UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL ASSISTANCE IN NORTHERN ONTARIO: 1997 TO 2010

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Faculty: The Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work
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Abstract

This study explores how the post-1997, redeveloped Ontario Works welfare system, together with the economic and social conditions in northern Ontario, influenced the administration and delivery of social assistance. In particular, this research aims to expand the limited knowledge of welfare in northern rural and non-metropolitan contexts and to increase understanding of how economic and social conditions influence the provision of the Ontario Works program. Using a constructivist grounded theory methodology, the experiences of Ontario Works program deliverers were drawn upon to foster an increased understanding of issues commonly encountered when providing social assistance to northern Ontario residents. Data were gathered over two primary periods through in-depth interviews, and follow up interviews conducted throughout a several year data collection and analysis process. Forty-three northern Ontario Works program deliverers comprised of Ontario Works managers, supervisors, and caseworkers from across northern Ontario participated in the study.

The analysis of the data reveals that northern Ontario Works program deliverers experience a multitude of resource constraints arising from local northern conditions as well
as those situated within the welfare system. Research participants across northern Ontario reported that northern areas had limited economic capacity to provide adequate social services and infrastructure necessary to support the fulfillment of social assistance employment objectives. This study also found that social assistance employment objectives were compromised by limited local control over decision-making, under-resourcing within the Ontario Works program, and ‘urban-centric’ funding arrangements and policies that disadvantaged northern areas. In addition, northern Ontario Works program deliverers reported substantive barriers to employment due to extremely low human capital among welfare recipients.

Moreover, findings indicate that these constraints are compounding. In other words, northern Ontario Works program deliverers frequently encountered multiple and simultaneously occurring resource barriers. The result was described as intensifying resource deficiencies and inhibiting efforts to facilitate sustained labour market attachment for welfare recipients.
Acknowledgements

As with most achievements, there are many helping hands that make the journey possible. To this point, I would like to thank the many people who generously provided their time, support, and guidance in the completion of this dissertation.

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I gratefully acknowledge and immensely appreciate the crucial guidance and support provided to me by my thesis committee members. Sincere thanks to Dr. Faye Mishna for her highly attentive and supportive approach to supervision and for her invaluable knowledge and experience of grounded theory; to Dr. Therese Jennissen and Dr. Allan Moscovitch for their immeasurable knowledge of social assistance, their unwavering support and feedback, and for their critical insights of social assistance policy that were pivotal to my learning process; and to Dr. Dan Zuberi as my Internal/External Reviewer committee member and Dr. Stephanie Baker Collins as my External Reviewer committee member for their very attentive reading, feedback, and discussion of the material. I also am grateful to Dr. Ernie Lightman for his guidance and support in the early part of this learning journey. His knowledge, enthusiasm, and support for this study provided the initial guidance, networking and assistance that permitted the launching of this dissertation research.
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AGM</td>
<td>Annual General Meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>AMO</td>
<td>Association of Municipalities of Ontario</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAP</td>
<td>Canada Assistance Plan</td>
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<td>CCPA</td>
<td>Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives</td>
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<td>CGT</td>
<td>Constructivist Grounded Theory</td>
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<td>CHST</td>
<td>Canada Health and Social Transfer</td>
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<td>CMSM</td>
<td>Consolidated Municipal Services Manager</td>
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<td>CRF</td>
<td>Community Reinvestment Fund</td>
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<td>CRI</td>
<td>Canadian Rehabilitation Institute</td>
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<td>CSUMB</td>
<td>Community Start-Up and Maintenance Benefit</td>
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<td>DSSAB</td>
<td>District Social Services Administration Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>EI</td>
<td>Employment Insurance</td>
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<tr>
<td>FA</td>
<td>Family Allowance</td>
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<tr>
<td>FONOM</td>
<td>Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GED</td>
<td>General Education Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>GST</td>
<td>Goods and Services Tax</td>
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<td>GTA</td>
<td>Greater Toronto Area</td>
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<td>GWA</td>
<td>General Welfare Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>LSR</td>
<td>Local Services Realignment</td>
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<tr>
<td>MCSS</td>
<td>Ministry of Community and Social Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MNDMF</td>
<td>Ministry of Northern Development and Mines and Forestry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MNR</td>
<td>Ministry of Natural Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOHFC</td>
<td>Northern Ontario Heritage Fund</td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>NOMA</td>
<td>Northern Ontario Municipal Association</td>
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<td>NOSDA</td>
<td>Northern Ontario Services Deliverers Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>NPM</td>
<td>New Public Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>OCB</td>
<td>Ontario Child Benefits</td>
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<td>OMB</td>
<td>Ontario Municipal Board</td>
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<td>OMFP</td>
<td>Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund</td>
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<td>OMSSA</td>
<td>Ontario Municipal Social Services Association</td>
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<td>OW</td>
<td>Ontario Works</td>
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<td>SUFA</td>
<td>Social Union Framework Agreement</td>
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<td>UI</td>
<td>Unemployment Insurance</td>
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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Purpose

This study seeks to understand how social assistance policy and programming are produced and delivered in northern Ontario. The dual emphasis on employment readiness and devolution as cornerstones in the 1990s restructuring of social assistance in Ontario is believed to have introduced a new set of expectations and pressures at the local scale (see Peck, 2001, 2006).

In northern Ontario, where economic conditions are hampered by demographic changes including an aging population, youth out-migration and a rapidly growing young Aboriginal population, an overdependence on natural resource based economies (Conteh, 2015; Graefe, 2015; Southcott, 2013), and shaped through centre-periphery relations that privilege urban perspectives (McCann and Simmons, 2000), the capacity to support the implementation of social assistance is in question. Similar to rural areas in the United States (see Pindus, 2001), the devolved responsibility for the administration and delivery of social assistance to northern communities is expected to intensify barriers to providing local resources and supports. The situation of rural areas which often lack sufficient employment

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1 This study concentrates on implications for the implementation of social assistance in northern contexts arising from the period of welfare restructuring that occurred in the late 1990s. As data collection in this study was completed between 2007 and 2009, the analysis draws on welfare restructuring processes that occurred between the late 1990s and the latter part of the 2000s. Similarly, literature adopted for use in this study focuses on this period.
opportunities and resources to adequately support the transition of welfare recipients into the labour market (Arsneault, 2006; Milbourne, 2010; Pindus, 2001; Tickamyer, White, Tadlock, and Henderson, 2002) offers insights into the experiences of northern Ontario communities, which are principally rural in composition.

In addition to influences stemming from northern Ontario’s demographic characteristics, its regional development, and overreliance on resource extraction industries (the physical environment), the capacity of northern communities to support the implementation of employment-orientated social assistance objectives is substantially influenced by social welfare and social assistance policy. Processes of globalisation, de- federalisation, decentralisation, and marketisation, which have shaped Ontario’s restructured welfare state and welfare policy, create challenges for northern communities and welfare workers in terms of fostering economic reliance within an urban-biased, increasingly residualised, privatised, and work-based social assistance policy. Accordingly, this study explores influences endemic to both the physical environment and to social assistance policy on the implementation of the Ontario Works program in northern Ontario.

The decision to focus this study on northern Ontario reflects an effort to respond to the scant attention northern areas have received in research, and in particular, to the dearth of research exploring the impact of place-based influences and welfare policy in northern settings. Persistent and disparate degrees of underdevelopment in northern Ontario raise questions about the capacity of northern communities to support the implementation of Ontario’s welfare-to-work social assistance program. The decentralisation of social assistance in Ontario as well as the program’s increased reliance on local infrastructure, labour markets, and social services positions northern contexts as playing a central role in
determining whether northern *Ontario Works* program deliverers and recipients successfully fulfil social assistance policy and program requirements. Accordingly, the following section is devoted to describing key aspects of the northern Ontario context.

### 1.2 Northern Ontario: The Study Area

Northern Ontario is predominantly comprised of settlements within rural and remote areas, with the exception of five non-metropolitan centres (i.e. Sudbury, Thunder-Bay, North Bay, Sault Ste. Marie and Timmins) that serve as economic hubs and service centres for the adjacent and non-adjacent communities. Although these cities rely on natural resource industries, in contrast to the rest of the north, they also enjoy the security of greater diversity within their economies (Southcott, 2013). Overall, northern Ontario is a sparsely populated region that covers a vast geographic area. It comprises 6.5 percent of the total provincial population, which is distributed over almost 90 percent of the province’s land area (Southcott, 2013). Northern Ontario is administratively delineated into two economic regions consisting of Northwestern and Northeastern Ontario (Woodrow, 2002).

Northeastern Ontario includes the census districts of Algoma, Cochrane, Timiskaming, Sudbury, Manitoulin, Parry Sound, and Nipissing, in addition to the census division of the city of Greater Sudbury with a population of 551,144 according to the 2011 census.

Northwestern Ontario consists of the districts of Kenora, Rainy River, and Thunder Bay, with a much smaller total population of 224,034 (Service Canada, 2014).
Despite its small population and isolated geography, northern Ontario is one of the country’s most vital resource-producing regions (Moazzami, 2015). However, despite the important contributions made by this region to the provincial economy, it maintains a largely peripheral and marginalised position in relation to the province as a whole. Created by exogenous corporations for the specific purpose of supplying their operations with raw natural resources, many northern Ontario communities have developed a reliance on natural resource extraction that adversely impacts economic development and growth (Conteh, 2013; Southcott, 2013). Additionally, the tradition of external control over northern economies by large corporations situated outside of the region (Southcott, 2008; 2013; Woodrow, 2002) has
been maintained as northern Ontario continues to have limited direct control over local decision making (Conteh, 2013).

The current and historical predominance of natural resource extraction as the primary industry across northern Ontario is believed to be deleteriously impacting social and economic conditions in the region (Woodrow, 2002). Overreliance on natural resource extraction substantially increases the vulnerability of northern economies to boom and bust economic cycles, resource depletion, fluctuating commodity pricing, changes in economic policy (Southcott, 2013), international competition, climate change, and rising energy prices (Conteh, 2013). Consequently, northern Ontario’s dependence on natural resource extraction economies is viewed as a principle factor responsible for the region’s chronic underdevelopment and high unemployment rates. Primary challenges facing northern Ontario are associated with considerable geographic distance from larger markets, declining populations due to aging and youth out-migration, in addition to a lack of economic diversification, high degrees of dependence upon government, and limited investment capital (Woodrow, 2002).

Changes in northern Ontario demographics have been identified as influencing economic and social conditions in the region (Moazzami, 2015; Southcott, 2013). For example, a key challenge for northern communities has been the decline in primary sector natural resource jobs. Resource based industries such as mining, forestry, and gas and oil represent the major industries in northern Ontario and have experienced widespread and severe decline. As identified by Southcott (2013), employment within these industries decreased by approximately 50 between 1987 and 2004 (i.e., from 4,400 jobs in 1987 to only 21,800 jobs by 2004) in contrast to the province of Ontario, for which employment in the
mining, oil, and gas industries accounted for 0.4 percent of employment in 2006 and 3.5 percent of the employment in northern Ontario. A further challenge is that unlike the remainder of the province which saw recoveries in the 1990s, northern Ontario has not been able to recover the losses (Southcott, 2013). Accordingly, declines in the forestry and mining sectors, which have comprised the bulk of full-time, permanent, well-paying jobs in the region over the past two decades, have not only led to substantial losses in employment (Conteh, 2013) but have also created severe economic challenges for northern communities (Southcott, 2013).

Intensifying these challenges is the limited diversity of most northern labour markets. Unlike southern Ontario, labour markets in northern communities are much smaller and less diverse, thereby lacking the capacity to offer employment alternatives available in more diversified urban economies (Slack, Bourne, and Gertler, 2003; Southcott, 2013). Thus, similar to rural labour markets, the event of job loss in northern Ontario is not easily addressed as there are fewer employment opportunities available in rural resource-dependent economies (see Gibbs, 2002; Slack et al., 2003; Southcott, 2013) to replace job losses. While there have been increases in other sectors in the north, including service sector employment, these positions are largely low-paying (Conteh, 2013; Southcott, 2013), and precarious (Cranford, Vosko, and Zukewich, 2003; Vosko, 2010), and therefore incapable of replacing the income lost from higher-paying primary sector employment. Adding to the challenge of securing alternative employment is the fact that growth experienced in emerging sectors such as the knowledge economy (which is seen as replacing manufacturing industries) has resulted in only a limited number of northern jobs (Southcott, 2013). Accordingly, northern Ontario’s
greater reliance on public sector employment compared to other areas of the province is consistent with the lack of employment options in northern Ontario generally. Northern Ontario public sector services employment comprised 28 per cent of the total employment in 2006, while the provincial total was 21.5 per cent (Southcott, 2013).

The income gap between urban and rural earnings represents a further challenge for northern Ontarians. Northern Ontario incomes have regularly and substantially lagged behind the province (Standing Senate Committee, 2008). Between 1981 and 2006, incomes in northern Ontario were consistently lower than Ontario as a whole. The average northern Ontario family income in 1981 was 92.5 percent of that earned in Ontario as a whole. This figure decreased to 82.3 percent of the provincial average in 2006 (Segsworth, 2013). Income disparity trends between northern Ontario and Ontario as a whole reflect the problems of growing wealth polarization in Canada. In this regard, the poorest 20 percent of the population experienced declines in their share of earnings from 4.5 percent in the latter part of the 1970s to 2.6 percent in 2001, while the wealthiest 10 percent of the population experienced average gains from 23 percent in the late 1970s to 29.5 percent between 2001 and 2004 (Yalnizan, 2007).

In addition to the decline of primary industries in northern Ontario, income differences can be attributed to increased productivity from agglomeration in urban economies. Specifically, higher wages in southern Ontario can be linked to productivity advantages, including reduced costs arising from opportunities for urban firms to share infrastructure and benefit from competing suppliers, as well as the greater availability of labour and specialisation associated with a larger market (Moazzami, 2015). Conversely, rural areas, which are assumed to experience lower productivity as a consequence of less
human capital (skilled/educated workers) and an absence of agglomeration economies, are deemed less entitled to the higher wages found in urban economies (see Moazzami, 2015; Slack et al., 2003). This problem is further demonstrated by the fact that capital produced in northern Ontario was reportedly absent of multiplier effects (Southcott, 2013). Consequently, the inability for most northern communities to benefit from agglomeration reinforces income and wage disparities between northern rural and southern urban areas.

Further contributing to lower northern incomes are lower levels of education among northern Ontarians in relation to the province as a whole. In 2006, 25.9 percent of northerners aged 25 years and over had attained less education than a high school diploma, in comparison to 18.7 percent of Ontarians as a whole (Southcott, 2013). In 2001, northern Ontarians aged 15 years and older without a certificate, diploma or degree averaged 25.8 percent (2001 census, Statistics Canada). Low levels of education in the north indicate a serious problem in light of the influence of higher levels of education on attaining higher wages (Southcott, 2013). Moreover, persistently lower levels of education could further disadvantage northerners from accessing employment opportunities in the growing knowledge economy, which requires greater educational attainment (Southcott, 2013).

Another important consideration for understanding economic challenges in northern Ontario involves disparities in the type and size of natural resource bases specific to different areas, as well as trends in the growth and/or decline of specific resource industries. For example, northwestern and northeastern Ontario regional economies are primarily comprised of forestry, mining, healthcare and utility sectors (Service Canada, 2014), yet demonstrate considerable variation in economic outcomes within and between the regions. For example, while global declines in commodity prices and demand for non-precious metals have limited
exploration projects and led to hiring freezes and the scaling back of employees by companies such as Vale in Sudbury, Ontario, developments in the precious metal sector are increasing with the opening of a large gold mine by Detour Gold Corporation near Cochrane, Ontario (Service Canada, 2014). Meanwhile, recovery in the lumber sector market following a lengthy stagnant period has resulted in the reopening of the previously closed Domtar mill in White River, Ontario as White River Forest Products (Service Canada, 2014).

In addition, according to Slack, Bourne, and Gertler (2003), smaller, more remote communities tend to experience greater economic volatility than larger communities which generally possess a larger, more diversified stable economy. Similarly, smaller natural resource based communities can be expected to experience greater risk than larger communities in terms of “potential economic dislocation and demographic decline because they are most vulnerable to changes in external economic conditions and markets” (p. 10). Consequently, the varying availability, accessibility, and opportunities to benefit from the proximity of larger markets creates differing and uneven economic conditions across northern Ontario communities.

Other issues such as events arising locally and internationally influenced changes. Decreases in demand for non-precious metals in addition to worldwide declines in commodity prices resulted in a global hiring freeze by Vale Canada Limited (Service Canada 2014) and the termination of 144 contracted employees by Kirkland Lake Gold Inc. Challenges in the sectors also impact the broader community. While the lengthy Vale strike in Greater Sudbury did not impact its cumulative overall growth during the 2010 to 2013 period, Greater Sudbury lost up to 700 jobs due to the closure of an additional Teletech
location. Meanwhile, Xstrata closed the Timmins copper smelter and moved the operation to Quebec (Bonin, 2015).

In addition to the type and productivity of the resource industry, a key factor identified as influencing economic conditions in small, rural and remote areas is population growth or decline (Slack et al., 2003; Southcott, 2013). Population density is highly influential in determining the prosperity of a community because there exists a strong relationship between population and economic potential. More specifically, Slack et al., (2003) posit that small, rural, and remote communities (including northern Ontario) face intersecting and compounding challenges involving population in terms of experiencing limited success in attracting and retaining skilled, highly educated workers due to the limited employment options and amenities available. These challenges in turn are strongly influenced by and also contribute to failure of small communities to secure a critical mass of consumers, employers or firms, and investment capital necessary for local production to occur and thrive.

Population changes influence the region’s economic conditions in several ways. Changes in northern populations resulting from the out-migration of youth, an aging population, and a growing Aboriginal population significantly impact economic outcomes for northern Ontario (Southcott, 2013). Other factors, including lower fertility and immigration rates (including attracting and retaining immigrants) that are attributed to population decline in northern Ontario (Moazzami, 2015), also influence economic conditions in the region. Population decline is of particular concern for northern Ontarians due to the implications for workforce composition, and consequently income generation and output in the region (Moazzami, 2015).
The out-migration of youth from the northern region is a particular concern in terms of future growth prospects. According to Southcott (2013), youth out-migration is a fairly recent problem experienced in northern Ontario. The decline of individuals aged twenty to thirty-four years in northern Ontario by 10.5 per cent in 2006 in contrast to an increase of 5.2 percent for Ontario as a whole (Southcott, 2013) raises valid concern about the availability of workers to ensure economic stability and advancement of northern Ontario.

The reality of rapidly declining numbers of available workers as both the population drops and the existing workforce ages adds to the challenge of ensuring a stable and available workforce. In particular, workforce composition is impacted as fewer people hold jobs, creating implications for local tax revenue as well as increasing need and cost of healthcare and income benefits (Moazzami, 2015). Thus, the challenge for northern Ontario is intensified in light of increasing youth out-migration (with the exception of some small mining communities) and few immigrants arriving in northern Ontario (Southcott, 2013). However, continuing growth of the Aboriginal population in the north, which exceeds the provincial average, suggests some relief to the population declines in the north. The Aboriginal population in northern Ontario increased from 77,430 in 2001 to 98,980 in 2011 (Moazzami, 2015). However, Aboriginal people remain among the most vulnerable in the country, with lower levels of education and higher rates of unemployment than other northerners (Southcott, 2013) making them increasingly susceptible to poverty and social exclusion.
1.2.1 Definitions

In this dissertation several terms are used to refer to non-urban contexts, including ‘rural’, and ‘non-metropolitan’. The Statistics Canada definition of ‘rural’ and ‘small town’ is adopted for its versatility in light of the varying demography of northern Ontario communities. According to du Plessis, Beshiri, Bollman and Clemenson (2002) of Statistics Canada, a rural area or small town includes:

...individuals in towns or municipalities outside the commuting zone of larger urban centres (with 10,000 or more population)... (p.6).

The term ‘urban-adjacent’ is occasionally used throughout this thesis to refer to rural or small towns that are located within fifty kilometers of a major urban centre (a population of 100,000 or more). For the purposes of this study, the term is also used to describe a condition in which a rural community borders a larger non-metropolitan area (i.e. with a population of 50,000 or more).

The term, ‘devolution’ is also used throughout this study to refer to the partial transfer of authority or power from the federal or provincial governments to lower levels of government.

1.3 The Context of Social Assistance in Canada and Ontario: An Overview

Canadian welfare state restructuring and welfare policy reforms of the 1990s led to significant changes in the design, implementation, and outcomes of social assistance in Ontario. Driving a considerable part of these changes was the cuts to social programs and reductions in transfer payments to the provinces and the constitutional crisis that led the
federal government to adopt decentralization as a major welfare state restructuring strategy. With the erosion of federalism and the corresponding growth of regionalisation (see Obinger, Leibfried, and Catles, 2005), increasing responsibility for administration and delivery of social assistance was shifted from the provincial government authority to municipalities and other local governing bodies in Ontario. Underlying this decentralization of social assistance were the principles and ideology that fueled austerity measures, the sweeping cuts to social assistance and social services made by the Harris government in the mid-1990s, as well as the endorsement of welfare-to-work approaches to social assistance.

Advanced as a means of deficit reduction and as a response to what was perceived to be an overly generous welfare system, a fiscally irresponsible previous government, and an insurgence of fraudulent (see Glasbeek, 2006), work-shy, and welfare-dependent welfare recipients, the Harris government launched a series of measures focused on ‘tightening up’ the welfare system (McIntosh and Boychuck, 2000). Changes considered to be among the most detrimental included a 21.6 percent cut to social assistance and the introduction of work-first social assistance (Stapleton, 2004), accompanied by the narrowing of eligibility requirements, reinstating mandatory home visits and the ‘spouse-in-the-house’ rule, introducing the provincial ‘snitch-line,’ and retracting extended benefits previously provided to welfare recipients moving onto employment (McIntosh and Boychuck, 2000) and the introduction of requirements for work in exchange for benefits (Stapleton, 2004).

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2 While it is recognised that social assistance programs including Ontario Works (OW) and its predecessor, General Welfare Assistance (GWA) were both administered municipally, the reference above draws attention to the centralisation of the programs provincially with increasing responsibility for program administration and implementation devolved to local levels of government.
Consistent with the regressive direction of federal government welfare state restructuring, welfare in Ontario has been largely predicated upon a continuing neoliberal ideology that has defined the welfare state as wasteful and unaffordable while promoting key priorities of balancing budgets, reducing taxes, shrinking the size of government, and emphasizing individual economic responsibility (Lightman, Herd, and Mitchell, 2006). Consequently, Ontario welfare was introduced as an initiative firmly rooted within the ‘Common Sense Revolution’, a Conservative provincial neoliberal platform that fervently warned of the deleterious consequences of swelling welfare rolls, escalating costs of welfare provision, welfare fraud, and rising ‘welfare dependency’ (see Miller, Vandome, and McBrewster, 2010). Closely following the blueprint of the U.S., welfare objectives in Ontario included reducing welfare dependency by encouraging economic self-sufficiency through mandatory labour force attachment, as well as devolving responsibilities for welfare administration to local levels of government (Herd, Lightman, Mitchell, 2009; Herd, Mitchell, and Lightman, 2005; Peck, 2001). Consistent with discourses of welfare dependency and welfare fraud endemic to the Ontario Works (OW) program, policy objectives also reflected a strong emphasis on individualism and a focus on redirecting welfare applicants into the labor market (Herd and Mitchell, 2002; Peck, 2001). Thus, social assistance has become an increasingly individual responsibility situated squarely within labor market parameters.

Additionally, the decentralized, work-based design of welfare indicates a transfer of responsibility for the provision of social assistance from the state to the individual and community via local labor market attachment. By design, and on an increasingly local scale (Tickamyer, et al., 2002), workfarist and devolutionist directions of welfare reflect a growing
reliance on local market economies to fulfill welfare requirements (Peck, 1996). Thus, welfare outcomes appear to be increasingly contingent on the prosperity of local economies and, by extension, local contexts or ‘place.’ Failure to consider the unique differences between urban and rural contexts (Tickamyer et al., 2002) ultimately disadvantages rural welfare recipients who, on average, experience greater risk for poverty and greater barriers to labour market participation than those who reside in urban areas (Gibbs, 2002). For example, although a greater percentage of rural than urban people hold jobs, the average earnings of most rural workers remain substantially lower than their urban counterparts (Standing Senate Committee, 2008). Resulting lower incomes within rural communities tend to further disadvantage and increase the risk of poverty among rural residents, who must typically manage with fewer job opportunities and higher living costs that include greater utility, transportation, and food costs than urban populations (Standing Senate Committee, 2006). Alongside the growing recognition of the influence of local environments in shaping social, political, and economic outcomes in their communities (Blank, 2005, Cotter, 2002), is the realization that local conditions can also influence welfare policy development (Arsneault, 2006; Blank 2005), participation, and outcomes (Arsneault, 2006; Parisi, McLaughlin, Grice, Taquino, and Gill, 2003; Tickamyer et al., 2002). Despite this, in instituting welfare reforms, the province has generally overlooked the impact of local conditions on welfare participation and outcomes. Specifically, welfare objectives which focus on reducing welfare dependency and fostering self-sufficiency through rapid labour force attachment have neglected to consider place-based or contextual factors, including demographic and community characteristics (Milbourne, 2004), local economic contexts (Gibbs, 2002), and cultural and social norms (Blank, 2005; Zimmerman, Goetz, and
Debertin, 2006), in addition to institutional structures and environmental factors (Parisi et al., 2003) that can promote or limit one’s ability to fulfill work-based requirements of welfare policy.

1.4 Methodological and Epistemological Foundations of the Study

A constructivist grounded theory (CGT) methodology (Charmaz, 2003, 2006) is used in this study to explore how northern contexts influence the delivery of social assistance in northern Ontario and to understand the implications of Ontario’s devolved model of work-first social assistance for program deliverers and welfare recipients in northern settings. Constructivist grounded theory maintains constructivist and social constructionism epistemological perspectives, in addition to a subjectivist epistemology and a relativist ontology. Constructivist epistemology recognises knowledge as socially constructed on the basis of human experience, perception, as well as historical and cultural factors. Within the subjectivist epistemology, knowledge is understood to be created from the mind and therefore can only exist if constructed by people. Given that individuals differentially interpret an experience or condition, it is understood that knowledge is subjective, as truth is determined on the basis of what is negotiated by the collective (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). The epistemological foundation provided by constructivism and social constructionism within constructive grounded theory is highly congruent with this study in several ways.

The constructivist and social constructionism epistemological perspectives which underpin Charmaz’s constructivist grounded theory (see Charmaz 2006) recognise the importance of context in understanding research participant accounts of the phenomenon under study (Crotty, 1998). Accordingly, the focus maintained by this epistemology on
understanding how actions of people impact the local as well as larger scales (Charmaz, 2006, p.132) holds particular relevance for the place-based focus of this study. The reflexive stance on ways of knowing adopted by constructivist grounded theorists further emphasizes the significance of context as a means of understanding phenomenon, as it requires locating oneself within the context of such realities in order to generate understanding. Moreover, the relativist ontology held within social constructionism is particularly congruent with this study in that it acknowledges multiple realities and the influence of historical and cultural factors on the construction of meaning (Crotty, 1998). Relativist assumptions, which maintain the existence of multiple realities, assert that constructions of reality are grounded in multiple interpretations that span varying time periods and places (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Consequently, relativist assumptions within constructivism recognise the prominent role that previous ways of knowing and interpreting reality have had in the past, and continue to play in the understanding of a particular phenomenon or reality. The current study identifies a wide range of perceptions (i.e., multiple realities) regarding economic disparities and uneven development in the north, as cumulative layers of regional development policies reflecting varied interpretations of the problem have emerged over time and place. Accordingly, the relativist ontological position within constructivism is highly congruent with the acknowledgement of multiple and varying historical interpretations of the ‘northern problem’ central to this study. Additionally, the constructionists’ view that all knowledge is socially constructed rather than created (Crotty, 1998), and that the meaning attributed to observations and experiences is created through interpretation and human interaction (Crotty, 1998), is strongly aligned with this researcher’s perspective. The structure of this study, which positions the perceptions and insights of northern Ontario Works program deliverers
as central to understanding the implications of introducing welfare principles and policies into northern contexts, also demonstrates consistency with the constructionist perspective.

Recognition within social constructionism that meanings are collectively produced and the constructivist assertion that each individual’s interpretation or meaning-making is equally valid (Crotty, 1998) also powerfully resonates with the valuing of often-marginalised northern voices in this study and the acknowledgement of disparities in welfare practices and policy interpretations by welfare workers within and across northern welfare sites. Howell’s (2013) assertion that constructivists recognise knowledge, reality, truth, and theory as based on human interpretation and experience further reflects the prioritisation of northern Ontario Works program deliverers’ perspectives (and voices) within this study. Finally, the attention constructivist grounded theory affords to clarifying implicit meaning enables the researcher to explore and interpret tacit meanings of research participant statements and actions (Charmaz, 2006). Completed largely through interpretive theorising, the focus on implicit meaning in constructivist grounded theory is well-suited to exploring the tacit meanings of welfare policy and program implementation directives and activities identified by local government delivery agents, as well as inferences made in extant texts in relation to this study. The acknowledgement that researchers and research participants enter into the research process with varying interpretive frames of reference further supports the adoption of constructivist grounded theory methodology.

1.5 Research Objectives and Questions

Considering the spatialised (and place-based) nature of welfare is important in acknowledging and exploring the extent to which the local administration and implementation of welfare shapes and becomes shaped by the geographic contexts in which
it is designed, implemented, and evaluated. Including spatialised considerations in this study of social assistance policy highlights the need to move beyond welfare’s focus on individualism and behavioral policies in order to attend to fundamental structural issues such as place-specific resource availability and distribution that now determine access to welfare benefits.

