that policy recommendations characterize strategies as ‘demand-led’ when they are far from it.
Engaging local employers in the Ontario Works framework is simply drawing them into the
governance fold of workfare delivery.

Lastly, the ‘participation agreement’ component of the OW program also requires more
thought and research. This legal document embodies the interstices of and blurring between what
we know as freedom and compulsion, and frames the relationships of power between
caseworker, employer/employment service provider and recipient/client. The participation
agreement is the document signed between an individual soliciting social assistance and her or his caseworker, binding the client to those employment assistant activities that were agreed upon in the document, in order to be eligible for financial benefits. What are the effects, nature, and meaning of the way that the participation agreement structures and situates choice within a framework of force?

This conclusion provokes a range of questions whose answers lie beyond the reach of this research. The latter has attempted to understand some of Toronto’s perplexing experiences with post-Keynesian social government and citizenship: its historically well-developed employment services, its vociferous and organized opposition to Ontario Works and the re-orientation of Toronto’s social infrastructure towards employment. As workfarism has developed, been debated and legitimized in the city, we are left with a telling blueprint of the values, lifestyles and attitudes that are nurtured in the city, as well as the consequences for those groups and individuals who do not share these.
Bibliography


Toronto Social Services. (2001). Update on Ontario Works Employment Assistance Programs and Services, Attachment 3


APPENDIX A: Administrative information letter and consent form

Administrative information letter

My name is Emily Reid-Musson and I am a Master’s student in the department of Geography and Planning the University of Toronto working under the supervision of Dr. Alan R. Walks. As a part of my MA thesis, I am conducting research on the origins of employment access and job training programs for people receiving social assistance benefits. Specifically, I am interested in how these programs can influence how people live and work within the Toronto region. The goal of this research is to explore how these programs impact on Toronto’s social service infrastructure.

The objectives of my research are:

- What employment services were community-based organizations offering to social assistance recipients prior to the OW Act in 1998?
- What specific or general points of political consensus or conflict have developed between the City of Toronto and community-based organizations related to the delivery of Ontario Works at the local level?
- Did these relationships have an impact of the genealogy of workfare over the next decade at the municipal-level and/or the provincial scale?

I am requesting permission that potential participants (employees or program recipients) can be recruited through your organization in one or several of the following ways 1) your referral, 2) intake interviews, 3) email listserv or 4) any other way which we may identify. I am also requesting permission to recruit former employees or people who were formerly employees or program recipients via phone or email. I will develop information letters for research participants that will be presented via e-mail, fax, or regular mail. I will use this letter to explain the study in detail and direct those who are interested to contact me personally. Because of language and literacy issues that may be present, research participants will be informed of project details and asked for their consent verbally.

To complete my research, I would like to interview between 10-20 individuals who have been involved with employment access programs either as program administrators or as program recipients with non-profit agencies in Toronto. The participants will be asked to contact me either by e-mail or by phone if they are interested in participating in the study. Once the participants contact me voluntarily they will be presented with a detailed consent form and will be reviewed of the information contained in the information letter.
As the director of (organization name), I would like both to ask for your administrative consent, as well as to invite you to participate in a one-on-one interview that will last approximately 90 minutes. You will be asked questions which will touch on all aspects of the history of the organization, its programs and client such as the organization and/or programs’ relationship with funders and government policy-makers, and your vision for the organization.

The interview conversation will be held either on the phone or in person in a place that is most comfortable for the participant. I expect that the interview will last between one and two hours. I will ask participants questions about the employment access programs in which they have experience. I will ask program recipients questions such as: reasons for joining the program, how it relates to social assistance programs, impacts of the program (for example, housing, income), their opinion about the benefits or flaws of the programs, etc. I will ask program administrators/officers about the rationale and history of programs, relationships to funders, government and employers, etc.

The interview will be conducted at a place and time suited to your convenience. The data collected for this project will be used to develop my Master’s thesis and findings will be published and may be presented at academic conferences. Your name will not be used in the study unless otherwise indicated by you. All conversations and information pertaining to this project will remain confidential. The only people who will have access to this information will be my supervisor, Dr. Alan Walks, and I.

You will be asked at the beginning of the interview for permission to record the audio portion of the interview. I will transcribe the interview afterwards and send the transcript back to you for your verification. Once the transcription process is complete I will immediately destroy all data pertaining to the project. You will also receive a summary of the findings and have access to the thesis once it is completed.

**Participation in this project is completely voluntary.** If you decide to participate, you may withdraw your participation from the study at any time, with no negative consequences. If you decide to participate you may also decline to answer any question at any time during the interview. If you have any concerns or questions throughout the study, you may discuss your concerns with me.

As the director of an employment access agency, you will be identified by your title and through your responses. I will seek to protect participants and minimize this risk by changing your name as well as the scenario (without affecting the integrity of the research).

I will not be offering any payment or compensation for participation. However, potential benefits towards scholarship in urban geography, governance and public policy, as well as an analysis of
programs within a broader perspective for your own organization’s research, advocacy and/or evaluation purposes will come about as a result of your participation.