With acknowledgement of spatial influences and the critical, yet under-recognized role space and place play within welfare, this study research adopts a place-based approach. Specifically, this study considers place-based influences on the local delivery of social assistance. In particular, local contextual factors including economic conditions, services, and infrastructure, as well as demographic changes are considered within broader influences of spatial unevenness in the north. Spatial factors are critical to consider since they are unique to specific locales and largely determine the non-uniform nature of economic decline or growth in rural and non-metropolitan and northern contexts. Spatial factors also determine the corresponding level of local resources and quality of local infrastructure, both of which are imperative to the successful transition and mobility of welfare recipients to the labour force.

With an aim to identify implications of the local capacity of northern Ontario communities to support the resource requirements of social assistance, this dissertation considers relations between local contextual factors and constraints within the welfare system. Thus, the primary aim of this research is to explore how local contextual factors (including place-based factors) influence welfare design and delivery in northern rural and non-metropolitan settings.

Three primary research objectives guide this study. The first objective is to identify and explore the role place and space play within income assistance policy and programming.
The second objective is to explore the intersection of institutionalised welfare and local practices and capacities in the delivery of social assistance in northern areas. The third objective is to explore how local factors facilitate and/or constrain the ability of Ontario Works program deliverers to foster the successful transition of welfare recipients from welfare to work in northern rural and non-metropolitan settings. This inquiry will also be guided by three overarching research questions. These include: 1) How do local conditions impact welfare in northern rural and non-metropolitan contexts? 2) What local factors facilitate and/or constrain successful transition from welfare to work? and 3) What challenges and opportunities do local welfare deliverers experience in designing and implementing welfare policies and practices in northern areas?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The sparse research and knowledge base in the area of rural and non-metropolitan welfare further necessitates this research. The limited research conducted on rural welfare particularly welfare in northern areas intensifies the challenges associated with designing and implementing policies and programs that can effectively respond to and address northern rural poverty. This oversight is of particular concern as it may pose considerable limitations to income support provided through welfare policy in rural northern contexts and for the transition out of poverty for these welfare recipients.

In addition to contributing to Canadian rural welfare research, this thesis represents a concerted effort to begin to address the dearth of qualitative research on welfare, as well as the limited research conducted on northern as opposed to far north settings3. Additionally,

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3 The ‘north’ is geographically recognized as the northern aspect of provinces and south of Territory boundaries with similarities to the Far North in terms of dependency on natural
This study’s exploration of Ontario Works administrators’ experiences of delivering welfare in northern rural and non-metropolitan contexts is the first of its kind in Ontario and is an initial effort to address a critical gap in income assistance policy and program research.

This study’s focus on exploring the local design and delivery of northern rural and non-metropolitan welfare is intended to gain an understanding of how intersections of place, spatial unevenness, and welfare policy shape the administration and delivery of welfare in rural and non-metropolitan contexts. It is intended to provide research information critically needed by practitioners, policy makers, and social workers to better respond to the complexities, unique challenges, and opportunities associated with designing and delivering local employment-based income support programs in northern rural and non-metropolitan settings. As one of the first studies of its kind in Canada and the first in Ontario, the place-based focus of this research will provide a foundation for innovative welfare policy and practice options that acknowledge and respond to spatial and place-based issues within northern rural and non-metropolitan contexts.

1.7 Organisation of the Dissertation

This dissertation is comprised of seven chapters. Chapter one introduces the aim of the study, its methodological and epistemological foundations, and research objectives. It also provides an overview of social assistance generally and within rural and non-metropolitan northern contexts. Chapter one also highlights the significance of place in understanding welfare policy and programming and the importance of accounting for geographic influences. Chapter two provides a foundational review of relevant literature, offering an overview of key resources, geographic isolation and climatic challenges (Markey et al., 2005; MNDM, 2007; and Slack et al., 2003).
changes within the welfare state leading to current work-based social assistance in Ontario in order to provide a contextual understanding of the impact of neoliberal welfare state restructuring in shaping current welfare. Resulting shifts in social assistance policy and programming that have emerged within welfare in Canada and social assistance reforms in Ontario are also discussed. Literature summarising relations between different levels of government and social assistance is reviewed and accompanied by a discussion concerning the significance of de-federalism, austerity measures, and municipal restructuring for social assistance in rural and non-metropolitan settings. Chapter three describes the constructivist research design and methodology, grounded theory methodological elements, and modifications made to the study implementation in light of northern constraints encountered by this researcher. An overview of grounded theory and how it was utilised within the constraints of northern rural contexts is also provided. Selection and recruitment of the sample, data collection methods, and grounded theory analysis procedures are described. Methods adopted for ensuring trustworthiness are also discussed, along with ethical considerations and study limitations. Chapter four introduces and discusses theoretical perspectives that explain the phenomenon of uneven development as a central construct of this study. Chapter five is a precluding chapter to the findings chapter. It outlines the core category, as well as major categories and minor categories that emerged in the grounded theory analysis. This chapter also discusses key considerations undertaken for the presentation of the findings in light of anonymity challenges encountered in rural northern contexts. A detailed discussion of the study findings and an analysis of them comprise four sections within the sixth chapter. Chapter seven presents a discussion of the contributions the data and
analysis make in relation to existing literature. The chapter concludes with a presentation of strengths and limitations of the study, as well as considerations for policy and future research.
Chapter Two:
Review of Literature

2.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter provides a review of literature that seeks to explore the concept of welfare ‘in place.’ A principle aim of this review is to provide a foundation for understanding the local administration and implementation of social assistance in non-urban contexts. The direction of welfare restructuring in Ontario has had a direct impact at the local level (Lightman et al., 2006). In order to understand social assistance in local northern contexts, it is therefore necessary to consider the major restructuring strategies initiated by both the provincial and federal governments in the decade of massive restructuring starting in the mid-90s.

In addition to reviewing literature on the impact of governments’ restructuring processes on social assistance, the literature review examines the unique conditions of the northern context. Based on a combination of these two factors, the literature review responds to two primary questions and spans several topic areas. The questions are: a) what are the implications of government policies for localised social assistance? and b) in what ways do physical environments with their range of social, economic, and political factors influence prospects for gaining financial self-sufficiency through labour market attachment?

Accordingly, the subject areas considered in this review include theoretical and research literature examining welfare restructuring at the federal, provincial (Ontario), and municipal
(northern Ontario) scales, the introduction and production of work-first approaches in Ontario, as well as social assistance in rural contexts.

### 2.2 Government Influences

#### 2.2.1 Federal Influences

Federalism—that is, the relationship between the federal government and the provinces—has played a central role in how social policies in Canada have evolved (Banting, 1987; Moscovitch and Drover, 1987; see Torjman, 1993). However, federal government involvement in funding social assistance was not a role initially relegated to the federal order of government. Rather, the funding of social assistance was largely left to individuals, families, charities, and eventually to local governments (Banting, 1980; Guest, 1997; Finkel, 1985; Lightman, 2003). During the interwar years, forces involving the economic transition from agriculture to industry, increasing unionisation among the urbanised workforce, and the growing leftist political movement fostered conditions that paved the way for changes to the traditional centralist government regime or political centralisation (Banting, 1987). These forces, in combination with the economic and social dislocation resulting from the Depression of the 1930s, demonstrated that neither local nor provincial governments were able to carry the financial burden of social assistance (Banting, 1987). Following the Royal Commission on Dominion Provincial Relations (Rowell-Sirois Commission, 1937-1940), the notion of federal grants was developed and a role for the federal government in the administration and funding of income support increased through the years.

According to Guest (1997), the rapid development of the economy and service structures that occurred at provincial levels following the Second World War also increased
demand for greater decision-making power at the provincial level. Consequently, the period of ‘joint federalism’ that arose during the 1945-1962 period marked a period of shared power over decision-making and funding between the federal and provincial governments that led to disputes in the late 1950s and early 1960s concerning the inflexibility of the conditional grant and shared-cost programs. During the 1960s, provinces increasingly became critical of the limited capacity of cost-sharing arrangements to accommodate varying fiscal circumstances of the provinces. Further concerns associated with the lack of provincial autonomy within these cost-sharing arrangements grew in strength throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Corresponding with the growth of provincial economies and elites during this period was increased pressure made by the provinces to the federal government for greater decentralisation (Guest, 1997). The continued campaign towards federal decentralisation intensified with Quebec’s ‘Quiet Revolution’ during the 1960s and led to a redefinition of federalism that more readily appealed to Quebec’s interest in gaining financial control and autonomy to facilitate social and economic development (Guest, 1997; Lightman, 2003). The federal government’s progressive withdrawal from provincial jurisdictions enabled provinces to develop more locally relevant social programming (Lightman, 2003) and expand their access to tax revenue sources, which in turn eased affordability challenges of social program responsibilities (Banting, 1987; Guest, 1997). However, provincial pressures for the control over taxation rights and revenues, as well as autonomy over social programming, both contributed to the adoption of decentralisation as a central welfare restructuring strategy by the federal government while dramatically reducing federal authority. Other major factors contributing to the residual welfare restructuring that occurred in the mid to late 1990s included widespread austerity measures instituted at the federal level in response to
neoliberal agendas focused on deficit reduction and cuts to social programs, demands from provincial governments for increased jurisdictional control over funding and program administration in response to the federal decentralisation of social programs, provincially implemented austerity measures in response to federal government cutbacks and decentralisation, and further funding reductions to social programs stemming from the economic conditions brought about by the 1990 recession (Stapleton, 2004; see Torjman, 1993). As identified by Ernie Lightman (2003), the federal role has been substantially reduced, with its primary function limited to the transfer of funds and taxation powers to the provinces. In reference to measures employed that have advanced and solidified centralisation, Lightman (2003) mentions the introduction of the Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA), which removed authority from the federal government to introduce new social programs without the approval of a minimum of six provinces.

No longer constrained by most of the federally-imposed conditions on social welfare spending, provinces currently have complete autonomy to develop social programs as they wish while dramatically downsizing the federal government and removing it from areas of provincial jurisdiction (Lightman, 2003). The move towards decentralisation, while effectively countering criticism and accommodating demands of the provinces for increased control over funding and autonomy to deliver social programming, has led income security scholars to recognise the resulting ‘erosion of federalism’ and the associated serious implications for social assistance in Canada. In particular, the decision by the federal government to intervene or override provincial laws signifies the loss of traditional functions that Canadians relied upon to ensure equal service standards of public and social services. Concerns also centred on federally-initiated cost saving measures focused on re-distributing
the ‘burden’ for social program expenditures through funding cutbacks to social programs and through terminating, outsourcing, or privatizing others (Guest, 1997).

The decentralisation exercise initiated by the federal government resulted in major reforms and austerity measures that have profoundly influenced social assistance. Deficit reduction objectives have dominated several federal budgets. In 1995, $29 billion in public services cuts were implemented over a three-year period, including cuts to transfer payments for the provinces, the introduction of the Canadian Health and Social Transfer (CHST), a 14 percent cut to public sector jobs (the loss of 45,000 jobs), and a 19 percent cut to government departments, among others (Griffin Cohen, Morrison, and Smith, 1995). Other examples of cuts include the 15 percent funding cut to social housing in the 1990s, as well as the restructuring and multiple cutbacks to the Employment Insurance (EI) program beginning in the 1990s which focused on narrowing eligibility and reducing the duration of benefit receipt. Moreover, the Canadian Labour Congress notes rapid declines in the percentage of unemployed eligible for EI benefits. This is evidenced by 74 per cent of unemployed workers eligible to receive unemployment insurance in 1990, compared to only to 39 per cent by 2001 (Vosko, 2006). However, the most significant of these cutbacks was the elimination of the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) (created in 1966) and its replacement with the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) in 1996. Recognised as the cornerstone of social programming, CAP provided federal dollar-for-dollar matching of provincial social program expenditures for social assistance and social services (Lightman, 2003; Moscovitch, 1996). In addition to providing funding for social assistance and social services that was adjusted for periods of recession, the CAP program ensured national standards. Accordingly, the introduction of the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) in 1996 dramatically changed
the social welfare landscape. In particular, the replacement of the 50/50 cost-shared program under CAP with a block funding grant enabled provinces to allocate amounts of their choosing between education, health, and welfare. Consequently, allocations to the provinces for social programming were dramatically reduced under the CHST, decreasing provincial ability to afford the devolved responsibilities and costs of social welfare. Terminating the CAP effectively ended needs-based, non-work requirements of welfare receipt (LeRoy and Clemens, 2003) and eliminated protections from workfare experimentation and implementation (Herd, 2002).

2.2.2 Quebec-Federal Relations

As evidenced by Quebec’s ‘Quiet Revolution’, Canada-Quebec relations are believed to have had a major influence on federal decentralisation of social assistance in particular. Quebec’s long-time central objective of becoming a prosperous, modern, French-speaking society with a repatriated French economy included income security as a central component to achieving this vision. Quebec Premier Bourassa’s rejection of the Victoria Charter in 1971 was partly based on the inadequacy of resources it offered, which would have precluded Quebec’s advancement of the Quiet Revolution (Mendelson, 1995). The repatriation objectives maintained by Quebecers and their perception of their province as the primary mechanism for the advancement of their economic and social development differed considerably from the rest of Canada. For Quebecers, the centrality of the province as the representation of a national identity and an emancipatory tool was a view held in stark contrast with the rest of Canadians, who generally viewed the state with suspicion, and at times contempt (Mendelson, 1995). The clash between these differing visions resulted in
considerable efforts made by a federal government coalition during 1964-1974 to balance national planning interests while accommodating Quebec’s vision of repatriation (Mendelson, 1995). This period saw the introduction of central income security programs including the Quebec Pension Plan (QPP) and the Quebec-based Family Allowance (FA) that were deemed essential to Quebec’s social and economic development. Unlike the federal government, Quebec placed substantially greater emphasis on the development of human services, viewing these programs as the means by which to accomplish repatriating the economy (Mendelson, 1995). This period also marked the federal government's decision to redevelop the social security system in Canada as a way to avoid both significant disparities in income security programs between Quebec and the rest of the country and the appearance of national disunion. The 1973-1974 Federal-Provincial Social Security Review, initiated by Pierre Trudeau, was an honest attempt by the federal government to exercise flexibility in addressing the differing agendas of Quebec and the rest of country, but ceased when fiscal challenges erupted from the Finance Deputy Minister’s agenda to reduce the size of government, making the initiative fiscally impossible (Mendelson, 1995). These events marked the beginning of the period of austerity.

The election of Mulroney marked the next period of response to the issue. Mulroney’s government made two major attempts after the election in 1984 to bring Quebec into the Constitution and to alter the federal-provincial financial arrangements. Mulroney adopted a ‘provincial rights’ approach, which involved developing alliances with Quebec nationalists

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4 Quebec instituted the QPP and used it as an economic development tool because it provided access to a large amount of public funds for further investment. The federal government followed suit with a similarly public but less substantial Canada Pension Plan to avoid considerable disparity within the rest of the country (Simeon 1972 cited in Mendelson, 1995).
and Western conservatives (that failed). He also de-indexed major federal social programs 
(Battle, 1990 cited in Mendelson, 1995) that substantially reduced the size and value of 
federal contributions. Further efforts on his part involved introducing the ‘cap on CAP’ that 
imposed a five percent limit on federal funding cost-sharing increases for British Columbia, 
Alberta, and Ontario. This action created provincial cost pressures that led to further 
decreases in social spending at the provincial and federal levels (Mendelson, 1995) and 
initiated the Meech Lake and Charlottetown Accords that were rejected due to concerns over 
reductions in ‘federal spending power’ (Mendelson, 1995).

The Meech Lake Accord was advanced in June 1987 by Prime Minister Mulroney as 
a means of gaining constitutional compliance from Quebec (Massey, 1991). In Ghiz’s 
recollection as a Premier involved in the discussions, the failure of all of the provinces to 
ratify the Meech Lake Accord was perceived by Quebec as a rejection of its aspirations as a 
province by the rest of the country (Ghiz, 1993). The failure of the Meech Lake accord is 
regarded as a reflection of executive federalism in which the Prime Minister, in his haste to 
establish an agreement with Quebec, disregarded a host of divergent provincial interests that 
emerged within the discussions. A similar outcome resulted when the federal government 
made efforts to negotiate the Charlottetown Accord with the provinces (Massey, 1991). The 
resulting failure of the Charlottetown Accord was attributed to a multitude of wide-ranging 
demands from the provinces that were unaddressed, but was also considered an indication of 
substantial uncertainties about decentralisation on the part of the provinces (Massey, 1991).

5 The Meech Lake Accord proposed changes to federal funding that enabled provinces to opt 
out while still having the option to access the funds if they offered comparable initiatives 
(Mendelson, 1995). However, the main purpose for the Accord was to gain Quebec’s consent 
to support the 1982 Constitution (Canadian Encyclopedia, n.d.).
Following the failures of the Charlottetown and Meech Lake accords was the introduction of constitutional developments, including the Allaire Report and the Belanger-Campeau Commission recommendations which signified Quebec’s strong demands for extensive constitutional reform and the devolution of significant power upon Quebec (Massey, 1991). Thus, a major impetus for federal decentralisation included the pressures imposed upon the federal government by Quebec, which sought to exchange devolved powers and increased autonomy for remaining a part of the Constitution (Massey, 1991). Quebec’s desire for independence has persisted as a key issue driving federal decentralisation. The federal government’s desire to avoid a national unity crisis triggered implementation of a variety of actions over the years geared towards thwarting Quebec’s potential separatism. As evidenced by the concerns voiced among provincial leaders and citizens about the potential for Chretien’s loss of employment (for failing to ensure national unity) had the 1995 Quebec Referendum yielded a “yes” vote\(^6\) (Spencer, 2014), implications of Quebec’s pressure for autonomy over economic and social program development and spending appears to have been a powerful driving force of federal decentralisation. These events, alongside separatist threats demonstrated a strong inclination toward federal decentralisation that has set a course of social service devolution expected to continue well into the future.

### 2.2.3 Provincial Influences and Impact at the Local Scale

The federal government’s dismantling of the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) and its replacement with the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) eroded national welfare

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\(^6\) If the separatists had won the 1995 Quebec referendum, PM Chretien would have been expected to resign as a result of a clear failure to maintain Canada as a federation (Spencer, 2014).
standards, allowing for welfare retrenchment (Lightman et al., 2006) and the introduction of local experimentation with welfare-to-work programs (Herd, 2002). Many provinces took advantage of the increased ‘flexibility’ granted through the CHST including Ontario, where the Conservative Harris government cut welfare rates by 21.6 percent in 1995, setting a precedent for what has become an ongoing assault on welfare (Herd, Mitchell, and Lightman, 2005).

Ontario’s reformed social assistance program, *Ontario Works (OW)*, was designed as a work-first welfare program and was introduced in 1998 by the Harris government. The program, which provides minimal and temporary financial and employment-based assistance, would not have been possible without the federal government’s adoption of decentralisation as a major social welfare restructuring strategy (Lightman et al., 2006).

This climate of retrenchment and restructuring in both the federal and provincial orders of government had a profound impact on the most vulnerable people in the country, particularly the poor. How this played out for rural communities is the subject of the following section of the literature review.

The welfare state restructuring that has occurred at both the federal and provincial government levels over the past 15 years, as discussed above, has profound implications at the local level. The movement toward dismantling national welfare standards through the termination of CAP, accompanied by a rigorous agenda of decentralisation and austerity, has helped to situate the local scale as a hub of welfare policy experimentation (Lightman et al., 2006). While the devolution of social assistance has introduced promises of greater local

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7 Work-first programs tend to favour explanations of poverty and unemployment that stress individual failings such as deficient education or work experience and/or moral failings such as dependency or poor work habits, while they downplay structural variables such as labour demand or the structure of employment opportunities (Peck, 2001).
control over social assistance policy and program administration and delivery, the structure of social assistance adopted by the Province of Ontario “has also steered responses towards narrow, short-term work-first measures through, for example, decreased funding and specific performance measures” (Lightman et al., 2006, p.140). The authority maintained by provincial governments over welfare has involved the devolution of delivery to municipal levels of governments, a process that has served to increasingly implicate local governments in the activities and operations of federal and provincial governments (see McBride and McNutt, 2007; Tindal and Tindal, 2011b). Accordingly, while the rhetoric of privileging the local scale continues, in reality the constraints that many local communities endure in relation to their economic and political status can leave them extremely vulnerable. Local governments are directly subordinate to provincial governments in terms of jurisdictional responsibility, yet they bear the unique and growing pressures of social assistance administration and implementation costs. This is particularly problematic with local communities that have little access to resources, which is characteristic of northern, rural communities.

2.2.3.1 Ontario provincial-municipal government relations: A brief history

Cote and Fenn (2014) offer a detailed history of the evolution of Ontario municipalities, as summarised below. For the purposes of this thesis, a brief overview of key events in the development of the municipal government in Ontario is provided. A particular emphasis is placed on the period of the 1990s restructuring, which best corresponds with the data collection period of this study.

Due to the jurisdictional control maintained over local governments by their respective provincial governments, municipal or local governments are continually subject to
limits placed on their capacity to generate revenue, develop policies, and incur debt (Tindal and Tindal, 2009). The development of municipal governments in Ontario has been described as ‘steadily evolving’ over the past century and a half, with developments largely coinciding with urban expansion. From the conflict that ensued during efforts of 19th century politicians to prevent self-governance and otherwise limit local authority (i.e., Rebellion of 1837), to the expanding role of municipal governments throughout the post-war years, municipal governments in Canada have and continue to play a vital role in providing necessary local infrastructure and services. In addition to economic growth and urban expansion, affordability challenges are central to the history of municipal government evolution. For example, the rapid period of urbanisation throughout the 1920s was accompanied by massive borrowing, which resulted in a debt crisis with the onset of the Depression era. A myriad of factors intensified the severe indebtedness experienced in the 1930s, including declining property values, failure of taxpayers to honour their debts, as well as poor administration. Increased growth during the post-war period and beyond has led to provinces creating bodies such as the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB), devolving increasing responsibilities to local governments to meet the demand for local services and supports (Dewing, Young, and Trolley, 2006 cited in Cote and Fenn, 2014). Thus, in their efforts to respond to growth, municipal governments have consistently struggled with affordability issues. With each period of expansion, additional resources were required to expand services and existing or outdated infrastructure.

Also consistent throughout the history of municipal government is the introduction of provincial measures, such as legislated agreements to regulate municipal activities (i.e., stabilise finances). As the population and economic activity continued to grow throughout
the 1960s and 1970s, efforts to support urban centres became a major focus within municipal governance, as did common challenges stemming from urbanisation, including fragmentation and service delivery coordination challenges. The increasing need for services and infrastructure between the 1950s and 1970s resulted in the creation of ‘regional governments’ and municipal two-tiered governance structures by the Province, which were responsible for the administration, planning, and management of urban development initiatives. Similar to challenges currently experienced by municipal governments in relation to managing fiscal challenges, municipalities sought increased autonomy during the 1970s with little success. Consistent with present-day events, the Ontario provincial government refused to permit constitutional recognition of municipal governments (a request initiated by municipal governments to attain authority and autonomy necessary to manage fiscal pressures often imposed upon them by other levels of government), but instead allocated funding that buffered initial costs without the promise of operational funding necessary to maintain services and infrastructure (Cote and Fenn, 2014).

In contrast with the relatively stable period of the 1980s, the major municipal restructuring that took place in the 1990s heightened provincial-municipal tensions to a level never encountered in the country’s history (Cote and Fenn, 2014). Municipal reforms initiated in Ontario during the 1990s were largely attributed to provincial fiscal challenges and comprised three major areas, identified by Cote and Fenn (2014) as: 1) a unilateral process resulting in the major repositioning of provincial and municipal government areas of responsibility; 2) using restructuring and amalgamation processes to substantially reduce the number of municipalities (by almost half); and 3) an overhaul of the property tax system (p. 9).
Following the ‘Who Does What’ panel that advised the provincial government of strategies to address challenges including role and service duplication and blurred service delivery responsibilities between the provincial and municipal governments (AMO, 2008), the unilateral Local Services Realignment (LSR) was rolled out in 1998. The purpose was to amalgamate municipalities in order to foster greater efficiency and reduce costs associated with local governments assuming increased responsibility for a multitude of services. This wide-scale municipal restructuring marked a fundamental period in the shift toward decentralisation and dramatic changes to the role of municipalities. Introduced as a cost-savings measure promising to generate savings by streamlining government functions and “simplifying government,” the Harris government focused on reducing the size of government by amalgamating municipalities. Consequently, the number of municipalities was reduced by almost half from the time the initiative commenced with 815 municipalities in 1995 to its reduction to 444 municipalities by the end of the exercise in the early 2000s (Tindal and Tindal, 2009). In addition to changes in municipal boundaries, the restructuring also involved transferring substantial responsibility for service delivery and infrastructure to municipalities. Table 1.0 outlines the key areas of responsibility devolved to municipalities before and after the LSR. Following considerable fiscal challenges experienced by municipalities in their efforts to deliver social assistance, the Province agreed to resume 80 percent of the funding, while administrative costs remained shared between the province and the municipality on an equal basis.
Table 1.0 The Effects of Local Services Realignment (LSR), 1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Pre-LSR</th>
<th>LSR</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provincial</td>
<td>Municipal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Assistance (Ontario Works or OW)</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Assistance Administration</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Care Services</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODSP &amp; Child Care Administration</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Health*</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land Ambulance**</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Housing</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal Transit Costs***</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property Assessment</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sewer &amp; Water</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policing</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm Tax &amp; Conservation Lands Tax Rebates</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s Aid Societies</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Public health costs were returned to pre-LSR 75-25% shares in 2007.
**The land ambulance funding share was shifted to 50-50% in 1999.
***GO Transit was completely devolved to municipalities, only to be re-assumed by the Province in 2002.

Note. Reprinted with permission from “Approaching and inflection point in Ontario’s provincial-municipal relations,” by A. Cote and M. Fenn 2014, IMFG Perspectives, 6. Copyright 2014 by the Munk Institute, University of Toronto.

Other funding adjustments involved several areas. Anticipating affordability issues, the uploading of public education services to the Province was intended to open up a revenue source of taxation for municipalities. Additionally, the Community Reinvestment Fund (CRF) introduced by the Province was proposed as a means to ensure the devolution process
was cost neutral. However, these measures largely failed to adequately provide local
governments with the resources necessary to offset the costs, as confirmed in part by the
Province of Ontario Auditor’s report in 2001 that identified the process as failing in its
promise to ensure cost neutrality (AMO, 2008). While there has been some attention to the
issue of supporting affordability options for municipalities by the federal government,
including such as initiatives contained in Prime Minister Paul Martin’s ‘New Deal’ in the
early 2000s (Cote and Fenn, 2014), many initiatives have yet to be implemented, while most
are recognised as temporary responses to the problem.

However, it is important to note that between 2004 and 2007 the federal and
provincial governments made adjustments to funding arrangements that provided a dramatic
increase in support focused on reducing the fiscal burden of devolution for municipal
governments. These included the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) rebate,
improvements to the Gas Tax Fund, in addition to dedicating additional funding to social
housing programs (Government of Canada, Department of Finance cited in Cote and Fenn,
2014). In addition, the introduction of the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund (OMFP) in
2005, which replaced the Community Reinvestment Fund (CRF), was deemed a more
equitable and transparent alternative due to its attention to economic disparity among
municipalities. The provincial government also “increased its share of public health funding
from 50 percent to 75 percent and provided an additional $300 million over three years
starting in 2006 for land ambulance costs” (AMO, 2008, n.d.).

Efforts to address funding challenges experienced by municipal governments
continued from 2008 through the development of formal consultation agreements, including
increased financial support from the Province. A key example is the decision to upload the
full cost of *Ontario Works* benefits from municipal governments to the Province by 2018. Following considerable efforts to lobby the Province for additional funds, the Province conceded by agreeing to upload the municipal costs of *Ontario Works* over a nine year period that commenced in 2010 (AMO, 2008). Table 2.0 outlines this funding transition.

### Table 2.0 Ontario Works Provincial to Municipal Funding Transition, 2010 to 2018

<table>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Data was obtained from: [www.amo.on.ca](http://www.amo.on.ca).

In addition to changes to funding arrangements to municipal governments within the last decade, significant legislative changes including the 2001 *Municipal Act*, the 2005 Greenbelt Plan focused on southern Ontario, and the Northern Growth Plan (2011) targeting economic development issues in northern Ontario were also introduced, granting municipalities greater autonomy and control over local affairs (Cote and Fenn, 2014). Despite increased federal and provincial financial supports directed to address the growing financial burden of the expansion of localised service delivery (i.e. infrastructure and service needs), some believe the trend is unlikely to continue into the future (Tindal and Tindal, 2011a). Municipalities generally perceived the LSR process to be more of a cost savings exercise than a strategy to address specific responsibilities of service delivery and infrastructure funding issues (Cote and Fenn, 2014).

Additionally, the top-down nature of the LSR resulted in increased tensions in provincial-municipal government relations, with municipalities bearing the responsibility of fulfilling service delivery demands without sufficient infrastructure and funding (AMO,
Rather, consistent with the trend towards regional economic self-sufficiency (see Markey, Pierce, Vodden, and Roseland, 2005), it is anticipated that municipalities will be expected to become more financially self-sufficient in order to manage the increased costs through other means, such as the new ability to establish specific tax policies (Tindal and Tindal, 2011a).

In addition to the lack of adequate revenue sources provided to municipal governments, austerity measures employed at the provincial and federal levels have been attributed to challenges experienced by municipal governments to successfully manage the costs associated with devolved areas of responsibility. Accordingly, the localised delivery of many services, including social assistance, is highly impacted by federal and provincial activities. Among the most visible and discussed implications are the austerity measures introduced at both federal and provincial levels that have spanned over two decades. Implications for local governments arising from this devolution of responsibility from federal and provincial levels of government include increased responsibility for social housing costs, costs associated with hosting international events, as well as making up for federal payments that fail to adequately cover a range of costs arising at the local level (Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2006, cited in Tindal and Tindal, 2011a).

Associated challenges further involve federal and provincial funding provision that falls short of covering the costs of service delivery. For example, although a slight increase in funding to homecare services was included in the 2013 budget, the spending remained insufficient to meet growing needs of aging populations (Mackenzie and Hennessy, 2013). As noted by Hennessy and Stanford (2013), Ontario’s austerity measures have had far-reaching effects or “collateral social damage” (p. 26), including substantial cuts to education,
the introduction of “a hornets nest of labour rights issues” (p. 26) as the Province revoked right to strike legislation for teachers, as well as the highest university tuition fees in the country.

Additionally, Hennessy and Stanford (2013) identify that cuts have resulted in the country’s lowest per capita spending on health care, including dramatic cuts to health care professionals and essential health care services despite a growing array of health issues associated with aging populations. Failure to ensure that child care services receive the same inflation adjustments to funding as education and health sectors, in addition to the aforementioned austerity measures, imposes further challenges for municipal governments now responsible for funding and providing many of these services. The elimination of the Community Start-Up and Maintenance Benefit (CSUMB) in 2009 marked a significant loss for the most vulnerable people. The CSUMB fund was implemented in conjunction with the Ontario Works program, providing financial support to low income people that offset housing costs and other expenses. Although the Province allocated 42 million dollars to respond to the protesting of the benefits’ elimination, the benefit is nonetheless terminated (Hennessey and Stanford, 2013). Another key challenge of the austerity measures for local governments is that once cuts to services have been made (for deficit reduction purposes), the services and of funding levels are never restored to their previous levels (MacKenzie and Hennessy, 2013).

2.2.3.2 Northern and rural Ontario governance

While northern and rural areas were included in the Local Services Realignment (LSR), the restructuring efforts reflected some differences. In contrast to municipal development in other areas of the province, northern Ontario is comprised of specialised
local authorities with the exception of the city of Sudbury, which was amalgamated with local towns and reclassified as a single tier municipality (Cote and Fenn, 2014; Tindal and Tindal, 2011a). Two municipal associations encompass 10 districts on the basis of geographical location. For example, the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association (NOMA) is comprised of the Kenora, Rainy River, and Thunder Bay districts, while the districts of Timiskaming, Sudbury, Parry Sound, Nipissing, Manitoulin, Cochrane, and Algoma are encompassed within the Federation of Northern Municipalities (FP NOM), representing Northeastern Ontario (Tindal and Tindal, 2011a). Moreover, “approximately 150 unincorporated communities exist in northern Ontario that deliver services through 44 local services boards, as well as over 200 local roads boards, planning boards, recreational organisations, and volunteer fire departments. In addition, northern Ontario is home to the vast majority of First Nations, with 106 Nations situated in northern Ontario out of a total of 134 in Ontario (Tindal and Tindal, 2011a, p.6).”

In accordance with structures intended to facilitate social services delivery in low-density areas, northern Ontario was reorganised into 10 District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs). As products of the 1990s LSR, DSSABs are responsible for the delivery of a range of social services in northern Ontario while Consolidated Municipal Services Managers (CMSMs) coordinate services in larger upper-tier municipalities in southern Ontario (Cote and Fenn, 2014). In accordance with the District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs) legislation, DSSABs are mandated to provide the Ontario Works program in addition to social housing and child care services (investing in accessible and affordable child care) while having the option to provide emergency medical care and transport and public health services (AMO, 2013-2016;
Manitoulin-Sudbury District Services Board, 2015a; 2015b; 2015c; 2015d; 2015e; 2016; Rainy River District Services Administration Board, 2016a; 2016b; 2016c; 2016d).

DSSABs fall into the category of, ‘other forms of local government’ in that they function as local governing bodies outside of municipalities (e.g. agencies, boards, and commissions) and also serve municipalities and unorganized territory (Ministry of Municipal Affairs). Boards represent a unique local governing body in that they are comprised of appointed rather than elected members, they lack the authority to levy taxes but can adopt user fees as a revenue source, and are essentially reliant on local municipalities for funding which municipalities have the authority to refuse (Tindal and Tindal, 2011a). Accordingly, despite the opportunities for local involvement in governance and local service delivery, tensions between boards and municipalities are not uncommon. In addition to tensions between boards and municipalities associated with funding access, boards have been criticised for causing accountability problems, further fragmentation, and impeding local governance coordination efforts. Divisions of responsibilities between municipalities and local boards often result in elected officials becoming accountable for Board activities of which they have little knowledge or control (Tindal and Tindal, 2011a).

In addition to the local governance structure outlined above, and similar to new governance mechanisms that have emerged in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) to support increased municipal coordination such as the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), the Northern Ontario Services Deliverers Association (NOSDA) was created to

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8 While DSSABs also provide services to municipalities and unorganised territory, Local Services Boards (LSBs) are created in unorganised territory under the Northern Services Boards Act with the financial assistance from the Ministry of Northern Development Mines and Forestry (MNDMF) in order to provide unorganised areas with a range of services (i.e., water, garbage collection, street lighting, fire protection) (Ministry of Municipal Affairs).
foster collaboration between municipalities and local governing organisations, while also providing a political forum to address policy issues and development in northern Ontario (Northern Ontario Services Deliverers Association, n.d.). Reflecting the different challenges and needs in northern settings, regional programs, including the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund (NOHFC) and FedNor are also available to northern Ontarians to foster local economic development and increased economic diversity within northern Ontario (Government of Canada, 2015).

Despite the increased federal and provincial government contributions in recent years, and in addition to the adoption of distinct local governing structures that are better suited to low density areas, northern and rural local governing bodies continue to face a range of challenges associated with polarised growth, remoteness, lagging economies, transportation issues, and limited infrastructure (Tindal and Tindal, 2009). Additionally, demographic factors including sparse populations, disproportionately older and aging populations (Southcott, 2013; Tindal and Tindal, 2009), a young and rapidly growing Aboriginal population (Southcott, 2013), a largely uneducated and low skilled workforce, extensive youth and skilled worker out-migration (Southcott, 2013), and a predominance of single-industry, natural resource based economies (Tindal and Tindal, 2009) all place increased pressure on service delivery needs and associated costs in northern and rural areas. Additionally, municipal and local government structures that largely confine revenue sources to local assessments (property taxes) further disadvantage local northern governments due to low population densities and limited economic bases that produce an increasingly disproportionate number of low-waged service sector employment opportunities.
In terms of the local governance structures, Cote and Fenn (2014) note that “the absence of a county system [in northern Ontario] makes the policy-making environment for human services and economic development cumbersome and often ineffective, and predictably too focused on cost and parochial considerations” (Cote and Fenn, 2014, p. 5). Moreover, amalgamation has led to very large municipalities (Tindal and Tindal, 2009), which may contribute to uneven attention to and representation of local concerns or priorities due to considerable diversity in economic engines and varying economic capacities of northern communities. In light of the challenges northern areas experience, Cote and Fenn (2014) suggest expanding the size and authority of DSSABs as a means of creating the ‘critical mass’ necessary for northern areas to more effectively address fiscal, administrative, and service delivery challenges. They also recommend a shared service delivery model advanced through intergovernmental purchasing and service provision agreements.

The northern context also faces unique challenges in terms of local governance and the increasing responsibilities imposed on local governments to provide public and social services (Tindal and Tindal, 2011a). Challenges stemming from sparse populations throughout the north’s vast geographic area, as well as the concentration of the north’s population in the five northern urban centres, have been reflected in the fragmentation of local governance structures and processes. Moreover, the inability of the northern regions to fit within pre-existing urban arrangements such as county governments has led to jurisdictional overlap and service gaps (Tindal and Tindal, 2011a) that pose unique challenges to northern residents. In contrast to larger urban areas, the North’s inability to benefit from economies of scale is accompanied and compounded by small tax bases and
reduced access to revenue sources (i.e. user fees), which further limit development and access to local services (Tindal and Tindal, 2011a).

Reductions in funding from higher levels of government have resulted in greater reliance on local tax bases. Lower tax bases, which are characteristic of northern, rural and non-metropolitan areas as a consequence of smaller, sparser populations, fewer jobs and lower wages (Slack et al., 2003), present greater challenges to sustain previously funded levels of local service and programming (Yalnizyan, 2005). Accordingly, government strategies such as devolution have diminished the quality and quantity of community-based programs and have deepened economic challenges experienced by rural communities (Warner, 1999). With the devolution of responsibilities for local service and infrastructure expected to not only continue but increase, it is anticipated that northern Ontario will face even greater challenges in light of the resource dependency of the local economy, low population density, and demographic changes (Tindal and Tindal, 2009; Tindal and Tindal, 2011a).

### 2.3 Factors Influencing Social Assistance in Rural and Non-Metropolitan Areas

Increasingly, geographic or contextual factors within local settings or ‘place’ have been viewed as influential to social assistance program outcomes. According to Arsneault (2006), the recognition that welfare requirements are most difficult to meet in rural areas has become a widely held conclusion. Greater challenges to moving from welfare to work in rural and nonmetropolitan areas have been linked to local conditions (Arsneault, 2006; Hoynes, 2000; Whitener, Weber, and Duncan, 2002). This section is dedicated to reviewing key studies on the effects of welfare in rural and non-metropolitan areas. Research on rural
social assistance is limited, with the exception of a small group of studies conducted in the late 1990s to early 2000s initiated shortly after the introduction of welfare reform in the United States. Rural challenges to fulfilling welfare requirements have been found to be cumulative and compounding. These challenges are associated both with local economic factors and with limited social services and infrastructure.

2.3.1 Local Economic Factors and Conditions

Two primary concerns have been raised in the literature in relation to welfare-to-work objectives. These include questions regarding the capacity of local labour markets to provide sufficient employment opportunities and resources to absorb welfare recipients and the implications for welfare outcomes in periods of economic decline. For welfare recipients in rural and non-metropolitan areas, these issues are of even greater concern due to rural economic conditions and characteristics that can impose barriers to fulfilling welfare-to-work employment objectives. The literature, albeit sparse (and American), reveals several economic conditions specific to rural and non-metropolitan areas that influence the fulfillment of employment-based welfare requirements. Common findings include a higher proportion of unemployment, underemployment, poverty (Cotter, 2002; Lichter and Jensen, 2002), and lower wages in rural areas than in urban areas, all of which have been suggested to impede employment prospects for rural welfare recipients (Arsneault, 2006; Blank, 2005; Gibbs, 2002).

In his analysis of factors that influence rural labour market outcomes and their implications for economic dependence among welfare recipients, Gibbs (2002) found that rural local economic conditions and labour market outcomes are distinctly shaped by rural
geographies. The spatial divisions of labour formed by persistent characteristics of rural areas, including reliance on natural resource based extractive industries and small and dispersed populations with lower education levels, produced rural labour markets with fewer jobs and fewer opportunities for job (and income) mobility than in urban areas.

Rebecca Blank’s (2005) synthesis of literature analyzing the potential impact of local factors on rural poverty and social policy asserted similar claims to that of Gibbs (2002). In her analysis, Blank (2005) identifies the mix of industries and population density and demographics as key determinants of the type and nature of job opportunities available in rural areas. In addition to identifying the high vulnerability of single-industry extraction economies to business cycle changes and to ‘major economic disruption’ (including recessions) (also see Markey, Halseth, and Manson, 2006), Blank (2005) asserts that factors including geographic distance and climate can preclude access to wider markets and limit access to capital necessary for economic development or expansion (also see Lawson et al., 2010). Consequently, low skilled, low waged employment opportunities tend to predominate in rural labour markets and result in higher levels of poverty (Gibbs, 2002).

In their investigation into the operations and intersections of rural labour markets and welfare dynamics, Harvey, Summers, Pickering and Richards (2002) identify four distinct characteristics of social assistance and employment opportunity structures in rural areas found within the existing literature. These include: 1) the restructuring of rural labour markets, which has substantially decreased primary sector employment (including extractive industries); 2) hardship associated with rural employment that involves disproportionately low waged, precarious work found in rural areas; 3) the adoption of ‘household survival strategies’ within rural and poor households that includes increased reliance on the informal
economy and resources from family and friends in addition to regular earnings, due to increasing bureaucratic deterrents that reduce eligibility embedded within restructured welfare programs; and 4) chronic underinvestment in development initiatives characterising rural economic conditions that perpetuate low levels of human capital among rural welfare recipients and present barriers for welfare recipients to transition from welfare to work.

In their extensive literature review of issues surrounding rural poverty, Halseth and Ryser (2010), discuss the implications that restructuring within natural resource dependent rural and small towns have on poverty. In relation to the first characteristic of rural economies and welfare systems identified by Harvey et al., (2002), Halseth and Ryser (2006) identify implications associated with the considerable decline in primary sector employment opportunities and the corresponding increase in lower paying and more precarious service sector jobs (see Blank, 2005; Tickamyer and Duncan, 1990).

Halseth and Ryser (2006) also draw attention to the unevenness of poverty and related restructuring factors that have contributed to high rates of poverty within small town and rural extractive economies (even during periods of economic growth). In particular, they cite research that references the existence of a segmented labour market in resource communities. In such a context, high paying employment opportunities within the primary sector require higher levels of skills and training, in contrast with low-wage work within the secondary sector requiring less education and associated with an increased risk of living in poverty (see Tickamyer and Duncan 1990). Harvey et al., (2002) partly corroborate this finding in their study examining impacts of welfare within four geographically-concentrated impoverished counties within the states of Kentucky, Mississippi, South Dakota, and Texas. They also found a segmented labour market but with high- and low-skilled and waged work
divided between service sector employment and occupations requiring higher levels of education such as those within school systems and government. Accordingly, Harvey et al., (2002) concluded that the labour market inadequacies stated above reduce the incentive of welfare recipients to seek employment, since the majority of recipients would have access to the least desirable jobs.

Also examining linkages between economic conditions and welfare in rural areas was Hoynes (2000) in her study examining the impact of labour market conditions on welfare participation in California. Hoynes’s (2000) results indicate a relationship between welfare spells, recidivism, and the availability and quality of employment opportunities. Specifically, her results indicate that welfare recipients who have greater access to employment opportunities with higher earnings have a greater likelihood of both leaving welfare and remaining off welfare. Conversely, she found lower levels of employment and wage growth as well as ‘lower employment-to-population ratios’ tended to lengthen durations of welfare receipt and increase welfare cycling.

Other aspects of rural labour markets of a more demographic nature have also been found to impact welfare job seekers. Some studies have considered the implications of low employment density for welfare job seekers in rural areas. Gibbs (2002) identified several potential advantages and disadvantages of rural labour markets, including the prominence of informal job seeking methods (i.e. word of mouth) that may work to advantage or disadvantage potential job seekers if the personal knowledge of them by prospective employers is used to assess them unfairly. This issue may be particularly problematic for welfare job seekers with ‘bad’ reputations in the community. Limited job opportunities in rural areas may also result in a longer period between jobs than for urban job seekers due to
fewer job options, which in turn may result in sanctions for welfare recipients unable to fulfill employment requirements of the program (Gibbs, 2002).

Further evidence of the influence of rural economic conditions on welfare includes implications for changes in welfare use and caseloads. In a study testing for differences between urban and rural welfare caseloads over time, Henry, Reinschmiedt, Lewis, and Hudson (2002) found changes in caseload sizes to be influenced by the strength of the state economy as well as by reforms to social assistance within different states. The relationship between state-level economies and welfare caseloads found by Henry et al., (2002) affirms the growing consensus among rural welfare researchers that economic conditions have the capacity to shape welfare outcomes. The findings also suggest that greater challenges exist for rural welfare workers trying to transition people from social assistance into the labour market. In their examination of the ‘rural disadvantage’ hypothesis, Henry et al., (2002) found that rural areas experienced disadvantage, both in the significantly higher welfare receipt in rural areas and in local efforts to reduce welfare participation. Consequently, local economic conditions are strongly linked to welfare (Blank, 2005; Brady, Sprague, Gey, and Wiseman, 2002; Gibbs, 2002).

In addition to the highly influential role economic conditions play in rural areas in relation to welfare outcomes, other factors including skills mismatch and low educational attainment among rural welfare recipients play a key role in the transition from welfare to work. Skills mismatch is a significant problem, as lower education levels and employment skills of welfare recipients and rural job seekers often do not adequately meet the requirements of available employment opportunities (Levernier, Partridge, and Rickman, 2000; Mills, 2001). Matching available employment with the limited skill sets of low income
rural job seekers is more of a challenge for rural welfare recipients than in urban settings where child care, public transportation, education, and employment training are in greater supply and more easily accessible (Davis, Connolly, and Weber, 2003). Overall, rural labour markets tend be less effective in absorbing job seekers who are less marketable or less able to meet demands within the current economy (Davis et al., 2003).

### 2.3.2 Support Services, Infrastructure, and Resources

The availability and adequacy of employment supports is closely associated with rural economic conditions and strongly influential in the transition of welfare recipients into employment. Services such as child care, transportation, job training, and education are among the support services most commonly identified in the literature as important for labour force attachment among rural welfare recipients (Arsneault, 2006; Harvey et al., 2002; Reimer, 2002). Unfortunately, rural welfare recipients have been identified as facing greater challenges than their urban counterparts in accessing these services (Brady, Harvey et al, 2002; Brady, Sprague, Gey, and Wiseman, 2002; Tickamyer, et al., 2002).

The smaller population densities and lower tax bases that characterise rural areas limit the ability of smaller communities to afford local services and infrastructure (Slack et al., 2003). In addition to small local tax bases and sparse populations, Harvey et al., (2002) attributed service deficiencies in rural areas to “labor market dynamics and the historical underinvestment in job assistance programs; a lack of basic infrastructure, including paved roads and buses and insufficient child and elder care facilities” (p. 397). In their case studies of eight rural U.S. counties, Harvey et al., (2002) identified serious service deficits in all eight counties. In some cases, job skills training and other education was not provided at all.
Fletcher, Garasky, and Jensen, (2002) found similar rural challenges in their longitudinal study of how families and communities were impacted by social assistance reforms in seven non-metropolitan and one metropolitan community in Iowa. Their interview data revealed varying degrees of service availability across the areas studied, with the two larger communities offering the most comprehensive education and job training supports to welfare recipients, as well as more highly coordinated and integrated services within the community. Welfare recipients in the larger communities also benefitted from access to public transportation and what were perceived by educators and welfare recipients to be a greater range of and higher waged employment opportunities. In contrast, the smaller communities studied provided considerably fewer and less comprehensive job training and education supports to welfare recipients. Study examples described a lack or absence of post-secondary options in four of the five smaller communities, with considerable travelling distance required (20 to 40 miles) to access existing educational institutions. The job training available to welfare recipients in smaller communities was further limited by in-person access that corresponded with weekly or bi-monthly on-site staffing of the program. Staff were available on a full-time basis by telephone.

Arsneault’s (2006) study revealed similar findings and confirmed the greater availability of services in larger urban counties in contrast to rural areas as a key advantage to the implementation of social assistance. Consistent with Fletcher et al., (2002), Arsneault (2006) found more availability of colleges, universities, and vocational training centres in urban centres, while most rural counties lacked educational institutions (the single rural site that had access to post-secondary training was limited to accessing education via satellite). In most cases, rural residents were required to travel between 30 and 50 miles on rural roads to
access a college or university. Although high school equivalency or GED classes are available in most rural communities (Pindus, 2001), the limited opportunities for job skills training and higher education presents a considerable barrier for rural welfare recipients, who generally possess lower levels of education attainment than recipients in urban areas (Eggerston, 2006) and require access to training and educational opportunities in order to fulfill employment objectives of welfare-to-work programs.

Access to child care services is another major barrier identified in the rural welfare research literature. Without reliable, accessible, quality child care services, rural welfare recipients are often unable to enter the labour market or maintain employment once they attain work (Danziger, 2002). Child care in rural areas remains inaccessible to many welfare recipients for several reasons. Day care facilities are limited in some rural areas (Fletcher, et al., 2002; Tickamyer et al., 2002) and non-existent in other areas (Fletcher et al., 2002). Additionally, lengthy distances to child care facilities pose greater challenges for rural families due to factors such as access and affordability (Colker and Dewees, 2000 cited in Arsneault, 2006). Factors further complicating access to child care in rural communities include the irregular hours of work often required by welfare recipients, who are primarily employed in low skill, low wage, precarious employment (Loprest, 2001). The limited numbers of child care services in rural areas often maintain regular business hours, resulting in an inability for welfare recipients working shiftwork to access required child care supports. Fletcher et al., (2002) found other child care challenges, including the lack of infant care and specialized care for children with disabilities, as presenting additional challenges for welfare mothers requiring child care services. Moreover, the affordability of child care presents rural welfare recipients with added challenges as not all areas provide any subsidy or the same
degree of subsidy for child care services (Fletcher et al., 2002). While rural parents tend to rely more heavily on family and relatives for child care than do parents in urban areas (Fletcher et al., 2002; Tickamyer et al., 2002), the lack of child care availability in rural areas presents a serious barrier to employment for rural welfare recipients without such resources.

In her synthesis of challenges associated with child care in rural Canadian communities, Doherty (1994) noted several challenges associated with creating child care programs in rural communities. These include sparse and disperse rural populations with diverse child care requirements, distrust toward formal child care service providers, and large geographic boundaries that reduce feelings of local ownership of the day care service and exacerbate accessibility challenges due to limited public transportation. Affordability challenges associated with the increased costs of providing child care services to a small population in an area where supplies such as food and sundries tend to be higher further limit the availability of day care services (Doherty, 1994). As noted by Reimer (2002), the lack of government attention to child care as a national or regional issue has resulted in barriers for rural families with respect to the availability of child care services in their communities.

Despite the significant challenges presented by limited child care and limited access to training and education for labour market attachment of rural welfare recipients, the lack of transportation within most rural areas is considered by many to be the most serious barrier (McKernan, Lerman, Pindus, and Valente, 2002). Lengthy travelling distances required to access employment opportunities, social services, training or education, and child care by rural welfare recipients have often led to an inability to access necessary welfare-to-work supports (Fletcher, et al., 2002; Rural Policy Research Institute, 1999). The low rate of vehicle ownership among rural welfare recipients further inhibits the mobility of rural
welfare recipients (Fletcher et al., 2000), as well as their ability to access services necessary to foster and maintain labour market attachment.

2.4 Chapter Summary

The literature reviewed in this chapter has focused on the role of governments in restructuring social assistance at both the federal and provincial levels. Because local governments are shaped by other levels of government, the role of local governments, their relationship with the provinces, and the limitations of this relationship were delineated.

This literature review addressed some of the unique conditions of local communities that assist in understanding government roles in social assistance. Through this discussion, it is clear that federal, provincial, and municipal (local) governments all play important but different roles in the restructuring and delivery of social assistance. The literature has identified the particularly difficult role of local government as a result of its limited power base.

Finally, the relationship between rural physical environments and implications for welfare-to-work social assistance programs was discussed in terms of the crucial roles local rural environments play in influencing social assistance provision in rural areas. The central role played by local economic conditions and structures in terms of providing employment opportunities and work-based social service supports comprised a key component of this section of the literature review. Specifically, the limited capacity of rural communities to provide an adequate number of living-wage employment opportunities, education and training supports, child care services, as well as infrastructure such as public transportation necessary to facilitate access to necessary welfare-to-work resources and supports, presents considerable barriers to employment for rural welfare recipients. Challenges facing rural
areas to afford the costs of providing the necessary supports to fulfil employment-based requirements of work-first social assistance largely remain unaddressed.
Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology

3.1 Chapter Overview

This dissertation seeks to respond to the substantial gap in research on northern rural and non-metropolitan welfare within a Canadian context. To this end, the influential nature of local factors in the design and implementation of welfare and the oversight of their impacts (Arsneault, 2006; Parisi et al., 2003) comprise a primary emphasis in this research. With an aim to better understand how local northern rural and non-metropolitan factors influence welfare, exploring the variant capacity of rural and non-metropolitan areas to meet work-based requirements of welfare comprises a central focus of this research.

This chapter provides a description and reflection of the research process, as well as a rationale for the research methodology and discussion of its application. The sites of study are introduced, along with a discussion of the selection criteria. The chapter further includes an overview of the sampling methods and participant recruitment, and a detailed explanation of the data collection and analysis techniques adopted. Strategies to ensure trustworthiness and study rigor are also discussed, along with ethical considerations and study limitations.

3.2 Study Design

The interconnected nature of geography (place) and social and economic processes, the marginalised political and economic position of northern welfare workers and welfare recipients, and the need for exploratory welfare research in northern Ontario merit the
adoption of a qualitative grounded theory research design for this study. Qualitative research advocates for a holistic approach and permits the exploration of multiple dimensions of a problem while also valuing knowledge that is generated from its natural setting (Creswell, 1998), making it particularly well-suited for this research. In particular, the naturalistic emphasis within qualitative research permits the study of social assistance within its northern rural and non-metropolitan setting (Creswell, 1998). Moreover, the common exclusion of northern and rural populations from decision-making processes and research can be addressed through a qualitative research design which recognizes the experiential wisdom of people and can create opportunities for often suppressed or silenced voices to be heard (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

Grounded theory research was selected for this study because it facilitates the development of theory that is directly informed by the context in which the issue under study is occurring (Charmaz, 2006). Accordingly, using a grounded theory methodology for this study permits a rich and contextual understanding of the circumstances experienced by service providers and administrators delivering welfare within northern rural and non-metropolitan welfare settings (Padgett, 1998). Moreover, grounded theory fosters the emergence of new and comprehensive theoretical understandings from the interaction of individuals and the larger environmental contexts that shape and inform their experience (Dey, 1999). In this way, the research design offers the flexibility needed to identify and develop theories specific to northern rural and non-metropolitan welfare (Creswell, 1998).

The study involved semi-structured in-depth interviews with Ontario Works managers, supervisors and caseworkers with varying responsibilities within the Ontario Works system. Two focus groups were conducted with willing members of two Ontario
Works service teams, which provided an opportunity for comparison and member checking (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln and Guba 1989). The following section discusses the three components of the research design: grounded theory philosophy, methodology, and methods.

### 3.2.1 Philosophical Underpinnings of Grounded Theory

Grounded theory maintains philosophical linkages to the Chicago school of symbolic interactionism (Charmaz, 2000; 2006) and American pragmatism (Wuest, 2012). Symbolic interactionism constitutes the philosophy of how meaning is created and assigned by people in relation to social interactions with their environment. In particular, symbolic interactionism considers people to be active agents of change in their worlds through social interaction. In her analysis of symbolic interactionism, Judith Wuest (2012) draws on three seminal assumptions of the philosophy identified by Blumer (1969). These include: 1) individual behaviour is shaped by the constructed meaning that individuals ascribe to things; 2) social interaction is the foundation from which meaning is constructed; and 3) understandings are shaped and reshaped through an interpretive process used by people to make sense of their social environments.

As recognised by Aldiabat and Le Navenec (2011), symbolic interactionism and grounded theory share similar assumptions and objectives. The adoption of symbolic interactionism as a philosophical underpinning for grounded theory studies recognises that research participant behaviours are created and shaped through both social interaction and the context in which phenomenon and behaviour are situated (Aldiabat and Le Navenec, 2011).

According to Weust (2012), symbolic interaction and pragmatism form the philosophical foundation of grounded theory. Pragmatism is a humanist philosophy that
focuses on and acknowledges that bias cannot be avoided in the development of knowledge and that knowledge is shaped by historical processes (Wuest, 2012). Wuest (2012) considers the connection between symbolic interactionism and grounded theory to constitute the relationship she describes below.

Symbolic interactionism directs grounded theorists to assume that meaning is made and constantly changed through interaction and becomes embedded in social context. Both meaning and social context influence the ways that human agency is enacted. Pragmatism supports seeking revised understandings for the purpose of making useful change through inductive exploration of diverse situated human experience with reflexive confirmation and use of applicable existing knowledge. Thus, pragmatism and symbolic interactionism are the source of foundational assumptions of grounded theory (Wuest, 2012, p.229)

### 3.2.2 Grounded Theory Methodology

Grounded theory was selected for this dissertation research primarily for its ability to enable study of the ways in which people react or respond to phenomena while also providing a rigorous and systematic process for the generation of a theory or theoretical framework that is bounded to the experiences and interpretations of those experiencing the phenomena (Creswell, 1998). The importance placed upon contextually grounded understandings of a phenomenon or problem in addition to the valuing of experience and acknowledgement of multiple perspectives within grounded theory highlight the relevance of this methodology for this study. As an interpretive, inductive approach that does not rely on a priori knowledge, grounded theory is recognized as particularly well suited for research in which little is known about the
phenomenon, experience, or process under study (Jones, Kriflik, and Zanko, 2005). In this way, grounded theory helps to recognize unique ecological factors that shape rural northern experience and offers the flexibility to identify and develop theoretical understandings of northern rural and non-metropolitan welfare that are lacking (Creswell, 1998). Further, grounded theory offers rigorous approaches to data collection and analysis, with guidelines to support the development of explanatory theoretical frameworks (Charmaz, 2003).

The constructivist grounded theory design used for this study draws upon a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). The inductive nature of this study enables a focus on exploring the understudied influence of northern contexts on social assistance. It also permits a focus on understanding these influences through the experiences and perceptions of front-line welfare workers and administrators. The applicability of a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm to this research design lies in its foundational elements of constructivism and interpretivism, recognizing reality as socially constructed and the validity of multiple perspectives that emerge from the collective experience of a phenomenon or social problem (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). This paradigm, which takes the perspectives and interpretations of respondents and the researcher’s interpretations along with emerging interpretations from respondent and researcher interactions into account, is strongly identified with an interpretive epistemology and method. Assumptions that multiple realities exist and that reality is socially constructed by the respondents and the researcher reflect the relativist ontology that characterizes the constructive paradigm adopted in this study (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

Constructivist epistemology was used for this study due to the ability to consider multiple experiences and realities of those delivering welfare in northern settings, the
capacity to account for the emergence of new understandings from the individual perspectives of the researcher and the research participant, and the flexibility of this paradigm to enable data collection and analysis procedures to be grounded within the natural environment in which the phenomenon is occurring (i.e., northern, rural and non-metropolitan settings) (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Since the experiences of local welfare workers and administrators form the basis for understanding how place-based factors influence welfare in northern rural and non-metropolitan settings, a constructivist perspective was deemed particularly relevant for its ability to validate the multiple realities and experiences of welfare program deliverers in terms of its view that knowledge is socially constructed via the interpretation of experience (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Moreover, this perspective permits the necessary contextualized understanding of how place (and spatial) factors interact with welfare in northern rural and non-metropolitan settings.