Any further questions regarding the content of this project may be directed to me at [phone number] or via e-mail at [email address]. Also feel free to contact my departmental supervisor, Dr. Alan Walks, via email at [email address]. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this project please do not hesitate to contact the University of Toronto Ethics Review Office at [number].
**Administrative consent form**

By signing this form:

- I understand that as the representative administrator of [organization name] I can withdraw from participating in this study at any point, in any way that I wish, and that there will be no negative consequences for withdrawing.

- I understand that individual participation in this study is confidential. Only the principal investigator, Emily Reid-Musson and the research supervisor, Dr. Alan Walks, will have access to information provided in interviews. I understand that the identity of this organization will *not* be concealed in the research dissemination.

- I have read the information letter. I have had a chance to have my questions answered.

- I give administrative consent to employees and clients from this organization to participate in this research.

_________________________________  ______________________
Signature                          Date
APPENDIX B: Participant information letter and consent form

Participant information letter

My name is Emily Reid-Musson. I am a Masters of Arts student in the department of geography and planning at the University of Toronto. My MA research is being supervised by Dr. Alan Walks. As a part of my MA thesis, I am conducting research on the origins of employment access and job training programs for people receiving social assistance benefits. Specifically, I am interested in how these programs can influence how people live and work within the Toronto region. The goal of this research is to explore how these programs impact on Toronto’s social service infrastructure.

To complete my research, I would like to interview between 10-20 individuals who have been involved with employment access programs either as program administrators or as program recipients that run by non-profit agencies in Toronto. I am warmly inviting you to participate in this research project because you have experience with the programs described above and you are prepared to share them with me. The interview conversation will be either on the phone or in person in a place that is most comfortable for you. I expect that the interview will last between one and two hours. I will ask you questions about the employment access programs in which you've participated. If you are a program recipient, I would ask you questions such as: reasons for joining the program, how it relates to social assistance programs, impacts of the program (for example, housing, income), your opinion about the benefits or flaws of the programs, etc. If you are a program administrator, I would ask you about the rationale and history of programs, relationships to funders, government and employers, etc.

You will be asked at the beginning of the interview for permission to record the audio portion of the interview. No portions of the interview will be recorded without your permission. Participation in this project is completely voluntary, and if you decide to participate, you may withdraw your participation from the study at any time, with no negative consequences. If you decide to participate you may also decline to answer any question at any time during the interview. You may also ask me for clarifications, correct any statements I make that you feel are incorrect, and add anything to the interview my questions may have missed.

Your anonymity will be guaranteed. In my research I will be using pseudonyms of participants and will generalize markers such as locations, organizations, programs, etc. Data collected will be stored in my computer’s hard drive and in various notebooks throughout the duration of the research, and will be erased and shredded on completion of the project. The project will eventually be published in the form of a M.A. thesis and will be available publicly through the University of Toronto. If they wish, individual participants will also be offered a summary of the research results for their own records.
I will not be offering any payment or compensation for participation. However, this is an opportunity to share your experiences with employment access and job training programs and policies.

Any further questions regarding the content of this project may be directed to me at [number] or via e-mail at [email]. My research supervisor, Dr. Alan R. Walks, can be contacted by email: [email address]. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research project, you should contact the University of Toronto's Office of Research Ethics at [email address] or [number]. It is recommended that you keep a copy of this information and consent letter for your own reference.
**Participant consent form**

By signing this form:

- I understand that I can withdraw from participating in this study at any point, in any way that I wish, and that there will be no negative consequences for withdrawing.

- I understand that this study is confidential. Only the principal investigator, Emily Reid-Musson and the research supervisor, Dr. Alan Walks, will have access to the material I provide during the interview.

- I understand that I can refuse to ask any question, at any point during or after the interview, without any negative consequences.

- I agree to be audio-recorded during the interview process of this study.

- I have read the information letter or have had this study explained to me. I have had a chance to have my questions answered.

- I agree to participate in this research.

__________________________________________  _______________________________________
Signature                                      Date
APPENDIX C: Sample interview guide

- Describe your work with [organization].
- Describe the organization’s general history.
- Describe the organization’s clients and target groups.
- Describe the programs OW-/TESS-funded for social assistance clients.
- What proportion of your clients are OW and EI clients?
- What proportion is not eligible for either of these?
- How have these proportions and/or target groups shifted in the past decade/past two decades?
- How do clients find your organization?
- How long has your organization been delivering employment services to social assistance recipients?
- Describe the history, objectives and outcomes of your pre-OW employment programs.
- When and why did you begin delivering OW-funded programs?
- Describe your OW-funded programs.
- How have these changed in the past decade?
- How have they affected your programming and services?
- Do you have a relationship with employers? Describe.
- How has your organization been successful in finding clients jobs/meeting employment assistance goals?
- Define success.
- Describe personal and professional challenges or frustrations in delivering OW programming.
- Describe positive or satisfying aspects of delivering OW programming.
- Have you experienced shifts in how OW is delivered? Describe.
- Would you say that OW is less or more punitive? Why or why not?
- Describe general or specific ways the OW programs you deliver could be improved.
- Describe your organization’s relationship with TESS.