An adapted version of grounded theory was used in this study. Variations to grounded theory are common (Dey, 1999; Strauss and Corbin, 1990) and are reflective of the flexibilities permitted within the approach itself (Charmaz 2003). In this study, modifications to the method addressed constraints associated with conducting research within a bureaucratic environment and at multiple geographically dispersed northern sites. Organizational requirements, respondent workloads, along with physical and resource based constraints arising from geographic distance, climatic factors, as well as time and travel expenses comprised primary constraints associated with conducting this grounded theory study. Modifications made to the grounded theory method are described in detail in chapter five.
3.2.3 The Grounded Theory Method

As a research method, grounded theory comprises a set of inductive data analysis strategies (Charmaz, 1995) that are used to construct theory that is grounded in the data. The data analysis involves a process of progressing from individual level experiences to broader and more abstract categories, concepts, and constructs. Following this, the theoretical analysis is constructed, based on the emergent analysis arising from the simultaneous collection and analysis of data (Charmaz, 1995, 2006).

Throughout several of her works, Kathy Charmaz identifies the central elements of grounded theory as including theoretical sampling to focus data collection in a direction consistent with the theoretical construction objectives of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser and Strauss, 1967), the simultaneous collection and analysis of data, the development of middle range theory, limiting preconceived notions of the data (Charmaz, 2008), and specific strategies unique to grounded theory. These strategies include the identification of coded categories, concepts, and constructs that emerge from the data, the use of memo-writing and field notes to explain data and categories (Charmaz, 1995, 2006), and theoretical sampling to narrow the categories and refine the analysis (Charmaz, 1995, 2006).

While described in terms of guidelines for research as opposed to absolute directives, constructive grounded theory methods generally involve a progression from theoretical sampling to initial and focused coding that occurs in conjunction with the data collection. Memo-writing is a strategy used to clarify and fine-tune codes, raising some of them to conceptual categories while ensuring that the emerging analysis remains grounded in or ‘fitting’ with the data (Breckenridge and Jones, 2009). Engaging the constant comparison analysis which involves comparing codes to codes and codes to categories is used to further
refine the analysis and explain conditions and processes grounded in the data (Charmaz, 2006). Theoretical sampling ceases once the data analysis or ‘generation’ process is completed. This is determined once categories become saturated, whereby new data do not add any additional insight to the analysis (Breckenridge and Jones, 2009; Dey 1999).

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

3.3.1 An Overview of Key Considerations

Data collection within this study was largely conducted in two waves of semi-structured, in-depth interviews and follow up interviews with research participants that took place as needed by telephone. Limited access to northern sites and research participants is the result of considerable geographic distances (ranging from 400 to 1900 kilometers of travel each way to the various northern Ontario sites) and climatic factors that made data collection during the fall and winter months treacherous. Workload and travel requirements of Ontario Works program deliverers further constrained data collection, as many workers spent considerable time ‘on the road’ providing service to welfare recipients in rural and remote office sites and were thus less available for interviews. Consequently, the nature of northern conditions necessitated modification of data collection procedures. Data collection was organised in advance with the Ontario Works program deliverers, as was travel to the selected Ontario Works offices where interviews were conducted. Geographic distance and climate required that data collection occurred over a concentrated period to enable access to research participants and to ensure affordability of the extensive travel required. The period of a seven to ten days during each ‘wave’ of data collection involved multiple flights and driving several hundred kilometers in the northwestern region between research sites, as well
as several overnight stays. Data collection in the northeastern region took place over three days for the first trip and a week for the second due to the addition of several office sites.

Because grounded theory data collection and analysis are conducted simultaneously using the ‘constant comparative method’ (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser and Strauss, 1967), coding was completed immediately following the small clusters of interviews that took place at each research site (Ontario Works offices) by listening to and coding the recorded interviews in the evening following the interviews. Using my recorded codes and field notes, revisions to research questions based on the emergent codes and concepts were completed in advance of each subsequent cluster of scheduled interviews. While Charmaz (2006) recommends word by word and line by line coding be conducted from interview transcripts, the nature of the northern conditions surrounding this study required the aforementioned modifications. Additionally, Stern (2007) maintains that Glaser and Strauss believed the use of field notes to be among the most effective measures to identify and concentrate on relevant data (cited in Munhall, 2012).

Once the interviews were completed and I returned home, I transcribed the recorded interviews, completed the word-by-word and line by line coding, and contacted research participants with follow up questions as needed. I asked research participants for permission to conduct subsequent telephone calls with them following the interviews as required. All but two research participants agreed to the arrangement. The two caseworkers who refused cited workload issues as their reason for declining further contact and involvement in the study.

The planning phase of the study comprised site selection, the identification of site contacts, initial sample identification, and participant recruitment. These tasks were
conducted within each of the two study waves. The first wave of data collection was conducted between August 2007 and early November 2007, with the second wave completed as a follow up study in September and October 2009. The subsequent round of data collection provided an opportunity to capture changes in the experience of delivering welfare in the north as a result of demographic and policy changes which occurred over this period.

### 3.3.2 Selection Criteria

Inclusion criteria for this dissertation research were limited to *Ontario Works* front-line case managers and administrators involved in the delivery of the *Ontario Works* program in northern Ontario. Administrators included *Ontario Works* managers and supervisors, as well as senior administrators. In addition to delivering the *Ontario Works* program in a northern community, research participants were required to be currently residing in a northern rural or non-metropolitan community.

### 3.3.3 Site Selection: Study Sites

Research sites for this study comprised rural and non-metropolitan *Ontario Works* (OW) offices located within the northeastern and northwestern Ontario regions. The geographic catchment area of the study was determined on the basis of interest received from northern *Ontario Works* program administrators who agreed to participate and permitted caseworkers from their respective offices the option to participate in the study. Specific research sites in this study are not disclosed due to the greater likelihood for the anonymity of the research participants to be compromised due to low population densities across northern
Ontario (see Southcott, 2013). However, Table 3.0 lists the *Ontario Works* offices and their respective locations in northern Ontario and is included as a point of reference for readers.

Research sites and participants were limited to off-reserve locations, out of consideration for the culturally distinct income assistance programing offered to on-reserve populations (Moscovitch and Webster, 1995). In addition to gaining an understanding of mainstream *Ontario Works* policy and program implementation issues in northern settings, focusing on off-reserve *Ontario Works* program deliverers permitted consideration of the unique issues experienced by *Ontario Works* workers serving Aboriginal people who leave their reserve and access the mainstream *Ontario Works* program.

### Table 3.0 Northern Ontario Region, Ontario Works Offices and Office Locations

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<tr>
<td>Central Algoma Area Office, Thessalon ON</td>
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<td>Blind River Area Office, Blind River ON</td>
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<td>Elliot Lake Area Office, Elliot Lake ON</td>
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<td>Wawa Area Office, Wawa ON</td>
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<td>Ontario Works – Kenora, Kenora ON</td>
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<td>Kenora District Services Board, Kenora ON</td>
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<td>Red Lake Local Office, Red Lake, ON</td>
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<td>Dryden Local Office, Dryden ON</td>
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<td>Region</td>
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<td>Sioux Lookout Local Office</td>
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<td>Little Current Local Office</td>
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<td><strong>Rainy River</strong></td>
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<td>City of Thunder Bay ON</td>
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<td>Town of Marathon, Marathon ON</td>
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<td>Township of Manitouwadge, Manitouwadge ON</td>
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<td>The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board</td>
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<td>Sturgeon Falls, ON</td>
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<td>Mattawa, ON</td>
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<td><strong>Parry Sound</strong></td>
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3.3.4 Sampling Procedures

Consistent with grounded theory methods, theoretical sampling was undertaken using the grounded theory sampling process outlined by Charmaz (2006) and Morse (2007). Purposive sampling was used as an initial sampling procedure to determine future sampling criteria for the research sites and participants in the study (Charmaz, 2006). As Charmaz (2006) notes, initial use of purposive sampling provides a starting point for the identification of categories, while theoretical sampling fosters the explication of new categories and enables the expression of their theoretical linkages to the data. In this study, the use of purposive sampling permitted the identification of research participants who possessed specific knowledge and criteria identified within the research study (Charmaz, 2003). In the current study, participants were sought who possessed knowledge of the Ontario Works program through experience either in direct delivery of the program or in directing the delivery of the program through oversight and direct involvement with case managers.
responsible for *Ontario Works* implementation. Criteria also required participants to reside in northern rural or non-metropolitan communities. A diverse purposive sample of front-line case managers and administrators who possessed direct knowledge about the experience of delivering the *Ontario Works* program in a northern setting was obtained in the initial sampling procedure to offer the best opportunity to identify concepts.

Because northern *Ontario Works* program deliverers generally possessed the desired research attributes by virtue of their employment status and research participants were concentrated in the geographic space of *Ontario Works* office sites, purposive sampling was used only in the initial round of interviews as a means of confirming sampling criteria and early category identification. As concepts began to emerge from the coded data and written memos that were completed alongside data collection efforts (Charmaz, 2003; Morse, 2007) theoretical sampling procedures were employed to clarify and refine ideas and develop emerging categories and concepts (Charmaz, 2003). Theoretical sampling also served to develop theoretical constructs from emergent categories (Munhall, 2012). Theoretical sampling was conducted until saturation was reached; that is, data collection occurred until no new conceptual insights were identified and repeated evidence was found for the conceptual categories identified within the study (Bloor and Wood, 2006; Dey, 1999; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Moore, 2004).
3.3.5 The Sample

The sample comprised forty-three northern Ontario Works program deliverers with varying responsibilities and positions that included Ontario Works managers, supervisors, and a range of specialised caseworker roles including eligibility review officers, employment workers, family support workers, case presenting officers, and general case managers. Anonymity concerns required the aggregation of positions and roles of the sample. Decisions on the part of many research participants to forego providing demographic information including age, level of education completed, number of years of welfare program work experience, race, and place of residence resulted in my inability to accurately report the demographic characteristics of the research participants. Research participants cited concerns about their anonymity as the reason for declining to provide demographic information.

Thirty-three Ontario Works program deliverers participated in individual interviews while six northern Ontario Works program deliverers requested to be interviewed in two groups of three, and four other northern Ontario Works program deliverers requested to be interviewed in two dyads. Research participants who requested to be interviewed with colleagues expressed this desire on the basis of feeling more comfortable responding to the questions with trusted colleagues.

3.3.6 Recruitment

The northern region, as defined by the Ministry of Community and Social Services (Table 3.0), was chosen for the recruitment of participants for this study. As previously mentioned, the recruitment strategy was limited to specific areas within the northern Ontario Works program region (Table 3.0) that coincided with the interest received from Ontario
Works program administrators. More specifically, the location of study sites corresponded with the location of the respective Ontario Works offices of the Ontario Works managers who agreed to participate in the study.

Participants were recruited in conjunction with support received from the Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association (NOSDA) and Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) senior representatives, upon receiving approval from the University of Toronto Research Ethics Board to conduct the research. Professor Ernie Lightman from the University of Toronto brought my dissertation study to the attention of OMSSA and NOSDA representatives, which followed with an invitation to make a formal presentation of the proposed dissertation research study to OMSSA and NOSDA representatives, most of whom were northern Ontario Works program service providers. Following the presentation, an information meeting was held with northern Ontario Works program managers and supervisors to further discuss the research and to answer questions concerning the study. At this meeting, considerable interest in the research was expressed and it was agreed that I would follow up with Ontario Works program managers in the northern region who expressed interest following the annual general meeting (AGM) to inform them of participation requirements associated with the study.

In those districts where interest in study participation was expressed, key informants were used to assist with identifying the sample and developing and coordinating the interview schedule. Key informants were internal to the organization (the Ontario Works program) and comprised Ontario Works supervisors and managers who volunteered to act as intermediaries for the recruitment of the sample. Because the sample was comprised exclusively of Ontario Works program employees in northern Ontario, working with key
informants as intermediaries who were well-known and trusted by Ontario Works employees was thought to be the most feasible and effective strategy to recruit a sufficient and appropriate sample. Key informants were located in eighty percent of the participating office sites. Sites where key informants were not situated included satellite Ontario Works program offices overseen by larger offices in neighbouring communities. Key informants assisted with recruitment efforts of all office sites within their respective districts.

Purposive sampling techniques were used to identify initial research participants (Charmaz, 2003; Morse, 2007). An information sheet describing the study (Appendix A and B) and participation criteria which included the researcher’s name, university affiliation, and contact information was emailed to the key informants who forwarded the flyer to employees working in their respective offices who met the inclusion criteria. Interested employees were invited to contact me for additional information about the study and/or to arrange an interview date and time. Research participants were also encouraged to inform other employees about the study. Because suspicion of outsiders is common in rural communities, it was believed that if employees received the information about the study from an ‘insider’ and trusted colleague, trust issues with me as an ‘outsider’ and as someone who was residing in Toronto at the time of the study would be decreased and not interfere with the desire of many Ontario Works program deliverers to participate in the study.

3.3.7 Data Collection

Semi-structured in-depth interviews and direct observation comprised the data collection methods used in this study. The focus on gathering rich, contextualized data with thick descriptions of the experience, reality, and worldview of the respondent is fostered
through in-depth interviewing. Moreover, in-depth interviewing provides an important opportunity for the interviewer to confirm information and understanding as well as promote research participant self-reflection and insight (Johnson, 2001).

Consistent with the multiple data sources common and encouraged within grounded theory studies as a means of gathering thorough data (Charmaz, 2003), I also reviewed government documents and used direct observation as data sources. Document analysis was primarily used for clarification of the data and emerging analysis as required. Observations were noted of a) the geographic features of the area; b) the Ontario Works office layout; c) interviewee non-verbal behaviours during interviews and; d) interactions between Ontario Works colleagues and between Ontario Works workers and service users in the Ontario Works offices visited. These observations were recorded in my field notes and used to inform the analysis.

Interview questions were informed by the study’s research objectives and relevant scholarly literature covering key issues identified within welfare studies in rural areas as well as literature that focused on welfare issues in Canada and within Ontario. Consistent with literature that identifies the use of focus groups as helpful in the development of interview guides (Hoppe, Well, Morrison, Gilmore, and Wilsdon, 1995), group-based feedback was obtained through an information session conducted with Ontario Works program representatives, which helped to develop the interview guide for this study. Interview questions and probes (Appendix E) were designed to elicit a range of experiences and insights from Ontario Works respondents regarding their implementation of welfare in northern contexts. Specifically, open-ended questions posed explored respondents’ experiences, actions, and reflections of a) local contextual (place-based) factors that were
perceived to have influenced their implementation of welfare; b) experienced implementation challenges of the *Ontario Works* program; c) perceived advantages of delivering the *Ontario Works* program in their respective northern region/community; and d) innovation questions that explored how *Ontario Works* program workers experienced and responded to devolution, welfare policy, and program decision-making processes and outcomes.

As recommended by Charmaz (2006), the interview guide for this study was designed to pose general, primarily open-ended questions to permit a sufficiently wide focus on the research topic in order to obtain participants’ experience, reflections, and actions (see also Charmaz and Belgrave, 2012). On the advice of established grounded theorists (Charmaz, 2003; Strauss and Corbin, 1990) that grounded theory novices require additional structure, I used an interview guide with pre-developed open-ended questions and probes for the interviews (Appendix E). Probes were added as the interviews progressed to effectively use a more informal conversational approach (Charmaz and Belgrave, 2012). The strategy of using a pre-developed interview guide was also important to provide the *Ontario Works* program administrators with reassurance that research participants would be uncompromised throughout the research and that organizational information sharing protocols would not be violated. The interview guide permitted managers, supervisors, and caseworkers to review the overarching research questions in advance of the interviews to determine if the questions were intrusive or compromising to their role within the welfare system.

Several research participants requested to view the interview questions in advance of the interview. Once study inclusion criteria were confirmed to have been met for the research participants, a copy of the interview questions was forwarded to each research participant. Because interview questions within grounded theory continually change in relation to the
evolving analysis, a copy of the foundational questions was shared with key informants and research participants in an effort to provide them with reassurance about the integrity of the research. Meanwhile, the interview questions that reflected the direction of the emerging and evolving concepts and constructs were implemented through the use of probing questions (Charmaz and Belgrave, 2012). This strategy was found to satisfy the interests of Ontario Works administrators to protect the organisation and workers while also enabling the research to be conducted in a manner consistent with grounded theory methods and methodology.

In addition to sharing interview questions in advance of the interview, the consent form to participate in the study was forwarded to interested northern Ontario Works program deliverers when they expressed a desire to participate to the key informant or to myself. Those interested in participating in the study were asked to read and sign the consent form (Appendix A and B) to enable interview scheduling and associated travel to be organised. Consent forms were subsequently reviewed with individual participants prior to interviews (where possible pending availability of the participant) and at each face-to-face interview with participants. Research participants were given the opportunity to ask questions and change their decision to participate in the study during the face-to-face interview. This procedure was used to ensure participants were giving informed and voluntary consent to participate in the study. Additionally, participants were reminded of the option to skip questions and opt out of the interview or research study at any point in the research process. Safety emerged as a key priority in this study due to concerns voiced by many Ontario Works program deliverers about the potential for reprimand from superiors or “the Ministry” for expressing views that might be considered contrary to the organisation’s vision, policies, or directives. Most often, these concerns were observed as hesitation or reluctance on the part of
research participants to respond fully to interview questions. These concerns were addressed with the option of removing comments of concern during and following the interviews. The option to have statements omitted from the interview and recorded records satisfied safety concerns of the participants and enabled them to proceed with the interviews.

Creating an interview setting that helps participants feel comfortable and ‘safe’ was a priority of mine as I was aware of the influence interview settings can have on the quality of interview dialogues (Munhall, 2012). Other reasons for prioritising interview safety to such a great extent centred on the issues common to rural and northern settings. Gaining access to northern Ontario Works program deliverer experiences and insights required trust between interviewer and interviewee that was not easily attained as a researcher residing in the provincial metropolis (Toronto) instead of the local community. The willingness of Ontario Works managers and the key informants to ‘vouch’ for my credibility as a competent researcher and sincere and genuine person concerned about social assistance in the north fostered the development of considerable trust and confidence from Ontario Works program deliverer participants. Additionally, my status as a “northerner” (as someone who resided in northern Ontario and northern British Columbia for a combined total of over 25 years) in addition to my background as a social worker and my education level as a PhD student with a Masters degree in Social Work afforded me status that attracted both trust and respect by many interviewees. My social work background also facilitated a means of connecting with many participants who perceived social work helping skills as increasingly relevant to their new employment support roles. Ensuring a positive relationship between the interviewer and interviewee in grounded theory is especially important due to the co-construction of knowledge that occurs in the data collection process (Charmaz, 2006).
Prior to proceeding with interview scheduling, I confirmed that the participants met the inclusion criteria for the study by a) asking if participants were employed as Ontario Works caseworkers, supervisors, or managers and b) confirming that Ontario Works program deliverer study participants were currently residing in a northern rural or non-metropolitan community. I found it important that, in addition to delivering Ontario Works in northern settings, research participants were northern residents to ensure service delivery experiences were informed by insights gained through a personal, intimate knowledge of the north. Participants were invited to contact me any time before and following the scheduled interview to ask questions and gain further clarification about the study.

Interviews were typically one to one and a half hours in length. On five occasions, either myself or the interviewees requested follow up sessions to complete the interview conversations. In these cases, interview duration totalled approximately 3 hours. Primary data were collected through face-to-face interviews, while telephone interviewing was primarily reserved for the purposes of completing and following up on previously conducted face-to-face interviews. In three instances, telephone interviews were conducted as the research participants were unavailable when I conducted the on-site face-to-face interviews or had heard about the study and expressed a wish to participate after I completed the interviews and returned home. Northern Ontario Works program deliverers generally expressed a preference for face-to-face interviews, referring to the importance of meeting me and trusting that I maintained a sincere concern for the north and understanding of the many challenges characterising the north.

Consistent with the principles of theoretical sampling and constant comparative analysis within grounded theory, data for this study were collected and analysed
simultaneously with the analysis, directing further data collection efforts (i.e. the constant comparative method) (Charmaz, 2006). As new data and concepts emerged through the interviewing process, interview questions were revised, and new questions were introduced to further explore and refine these concepts (Charmaz, 2003).

### 3.3.8 Data Analysis

Consistent with grounded theory, data collection and analysis for this study was completed using the constant comparative method, which requires data collection and analysis (coding) to occur jointly (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1998). A two-phase coding process was adopted, consisting of initial coding and focused coding (Charmaz, 2006). Initial coding comprised the first step of the data coding process, which involved closely scrutinising the data word by word, line by line, or segment by segment to identify initial analytical ideas that would direct further data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2006). Word-by-word and line-by-line coding was used in the coding and analysis of interview data.

During periods of concentrated data collection, field notes from interviews as well as repeated listening to audio recordings of interviews were used instead of line-by-line coding of interview transcripts. Concepts emerging from this revised coding process were identified, revealing new and emerging ideas and questions which were added to more selectively target sampling and inform subsequent interviews. As a means of data verification of initial coding

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9 As mentioned previously, geographic factors, travel costs, participant workloads and their schedules imposed constraints on the data collection and analysis phases of this research, requiring that interviews be conducted in concentrated clusters. Given these constraints and the modifications to data collection and analysis required to accommodate them, participants were advised of the potential need for follow up (by telephone) from the interviews. All participants consented to follow up interviewing with the exception of two who cited reasons associated with workload.
and as a coding method, line-by-line coding of interview transcriptions was completed upon my return from the northern research sites and was used to follow up on data gathered and to inform subsequent data collection and analysis. The process of coding using field notes rather than conducting line-by-line coding of transcripts has been advocated by Glaser and Strauss (Stern 2007 cited in Munhall, 2012) as a means of enabling the researcher to focus on key concepts and analyze data most efficiently. As with many grounded theory practices, the preferential use of field notes over interview transcripts is contested by other grounded theorists. In contrast to Glaser’s and Strauss’s position, Charmaz (2006) acknowledges the potential for coding from field notes to provide the researcher a wider lens on the data, but identifies the practice of line-by-line coding of transcribed interviews as an important and necessary means to ensure important data points are not missed and that a deeper analysis is achieved. Focused coding was used to determine the adequacy of the most significant previously developed codes, to raise focused codes to categories, and to categorize larger segments of data (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1978). Through the process of focused coding, initial coding was found to inadequately represent concepts. Subsequently, categories were reviewed and changed to more adequately fit the data. This process involved linking and merging codes and categories, as well as eliminating codes (Charmaz, 2006).

Drawing on Glaser (1978), Charmaz (2006), identifies theoretical coding as a higher level coding procedure that follows focused coding. As described by Charmaz (2006),

…theoretical codes specify possible relationships between categories you have developed in your focused coding….Theoretical codes are integrative; they lend form from focused codes you have collected….Hence, these codes not only conceptualize
how your substantive codes are related, but also move your analytic story in a theoretical direction. (p. 63)

Theoretical coding constituted the final stage of coding in this study and involved the linking and integrating of substantive codes (concepts) identified through the focused coding process (Charmaz, 2006). As with all forms of grounded theory coding, theoretical coding builds upon preceding coding and must not be premised on preconceived theories. Therefore, I was careful to ensure that coding at all stages remained emergent from the data and fit with the data in order to result in a substantiated theory (Glaser, 1998). Recognizing the explanatory function theoretical coding holds over that of the thematic descriptive capacity of focused coding (Charmaz, 2006) or substantive coding (Glaser, 1992), the importance of engaging the data at the level of theoretical coding was acknowledged in this research.

Theoretical memo writing was used throughout the research process to drive the data collection and analysis of the research. Memo writing enables the researcher to analyze data early in the study and is a critical step that merges the data collection and draft writing phases (Charmaz, 2006). Constituting the researcher’s thoughts and analysis about the emerging data, memo writing is instrumental in supporting the identification of codes and the development of categories and theoretical insights emergent from the data. Memo writing further fosters ongoing comparison between data, emergent codes and data, codes and categories, and between categories and concepts, which is critical for conducting the constant comparative analysis within grounded theory (Charmaz, 2003). Memos were developed during each analytic phase of the research and were titled according to the area of analysis they represented. Theoretical sorting of the memos facilitated the development of theoretical linking in which comparisons between categories and the theoretical integration of categories
occurred (Charmaz, 2006). More specifically, theoretical sorting consisted of a process of sorting, comparing, and integrating written memos. As memos were compared with each other, new ideas emerged and additional memos were written to reflect these emergent ideas and categories. Theoretical statements were constructed from this process and formed the initial draft of the analysis section of this dissertation (Charmaz, 2006).

3.3.9 Data Management

As the researcher, I audio recorded and transcribed data from interviews and completed field notes of interviews. Identifying information was removed from transcripts and participant names were replaced with pseudonyms. All electronic files containing data and identifying information are stored on a password protected computer accessible only to me. All hard copies of participant consent forms and other documents containing identifiers are stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. All data and documents containing identifying and personal information of the participants will be destroyed within seven years of completion of the research study. Research participants were advised of the above measures taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity (Appendix A) as well as the approval to proceed with the study as granted by the University of Toronto Research Ethics Board (Appendix C and D). I also described potential risks and benefits of the study in detail to all participants. Potential compromises to anonymity and confidentiality due to difficulties remaining unknown within small communities were also discussed.

Accommodations were made to address anonymity concerns with respect to data reporting. Sparse populations consistent with northern settings necessitated the use of specific data reporting considerations to protect participant anonymity. The potential for the
identification of those who participated in this study was deemed to be considerable given the small Ontario Works program staffing complements that characterised Ontario Works program sites across the north. Moreover, the familiarity between Ontario Works program deliverers and the potential for others to identify northern Ontario Works deliverers by virtue of lines of authority or direct reporting relationships raised concerns about the potential for participants to experience reprisal if identified. Indeed, many participants expressed concerns about being identified and possibly disciplined by the provincial government and requested that specific statements made by them during the interview process be omitted. Accordingly, efforts to protect the identities of Ontario Works deliverers who participated in the study involved a number of measures. Random assignment of gendered pseudonyms to all reported responses ensured that identities of participants were protected. Additionally, responses were aggregated rather than reported by areas, districts, or regions in order to disguise participant identities. Other potential identifiers, such as references made participants to specific places, other Ontario Works deliverers or communities, local employers, community partners, and some innovative practices, were either omitted or replaced by pseudonyms. In some cases, anonymising participant identities involved slightly modifying the reported responses to disguise habits in speech. Due to the small number of Ontario Works managers and caseworkers in specialized roles, responses were aggregated to protect the identity of these individuals. While measures taken served to protect the anonymity of the research participants, this practice limited findings and comparisons that could be reported within and between specialized roles, managers, supervisors, communities, districts, and regions. Instead, efforts were made to identify consistencies in the responses without identifying specific roles, positions, locations, or sites.
3.3.10 Strategies for Establishing and Verifying Trustworthiness

As a means of ensuring and demonstrating rigor, Lincoln and Guba’s (1989) seminal criteria for ensuring trustworthiness of qualitative research were adopted. The four methodological strategies that comprise Lincoln and Guba’s framework include credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability.

Credibility represents assurance that the data and the interpretations of the data are ‘truthful’ and that respondent views are consistent with the investigator’s reporting of the same. Fulfilling these criteria involves taking steps in implementing the research in ways that foster ‘believability’ and credibility of the findings (Polit and Tatano, 2008). Credibility was achieved through clear statements and following the research strategies, as well as ensuring sampling and data collection processes were consistent with the constant comparative analysis process.

Dependability, which involves the stability of data over time and conditions, was achieved through an inquiry audit conducted to ensure data collection and analyses were completed in accordance with the grounded theory research method used.

Transferability is defined as occurring when study findings are deemed to have transferability or ‘fit’ with other settings or contexts (Lincoln and Guba, 1989). Ensuring thick descriptions of study findings, along with achieving theoretical saturation, were measures adopted to foster transferability.

Confirmability which constitutes a likeness to achieving objectivity within quantitative research for qualitative researchers (Shenton, 2004) was achieved through the reflexivity process I engaged in as the researcher and discussed in this section 3.4 of this
chapter as well as through providing an audit trail discussed above and ensuring triangulation. Triangulation was achieved through the use of multiple data sources, including in-depth interviewing, document review, and observation to ensure that limitations within individual methods were compensated for and minimized. The use of multiple data collection methods and data sources also permitted the verification of interview data with that of organizational and government documents. Comparisons of specific points within the interview data enabled this researcher to corroborate information across participants (Shenton, 2004).

3.4 Reflexivity within the Research Process

Research conducted using a constructivist grounded theory methodology recognizes researcher-participant relations as well as values, beliefs, and interpretations held by these parties as particularly influential to the research process. In the next section, key considerations for reflexivity to occur within constructivist research are discussed. In the following section, reflexivity is discussed in relation to constructivist grounded theory assumptions and principles. The third section provides an overview of specific reflexive considerations in relation to my social work practice background. The final section considers the location of the research participants in relation to this study and strategies to address issues of power imbalance between the researcher and the participant.

3.4.1 Reflexivity and Constructivist Research

As described by Charmaz (2006), reflexivity involves the researcher’s recognition of how their “interests, positions, and assumptions influenced [the research] inquiry” (p. 188). The highly acknowledged impact that a researcher’s personal bias, pre-conceived ideas, and
judgments can have on the research process highlights the particular relevance of reflexivity within research. Moreover, reflexivity, which requires the researcher to critically examine underlying assumptions and interpretations in order to become aware of his or her influence on the research process, maintains an important role within qualitative research and particularly within constructivist research.

With its relativist foundations, constructivist research is recognized as an interpretivist form of inquiry (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006) in which multiple realities and interpretations of ‘truth’ comprise its fundamental features. Knowledge is understood as socially constructed and produced, and shaped through multiple perspectives (Charmaz, 2009) and by pre-existing social conditions (Mills, Bonner and Francis, 2006). A central tenet of constructivism rests on the notion that neither a researcher nor research process can be neutral or absolutely free of bias because reality is socially constructed and encompasses multiple perspectives (Charmaz, 2009). This point is further supported by Mills et al., 2006, who acknowledge that, “constructivists realize that conducting and writing research are not neutral acts” (p. 130). Accordingly, reflexivity holds a necessary role in illuminating researcher and research participant assumptions, interpretations, and experiences throughout the research process.

Within constructivist research, social constructions of knowledge are largely attributed to influences of structural conditions, geographical contexts, perceptions, and privilege of the researcher (Charmaz, 2009). The socially constructed nature of reality embraced within constructivist-interpretive paradigms and constructivist grounded theory (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006) further considers interpretations of reality to be the product of interactions between the researcher and participant (Charmaz, 2009), researcher reactions,
and their interpretations of data (Mills et al., 2006). Given the central role of the researcher and his or her relationship with research participants within constructivist research, considering unseen or previously unacknowledged privilege and power within the research relationship is an important measure to ensure the research remains grounded in participant experience.

The researcher, often described as the primary research instrument within qualitative research, is seen to rely more heavily upon the ability to perceive both their own perceptions and those of the participants, but also to ‘see’ how situations and contexts inform interpretations of the phenomenon under study. Consequently, the researcher’s discretion in terms of determining the research topic, decisions on which questions to pursue or ignore, and the lens with which he or she looks upon the analysis demonstrates considerable authority the researcher can have over the research process (see Hertz, 1997). As noted by Finlay (2002), the researcher strongly influences the research process, inclusive of constructing how data will be collected and interpreted. Therefore, a reflexive approach can serve to balance researcher authority within the research process. Reflexivity plays an essential role in supporting the researcher to identify factors that both impede and facilitate one’s ability to understand and interpret what one is ‘seeing’ within the research process (Russell & Kelly, 2002). In addition to the valuable insight reflexivity provides in supporting a researcher to identify and anticipate the impact of underlying assumptions, motivations, and bias within the research process, a reflexive approach provides public scrutiny of the research methods and research process (Finlay, 2002). In this way, a reflexive approach works to offer transparency of decisions made and accountability for practices adopted throughout the research process.
The high degree of subjectivity within constructive research further merits the adoption of a ‘reflexive stance’. Subjectivity is viewed as a key element because participant perspectives (which can be highly subjective) are held as essential components to generate data (Creswell, 2007). Embracing subjectivity permits a contextualized interpretation of the phenomenon under study and remains a key component to the generation of data. In contrast to positivist and post-positivist approaches that place researcher objectivity as a central and achievable research outcome, constructivist researchers recognize subjectivity and bias as inherent to the research process and thus do not perceive it to be a problem to resolve, but rather, as an opportunity to engage in critically reflecting upon and working to mitigate one’s underlying assumptions and interpretations and their impact (Finlay, 2002; Mills et al., 2006). Thus, adopting a ‘reflexive stance’ ensures attention is given to identifying and minimizing the impact of subjectivity in terms of how experiences, perceptions, and assertions of the researcher and research participant are produced (Charmaz, 2006; Mills et al., 2006).

### 3.4.2 Reflexivity and Constructivist Grounded Theory

The key position reflexivity maintains within constructivist research extends to constructivist grounded theory. Constructivist grounded theorists engage in a reflective process of data generation (rather than data collection) that results from a collaborative co-construction of meaning arising from researcher and research participant interactions (Charmaz, 2006). Thus, a collaborative connection between the constructivist grounded theory researcher and research participants comprises a key objective of the research. Similar to the constant comparison process that characterizes grounded theory, reflexivity is
a pivotal component within constructivist research that requires researchers to engage in a continuous process of self-awareness and critique (Mruck and Mey, 2007). Accordingly, constructivist grounded theory methodology strongly advocates for researchers to actively engage in reflexivity throughout the research process (Charmaz, 2006). Gaining an awareness and understanding of how one’s experience and assumptions arise from one’s past experience and how interactions between one’s experience with participants and the research environment potentially influence the research process provides critical insight into identifying and mitigating bias (Mruck and Mey, 2007).

Consistent with the above noted points, the constructivist grounded theorists’ responsibilities to ensure visibility of the participants’ perspectives and their own within the analysis is supported through providing a reflexive account of underlying assumptions that influence the research process. A reflexive approach can make visible the social location of the researcher and her or his respective ‘lenses’ through which they view the world. This visibility increases the opportunities for identifying underlying assumptions and their potential impact on the researcher’s ability to listen to and hear the voices and perspectives of participants (Mills et al., 2006). In addition to the benefits that a ‘reflexive stance’ (Charmaz, 2006) holds for the identification of researcher assumptions and their potential impact on the ability to be attentive to participant voices, reflexivity illuminates processes that structure relations shaping the generation of data and emergent grounded theory. Constructivist grounded theory demonstrates a deep connection between data analysis and social processes that may influence the researcher’s role in interpretive data analysis.
3.4.3 Understanding Influences of Researcher Location

Recognizing the qualitative researcher as the primary ‘instrument’ within the research process (Charmaz, 2006), being reflexive within this study was an integral part of the research and involved developing a critical awareness and analysis of many personal and professional perspectives. Illuminating and exploring these perspectives resulted in an increased awareness of my conscious and unconscious endorsement of values and positions relative to poverty, northern contexts, and welfare policy and programming. Gaining awareness of these values and positions enabled me to better identify and address impacts upon the research process.

An exploration of my beliefs and assumptions about the inner workings of the welfare system and how the welfare system and poverty is experienced by impoverished northern service users comprised some of my initial reflections on this dissertation research. Drawing upon my experience working in a social work capacity with low income, welfare reliant families in a variety of settings and capacities (e.g. community development, advocacy, counseling), my understanding of poverty and social assistance was largely informed by witnessing the barriers experienced by service users in their efforts to gain economic security.

In my previous family support, child welfare, addictions, and family violence counseling and service provider roles, service users receiving social assistance shared their experiences and insights regarding factors they understood to contribute to the poverty they experienced. Among the most detrimental issues they identified to overcoming poverty were unemployment, underemployment, and a lack of access to the resources necessary to obtain and maintain employment. Employment opportunities accessible to service users were
largely described as limited, low paid, insecure, and typically without health benefits. Among welfare recipients in northern settings, employment opportunities were viewed as even more limited as a consequence of a combination of volatile boom and bust local single-industry, natural resource based economies, low human capital, the stigma that followed them as a welfare recipient in the community, and the shame and humiliation most internalized as a consequence of the persistent social and economic exclusion they experienced. Downsizing and closures of mills and mines, along with the outsourcing of industry jobs to developing countries were described by service users to have left many northern small towns with limited employment opportunities. As many service users admitted, even when well-paying industrial jobs were available, the positions were unattainable for many due to their limited work experience and/or the absence of adequate training, credentials, or qualifications. Upon reflection, I discovered that in many ways, it was my inability to ‘save’ these families from the continual stress and humiliation of poverty they experienced that led me to select this research topic.

Recognising the inability of welfare recipients to afford the basic necessities of life and live with dignity was a common experience in my work. An equally common occurrence was my inability to provide resources and supports that would successfully lift these families out of the persistent poverty they experienced. In my experience, existent social service programs were in various states of underdevelopment. Long waitlists to access services and a continually lengthening queue in which service users were shuffled up or down the list to accommodate the increasingly desperate and disadvantaged was commonplace. The durations of detox or addiction counselling supports typically fell short of what was needed. In most circumstances, I observed a system of supports that demanded service users ‘fit’
within existing structures and programs. Service users with needs or behaviors falling outside of established program criteria were referred elsewhere or refused service. In other cases, I observed a ‘cookie cutter’ approach to service delivery that assumed all parents in the child welfare system required mainstream parenting classes over the provision of adequate funds for food, housing, and transportation. I also encountered highly bureaucratic processes resulting in barriers to poor families to access needed supports. As a practitioner, service users and I often experienced frustration with lengthy waitlists for services. As a child protection worker, it was a heartbreaking experience to witness a parent or youth struggling with a myriad of mental health and addiction issues without adequate resources to support recovery. As years of witnessing the hardships resulting from inadequate social services have shaped my understanding of the social service sector, I have had to regularly engage in self-reflection practices to maintain emotional health and a stave off the cynicism that has the potential to claim many social workers. Although I met many highly motivated services users and worked alongside numerous highly skilled, exceptionally committed social workers, insufficient resources often severely limited our capacity to effectively assist vulnerable populations.

While seeking to understand how my personal and professional values and beliefs might influence this research, I engaged in a process of recollecting assumptions and feelings about social assistance as a program, as a policy, and as a regulatory system. I also considered the realities of living in poverty in a northern area. From this process, I soon realized many of my beliefs about the system were informed, in part, by previous reading and research I had completed on the subjects of poverty and welfare in my clinical and academic career. Other perspectives I maintained were influenced by past accounts presented to me by
service users receiving social assistance benefits, and colleagues who characterized their interactions with the welfare system as frustrating and discouraging. In these instances, negative experiences of the welfare system were often attributed to workers responsible for delivering the service who were regarded as inattentive, judgmental, and disrespectful. My recognition that service providers and the clients they serve can and do experience parallel oppressions has supported a broader and more comprehensive understanding of the struggles inherent in accessing, receiving, and delivering social services.

Working with service users and providers significantly informed my insights regarding the substantial influence that structural factors can have on the capacity of poor families to overcome poverty. Consequently, these insights led me to conceptualize poverty as a multidimensional and multilayered phenomenon. The experiences of poverty described by service users further reinforced this perspective. In contrast to mainstream positions that attribute causes of poverty to individual inadequacies (Mead, 1992), my experiences as a social work practitioner and researcher hearing and observing service user and service provider interactions with poverty have led me to adopt the perspective that individualistic explanations of poverty (such as those represented within such theories as ‘the culture of poverty’) are superficial, incomplete, inaccurate, and dangerous.

3.4.4 Locating the Research Participants

Viewing relationships with research participants as integral to producing highly relevant research, I made specific efforts to be articulate in my hopes for the research study (to increase awareness and visibility of northern issues surrounding social assistance and poverty) in order to develop open, respectful relations with the participants.
A key expectation as a qualitative researcher, and particularly as a constructivist researcher, is to recognize the central importance of the researcher-research participant relationship (Charmaz, 2006). Consistent with the constructivist approach, conceptualizing research as an activity that facilitates knowledge generation and recognizing the interactions of researcher and research participant as collaborators in co-creating knowledge were central components of this study (see Charmaz, 2006; 2009). Accordingly, engaging in a collaborative process of generating data and knowledge is grounded in the expectation that efforts will be made to address power imbalances (Mills et al., 2006). To this end, I employed several strategies to equalize power relations between myself and the research participants.

Recognizing the power relations associated with the central role and authority the researcher occupies within the research process, I adopted a non-hierarchical approach within this study. This was accomplished through the use of open-ended interview questions and structuring the interview with sufficient flexibility to allow participants to elaborate on areas they perceived as salient to explicating their experience. In this way, participants exercised greater power and control within the study. By more actively directing the interview process, participants gained a greater share of the power within the researcher-research participant relationship (Mills et al., 2006). Other efforts to equalize power relations between the researcher and research participants included sharing broad interview questions in advance of the interview to provide participants greater pre-interview knowledge of the study, and employing measures to address participant safety concerns such as confidentiality and modifying data reporting to protect anonymity. These safety measures are discussed in greater detail in section 3.3.7.
3.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the research process, including the design, sampling, and recruitment strategies, as well as data collection, analysis, and management. Fundamental aspects of the research design were discussed, including the philosophical underpinnings of grounded theory, assumptions underlying the methodology of grounded theory, and elements specific to grounded theory research methods. The key components of trustworthiness within qualitative research were also discussed, focusing on how credibility, confirmability, transferability, and triangulation were accomplished within this study. Unique implications of conducting research in rural and remote northern areas were discussed in relation to strategies adopted to mitigate these challenges.

Reflexivity of the researcher as a key component of constructivist grounded theory was elaborated upon. The discussion emphasized the importance of revealing underlying processes and assumptions. In promoting greater credibility of the qualitative research, reflexivity was discussed as serving a number of key functions within constructivist grounded theory research. Strategies enabling the researcher to reflexively engage the research process included the processing of specific and key events that the researcher unconsciously or consciously adopted as general knowledge.
Chapter Four: Theoretical Underpinnings

4.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter introduces and discusses selected theoretical positions on the construct of uneven development with the aim of reflecting the emergent grounded theory of this study within an extant theoretical base. Forging a theoretical understanding of uneven development is considered critical to the study of northern work-first welfare because it is situated within the broader context of regional disparities. Historical disparities between Canadian regions provincially as well as along north-south divides have attracted considerable effort by researchers and theorists in order to understand causes of uneven development. In particular, the varying “distribution of resources across geographic space” has represented the crux of the challenge underlying uneven development (Brodie, 1990, p.12). Accordingly, a range of theories has emerged to address the question of uneven development in hopes of both understanding and resolving economic disparities across space. In contrast to neoclassical economic theories which have remained largely limited to market-based understandings of uneven development (Brodie, 1990), a theoretical orientation that conceptualises uneven development as a social, political, relational and spatialized phenomenon has been selected. Innis’s staples theory, the Metropolis-Hinterland thesis of uneven development by McCann and Simmons (2000) and Doreen Massey’s Spatial Divisions of Labour theory (1995) comprise the theoretical basis for understanding the emergent grounded theory of adaptation in this study.
The challenge of uneven development for social assistance lies in urbanised policy assumptions that assign a universal standard for funding and practice directives to all areas of Ontario irrespective of varying demographics, local infrastructure and social services, and the capacity of local economies to generate sufficient resources. Northern regions which are generally economically and politically marginalised in relation to southern urban centres maintain a relationship with the natural environment that both contributes to natural resource dependence and creates conditions that make northern regions susceptible to exploitive relations with the urban south. Accordingly, the adoption of Harold Innis’s Staples theory and McCann’s and Simmons’s (2000) Heartland-Hinterland Framework provide the basis for understanding uneven development from the perspective of economically and politically marginalised natural resource dependent hinterlands. Additionally, the spatialised nature of these relations calls for a spatialised theoretical perspective that draws on political economy assumptions. For this reason, Massey’s (1995) division of labour theory and Young’s (2000) theoretical insights on class and marginalised workers demonstrate particular relevance to forging a theoretical understanding of the grounded theory of this study.

4.2 The Heartland-Hinterland Framework

Reflecting the centre-periphery, north-south forms of development that continue to pervade Canada’s economic landscape (Howlett, Netherton, and Ramesh, 1999; McCann and Gunn, 1998), the heartland-hinterland approach provides a useful framework to explain the progression, persistence, and consequences of uneven economic development within northern, rural and non-metropolitan contexts (see Markey et al., 2005). Particular strengths of the heartland-hinterland model include its recognition of unique factors and forces that play formative roles in determining the potential for economic growth in centre and
peripheral regions as well as its attention to the interrelational nature and unequal relations associated with heartland and hinterland systems. The model’s emphasis on explaining underlying processes and their roles in shaping relations of resource transfer and growth within and between centre and peripheral areas further demonstrates the strengths of this approach in understanding the phenomenon of uneven development. Drawing on staples theory in addition to a number of regional development theory concepts (i.e. factors influencing regional economic growth and decline such as transportation and the availability of labour), the heartland-hinterland approach recognises that Canada’s economic development as a staples economy reliant and dependent on trade with international export markets has led to Canada’s continued dependency on trade and limited industrial development (Markey, et al., 2005).

4.3 The Metropolitan-Hinterland Thesis of Uneven Development

Canadian heartlands and hinterlands exhibit uneven development through highly observable spatial patterns of regional growth disparities. Heartlands and hinterlands maintain distinctive features that characterize and shape their respective development trajectories. Heartlands are typically advantaged economically by way of their location in geographical areas where the location, quality of land, and nature of the climate and terrain easily accommodate opportunities for economic growth through the development of transportation infrastructure and market access. Heartlands maintain distinct advantages in terms of opportunities for growth. Following from the concept of circular and cumulative advantage, initial advantages enjoyed by heartlands such as favourable physical location and climate expand as these characteristics facilitate further growth by attracting new and
increased levels of investment capital, skilled labour, and technological innovations that result in yet further economic activity and sustained growth. This is evidenced by the agglomeration economies that characterise metropolitan heartlands by way of their diversified industries, high population densities with varying levels of human capital, a highly networked infrastructure of communities and services, and a corresponding ability to foster technological innovations and influence policy decisions (McCann and Gunn, 1998).

In contrast, hinterland regions are predominantly located in areas with harsh climatic conditions and terrain, and have dispersed and low population density, which in turn imposes barriers to economic development resulting in limited infrastructure, industry, and amenities. These factors reduce the attractiveness of hinterlands as potential sites for capital investment, growth and settlement resulting in an outcome largely responsible for fostering a perpetual cycle of underdevelopment and dependence on core regions. The corresponding lack of attractiveness of hinterlands to highly educated and skilled workers on account of limited labour market opportunities and amenities limits the areas’ ability to attract investment capital to expand (Slack et al., 2003).

In addition to differential economic advantages of hinterland and heartland regions attributed to locality factors, the heartland-hinterland model also recognises uneven centre-periphery development to be attributed at least in part to the interrelations between centre and peripheral regions. As McCann and Gunn (1998) indicate, the extent to which heartland-hinterland relations facilitate transfers of cultural, political and economic attributes or the degree of interrelations between centre and periphery regions determine the extent of equality or inequality and economic independence or dependence of regions. Power relations underlying heartland-hinterland relations are embedded within an exchange process in which
industrial core areas provide the factors of production to peripheries in exchange for staples commodities or raw natural resources. The combination of the various resources and investment capital advantages enjoyed by heartland regions places them in a dominant position to hinterland regions (McCann and Simmons, 2000). The dominance of core regions over peripheries has followed historical patterns of heartland-hinterland relations that reproduce disparities over time through circular and cumulative effects of privilege and disadvantage experienced by heartland and hinterland regions respectively (Brodie, 1989). As such, the hinterland role in the heartland-hinterland process is largely confined to the extraction of staples commodities to meet heartland demands resulting in exchanges that limit economic development of hinterland peripheries and foster continued dependence on metropolitan centres.

4.4 Staples Theory

Dependency concerns identified within the heartland-hinterland framework comprise foundational themes within staples theory. Originally developed by Canadian economic historian, Harold Innis in the 1930s, staples theory draws on dependency theory and seeks to explain the nature of uneven centre-periphery development by acknowledging the unique contextual nature of factors shaping Canada’s economic development from its nascent 16th century beginnings, as a ‘New World Economy’ with an immense natural resource base to its current highly debated state as a mature staples economy transitioning into a post-industrial era (McCann and Gunn, 1998). Established as an alternative to dominant liberal and socialist theories of political economy which were premised on the contextual realities of ‘mature’ economies of industrialized European nations, Innis developed staples theory as inductive approach to understanding Canada’s uneven economic development. Staples theory offers a
contextually grounded description of the successive nature in which resource staples were extracted and traded in foreign markets as a means of accumulating economic wealth. Several apprehensions about the limitations this approach posed to sustainable and stable, even economic development guided Innis’s staples theory.

Concerns regarding uneven economic development in terms of the fostering and maintenance of a dependency relationship on staples exports have received considerable attention through the work of staples theorists. This concern flows from a central premise within the staples perspective which holds that Canada’s reliance on the export of staples commodities as a principle means of economic wealth fosters a dependency relationship on foreign markets that has and continues to impede this country’s ability to attain economic self-sufficiency and (long-term) sustainability (Brodie, 1989; McCann and Gunn, 1998). Also recognized as the ‘staples trap’ by Mel Watkins, the cumulative consequences of Canada’s failure to engage in industrial development in favour of pursuing staples extraction has served to strengthen its dependency relationship on international markets at the expense of its own economic development (Brodie, 1989; McCann and Gunn, 1998). Perpetual engagement in the foreign trade of staples commodities as a primary economic base forms a basis for exchange between industrial cores (i.e. Europe/US) and resource peripheries such as Canada in which limited available resources of hinterland-peripheries are perpetually prioritised towards continued staples-resource production in exchange for manufactured goods. In turn, maintaining a dependence on industrialised nations for manufactured products rather than investing in domestic industries to produce manufactured products reinforces a cycle of dependence which prevents economic industrial development in other areas (i.e. manufacturing sector). Following this line of thought is the consequential limited
industrial and technological development that has resulted in Canada’s perpetual ‘industrial lag’ behind that of ‘fully’ developed industrialized nations.

While post-industrialists and post-staples theorists argue in favour of W.A. Mackintosh’s more optimistic perspective that Canada’s staples dependency represents a normal transitional phase in economic development and growth on the basis of Canada’s expansion in some manufacturing areas (Brodie, 1989; Clement, 1989), Innis’s more critical view of the limited development and ongoing dependence resulting from staples reliance maintains strong support by way of the Canadian economy’s persistent instability as evidenced by its continual subjection to the ‘boom and bust’ cycles indicative of fluctuations within international commodity markets (Brodie, 1989). Considering staples theory in the context of northern rural and non-metropolitan welfare reform provides important insight into the local economic context upon which contemporary work-first social assistance relies.

4.5 Uneven Development and Space

Despite inequalities inherent within the welfare system, it is the spatialised patterns produced through inequalities such as growing concentrations of poverty and income differentials between rich and poor, between developed and underdeveloped nation states, and between urban metropolitan centres and less developed peripheries, that especially characterise uneven development and that have contributed to the recent resurgence in interest. Renewed interest in the uneven development phenomenon also stems from its outgrowth as a product of macroeconomic-political forces. Economic globalisation, deindustrialization, regional decline, nation state restructuring, and the primacy of locales as the new centres for growth have demonstrated new processes that contribute to and maintain
socio-economic disparities through uneven development (Brenner, 2004). Consistent with the view that capitalism is fundamentally central to creating uneven development (Gough, Eisenschitz, and McCulloch, 2006; Lefebvre, 1991; Smith, 2008), it can be said that the aforementioned processes maintain different relationships with capital that contribute to uneven development in new ways. For example, economic globalisation’s intensification of economic integration between nations and its fostering of greater mobility of capital have resulted in the relocation of markets to more profitable locations (Hudson, 2001). Overcoming barriers of distance and permeating international borders through technology and trade agreements has enabled development to progress more rapidly than ever while also permitting decline to occur as quickly. Further, the accompanying rescaling of nation states has resulted in capital not only circulating at the nation state level but also directly attaching to specific locales and ‘place’ (Smith, 2008). Such processes maintain pre-existing uneven development through reinforcing centre-peripheral development patterns. These patterns perpetually disadvantage rural areas as they tend to demonstrate less agglomeration, less investment capital, and less stable forms of industry (McCann and Gunn, 1998).

### 4.6 Divisions of Labour

Divisions of labour demonstrate particular significance to uneven development as they not only identify labour force attachment status, but can determine social and class positions (Storper and Walker, 1989). Consequently, labour divisions maintain a particular relevance to welfare reform in terms of its emphasis on labour force participation. More specifically welfare reform discourse promotes the idea that labour force attachment for the poor will result in economic self-sufficiency suggesting that gaining work experience will result in upward economic and social mobility of the poor while considerable research has
found that welfare recipients transitioning off of welfare reform generally do not escape poverty (Arsneault, 2006; Lichter and Jenson, 2002; Lightman, Mitchell, and Heard, 2005b; Peck 2001). Doreen Massey’s (1984, 1995) seminal work exploring divisions of labour provides an understanding of some of the structural reasons underlying the limited success of the poor in transitioning from low-wage, low status work to more economically secure, better paying upwardly mobile positions within the labour market.

As Reed (2003) and Massey (1995) argue, labour divisions are path dependent, such that where one is situated in the division of labour shapes status beyond the workplace by way of opportunities, choices and tastes that stem from differences in income, academic achievement and social location. Defined straightforwardly as, “who works for whom, who does not work, how the context of work is defined, and how it defines one’s institutional position relative to others” (Reed, 2003, p. 44-45), divisions of labour fall along lines of gender, race, age, ability, and geographic location (Massey, 1984; Reed, 2003). Less favourable, lower status, lower waged positions are generally concentrated among more marginalised groups consisting of women, people of colour, the elderly or the young, those with an impairment, and those who reside in deteriorating urban areas and within more geographically isolated rural areas (Reed, 2003). This trend directly implicates welfare reform recipients who, while participating in the labour force as a condition to remain eligible and receive welfare benefits, may remain marginalized as a consequence of hegemony inherent within labour market structures.

Divisions of labour occur predominantly along class lines as reflected in the structures of dominance and subordination encompassed within capital and labour and corresponding to the control over labour assigned to each class. In this vein, the bourgeoisie
are defined as those who maintain control over capital in terms of the means of production via ownership (Massey, 1984). This class status affords control over decisions about investment as well as labour organisation and processes. Conversely, ‘labour’ represented by the working class is generally defined by the absence of control over labour processes and investment decisions since labourers do not own the means of production and thus do not influence or control processes of wealth accumulation. Aside from differential forms of labour assigned on the basis of class such as ‘white collar’ and ‘blue collar’ jobs, employment can be further subdivided within classes. Divisions of labour within the working class for example, are also divided in terms of ‘skilled’ and ‘unskilled workers,’ and irregular workers (Massey, 1995). This labour force stratification is evident within northern (rural and non-metropolitan) labour markets which tend to yield primarily ‘blue-collar’ jobs while the proportion of ‘white collar’ jobs tends to be more prevalent in southern (urban) labour markets (Markey, Halseth, and Manson, (2006); Markey et al., 2005).

In her analysis of oppression, Young (2000) acknowledges divisions of labour as maintaining a vital role in both shaping and reinforcing inequality. Young’s theorising, which reflects a class analysis position as a means of explicating ways employment can reinforce disadvantage and social location is highly congruent with the Marxist political economy analysis that underpins Massey’s (1995) work and with other seminal works that analyse capital’s contribution to uneven development (i.e., Brenner, 2004; Harvey, 2006; Hudson, 2001; Lefebvre, 1991) and inform this study’s analysis of implications for economically and socially marginalised northern workers. While more recent analyses of precarious work and implications of employment insecurity extending to white collar workers is informative, the decision to draw on Young’s (2000) work rests in its more direct
relevance to conditions of employment specific to the northern welfare recipient worker demographic (namely, low skilled, poorly educated, social excluded workers). In Young’s (2000) view, divisions of labour produce oppressive relations of marginalization, powerless, and exploitation by the nature of work that is ‘assigned’ to differently positioned groups. For example, middle class and working class distinctions are demonstrated within divisions of labour through the status assigned to ‘professional’ work as ‘mental work’ and ‘non-professional’ work as ‘manual labour’. While middle class work is most often associated with greater personal autonomy, recognition of individual accomplishments, and decision making power, working class labour typically involves very little autonomy and requires working under the authority and scrutiny of others.

Menial labour, which can be categorized as a form of working class labour comprised of low skilled, low paid work principally conducted by the poor represents a division of labour that further marginalizes (Young, 2000). Similar to manual labour, menial work permits little autonomy and decision-making and also serves to ‘prop up’ or increase the status of other more skilled positions which claim primary recognition for the work completed. This form of employment is believed to be particularly exploitive and marginalising by way of the demeaning, mundane forms of work it encompasses as well as the low status it reinforces and the limited upward mobility it permits (Young, 2000). As mobility in status is largely determined by the type of employment one obtains and the skills garnered from previous positions, workfare participants who are concentrated within menial labour face considerable barriers in ‘moving up the ladder’ to higher paying, higher status positions that require a set of skills that cannot be obtained through performing tasks associated with menial labour positions. In this way, status or social location is reinforced by
way of entrapment within the lower tier of the labour market. Despite the potential for low wage, low skill work to reinforce lower socio-economic status, welfare reform objectives remain premised on rapid labour force attachment in lieu of providing education and training that would support access to higher level, better paying employment and increased economic stability and security. Despite considerable research findings that underscore the ineffectiveness of welfare reform in eliminating welfare dependency and poverty (Lichter and Jenson, 2002; Lightman, Mitchell, and Herd, 2005a; Peck 2001), welfare reform pundits maintain its work-first approach based on the claim that labour market participation will foster upward mobility by providing access to progressively higher skilled, better paying work.

In addition to labour ‘assigned’ on the basis of class, divisions of labour maintain and reproduce the marginalised status of vulnerable groups through gender. By designating forms of labour and work-related tasks on the basis of gender, women’s employment options become limited to work that complies with stereotypical images of femininity such as caregiving positions which typically are poorly paid with limited benefits (Young, 2000). Additionally, the resulting lower status of women is maintained through many rural hiring practices that delineate low paying customer service or caregiving work to women while expressing preference for men to occupy higher paying manual labour positions (Kaweesi, Wagner, and O’Hara, 2007). Marginalisation based on racism, ageism, and ableism is maintained through discriminatory employment practices that limit or even prevent access to employment, higher status, better paying positions to Aboriginal peoples, visible minorities, the elderly, and those with disabilities (Reed, 2003; Young, 2000). Such practices which limit access to only the least favourable work opportunities reproduce conditions of uneven
development by reinforcing low wages, poor working conditions, and unstable employment among largely impoverished, marginalised groups. In this way, work-first participants entering the market predominantly as low-skilled, poor, women and minorities may face additional barriers to employment in terms of the predetermined nature of job paths reinforced through patterns of gender, class, and racial oppression.

Geographic location plays an influential role in shaping labour divisions. Economic location theories have confirmed that industrial location choices strongly influence not only the economic prospects of a geographic area, but also the forms of employment that are available locally. According to Massey (1984) different industries produce distinctly dissimilar employment opportunities and status for workers as relations of power are differentially embedded within labour processes and positions. While industries produce employment opportunities that correspond with levels of social status, geography - including local area attributes, strongly determines the type of industry and by extension, employment opportunities that will be attracted to or that can thrive in an area. McCann and Gunn (1998) argue that the resources within a geographic area can advance or decline its economic status as an area’s resources play a large role in attracting or repelling as well as building and maintaining investment. This phenomenon spatially manifests as polarised development with dramatically higher levels of capital investment, economic development, and job growth occurring in capital-rich, urban cores (heartlands) with by contrast, limited investment capital and largely unstable, limited economic development and employment within resource economies that typically characterise rural peripheral hinterlands (McCann and Simmons, 2000). Polarised patterns of development identified within centre-periphery models (Friedmann, 1972) explain uneven development as resulting from exploitive relations
between centres and peripheries leading to insights about how these patterns translate into uneven labour processes and labour divisions.

In the case of Canadian resource economies that are highly reliant on raw staples, divisions of labour correspond with spatial patterns of resource development. Staples theorists acknowledge these patterns by recognizing the historical link between Canadian economic development and geographic areas that contain natural resources (e.g. fish, timber, minerals) or the agricultural capacity to develop staples (e.g. wheat) as well as the different modes of development, the segmentation of labour markets and employment opportunities that occur with each successive wave of staples extraction (Phillips, 1998). Accordingly, as staples economies are generally located in geographic peripheries and are semi-industrial by nature (Watkins, 1989), there exists major divisions in labour and geography between the primarily manual labour completed within rural hinterland resource economies and the more advanced manufacturing, technological, and ‘professional’ management positions that comprise labour within supervising urban heartland economies (Massey, 1995). This position is partially supported by Stedman, Parkins, and Beckley (2004) in their analysis of Statistics Canada data that examined the relationship between resource dependence and community well-being and revealed that income was both positively and negatively associated with resource dependence. While there was some variation in income found depending on the location of a particular type of industry (i.e. reliance on the forest sector provided less income in the central region of Canada while providing greater wealth in British Columbia), some industries such as mining and energy were found to be consistently more lucrative than fishing and agriculture.
Divisions of labour between northern rural and non-metropolitan and southern urban metropolitan areas are reinforced through the increasingly limited range, wage, and variety of employment opportunities available within northern areas as a consequence of reductions in manufacturing jobs, the international relocation of resource industry jobs, and a dramatic increase in service sector employment in comparison to more urban areas where despite experiencing job reductions, there remains a wider range of job options (Halseth and Ryser, 2006). The deteriorating secondary labour market places northern rural and non-metropolitan areas further behind their urban counterparts in terms of wages and status obtained from employment (Gibbs and Cromartie, 2000). While geography or ‘place’ remains a highly influential factor in uneven development and within divisions of labour, there has been substantial criticism towards analyses that predominantly focus on geographical factors as this approach risks overemphasizing the importance of geography to the detriment of other contributing factors and related processes. Staples theory, with its analytic focus that attributes economic growth and decline to environmental factors has been criticised for this oversight (Brodie, 1989; Massey, 1984; Watkins, 1989).

As a means of extending the divisions of labour and uneven development analysis beyond geographical attributes or ‘place’, Doreen Massey (1995) argues for broader considerations of labour that consider place, social relations of production, power, and space. Massey, a human geographer by profession, adopts a spatialised geographical focus within a Marxist perspective to understand the spatialised role that the social relations of production play in shaping industrial divisions of labour at different scales. Accordingly, Massey’s analysis entitled, *Spatial Divisions of Labour* (1984; 1995) is regarded as one of the most insightful and valuable analyses of employment and production (Callard, 2004; Peck, 1996).
and provides many key insights which can be used to understand uneven development within northern rural and non-metropolitan contexts. Massey’s (1984, 1995) analysis is particularly germane to rural and non-metropolitan peripheries as she considers the unique labour divisions, production processes and outcomes that occur within diverse industries and at different scales\(^\text{10}\). Natural resource-based industries and hinterlands demonstrate distinctly different types of industry, economic development processes, and labour issues from heartland or core economies (Phillips, 1998), making Massey’s distinctions particularly relevant.

Further relevance of Massey’s work to northern rural and non-metropolitan areas is grounded in her position which advocates for considering structural explanations over individual ones. This position reflects the major theme within Massey’s theorising that phenomena can only be understood outside of the broader socioeconomic spatialised structures and processes in which they occur. Considering structural influences enables the analysis to extend beyond the more common practice of relegating the causes of particular problems such as unemployment onto the characteristics of a particular place or locale (i.e. believing decline within rural areas is the result of rural areas themselves) (Callard, 2004; Gough et al., 2006). Similar to attributing responsibility for poverty to the fault of the individual or the poor generally rather than considering structural explanations (Cotter, 2002), rural communities and populations experience this challenge in the derogatory ways they are often constructed as ‘backward’ or deficient in comparison to urban areas (Start, 2001). Privileging the individual perspective conceals underlying structural relations

\(^\text{10}\) The significance of considering the local scale is also reflected in the understanding that contrasts associated with spatially uneven development become greater as the scale of analysis becomes smaller (Gough et al., 2006:61).
responsible for the lagging economic activity in rural areas by attributing the problem to deficiencies within rural and non-metropolitan settings rather than to the exploitive heartland-hinterland relations that persistently economically disadvantage hinterlands (McCann and Gunn, 1998). This perspective also challenges the overuse or privileging of geographic patterns (numerical distributions of phenomena observed within an area) potentially leading to oversights in the absence of considering broader factors (Massey, 1995). Extending the analysis beyond location factors in explaining uneven development is encouraged through the consideration of other factors, namely structural explanations including global economic decline and state responses to changing global economic conditions and institutional arrangements (Massey, 1995).

Accordingly, Massey further argues that understanding uneven development must go beyond considering locational characteristics as primary causes. Broader factors such as industrial demands, national pressures, and/or international economic activities or crises might be attributed to changes impacting communities that are beyond their ability to mediate or control. This phenomenon is believed to be occurring within a number of single resource-based rural communities which are increasingly governed by larger scale social, economic, and political processes effectively excluding decision making or control over industry decisions at the local scale/level (Markey et al., 2005). Also highly relevant to rural and northern resource-based economies is Massey’s argument that industrial location decisions are determined not primarily by the decisions of management, but rather by the ‘broader social processes’ that exist within and beyond local industries (Massey, 1984).

Acknowledging broader contextual issues demonstrates the central importance of the social relations of production in understanding the continuing conflict between capital and
labour and the relationship capital has to uneven development (Massey, 1995). Considering the relationship between capital and labour within a spatial context is vital to understanding uneven development because larger global economic influences are spatial in nature and spatial divisions of labour are inextricably linked to capitalist structures. The nature of capitalism itself has been routinely argued to be the principle culprit in fostering relations that produce and sustain uneven development through its contradictory social, economic, and political processes that do not favour all geographical areas equally (Brenner, 2004; Smith, 2008). Largely accomplished through the greater mobility of capital, capitalism’s agenda to increase profit creates economic disparities as it moves with greater intensity and fewer barriers because of its ability to access less expensive, more flexible labour markets for investment and development (Storper and Walker, 1989). This process exaggerates uneven development through capital’s ability to be increasingly selective in its location decisions and its ability to suppress costs by accessing large low-skilled labour markets. Labour has become increasingly disadvantaged in this context through its continual displacement from being inadequately mobile to capture capital investment opportunities and from its redundancy in the face of new technological development (Gough et al., 2006).

Stemming from the consideration of capitalist structures is the associated issue of class. An important aspect of Massey’s theorising is the attention she gives to examining class influences on the spatial divisions of labour. In her view, class divisions are created and reinforced from uneven flows of capital governed through capitalist processes. Consequently, uneven opportunities provided through capitalism account for power relations that are embedded within the types of work offered to, and differentially completed by, specific populations in specific regions. In turn, spatial divisions of labour are influenced
and shaped by societal definitions of skill that categorise certain jobs as characteristic of
certain types of people. Similar to employers taking advantage of the fragmented nature of
Canada’s early labour market (Phillips, 1998), Massey (1995) also argues that industries
make strategic use of these differences ranging from regional variances to those associated
with gender, racial, and class divides. This argument is further supported within staples
theory literature that documents historical divisions within Canada’s labour market occurring
with each new wave of immigrants that coincided with the production of different staples
(Phillips, 1998). Employers were believed to have strategically exploited racial and gender
differences during the period taking advantage of the fragmented nature of the immigrant
labour force by intensifying pre-existing divisions (Phillips, 1998). The trend can be
understood today in terms of how capital takes advantage of weakened labour through its
capacity to locate progressively cheaper labour markets because of greater disorganization
within the labour force. This is occurring as a consequence of the growing precariousness
and ‘flexibility of work’; and as a result of neoliberal success at administering attacks on
unions through discouraging labour organisation and discrediting union competence to
protect workers (Hudson, 2001; Peck, 2001).

In Massey’s (1995) view, differences in industries also contribute to subsequent
divisions which further demonstrate stratified advantages and disadvantages within the
labour force. These divisions are influenced not only by industry location but are driven by
unequal relations of capital and labour. Differences in labour processes and industry
location, for example, can determine divisions in terms of lesser and greater status. Massey
uses the example of industries that produce means of production as those attaining higher
status than other industries that produce commodities perceived to be of lesser value or lower
status. In this way divisions of labour reflect differential advantages and disadvantages inherent within the labour process and capital production structures and processes. These divisions are thought to determine a number of outcomes for industry including the ability to manage or mitigate rapidly changing economic conditions at the global scale.

Divisions of labour are linked to phases in the growth process. Drawing on the phases of industrial development advanced by Aglietta (1979), Massey (1995) asserts that divisions of labour occur within production from the second stage of ‘machinofacture.’ ‘Machinofacture’ is defined as the mechanization of the labour process involving infrastructure development, with increasing divisions occurring throughout the remaining phases. This includes Fordist mass production with its fragmentation of labour tasks and neo-Fordism that are characterized by further ‘separation of control and parts of the production process’, job fragmentation and deskillling (Massey, 1995: 23-4). Massey attributes the occurrence of labour divisions to the varying ways through which capital and labour become organized within the production process as a consequence of unique relations associated with specific places over specific periods. In this way, labour processes develop in conjunction with industrial location decisions and economic development which are all inherited from previous processes. Also important are the divisions of labour that accompany differential technical and manufacturing roles between parent operations and branch plants or between branch plants. These divisions can be assigned based on differing stages in the production process or to different regions or workers. Divisions of labour follow the ways in which operations are separated and organised through the spatial organisation of production.

Adopting Marxist ideas and Henri Lefebvre’s (1991) spatial theorising, Massey acknowledges uneven development as occurring through spatial relations inherent within
capital’s increased mobility and seeks to explain underlying causes of changes of industrial and employment opportunities within the broader context of spatialised capitalist relations. This approach is applied in her analysis in which she adopts a number of considerations critical to understanding the spatialised nature of industry location, employment patterns and production. Extending understandings of labour beyond the two-dimensional analyses of conventional practices of interpreting employment as numerical distributions on a surface, Massey (1995) argues for additional focus on the geography of employment in terms of the spatial social relations of production on which it is based. Premised on assumptions that the ‘social is inextricably spatial’ (p.65), Massey (1995) recognises that “geographic patterns are the outcome of socioeconomic processes that operate over space” (p.65) which, in turn, determine that “the spatial distribution of employment, therefore, can be interpreted as the outcome of the way in which [the relations of] production [are] organized over space” (p. 65).

Interrelationships signify an integral part of Massey’s conceptualisation of space. The capacity of space to be shaped or influenced by social processes implies that it is connected to these processes that in turn, produce new spaces. Because processes are influenced by other factors, they do not occur in isolation (Massey, 1984). This view is supported within structural social work (Mullaly, 1997) and the anti-oppressive practice paradigm which understand disadvantage or oppression to occur as a result of not only a number of individual factors but through the ways in which these factors intersect and by so doing, intensify their repressive effects (AWID, 2004; Bograd, 1999; Mullaly, 2002). The implications of identifying individual factors that influence an issue such as accessibility barriers to labour force participation for rural workfare participants, lie in the risk of focusing on the
contributing factors in isolation; thereby overlooking the nature and intensity of accessibility barriers that result through their intersections. The ways in which divisions of labour are embedded within differing power relations that reflect varying status attached to different types of work, the dissimilar skills and educational levels of workers, and the locations where differential production functions take place, also demonstrate their interrelatedness. Using an interrelated approach permits the consideration of a multitude of relations (e.g. power, dominance, privilege and disadvantage). This approach fosters consideration of ways in which change in one region or area within a region impacts or influences changes in others.

Adopting Henri Lefebvre’s (1991) theorising of space as historical and relational, Massey explains the phenomenon of divisions of labour as predicated upon previous layers and periods of development activity. Within this perspective, new patterns of labour are formed through previous relations of production and previously distinct ways in which investment, development and accumulation have differentially occurred in individual geographical places over historical periods. These differential developments are ultimately linked to the historical developments occurring within capital. As Massey (1995) argues, “[f]undamental relations of capitalism developed historically under very different conditions and in each case, therefore, they took on different forms” (Massey, 1995, p.16). In turn, these new forms result in varying geographic patterns and economic and employment conditions across areas and continents. Subsequent relations between regions are shaped through these developments (Massey, 1995). This phenomenon characterises Canadian economic development in which different modes of production, processing and labour markets accompanied each successive wave of staple extraction and production (Howlett et al., 1999). In the context of space, conceptualised as both historical and relational, uneven
development can be understood as influencing economic structure by way of previous successive layers of investment and development that in turn form new forms of investment and development that shape both labour and place.

Consequently, place becomes an important consideration in understanding uneven development. In Massey’s spatial analysis, individual geographies or places shape processes between capital and labour differently, thereby producing varying responses and outcomes that account for the heterogeneity of rural areas irrespective of their shared resource-based or community circumstances. From a spatial perspective, it is understood that places are determined through previous developments and as such, are founded on previous uneven or unequal relations (Massey, 1995). Hence, conditions of disadvantage or inequality are reproduced in new forms with each additional layer of development or division of labour. Lefebvre (1991) further adds to this point by recognizing that places are embedded within wider spatial structures, are part of broader spatial divisions of labour and each locality brings its own specific history and its character to new rounds of development. Therefore, while places are influenced by and shaped by historical processes and events, it is important to note that places are also shaped by contemporary forces. Accordingly, places are considered to represent the local economies in which they are situated but also remain influenced by the larger social contexts of which they are part (Lefebvre, 1991). Positions that recognise place as an important consideration in spatial inequality because they are determined by the current location decisions of firms and households (Kim, 2008) hold true, but are incomplete. Lefebvre’s position marks a particularly important consideration for understanding uneven development within northern rural and non-metropolitan settings since these areas are often at the mercy of larger scale forces such as international trade relations.
that drive the largely extraction and export-oriented economies in Canada’s northern rural and nonmetropolitan locales.

4.6.1 The Significance of Branch Plants

The branch plant economy, exceedingly prevalent in northern rural and non-metropolitan Canada (Clarkson, 1972; McCann and Gunn, 1998), is discussed by Massey (1995) as another example of how broader influences shape the local economy and the ways in which relationships are hegemonic. This analysis is helpful to understand Canadian resource economies in which the high rate of foreign ownership of Canadian industries has resulted in a growing number of branch plants that comprise the Canadian industrial sector and many local economies (Cameron, 2004; Howlett et al., 1999, Williams, 1998). Such work is critical to developing a solid understanding of the broader forces that shape northern rural and nonmetropolitan economies and the labour force options for welfare recipients transitioning into the labour force. The prevalence of branch plants in Canada’s northern economy suggests unique challenges for welfare workers and welfare recipients that are grounded in local contexts and that continue to be largely overlooked within welfare reform policy and programming. Labour divisions maintained and reinforced through branch plant development and operation are an important consideration for welfare reform policy and programming within northern rural and nonmetropolitan areas since the resulting local labour conditions directly impact the type, nature, and quality of labour force opportunities available to welfare recipients. This section discusses the significance of branch plants in the context of uneven development in an effort to consider the implications for the stability of local northern rural and nonmetropolitan economies and opportunities for welfare recipients who...
are faced with navigating the constraints of these economies in order to transition from welfare to the labour force.

Branch plants, which are smaller branches or subsidiaries of larger operations most often located in different countries than the parent company, are subject to external (typically foreign) ownership and control that imposes unevenness observed through local development patterns, and hierarchies that reinforce power structures (Massey, 1995). The lack of external control becomes a primary issue that has significant implications for local accumulation and investment processes.

The spatial organisation of production which includes the ways in which branch plant functions are divided either as centralised functions within the parent company or diffused throughout a variety of areas, plays a key role in determining hierarchical or power relations and local characteristics (Massey, 1995). According to Massey (1995), the structure of branch plants leaves them (the sole local industry in some cases) highly vulnerable to external forces that not only include increasingly volatile global markets, but also the effects of having a smaller, fragmented version of the parent company. Massey (1995) notes the impacts from this on local economic development as challenges associated with ‘lower local multipliers’ that tend to limit capacity for local growth from not having the advantage of the momentum a full company compliment can provide.

Other implications for uneven development stem from the systemic hierarchies inherent within the structures of branch plant economies. In Massey’s discussion of ‘the branch plant problem’, she identifies power differences as arising from the spatial organisation of production manifesting as hierarchies that connect plants and the distinct locations that house them. Branch plants provide an excellent example of the ways
hierarchies reflect operational and organisational structures that in turn, foster power differences. Power differences are reinforced through the differential status and authority that exists between headquarter offices that are primarily comprised of ‘professional’ management positions (that maintain authority over other positions) and the lower-skilled workers who fulfill labour functions that predominate within decentralized branches. This pattern is well established in Canadian northern rural and non-metropolitan economies where local industries and local services are often heartland-operated and increasingly foreign-owned. Some examples include the De Beers diamond mining in the Northwest Territories that maintains headquarters in Toronto through its Canadian operation (De Beers Canada, n.d.) as well as the foreign ownership of Vale Ltd. (previously Inco Ltd.), one of the world’s largest nickel mining operations located in Sudbury, Ontario that is now under Brazilian control of the Companhia Vale do Rio Doce (Louiseize, 2006). Such arrangements concentrate greater capital, technical expertise and policy decision within urban centres and foreign countries reinforcing a cycle of peripheral development within Canada’s northern rural and non-metropolitan areas. Hence, resulting constraints on local control over economic processes from the branch plant phenomenon pose distinct challenges for northern rural and nonmetropolitan economies and the residents. Limited local control over economic decisions has been a recurrent challenge for northern rural and nonmetropolitan residents subjecting them to volatile economic conditions and economic insecurity (Markey, Manson, and Halseth, 2007). Rural welfare recipients, who typically possess lower levels of human capital than other groups (Pindus, 2001) may face greater adversity in seeking labour force attachment within this form of economy. The unique challenges for rural welfare recipients that result from branch plant economies must therefore be fully recognised and considered if
welfare reform policy and programming is to serve an effective role in facilitating economic self-sufficiency of welfare recipients that lifts them out of poverty.

### 4.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed several theoretical perspectives to explain the construct of uneven development as it applies to northern Ontario economic, social and political conditions. Harold Innis’s staples theory and Doreen Massey’s spatial theorization of labour provided Canadian political economy and capitalist accumulation perspectives on uneven development respectively (Brodie, 1989) that attribute uneven development to historical and social relations within capitalism. Both perspectives recognise the ability of capitalism to shape and reshape geographic and economic landscapes that in turn determine the nature of economic and labour opportunities for communities. Innis’s staples theory offers a major contribution to understanding Canadian economic development and dynamics through its emphasis on geography and its recognition of the successive exploitation of role raw staples that have historically played in Canada’s phases of economic development. Meanwhile, Massey’s attention to regional development in terms of how specific place-based natural attributes and the activities of community residents influence economic activity provides an understanding of uneven development. Moreover, Massey’s focus on understanding power relations within structures and dynamics of employment by way of the branch plant phenomenon provides a helpful foundation from which to gain insight into labour markets and economic conditions in northern Ontario. The hinterland-heartland framework and the metropolis-Hinterland thesis, which attribute economic development challenges within peripheries (i.e. underdevelopment) to the more prosperous centres (Brodie, 1989), provide partial insight into the economic power relations between peripheries and centres that have
the potential to influence economic prospects in northern peripheries. Considered together, these theoretical perspectives provide diverse explanations for uneven development that help to explain the range of factors that contribute to and shape uneven and underdevelopment in northern communities.
Chapter Five:  
An Overview of the Research Process

5.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter provides an overview of the grounded theory research process that led to the development of the major and minor categories, in this study. Consistent with Charmaz’s (2006) constructivist grounded theory method, this study began with the development of the research problem and initial research questions and continued with initial and focused coding, theoretical sampling, and the writing of drafts of the grounded theory manuscript. Memo writing was completed throughout the process to develop the analysis while theoretical sorting was conducted to compare, sort, and integrate the memos that formed the basis for the first and subsequent drafts of the grounded theory. As noted in the methodology chapter, some modifications were made to the grounded theory process in order to accommodate northern contextual factors related to population size and dispersion, geographic distance and terrain, and climatic conditions.

5.1.1 The Research Problem and Research Questions

The research problem and questions originated from my area of professional interest and from insights gained through feedback from northern Ontario Works managers obtained during an information session at the onset of the study. The feedback received from this session focused generally on the types of barriers encountered by Ontario Works program
deliverers in their efforts to facilitate the transition of welfare recipients from social assistance to employment. Speaking in an open meeting, most managers discussed Ontario Works program delivery challenges that were associated with the availability and accessing of resources, and various limitations of the local infrastructure (i.e. lack of transportation). Varying degrees of frustration were voiced regarding constraints on local decision making and funding allocations determined by the provincial centralised welfare authority in Toronto. These perspectives and insights formed the basis for the study’s research questions and the development of the opening interview questions (see Appendix E, interview guide). The research process is depicted in Figure 2.0 below.
5.1.2 The Interview

Interviews were conducted with research participants who self-identified as Ontario Works program deliverers, who resided and worked in northern Ontario and who gave informed consent to participate in the study. The interviews were comprised of broad questions that became refined as the data collection and theoretical sampling progressed. Initial questions marked the ‘starting point for [the] analysis’ which explored research
participants’ perspectives on how they conceptualised social assistance in their respective northern contexts. Early interview conversations explored their perceptions concerning the local context and the nature and scope of the challenges as well as opportunities they encountered in the delivery of social assistance to northern welfare recipients. Particular attention was paid to the types of issues and events identified as well as the meanings participants attached to these issues and events as a means to focus future interview questions and direct future sampling (re: theoretical sampling). Subsequent interviews featured probing questions that served to ‘fill out’ and refine emergent categories and further develop the analysis. These questions focused on expanding codes that I identified as potential categories. In particular, they examined how research participants navigated specific challenges and engaged in processes associated with managing multiple roles, making do with insufficient resources, determining and employing strategies for working alone, supporting clients, ensuring policy compliance, and addressing associated feelings of isolation and frustration which spoke to resource deficits in relation to the low human capital of welfare recipients, residualism within the welfare system, and the limited availability of community and welfare system supports to foster labour market attachment of clients. Questions that followed initial questions were primarily structured as open-ended with probes encouraging participants to provide more explicit details of their experiences. Such practices served to fulfil the principal aim of obtaining ‘rich data’ (Charmaz, 2006). An interview guide reflecting Charmaz’s (2006) recommended practice for grounded theory researchers was used to convey the questions. While working to avoid what Glaser (1988) (cited in Charmaz, 2006) cautioned as the potential for forcing data when using interview guides, the interview guide comprised open-ended broad questions encompassing several key
areas of Social Assistance program implementation in the north including the roles and responsibilities of *Ontario Works* deliverers, their expectations and perceptions of welfare recipients, and their understandings of the policies they implement. This format enabled the researcher to add probes as necessary and take advantage of opportunities to pursue analytical directions as they arose in the interviews. The use of probes alongside more standard interview questions was a strategy adopted in this study to accommodate requirements by *Ontario Works* administrators to view and approve the interview questions in advance of the interviews while enabling me to effectively employ the constant comparative method of data collection and analysis required within grounded theory research. As questions were refined, *Ontario Works* administrators and interviewees were presented with the set of standard interview questions that provided the basic pillars for the interviews. Probes were added as a means of refining the ‘standard’ questions to enable me to pursue distinct directions of data collection and sampling and to promote open communication between the researcher and research. They were loosely structured within interview guide as semi-structured questions to foster conversational interviews.

Emphasis on developing rapport with research participants remained a strong focus throughout the data collection to promote the collection of ‘rich data.’ Minimising distrust of strangers or ‘outsiders’ remained a key objective throughout the interviews due to the prevalence of trust issues in smaller communities (Miller, 2007). The potential for mistrust to limit access to research participants and impede data quality was a significant concern. Consequently, focus was maintained on building trust through establishing rapport with research participants throughout the interview process. As recognised by researchers (Tondu et al., 2014), building trust with research participants in northern settings through
demonstrating a genuine interest in the local culture is essential to fostering an exchange of knowledge. Glaser and Strauss (1967) further identify the importance of establishing rapport as a means of obtaining access to data through subsequent interviews (cited in Charmaz, 2006). The interview style remained informal (conversational) while I demonstrated an ‘insider knowledge’ of northern communities and culture resulting from being a northerner by birth and from over three decades of living and/or working in northern communities in Ontario and British Columbia. As a social work practitioner for many years, I was also able to demonstrate knowledge of social work practice and social assistance that was respected among Ontario Works program front line workers and managers who were engaged in a shift towards the adoption of helping skills in their employment support work with welfare recipients. Many research participants expressed an appreciation of my background and engagement skills. Feedback from participants confirmed that my northern identity and social work background helped them to feel comfortable and respected. The corresponding trust that I was able to build within a short period of time led many research participants to regard me as less of an outsider and more of an ally for northern perspectives on social assistance policy. Although it was hoped that the development of rapport would support ongoing contact following the study to enable follow up on interviews as needed, with the exception of three instances in which follow up calls were arranged in-person while I was on-site, telephone messages that I left research participants to follow up on interview conversations were not returned. I left eight unreturned messages for participants.

5.1.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Data for this study were gathered primarily through intensive, semi-structured interviews. Consistent with grounded theory research, the constant comparative analysis
method was used to inductively reduce data during the coding process to reveal emergent analyses (Fram, 2013). Throughout this process, data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously as data were compared with data categories and events to permit the emergence of [general and] core categories (Charmaz, 2001; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987 cited in Fram, 2013) and processes (Charmaz, 2006). This method requires that initial data collection and analysis direct further data collection through decisions made by the researcher about which aspects of the phenomenon to explore and which to leave behind in the ongoing analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). I completed this process through a modified approach that enabled me to conduct the research interviews and analysis within the confines of restricted access to research participants due to their workloads as well as other northern factors including lengthy distances and harsh climatic conditions encountered when travelling to and between interview sites. Modifications made to accommodate data collection within northern communities while maintaining the integrity of the constant comparative method included condensing the interviewing, transcribing, coding and preliminary data analysis processes while conducting on-site interviews. Interviews were arranged several weeks in advance of my on-site visits to accommodate the work schedules of participants and to ensure a sufficient sample was secured upon my arrival at the interview sites. Interview sites consisted of local Ontario Works program offices in which the OW manager permitted the staff to participate in the study. The initial purposive sample was obtained through Ontario Works deliverers’ identifying their interests in participating in the study to the local contact (an OW manager or supervisor) or directly to me in response to an information sheet/flyer (See Appendix A and B) that I arranged to have distributed to participating northern Ontario Works offices. Theoretical sampling which is used to refine
categories within the emergent theory (Charmaz, 2006) was primarily conducted by selectively interviewing *Ontario Works* program deliverers with a focus on gaining responses to specific questions that arose in previous interviews. Sites comprised of *Ontario Works* deliverers who maintained generalized responsibilities enabled me to explore data comparisons that were not as easily attained in locations where a more ‘specialised worker’ delivery structure was adopted. Conversely, I reserved interview questions intended to explore events and processes associated with specialised program deliverer roles for *Ontario Works* sites that adopted a more centralised delivery structure.

Data were collected from interviews conducted over two periods in 2007 and 2009 which were arranged in accordance with geographic location and seasonal periods. Interviews conducted at *Ontario Works* offices located in the far northwestern part of the province involved air and road travel while *Ontario Works* offices sites located in the more southern aspects of northern Ontario were accessed by driving. Therefore, interviews were arranged at the sites sequentially to allow sufficient driving time between the sites. The distance of several sites (from Toronto where I resided) required me to travel to a northern centre by air and drive several hundred kilometers over a 7 to 10 day period to the sites before making my way back to the larger center at the end of the interview cycle. Although the proximity of the other sites permitted me to drive rather than fly, the sites nevertheless were several hundred kilometers from Toronto. This distance required the arrangement of an interview schedule prior to my arrival to enable me to access research participants at multiple sites over a period of several days.

Consequently, the need to cluster the interviews due to northern geographies did not permit me with sufficient time to transcribe the interviews and complete the recommended
line-by-line analysis (see Charmaz, 2006). To address these constraints, I reviewed the recorded interviews and completed preliminary memos and field notes following the interviews. Field notes consisted of my thoughts and impressions of the *Ontario Works* office structure and its physical design or layout (i.e. physical layout of the client waiting room, whether Plexiglas or other physical barriers were installed where points of client-worker interaction occurred) as well as descriptions of locational attributes (i.e. proximity of industry and local resources to neighbourhoods/settlements). Preliminary coding and memo writing were completed while reviewing the recorded interviews in order to assist in identifying potential categories. This process enabled me to consider what was occurring in the data and determine directions for further data collection (Charmaz, 2006) that I employed the following day. Transcriptions, coding, and the writing of early and advanced memos were fully completed upon my return home. The analysis generated through this process was then used to direct the second period of data collection and analysis that occurred during the fall of 2009.

In accordance with constructivist grounded theory guidelines developed by Kathy Charmaz (2000; 2006), initial and focused coding was completed to develop the analysis. As noted by Charmaz (2006), grounded theory coding is essential to explaining the data (i.e. understanding participants’ perspectives) and developing emergent theory. Initial coding which marks the first phase of organizing and understanding the data was conducted with an aim to gain a “close reading of the data” (Charmaz, 2006, pp.47-48). More specifically, initial coding focused on identifying and defining actions consistent with the issues and events identified and described by participants. Accordingly, gerunds (i.e. verbs that act as nouns) were used to better identify actions described by research participants and to identify
sequences of these activities which help to reveal processes. Initial codes spanned a myriad of subject areas including struggles to obtaining necessary services and supports, managing heavy workloads, adhering to policy, and moving welfare recipients off assistance. Some of the more prominent (most frequently occurring) initial codes included, ‘foreseeing problems’ ‘building human capital’, ‘courting employers’, ‘applying pressure to clients’, ‘imposing authority’, ‘working alone’, ‘performing multiple roles,’ ‘wearing many hats’, ‘making a case for resource requests’, ‘feeling unprepared or underqualified’, ‘being controlled’, ‘having to ask permission’, ‘making use of what is available’, ‘anticipating problems’, and ‘witnessing hardship’.

In addition to identifying initial codes from the data, early memo writing was completed to develop ideas about what was potentially happening in the data and to explore codes that I believed showed the most promise for demonstrating what was occurring in the data and that could become potential categories (Charmaz, 2006). While coding, questions arose for me concerning gaps in the data that served as a common subject in my memos and as a guide for my future data collection. Two major questions I noted during the initial coding phase concerned factors that dramatically shaped the program implementation experiences of northern Ontario Works program deliverers. Specifically, ‘How do northern Ontario Works program deliverers perceive challenges associated with resource deficits that originate within the northern context and those that result from a residual welfare system?’ and ‘What factors or influences play a key role in the “success” of welfare recipients in northern Ontario?’ became early questions from which many subsequent interview questions were developed. Many of my early memos reflected my efforts to understand which factors contributed to the resource deficiencies discussed by northern Ontario Works program
deliverers, how program deliverers perceived these issues as influencing program outcomes, and which processes were related to the resource deficiencies that program deliverers often discussed.

My progression to the focused coding phase involved revisiting initial codes and identifying those that were most significant. I determined the focused codes by selecting the initial codes that occurred most frequently in the data and that I deemed to best fit the data. This process led to sorting large segments of interview data by aggregating several initial codes to form focused codes. The example below demonstrates the process I undertook collapsing several initial codes into a broader focused code. In total, my study included 187 focused codes that were narrowed down from 352 initial codes.

**Figure 3.0: An Example of Initial Coding to Focused Coding**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Codes</th>
<th>Focused Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performing multiple roles</td>
<td>Managing multiple demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juggling reporting and caring responsibilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wearing many hats</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling overwhelmed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping good [detailed] records</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trying to keep remote offices open</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locating resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Advanced memo writing was completed in conjunction with focused coding and included efforts on my part to better understand the properties of emerging categories and identify sequences of events and processes that presented from the codes and categories. In particular, I worked on comparing data to codes and codes to codes and codes to categories from earlier and later interviews which served to aid in identifying relationships between
codes and categories. Making comparisons and identifying properties helped me to determine analytic merit by raising prominent codes to categories and by exploring relationships between them. Key theoretical categories that emerged at this stage included, ‘creating bureaucratic culture’, ‘creating compliance and being compliant’, ‘being efficient’, ‘exercising power’ and ‘experiencing scarcity’. These theoretical categories represent a refining and narrowing of lesser categories (see Fig.3.0). Consistent with focused coding, I based my decisions to raise specific codes to categories and others to theoretical categories by determining their analytic strength. Similar to the example above in Figure 3.0 the development of theorising concepts relies on subsuming categories (Charmaz, 2006).

Focused coding and advanced memo writing led to the identification of gaps in my data which necessitated theoretical sampling as a means to obtain data to address gaps and ‘fill’ categories. Properties of the categories were developed through theoretical sampling until ‘no new properties emerged’ (Charmaz, 2006). More specifically, I asked selected participants using specific probing questions that corresponded with the identified gaps in the data until there were no new ideas about the issue were identified. When proceeding with the theoretical integration of my categories, I elected to use theoretical coding rather than axial coding to enable me to extend the analysis of the codes I selected in the focused coding process. Using theoretical coding permitted me to keep my theoretical analysis consistent by specifying the relationships between theoretical categories that emerged during focused coding (Charmaz, 2006). According to Charmaz (2006), theoretical coding affords researchers a theoretical integration format that precludes problems associated with the pre-established analytical frames; namely, problems that restrict code construction found in axial coding.
Consistent with Charmaz’s (2006) approach, I developed minor (sub) categories of major categories that emerged from the process of theoretical sampling, advanced memo writing and theoretical sorting. I then explicated the links between the minor and major categories. I accomplished this by identifying, specifying and refining linkages between minor and major categories that emerged in my study and by fostering theoretical integration of these links through sorting, comparing, and integrating my memos. In addition to using NVivo software to input my interview transcripts, identify emerging codes and categories, I created, titled, and sorted my memos by assigning them to a corresponding category. I labelled envelopes with category titles and placed memos that corresponded with the categories into the respective envelopes. I then proceeded to arrange the envelopes in a manner that illustrated a process based on the three major theoretical and categorical processes that emerged in my study: building and maintaining controls, enduring constraints, and navigating incongruences. I reviewed all of the codes and categories associated with each of the emergent major theoretical categories/processes in preparation for the writing of the full draft. Due to challenges I encountered diagramming my data using the NVivo program, I diagrammed linkages between minor and major categories by hand and created a legend to illustrate the type of relationships between categories of interest to the analysis (i.e. arrows to represent the direction of relationships, bold lines to represent strong relationships, think lines to represent weak relationships, while hyphenated lines represented tenuous relationships). I diagrammed various possibilities for linking the categories and referred to and revised these diagrams during the writing of the draft. This process provided me with a means of organising the material that permitted me to easily integrate memos and affiliated categories into the analysis.
5.1.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlines the research process that was undertaken to collect, code, and analyse the data. Using constructivist grounded theory, semi-structured intensive interviews were conducted with northern Ontario Works program deliverers alongside initial and focused coding. Interviews used broad questions that were refined as the analysis progressed. Theoretical sampling, coding, and memo writing were conducted to further direct data collection and analysis. In addition to identifying key components of the research process, this chapter described measures taken to facilitate data collection and analysis in order to reveal the emergent analysis. Efforts to adapt the research process to northern conditions were also discussed. This chapter is followed by the presentation of the study findings.
Chapter Six:
Findings

6.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the main findings of this research study which explored the experiences of those delivering the Ontario Works program in northern Ontario communities. The findings are presented in accordance with the grounded theory method as delineated diagrammatically in Figure 3 below. The analysis of interview data and extant texts revealed the core category as the concept, adaptation. Adaptation refers to the continual adjustments and accommodations made by northern Ontario Works program deliverers as they navigated and addressed issues that arose when implementing the Ontario Works program. This core category and concept was developed through the coding of transcripts and the sorting, comparing and integration of memos that reflected the integration of emergent categories. Adaptation is comprised of four emergent major categories, each of which is constituted by minor categories and their elements. Figure 3 illustrates the basic framework of the findings addressed. The four major categories are: 1) building and maintaining controls, 2) adopting efficiency as a practice, 3) encountering constraints, and 4) navigating incongruences. This chapter begins with a description of the overarching category and concept of adaptation.

Following this, each of the four major categories and their respective minor categories are presented. This section is followed by an overview of the minor categories and elements.
6.2 The Core Category: Adaptation

Adaptation emerged as the core category through the grounded theory analysis. It consists of the collective considerations and compromises routinely made by northern Ontario Works program deliverers implementing social assistance. Through the analytical
process of comparing data and raising codes to conceptual categories, my research found that program deliverers had common and interrelated experiences in making adjustments for a multitude of conditions and circumstances they encountered in the process. The analysis of these data, through the constant comparison method, led to the emergence of four major categories that depict specific challenges encountered by northern Ontario Works program deliverers and their responses to those challenges. Further analysis which involved refinement of the major categories through continued comparison of categories and memos and their integration into the broader theoretical analysis resulted in the emergence of the core category of adaptation.

In the current study, Adaptation refers to the collection of considerations and strategies, some imposed upon and others initiated and adopted by northern Ontario Works program deliverers in response to the constraints they encountered. These constraints arose from the limited local infrastructure and the barriers imposed through neoliberal policies (i.e., making social assistance a policy of last resort) and policy rigidities within the welfare system. They were highly visible within emergent major and minor categories and in turn represent the key elements comprising the overarching category of adaptation. In particular, all research participants reported engaging in adaptation to accommodate residual and rigid policies within the welfare system and to adjust their practice in order to compensate for constraints encountered in the northern context, constraints within the welfare bureaucracy (welfare system), and challenges arising as a product of a combination of place-based and bureaucratic constraints.

As the overarching category, adaptation is linked to each of the four major categories in specific ways. Within the first major category identified, building and maintaining
controls, adaptation primarily involved adjustments made by northern Ontario Works program deliverers to accommodate new policy directives, which required shifts in values and practices to provide emotional support and employment counselling. The frequent and numerous changes to existing policy demanded immediate changes to practice, additional time and resources to interpret complex policy directives, the need to find means to mitigate resource deficiencies within welfare policy, and alternatives to navigate and negotiate policy rigidities that limited options available to Ontario Works program deliverers.

The second major category, adopting efficiency as a practice demonstrated linkages to the overarching category of adaptation through efforts by northern Ontario Works program deliverers to adapt their practice to performance measures instituted by the Province. This included practices such as meeting caseload reduction targets, and ensuring welfare system resource utilisation was constantly minimised. The third major category, encountering constraints, is linked to adaptation through northern workers’ efforts to acknowledge and navigate a service delivery model that heavily relied on largely inadequate local infrastructure and under-resourced social services. Through their exposure to a range of resource, infrastructure, and human constraints, northern Ontario Works program deliverers adapted to the resource deficient climate of the north by adjusting their expectations and developing a deeper understanding of the available options.

The fourth major category, navigating incongruences, refers to the strategies of the program deliverers as they came face-to-face with the resource limitations and other constraints both within and outside of the program. Workers adapted to changing and residual conditions within the welfare system and those arising from deficits in northern contexts by managing factors that both facilitated and compromised their capacity to
transition welfare recipients off the welfare system. Efforts to manage these factors included developing strategies in response to rigid or contradictory policies and resource deficiencies. Overall, the major and minor categories reflect the constraints encountered by northern Ontario Works program deliverers and recognise the necessity for northern Ontario Works program deliverers to adapt to continually changing conditions.

6.3 The Major and Minor Categories

The four major categories and their corresponding minor categories represent the foundational processes that underlie the core category, adaptation. Many findings emerged as parallel yet distinct processes at two scales. One scale constituted local level program implementation by northern program deliverers that impacted welfare recipients, while policy directives centralised at the Provincial level impacting northern program deliverers constituted the second scale. These two scales will be identified throughout the findings chapter where relevant.

6.3.1 Major Category: Building and Maintaining Controls

The major category, building and maintaining controls explicates the challenges faced by northern Ontario Works program deliverers as they attempted to reconcile the regulatory and bureaucratic imperatives of the legislation (centralised, provincial welfare policy), with the northern local conditions and challenging lives of their clients. In particular, this major category details the introduction and reinforcement of organisational and behavioural regulation, ideology, and culture experienced by workers throughout their implementation of the Ontario Works program. In general, this category identifies an overall strategy of behaviour regulating processes or mechanisms used to establish and reinforce compliance to
the Ontario Works program policy.

Consistent with the scaled relations outlined above, regulatory and bureaucratic controls were observed by northern Ontario Works program deliverers as manifesting at two levels (or scales): a) between the welfare system and the Ontario Works program deliverer; and b) between the Ontario Works program deliverer and the Ontario Works participant (welfare recipient). Less emphasised by program deliverers was a third level that included the relationship between the northern Ontario Works program deliverers and the local social service organisations contracted by the Ontario Works program to provide services to welfare recipients.

Centralised institutional controls of the welfare system emerged in many forms throughout the study and were found to influence virtually all aspects of the Ontario Works program and the activities of the northern Ontario Works program deliverers. Consequently, the efforts of the Ontario Works program deliverers to engage and navigate organizational controls emerged as a key part of Ontario Works program implementation in the north.

6.3.1.1 Minor categories that comprise Building and Maintaining Controls

The organisational controls that emerged through the interview data fall within three minor categories: promoting the dominant discourse, changing the mind-set, and ensuring compliance and being compliant. The findings of each of these categories are presented and explored below.

6.3.1.2 Promoting the dominant discourse

Promoting the dominant discourse constituted efforts at both the centralised
(provincial) and the local delivery scales of the *Ontario Works* program to propagate and reinforce neoliberal values and principles in relation to conceptualisations of welfare. Evident at the central scale (the Province of Ontario), organisational welfare culture appeared to be introduced to northern *Ontario Works* program deliverers through the dominant discourse of market-based ideology during the era that Mike Harris was the Conservative Premier of Ontario (1995-2002). An important part of the dominant discourse of the Harris years was that social assistance was creating welfare dependence among welfare recipients and that this was an unsustainable cost to the Ontario government. The rhetoric underlying the changes to the welfare system, popularly referred to as the ‘Common Sense Revolution,’ was cast in terms of self-sufficiency and economic independence – concepts that resonated strongly with a class of people who felt overburdened by taxes (Daigneault and Beland, 2015, Peck, 2001).

The platform of the ‘Common Sense Revolution’ was based on a repudiation of what the government perceived was a sense of entitlement to social assistance (i.e., cash benefits). Long-term welfare receipt was regarded as a disincentive to work and the new work-first policies were designed to discourage this perceived welfare dependence in favour of facilitating labour market attachment (Harris, n.d.). Accordingly, there was a shift in focus of social assistance from providing only financial support to providing employment assistance (Graefe, 2015; Peck, 2001).

The promotion of neoliberal ideology and principles as the basis for work-based welfare appeared to validate and legitimise the work-first orientation of the *Ontario Works* program among northern *Ontario Works* program deliverers. As discussed in the welfare literature, this approach was presented to *Ontario Works* program deliverers as part of a
larger discourse that highlighted self-sufficiency and economic independence as key objectives and benefits of the *Ontario Works* program (Peck, 2001). These principles of self-sufficiency and independence were embraced in varying degrees by program deliverers. This was demonstrated in the findings primarily through the comments and language used by northern *Ontario Works* program deliverers to describe their feelings about the shift that was taking place in social assistance (toward employment and their perceptions of welfare recipient motivations with respect to welfare receipt and work). Although McGuinty introduced a somewhat softer approach to social assistance through his leadership (i.e., the introduction of the Ontario Child Benefit in 2007, providing additional funding to enhance child care and base grants for post-secondary institutions), many program deliverers identified little change from the Harris years, in their practice. The focus on verifying eligibility and the emphasis on ensuring the program was accessed as a temporary support measure remained relatively unchanged from the Harris government policies. The most visible difference between the Harris and McGuinty approaches, namely, the McGuinty governments’ softening of Harris’s ‘shortest route to employment’ directive was interpreted by program deliverers with a wide lens. Although program deliverers acknowledged the change in approach, they remained subject to the program’s efficiency objectives which varied in interpretation and application by the workers. Most northern program deliverers reported that the ‘shortest route to employment’ approach was consistently practiced with varying degrees of intensity. While most program deliverers reported extending the period of financial support to welfare recipients seeking employment in recognition of the welfare cycling or ‘revolving door’ phenomenon that occurred when people were transitioned off the program too soon, all workers remained focused on moving welfare recipients off welfare as
soon as possible. Several program deliverers acknowledged knowing of colleagues who had not adjusted their practices at all and thus continued to employ the ‘shortest route to employment’ approach in its original form.

Believing labour market participation to be the gateway to re-establishing responsible citizenship through the installation of a strong work ethic, northern Ontario Works program deliverers expressed strong and widespread support for welfare’s shift toward mandated employment or employment related activities in exchange for benefits. Reflecting on the shift from ‘passive’ to ‘active’ welfare, a caseworker expressed a sentiment that was widely shared by other northern program deliverers:

We were all looking forward to it because before it felt like we were just sitting there handing out cheques month after month with no real purpose to it. I mean the purpose obviously was so people had food and shelter - that kind of thing, but other than that it was paperwork.

Northern Ontario Works program deliverers further regarded the benefits of the shift toward employment-based welfare as a necessary and positive alternative to long-term welfare receipt by single mothers. One worker outlined what she perceives to be a common phenomenon in her northern community:

There need to be other avenues. Some of these girls that go out have baby after baby after baby, because they know, they’re going to have a baby, they’re going to get social assistance and they’re not going to have any requirements. They’re not going to be required to work until those kids are at least four [years old]. Once they start going to school, they’re deferred until then. We have to get these people back to being healthy because we can give them as much money as we want, right now. It’s not going to do
them any good at all.

In addition to the stereotypical views of ‘welfare moms’, the northern welfare workers also supported the dominant neoliberal view that these changes to social assistance had the capacity to instill a work ethic or a culture of work in welfare recipients. The findings demonstrate that these workers believed work-first social assistance would promote additional benefits such as providing ongoing stability in many areas of the recipients’ lives. One northern Ontario Works program deliverer expressed her support for the work-first approach by stating that the program will...“make them financially independent; make them better parents; make them so they can cope with the stresses of raising a family so they can pay their bills and keep their housing.”

The objectives of work-oriented welfare resonated favourably with many program deliverers possibly because self-sufficiency is consistent with northern and rural culture. That is, self-sufficiency is regarded as a desirable and necessary condition for improving the quality of life in these communities. The presumed benefits of labour market attachment held by northern Ontario program deliverers went beyond their support of financial self-sufficiency however, and included the betterment of moral character (i.e., becoming more responsible and better parents) and being more resilient in response to the stresses of maintaining a household. The emphasis on morality is highly consistent with dominant discourse supporting welfare reform (Graefe, 2015, Peck, 2001, Piven and Cloward, 1971). Accompanying this perspective was the dominant view within Ontario Works discourse that attributed welfare use to limited motivation and a poor work ethic. This view, rational choice, emerged as widely held by many northern Ontario Works program deliverers.
characterising *Ontario Works* recipients as seeking the least labour intensive path to attaining desired resources.

Consistent with the rationale choice perspective, welfare recipients are thought to engage in courses of action that involve pursuing choices that maximise their self-interest (e.g., the least amount of effort in order to receive the benefit). Many northern *Ontario Works* program deliverers’ support for a work-first welfare system was accompanied by their perceptions that *Ontario Works* recipients chose impoverished lifestyles by living in a culture of poverty believed to be rampant in multiple generations of welfare recipient families. Despite their unanimous acknowledgement of the environmental conditions in the north that recognised substantial barriers to employment for *Ontario Works* recipients, most of the program deliverers subscribed to the generational cycle of welfare perspective grounded in the culture of poverty thesis, a thesis that is prevalent within dominant neoliberal discourse on welfare reform (Zastrow, 2014). A caseworker expressed such a view of northern welfare recipients:

> Get a job; keep it for a week or two. Try something else. Then you have the groups. I guess the parents grew up on the system, they’re on the system and their kids are going to be on the system and to them they’re comfortable with it. They have a roof over their head, they have food on the table – whether it’s adequate or healthy or not and they seem to be happy. So they don’t really need anything more and those are the ones that are hard to get.

Some northern *Ontario Works* program deliverers were harsh in their criticism of welfare recipients, possibly influenced in part by their frustration at the slow progress of some welfare recipients and their decisions to live in locations isolated from employment
opportunities, as well as the intergenerational poverty and long-term reliance on social assistance. As an example of the pejorative perception consistent with the dominant discourse of the ‘work shy’ welfare recipient that was endorsed by many northern *Ontario Works* program deliverers, the following was expressed by a program deliverer: “They don’t see beyond their doors. And I would say this is a good part of the caseload. They don’t want to improve.”

While the majority of northern Ontario Work program deliverers held pejorative views of welfare recipients, some program deliverers understood poverty and its impact on work ethic differently, whereby they more readily recognised the lack of motivation to work as a reflection of one’s social and economic environment. A northern *Ontario Works* program manager commented on her perceptions of circumstances contributing to welfare dependence of a single mother who was a long term welfare recipient:

She grew up in a poor home. My analogy is: if I put you in a garbage can and feed you garbage all your life, it tastes good, it looks good, and it smells good. You don’t know any different as a person. You don’t understand that living the way you live is wrong or that there is anything wrong with it, because that’s all you’ve ever seen.

6.3.1.3 Changing the mind-set

A second minor category that fed into the major category of, *building and maintaining controls* is that of, *changing the mindset*. Implementing the *Ontario Works* program as a work-first social assistance program involved ensuring that workers and clients maintained perspectives consistent with the employment-centred focus. For research participants, the transition to the employment-based *Ontario Works* program involved a dramatic shift in practice and perspective. Accustomed to providing only financial assistance, caseworkers
were required to shift their attention from a primary focus on issuing cheques and verifying eligibility to also providing employment support. A northern Ontario Works manager recognised a key challenge for program deliverers as: “Some people just aren’t as comfortable with the employment piece. They don’t like it. They find working with clients, it’s stepping out of their comfort zone and working with employers so there’s more that needs to be done.”

Ontario Works caseworkers, most of whom were identified by the respective local manager as having a college level diploma in social services, expressed feeling inadequately qualified to take up responsibilities that focused on providing employment counselling, and lacking the helping skills required to provide emotional support. In many instances, northern Ontario Works caseworkers seemed to be uncertain about their new responsibilities. This uncertainty is reflected in a manager’s comment:

I do think what we do is social work as much as people want to challenge me on this. I do think it is social work especially now more than ever since the system has changed and we are focusing more now on employment. Focusing more on the social aspect than on income maintenance – income maintenance is dry and muddy – black and white. There’s a lot of gray area in employment. As a worker, in order to be effective you have to work outside your four walls. If you’re stuck in your office and you only focused on your OW, you will be ineffective. You must always broaden your horizons. You have to always be learning and exposed to what is going outside so you can apply what you learn and bring it to your clients and inform them.

Consistent with the account above, Northern Ontario Works caseworkers confirmed the difficulties encountered when their roles were expanded from individual case managing
(largely financial) to providing direct support to welfare recipients and engaging with local employers in the community (i.e., employment counselling). The manager quoted above clearly articulates this issue and the challenges it engenders:

I think that I have some offices that are very good at embracing the employment counselling model. I have other workers who are clinging to the financial - you know, “I’m the boss, you got to bring this in and that in” - the caseworker of the financial part. We have done a lot of training this year trying to change the caseworker mentality so trying to treat the client more like you’re counselling, that you’re not in control of all the money they receive. We don’t have that type of relationship any longer. We have more informal give and, “let’s talk about it” - that kind of thing. It’s a huge thing to be asking people who have been working 20, 30 years in this business to completely switch around because you know in ’97 they were told, “we don’t want people coming to the office”. We would send them all up to an intake screening unit and they have to phone to apply and they come in for a verification interview but we can’t spend very much time with you because we don’t want people in the [welfare] office and now we’re saying, we want them there every week.

When asked about what the transition to delivering Ontario Works looked like in this manager’s region, she responded:

I’ve got to be diplomatic. We’ve had a lot of progress. When I started, I noticed a lot of resistance. It depends on where people come from. You have people who came from the Ministry who were very rigid in the way they did things because that’s what they learned. You had a job and you did it and I can appreciate that. They had a very
hard time. They struggled into the new way of doing things. …If your managers are open minded, that will go onto your staff; this will sink down to your staff…We still have people who don’t believe it will move on and we’ve had people who have moved on. That’s fine. And we still have people who are here, who are still struggling but are doing better and hopefully they will see it my way [laughs]…

There are not many positions. Yes, exactly. This is the disadvantage of a small organisation - if you don’t fit the mold, where else is there to go? There is nowhere else to go except outside… We’re doing better.

Changing the mindset involved not only the perceptions of the program held by deliverers in relation to the new demands of their jobs, but also involved the need to improve perceptions of social assistance within the local community, including those held by employers.

Northern Ontario Works program deliverers recognised the considerable stigma held by employers as detrimental to employment prospects for welfare recipients. In an effort to comply with the new legislation and corresponding employment support responsibilities, program deliverers adopted a strategy to highlight the employment aspect of Ontario Works and, simultaneously, to distance social assistance from the negative stereotypes of unemployment, addictions, and destitution. A northern Ontario Works program deliverer explained the effort to re-brand Ontario Works as an employment rather than a social assistance program:

It is job creation as well but I think it’s more of an awareness. ‘Just getting out and selling ourselves as an employment organization...It’s [about] changing our image, that’s what we need to work on. The image of so many people, because we have so
many intoxicated people on the streets. They [the community] think we’re paying for all of them you know, but it’s definitely not the case...They are not our clients.

The challenges to changing entrenched views on social assistance involved not only the program deliverers and the broader community, but also the recipients of social assistance themselves. It was now mandatory for welfare recipients to participate in employment related activities such as education and training, job searches, and interviews for jobs, as a condition for receiving financial assistance. Thus, the entire local community was strongly affected by the changes heralded by the Ontario Works program. As the shift in emphasis to employment support marked substantial change in the nature of the duties performed by Ontario Works program deliverers, it is important to note the existing tension between adapting to the new directives of employment support provision and resistance demonstrated by program deliverers who, while strongly supporting the work-first focus of social assistance were hesitant to accept additional workload responsibilities they felt largely unqualified to provide. Consequently, many northern program deliverers both welcomed the work-first orientation of social assistance introduced by Harris and continued in a slightly less punitive fashion by the McGuinty government while resisting the new employment support role which not only added to the previous income support and surveillance responsibilities of program deliverers but also demanded a new set of skills that many felt ill-equipped to provide.

6.3.1.4 Ensuring compliance and being compliant

The third means by which building and maintaining controls was exercised within the Ontario Works program was by shaping and regulating worker and client behaviour. The primary focus on ensuring policy compliance reflects broader welfare objectives of
behaviour regulation which targeted not only welfare recipients but also *Ontario Works* program deliverers. A range of strategies was adopted to facilitate these compliance objectives.

Many northern *Ontario Works* program deliverers believed they needed to build and gain the trust of welfare recipients in order to more effectively fulfill *Ontario Works* employment requirements. In particular, gaining trust was considered to be a key aspect of facilitating welfare recipient compliance to the program objectives. While not considered as paramount as achieving employment outcomes, most program deliverers believed gaining the trust of welfare recipients would enable welfare recipients to be more receptive to engaging in pre-employment activities because, like their caseworkers, they would acknowledge the personal benefits of economic self-sufficiency associated with participating in employment activities. A program deliverer explained the relationship she observed with her clients through the use of empathy:

There’s more trust. The clients will trust you more. Not all, but the majority of them will trust you more...they consider you their friend rather than their worker. So yeah, we have a tendency to make them feel that way or at least I do. I’m a pushover, I’m a softy.

In addition to placing more emphasis on providing emotional support to welfare recipients, program deliverers attributed successes in establishing supportive and trusting relationships with their clients to a few key attributes of northern contexts. Having fewer clients on a caseload was described as enabling program deliverers more time to develop relationships with clients. Additionally, the informal nature of relationships in smaller communities was perceived as reducing barriers to forming relationships. Furthermore, northern communities.
which often comprised “clusters” of people residing in smaller geographic spaces meant that the proximity between people was lessened permitting greater communication and opportunities for relationship development. A program deliverer explained, “Being in a small community makes it more personable I think, when you form a relationship with some of the clients. I know them on a personal level.” Another northern Ontario Works program deliverer added, “A good working relationship with the client, that is important. There is more trust in a small town between worker and client because you know client better. You have trust.”

In an effort to comply with work-first strategies of the Ontario Works program, several of the northern Ontario Works offices were modified to appear more like employment centres than welfare offices. For example, some intake offices had the Plexiglas barriers that previously separated caseworkers from welfare recipients removed. Some offices remodeled entrance spaces to include computers for job searches and open access to telephones, comfortable furniture, and coffee. Moreover, the new approach to welfare practice which employed the rhetoric of empowerment, emotional, and concrete resource supports to welfare recipients was generally believed to be a necessary step to enable caseworkers to fulfill their new employment support roles. Despite the commitment to these efforts, however, several northern Ontario Works program deliverers found it challenging to balance their supportive and empathic approach with punitive Ontario Works policies.

Nonetheless, building trust with clients under the new welfare program remained a commitment by many program deliverers. In many ways, building trust with welfare recipients was a means to gain welfare recipient compliance to Ontario Works program policy requirements. Program deliverers appeared to use relationship development with
welfare recipients to reduce resistance to fulfilling program requirements by increasing the willingness of welfare recipients to engage in program activities. As trust developed between program deliverers and welfare recipients, program deliverers perceived that welfare recipients became more open to following the advice or directives of program deliverers. The focus on building trust by program deliverers reflected the need to both build capacity among welfare recipients and the importance of fostering compliance to successfully fulfil Ontario Works employment objectives. Individual deficits among welfare recipients were widely recognised by northern Ontario Works program deliverers as posing serious impediments to economic self-sufficiency and by extension, complying with Ontario Works program requirements. As a way of overcoming this, program deliverers emphasised skills and confidence building among welfare recipients. Education, specific job skills training, and social skill development were the most common employment supports offered to clients. To this end, it was thought that the focus on capacity development would yield successes among welfare recipients that in turn would build self-esteem and potential support for the Ontario Works program’s employment mission. Achieving ‘buy-in’ from welfare recipients to the Ontario Works program was expected to increase the likelihood of their compliance to program requirements. Offering concrete supports to welfare recipients (i.e. child care, transportation, subsidised housing, job skills training) was seen by many program deliverers as a means of developing a stronger and more trusting relationship with clients.

In addition, accountability emerged in the interviews as a mechanism commonly used to ensure compliance to Ontario Works program policy for welfare recipients and northern Ontario Works program deliverers alike. Accountability primarily consisted of the completion of pre-employment tasks by welfare recipients and continual monitoring and
intervention by respective caseworkers. Placing the responsibility for fulfilling *Ontario Works* program requirements onto *Ontario Works* clients made them accountable for program outcomes.

Program deliverers were also accountable for fulfilling *Ontario Works* program requirements, albeit the nature of these responsibilities reflected operations at a different scale. Northern *Ontario Works* program deliverer accountability was primarily to the Province in terms of fulfilling *Ontario Works* program policies and responsibilities assigned to them through the devolution model adopted by the Province.

Northern *Ontario Works* program deliverers generally perceived accountability as a reciprocal responsibility required of everyone as a function of citizenship. In terms of welfare recipients, most program deliverers believed labour market participation to be not only a requirement of the *Ontario Works* program, but a fundamental responsibility of each community member. A program deliverer’s explanation of her position illustrates this point:

> We work in very difficult situations sometimes. As much as we want to be the advocate or accommodate or serve as much as possible, sometimes we have to take a very strong stance and make decisions that affect someone negatively… if you don’t meet your requirements, you are accountable. I’m accountable, you’re accountable as a recipient or whatever sometimes we’re stuck in a situation where I have to make a serious decision that will affect you negatively.

As indicated in the excerpt above, many program deliverers struggled with their dual role of providing support while administering sanctions when required or deemed necessary. While program deliverers generally supported the position on reciprocity (work in exchange for benefits), not all supported the concessions made for welfare recipients as a consequence of
individual and structural barriers. One program deliverer for instance, disapproved of granting deferrals to welfare recipients with pre-school age children:

Sometimes I think we’re too easy on them. We make it too easy for them. For instance, if there was a deferral on some of these families with young children and it’s not because I did it, but there are a lot of families out there that have to pack up their children in the middle of winter and haul them to a babysitter and go to work. I think we’re just - the program sometimes makes it way too easy for some of these recipients. Way too easy. Way too easy.

In contrast, another northern Ontario Works program deliverer (supervisor/manager) recognises issues of non-compliance as stemming from and embedded within structural barriers. She described her approach and recommended practice as follows:

We have this thing called noncompliance in your participation agreement. You can be cut off for three months and in the second event [cut off up to] to six months. And I keep saying to them [staff] well, the lady didn't show up for the appointment. What I do is try to defuse it. I say here's a noncompliance checklist. What I want you to do is write down every time she didn't do something activity wise. And I want you to ask her why she didn't. So I want you to sit down with her every time she didn't go [to the activity] and give her another chance…I'm more concerned about, other things going on in their lives where maybe there has been abuse at home and they are too afraid to tell us. And the fact that we told her she has to go to a literacy course. He [her husband/partner] doesn't want her going. So she goes there and she gets beat up. We can do nothing to her that is worse than what he's doing to her. And for my staff, well, we don't see what's going on, what's happening to her. They assume, well she
didn't show up her appointment …So I say to them, I don't care that she didn't show up. I want to know why she didn't show up. If the person has an alcohol problem, well, let's see if we can help them. Once we know why they're not actually making all of these appointments, we should reduce cutting people off arbitrarily… That's a step you hear from the staff. I don't make it easy for the staff to cut them off because the clients get cut off for three months. Then they come back after. They’re going to come back here. I mean, I always say to myself, if I had no money, I’d come back. The example I always give is … a jail cell costs 200 bucks a day, a hospital bed is about 400 - welfare is 20 bucks a day.

The issue of accountability, however is more complicated than policy indicates. In particular, considerations of tolerance and understanding were made by program deliverers with respect to the perceived efforts expended by welfare recipients to participate in program activities, the number and nature of individual and structural barriers encountered by welfare recipients, and as well, the cost implications of applying sanctions.

In addition to managing and navigating accountability issues associated with working to foster labour market attachment among welfare recipients, the program deliverers experienced accountability in other ways. Under constant scrutiny, they frequently remarked on the pressure exerted by supervisors, managers and the provincial authority located in Toronto to not only fulfil *Ontario Works* employment based requirements, but to also meet performance targets. Consequently, the introduction of performance targets revealed challenges that were experienced in addition to existing pressures associated with transitioning multi-barriered welfare recipients to employment when there were insufficient resources and employment opportunities.
Of considerable concern were the threats that failing to meet performance targets posed to existing levels of operational funding in local *Ontario Works* program offices. Although most program deliverers had not experienced sanctioning in the form of such ‘recoveries’, the threat of the possibility appeared to represent a persistent and central concern, particularly among managers. The threat of additional losses by those who had already been penalised in small amounts created even greater stress. In particular, the many implications associated with reductions in funding consistently occupied the thoughts of most *Ontario Works* managers. A program manager remained acutely aware of the implications of failing to meet performance to the point of staffing implications for the office:

> A lot of things that come down to the caseworkers are a result of me looking at things. If we don’t meet our targets, we don’t get our funding, money gets taken back to the Province [recovered]. Meanwhile, we have the number of staff we do based on the amount of money we’re projecting that we’re going to achieve.

A key aspect of northern *Ontario Works* program implementation involved measures to sustain progress towards fulfilling *Ontario Works* program employment objectives. Consequently, following the assignment of responsibilities, both welfare recipients and program deliverers were subject to measures to ensure ongoing compliance. *Ontario Works* welfare recipients received ‘incentives’ by their caseworkers, to fulfil *Ontario Works* program requirements, while expectations of the program deliverers were reinforced through supervisors, managers and municipalities by way of monitoring, audits, and funding clawbacks or threats thereof.

Although program deliverers recognised the commitment and efforts made by many welfare recipients to meet the goals specified within their respective participation
agreements, the perception that prevailed was that welfare recipients required continual monitoring and incentives to fulfil pre-employment objectives. As summed up by one northern Ontario Works program deliverer referring to the lack of follow through on tasks by some welfare recipients, “You have to use a cattle prod on them sometimes.”

Northern Ontario Works program deliverer activities primarily involved measures to encourage and maintain progress made by Ontario Works clients toward employment. Moving welfare recipients toward economic self-sufficiency and ensuring momentum towards Ontario Works program goals involved the application of several strategies. A program deliverer responsible for ensuring welfare recipients pursued child support as a condition for the receipt of Ontario Works social assistance discussed her approach to mobilising clients to seek child support from the absent parent:

It’s almost to try to make them understand the importance of pursuing this financial avenue. We certainly would not put them in harm’s way [force them to pursue child support from an absent parent in cases of domestic violence]. I’m not sure how to explain that one. I have to try to be a driving force behind them and say, “you need to do this, you have choices though.” It’s kind of like, if you choose not to do it you could be deemed ineligible to receive social assistance. I always have to push them. You help them through it. I don’t know if I’d call that serving them. … I have to push them to make a decision.

Another northern Ontario Works program deliverer described her approach to providing life skills training to welfare recipients where intergenerational poverty and welfare receipt is apparent:
You’ll be working with someone who is 40 or 50 years old and now their children are on it. It’s just a cycle. It’s not been broken. It’s the way of life they’ve seen and there’s nothing wrong with that in their eyes. So I guess I’m a little harder on them when I do life skills and training or something like that. Everybody says I’m pretty honest and blunt with these people. “You know, do you want your children to grow up in this sort of lifestyle” so I try to change their mindset.

At times, strategies to foster compliance among welfare recipients appeared to include elements of intimidation. Using threats and sanctions, whether to pressure welfare clients to conform to Ontario Works program requirements or as a means to offer foresight regarding consequences for failing to complete program requirements, many of the approaches to educate or change perspectives appeared to use negative reinforcement and include patronising statements. In terms of using sanctions to foster compliance, program deliverers typically described their practice as issuing a warning to the offending Ontario Works client followed by a sanction if the infraction was repeated. A program deliverer explained her use of sanctions as part of the process she adopts to address and prevent welfare fraud:

Yeah, if they don’t, [declare assets] it depends on the severity of it. Like, if they’ve failed to report maybe a thousand dollars’ worth of income and then they finally do admit it, “yeah I was working there and I didn’t declare it” you sign some statutory declaration stating that and then more often than not we warn them. “OK, your file will be monitored, we’ll be watching this and that’s pretty much the end of it and then we just do an overpayment that they’ve failed to declare and then it’s recovered at a rate. Others, where they choose to ignore, or respond to the inquiry or whatever, then I’ll put a brief together for the police.
In addition to quoting *Ontario Works* policies and legislation as a means of gaining the cooperation of welfare recipients, northern *Ontario Works* program deliverers used discretion and judgement. The program deliverer above identified her approach to decision making as involving weighing financial implications of the various courses of action at her disposal: “There again it depends on the monetary value. Other times when the report is done we’ll recommend an overpayment or that payment be suspended. It depends on the money involved. It could go any number of ways.” Another worker referred to her consideration of potential financial implications to the *Ontario Works* program as a strategy in deciding the extent to which compliance should be enforced:

> You don’t think, well, I want to hang this person…just trying to get to the bottom of it. You had a reason for doing what you did. You did that because desperate times call for desperate measures. However, common sense would prevail. If they go to jail, you’re certainly not going to get a recovery.

Although not explicitly identified as compliance measures, northern *Ontario Works* program deliverers identified several strategies that ensured adherence to *Ontario Works* policies and program delivery expectations. Most program deliverers described using surveillance as well as threatening and/or actualising sanctions. Although some program deliverers perceived their geographical distance from Toronto as potentially buffering them from the amount of scrutiny encountered by many of their more ‘southern’ northern counterparts, regular reports generated from an electronic mainframe computer as well as regular audits in all *Ontario Works* program offices considerably reduced the any potential ‘buffering effects’ of geographic distances. Consistent with other accounts, this northern *Ontario Works* program deliverer described the nature of the surveillance she encountered:
When our caseload jumped up real high and went down, I had the Province calling:

What happened? … It’s not that tons of people are finding jobs. They must be moving. They are finding something else to do. I just don’t know. We don’t have any contact with them until they come back [onto Ontario Works].

Many northern program deliverers indicated that another imposed compliance measure consisted of phone calls from superiors to follow up on anomalies identified in the program statistics. Additionally, while northern Ontario Works supervisors and managers monitored local Ontario Works office statistics, inquiries made by “Toronto” inevitably moved down the chain of command resulting in local northern office staff spending time responding to queries from multiple parties. Recalling requests she received for an explanation, a program deliverer referred to her experience after her supervisor recognised a drop in her office’s caseload average: “Then I have my program supervisor who is asking, ‘what the hell happened to you guys?’ You were doing great and then you fell off the map! We got one person a job. Isn’t that a good thing?” Many program deliverers noted surveillance and monitoring strategies as primarily focused on identifying problems. Consequently, many felt a responsibility to continually explain or defend their work which contributed to additional work and stress in light of working in conditions that already lacked sufficient resources. In other instances, program deliverers felt penalised for structural problems beyond their control to resolve. A northern Ontario Works program deliverer described her experience dealing with a superior who questioned the low use of their allocated employment funding:

I just had a regional program manager here. He was here two months ago because we’re not spending our employment dollars. Well, our clients are not going off to
employment. There’s nobody going off and doing that so we’re surpling dollars which we hate to do but we can’t spend it.

As indicated in the above example, northern program deliverers struggled with fulfilling employment based program objectives both in relation to the multitude of employment barriers experienced by welfare recipients and the expectations imposed by the Province. Consequently, many of provincial expectations were viewed by program deliverers as disconnected from the realities of northern communities.

6.4 Summary

This chapter segment provided an overview of the core category, Adaptation and the four major categories within the findings chapter with a primary focus on the first major category, building and maintaining controls. As the core category, adaptation reflects the compromises and considerations made by program deliverers as a means of managing a myriad of constraints they encountered when implementing the Ontario Works program. The need to adapt their practice to a range of circumstances and often changing conditions required program deliverers to be both innovative and flexible in their approach to delivering the program. As illustrated within the first major category however, northern program deliverers were heavily constrained by regulation within the welfare system. As discussed in this chapter, the emphasis on regulating behaviour within the welfare system became apparent through the application of several strategies including the introduction and reinforcement of a dominant discourse of neoliberal welfare in addition to practices engaged in at the local level by program deliverers which included efforts to re-brand social assistance as an employment program and obtain buy-in from welfare recipients and local employers.
The following segment elaborates on the regulatory aspect of the welfare system that emerged as the central focus of the *Ontario Works* program and the second major category: efficiency.

### 6.5 Major category: Adopting efficiency as a Practice

The concept of *efficiency* emerged as a second major category in the findings. Consistent with a classical economics perspective (see Sandel, 2012), efficiency emerged as a central concept in this study depicting objectives to produce and maintain an economic state that minimised program costs and expenditures to the greatest extent possible (based on the determination of the minimum support required to ensure labour market attachment or prevent risk of program recidivism) while ensuring the most economical use of resources. *Adopting Efficiency as a Practice* involved the expectation of northern *Ontario Works* program deliverers to control and minimise spending in the delivery of the *Ontario Works* program. Conforming to principles of new public management (NPM) and a market-based approach to welfare, the *Ontario Works* program reflected the dominant discourse of social assistance as a largely unnecessary and unaffordable luxury. The combination of neoliberal ideology and NPM principles both legitimised a fiscally prudent approach to providing social assistance and necessitated the imposition of a highly residual, temporary, and tightly regulated welfare program. These elements, prominently identified within welfare reform literature, emerged from interviews with program deliverers who overwhelmingly perceived social assistance as a program of last resort, primarily comprising an able-bodied, work-shy population.
As workers became increasingly familiar with the program, many identified and voiced criticism about the challenges they experienced in relation to expectations of efficiency. However, these challenges did not seem to lessen the strong support they maintained of the employment based focus of the *Ontario Works* program. Northern deliverers believed work in exchange for welfare benefits to be a fiscally responsible practice and regarded themselves as responsible to the tax paying public to ensure the appropriate management of program resources. These data led to the emergence of the major category, *adopting efficiency as a practice*.

### 6.5.1 Minor Categories that Comprise Adopting Efficiency as a Practice

Efficiency was adopted as a practice largely through organisational policies and practices focused on cost minimisation and cost containment that were set alongside strategies to promote and enforce accountability, expediency, and cost recovery. The minor categories that comprise the major category, *adopting efficiency as a practice* include:

*Transferring risk, implementing expediency, and deterring and diverting costs.*

### 6.5.2 Transferring Risk

As identified through the interviews, a principal means for achieving efficiency involved reducing risk by assigning and transferring responsibility and accountability. This transfer was accomplished mainly through the process of devolution of social assistance whereby the bulk of responsibility and accountability for the administration and program

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11 This major category was initially classified as a minor category within the major category, *building and maintaining controls*. However, further analysis using the constant comparative method resulted in the decision to raise the concept of efficiency from a sub-category to a major category because it became a central mode of practice employed by the program deliverers.
delivery shifted from the provincial to municipal levels of government and to community service providers. Individual welfare recipients became responsible for ending their own reliance on social assistance. This shift meant that the risk and responsibility involved in the provision of social assistance was concentrated at the local level while the ultimate authority and control over the processes remained with the provincial authority. The process of devolution was initially understood by most northern Ontario Works program deliverers as an opportunity to gain the authority to make Ontario Works policy and programming decisions on behalf of their respective local service areas. The program deliverers expected to gain the flexibility needed to design local solutions for local problems that most felt were misunderstood, mishandled, and largely overlooked by the central level (the Province). The costs devolved to the municipality were accompanied by the assignment of additional unexpected responsibilities such as delivering or managing the delivery of social housing and child care services. Consequently, some program deliverers reported receiving complaints from their local municipalities, voicing considerable disapproval of the devolution arrangement and a desire to discontinue the local provision of the Ontario Works program as a means of regaining fiscal control. Accordingly, program deliverers expressed feeling a lack of support from municipalities and an increasingly tenuous relationship that presented them with concerns about the stability of the Ontario Works program at the local level. The provincial reassigning or offloading program responsibilities and costs onto municipalities was viewed by many program deliverers to be unfair and not worth the gains they obtained in terms of having some control over local implementation in their respective communities.

In addition to the downloading of costs and responsibilities onto the labour market and onto the local program deliverers via municipalities, cost efficiencies in the program
were obtained by offloading costs onto a number of other government and non-government bodies. The downloading of responsibilities also included welfare recipients who were regarded as individually accountable for their own well-being. A program deliverer demonstrated her role in assigning program responsibility by way of her comment on an Ontario Works recipient’s loss of social housing, “But you know, the onus was on her to provide the information which she didn't do - whether she can read the letter, I don't know or she just throws the stuff in the garbage. I don't know.”

Another example of transferred risk is evident in the following program deliverer’s identification of her clients’ inability to pay for heat and her inability to assist them. The caseworker’s sentiment, “…I won’t get more money until January to usually February by the time I get the money again. I don’t know what they’re going to do” infers the understanding that the client is ultimately responsible for program outcomes, irrespective of whether or not the constraints experienced are beyond their control.

6.5.3 Implementing Expediency

Implementing expediency emerged as a minor category of, adopting efficiency as a practice that formed the basis for much of the Ontario Works program’s approach to the program’s implementation. The persistent emphasis by the Ontario government on reducing costs through limiting the duration of service provision and benefits demonstrated one of the most obvious means of being efficient. The economic benefits from these interventions came about by prohibiting or discouraging Ontario Works recipients from pursuing activities that required greater investment in favour of others that could be completed in a shorter period of time with less investment. While northern Ontario Works program deliverers described encouraging Ontario Works recipients to identify employment related goals and did their
best to accommodate their clients’ interests and goals, the emphasis on efficiency within the *Ontario Works* program appeared to narrow the range of options to those that could be completed quickly and cheaply. Thus, a central principle and practice in the *Ontario Works* program was on investing as few resources as possible in exchange for the highest possible return (minimal receipt of social assistance). For many program deliverers, this approach became problematic when they became aware that premature labour force attachment often lead to instability followed by recidivism and in many instances, cycling on and off the *Ontario Works* program. As time passed, it became clear to some of the program deliverers that the complex and persistent nature of the barriers faced by many *Ontario Works* recipients in northern communities were unlikely to be adequately addressed with brief, short-term supports. However, this realization did not sway northern program deliverers from strongly supporting the program’s employment objectives. A program deliverer shared her perspective:

> When OW started back in 1999 the focus was, and the focus has always been, on employment but the focus was the shortest route to employment. That’s what we’re brainwashed with. The shortest route to employment. Whatever is going to get you off assistance ASAP. It didn’t take the government very long to realise that that wasn’t working so, it just wasn’t happening. You’re pushing someone out of the system before they were ready, so of course they’re going to come back. So now, although that is still the focus, the shortest route to employment, they’ve relaxed a lot. It’s still the shortest route to employment. It doesn’t mean you’re on today, off tomorrow. If it’s going to take you a year to 2 years then for you, that’s your shortest route to employment. So it’s becoming much more individualised.
Despite the development of a revised directive on the shortest route to employment (see Herd, 2006) the policy change was not interpreted consistently across the north. Several northern Ontario Works offices interpreted the policy more literally than others resulting in disparate practices throughout the north that involved moving welfare recipients off the system more abruptly in some sites than in others studied. Exasperated at the process adopted in her office, one program deliverer explained the directive she received regarding the overall process of implementing the program, and how to manage recipients who were not employment ready:

Here’s your caseload. Find them a job. Get them on ODSP and close the file. There’s lots of little steps to it but basically those are the things…you’re going to get out there in the community and make connections with the employers. You’re going to get your clients wage subsidies and you’re going to get them working and if they’re not employment ready, you’re going to take them to the doctor’s and get them to ODSP.

6.5.4 Deterring and Diverting Costs

The adoption of efficiency practices among northern Ontario Works program deliverers included the application of two primary cost containment strategies: deterrence and diversion. They are discussed in the following subsections and constitute the third minor category.

The element, deterring costs refers to passive cost containment strategies used within the welfare system to establish and reinforce efficiency. These strategies which were introduced at the provincial as well as at the local municipal scales diverted costs away from the program by discouraging potential claimants from accessing social assistance. At the provincial scale, deterrence strategies were firmly present within policies and organisational
practices of the *Ontario Works* program. Specifically, they were deeply embedded within the dominant discourse stigmatising welfare receipt and introducing cumbersome and intrusive bureaucratic processes that discouraged program access. However, deterrence strategies were also adopted by program deliverers to a lesser extent by discouraging ongoing reliance on social assistance among welfare recipients. While this ‘softer’ approach to deterrence was typically implemented through dialogue with clients to discourage them from relying on social assistance, it nonetheless functioned as a practice intended to deter people from using the welfare system.

While workers generally maintained an agenda of minimising the duration of assistance provided, they also had a desire and a sense of obligation to provide services to those in need. Decisions by unemployed residents to forego applying to the *Ontario Works* program caused great concern for program deliverers over the welfare of children and other family members living without a discernible income. Amplifying these worries were the lengthy distances many of these families lived from amenities and employment resulting in isolation barriers in addition to deep and persistent impoverishment. Most program deliverers knew of several people in their respective communities whom they believed to be eligible but who refrained from applying for *Ontario Works* program benefits. While beyond and at odds with the ideological foundations and expectations of the *Ontario Works* program, many northern *Ontario Works* program deliverers considered their roles to include raising awareness of the *Ontario Works* program to potentially eligible local residents and soliciting applications from residents believed to be in need of income support. Participants attributed decisions of prospective recipients to reframe from applying for *Ontario Works* benefits to be influenced by a myriad of factors including: idleness, an intergenerational culture of poverty
in which a higher standard of living was not sought in favour of familiar conditions of
impoverishment, a desire to avoid increased scrutiny and program requirements, and the
sanctions of the *Ontario Works* program. Other factors believed to act as deterrents included
the lack of anonymity alongside the stigma attached to receiving social assistance in an
environment where self-sufficiency was highly valued and expected. One participant posited
a sentiment common among most of the northern *Ontario Works* program deliverers:

I think there are people who need assistance, but don’t apply because of the
requirements. People don’t like the requirements. They need OW but won’t apply.
People don’t like getting mail from us. Some adults are removed from the budget;
they’re living off the rest of the family’s money.

Another *Ontario Works* deliverer attributed stigma and the intrusion of privacy as reasons for
the absence of applications from eligible residents:

People sometimes they try to just live on their part-time earnings and their OCB
[Ontario Child Benefit] and their little child support they are getting—whether that is,
good or bad. I think, then they don’t have to answer any questions. *Ontario Works*…it
gets right into your private issues. I think I don’t know if it’s good or bad because
certainly when we have families coming they can’t pay for Hydro bills and we say,
“You should have been on, you should come on *Ontario Works* a long time ago.
Why didn’t you come?” Well, we know why they don’t come. They don’t want to
come. It’s embarrassing to come and say you have no money. It’s hard, and then you
know, they have to show this and this and this and they have other things going on in
their lives that they have to take care of.
Diversion comprised a strategy that appeared more prominent within the actions of *Ontario Works* program deliverers than did deterrence. Diversion refers to the re-routing of costs and expenditures away from the *Ontario Works* program; it was implemented through a number of strategies. Perhaps the most influential, efficient diversion strategy was the redesign of the *Ontario Works* program that instituted mandatory participation in the employment activities as a condition for receiving assistance. Positioning the work-first design of welfare as a central component of the *Ontario Works* program effectively diverted costs away from government by facilitating labour force attachment as a condition to receive assistance. More specifically, cost efficiencies or ‘savings’ were generated by diverting *Ontario Works* benefit expenditures away from the public purse and into the market through the adoption of active labour market policy (Peck, 2001). Program costs were diverted using the labour market for welfare recipients who successfully secured employment. However, as the program deliverers pointed out in their interviews, in many cases people were able to secure only part-time work because full-time work was not available in many of the northern communities or there was a mismatch of skills and jobs. In other cases full-time employment could not raise the income threshold of the recipient sufficiently to disqualify them from social assistance; this was commonly the case for families living on a single minimum wage income. In such instances *Ontario Works* program costs were offset or diverted into the labour market by applying the earnings generated from the paid employment of recipients toward the benefit amounts allocated to them from the *Ontario Works* program. A program deliverer described the formula used and the impacts of this on *Ontario Works* recipients and the working poor:

If you were working at a fast food place and you are finding it difficult and you came in to apply, we would take one hundred percent of your wages against the *OW*
budget. If you were a single person, and you made $600 a month, you would not be eligible for *Ontario Works*. If you are on assistance already for three months, and you got a job and you are making $600 a month, we would only take half of it and so you would be getting $600 for your job, and $300 from OW. But for the first three months, when you really need it, we take 100 percent of the wages off. So that disqualifies a lot of people for *Ontario Works*. So the working poor\(^\text{12}\), unless they are laid off are not eligible for EI or EI runs out, a lot of them would just be on the brink of being eligible, because we would take 100 percent of their wages into consideration.

The emphasis on mandating employment as a means for substituting the provision of social assistance support was observed to offset costs from the program and by extension, the provincial government of Ontario. In this way, failure of the individual welfare recipient to sustain employment over the long term might result in the transferring of responsibility for providing social assistance benefits from the provincial *Ontario Works* program to the federal jurisdiction via the *Employment Insurance* program. An *Ontario Works* program recipient who obtained a sufficient number of weeks of employment to qualify for Employment Insurance benefits would cease to be an expense to the *Ontario Works* program. However, while program deliverers remained hopeful that welfare recipients on their respective caseloads would eventually obtain long-term employment and transition off of the *Ontario Works* program, the predominance of precarious work within northern economies (i.e. part-time, contract, seasonal employment) and the ‘hard-to-serve’ population that comprised the

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\(^{12}\) The working poor in the north were described as a population believed to be highly vulnerable to welfare reliance due to the limited and precariousness of low skilled employment in the north, lower wages, and low human capital among the working poor.
bulk of northern *Ontario Works* caseloads was such that recipients who managed to obtain employment would often not qualify for Employment Insurance benefits by the time the employment opportunity ended.

Population demographics specific to the north, namely the considerably higher proportion of northern residents with low educational attainment, limited job skills, and poorer health outcomes compared to southern residents (Southcott, 2013) were identified by northern *Ontario Works* program deliverers as consistent with the composition of program deliverer caseloads. Consequently, a sizable percentage of caseloads were ‘unemployable’ welfare recipients who were presumed to suffer from physical or cognitive disabilities severe enough to preclude them successfully maintaining employment. A program deliverer commented, “I’m thinking 20-50 percent of the caseload is a work in progress to moving them off to *ODSP* because they’re definitely not employable.”

Seeking to fulfill the *Ontario Works* program objectives of reducing welfare rolls program deliverers reported that some *Ontario Works* offices allocated portions of their budgets toward efforts to transition people from *Ontario Works* into the *ODSP*. One participant commented on the strategy she became aware of in another northern area:

> [City X] uses a lot of their dollars identifying mental health issues… [They] used some of their dollars to contract psychologists, psychometricians to identify that and found that once they did that, they were able to move people off *Ontario Works* and onto provincial disability [*ODSP*]. It was money well spent…

However, the *Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)* restructuring included changes that narrowed eligibility requirements resulting in disqualifying a large contingent of northern welfare recipients believed to have been eligible previously for disability benefits.
While the resulting displacement of previously eligible ODSP clients into the Ontario Works program generated cost savings or efficiencies for the ODSP, the situation presented often insurmountable challenges to program deliverers who were unable to foster a timely transition of these ‘multi-barri ered’ or ‘unemployable’ clients from the Ontario Works program. Adding frustration were cases in which program recipients who were not ‘employment ready’ or who were ‘unemployable’ were refused admission to the ODSP and still were required to continue to pursue employment searches in order to remain eligible for Ontario Works benefits.

Many program deliverers reported having variable success in moving recipients from the Ontario Works program to the ODSP, not only as a consequence of narrowed eligibility criteria within the ODSP, but also due to the limited availability of physicians in many areas to conduct medical assessments necessary to verify the presence of a sufficiently debilitating condition. As widely acknowledged by program deliverers, severe shortages of general practitioners and specialists in northern communities leave many residents without a family physician. While many northerners adapt to the doctor shortage by accessing medical services from locum doctors and where available, nurses and nurse practitioners in medical clinics and in hospital emergency rooms within and outside of the community, those who wish to apply for ODSP benefits are unable to be considered without having an assessment completed by their family physician or specialist who can confirm the existence of their respective disability(ies) by demonstrating sufficient familiarity with their specific disabling conditions. A participant reflected on the challenges she observed when working towards transitioning Ontario Works recipients into the ODSP:
So that makes it hard when you send them with these medical forms; who am I supposed to go see? You need a history for most of these forms and if you haven’t had a family doctor, no one has your history. So the forms don’t get filled out properly, they get sent back and they [the welfare recipients] don’t understand and they don’t know what to do and we’re not allowed to help them with that application.

The narrowing of eligibility criteria of the *Ontario Disability Support Program* was believed to impose considerable hardship for northern populations. Health problems that led most to seek *ODSP* benefits were attributed by northern *Ontario Works* program deliverers in part to the barriers northerners routinely experienced in obtaining health services and other supports. Delayed diagnoses and a reduced ability to seek preventative care as a consequence of the limited availability of health services in most northern communities were thought to contribute to severity of northerners’ health problems. The additional funds and supports provided through the *ODSP* represented the only resources available to many people with disabilities living in the north.

To a lesser extent, another strategy used by workers that diverted *Ontario Works* program costs involved supporting welfare recipients to pursue post-secondary education. Legislative changes made by the Harris government, now prohibit *Ontario Works* recipients from receiving *Ontario Works* program benefits and *Ontario Student Assistance Program* funding concurrently. These changes were viewed by some participants as cost saving measures. Changes to the *Ontario Student Assistance Program* funding structure that reduced grant allocations while instilling corresponding increases in loans effectively transferred the risk and responsibility associated with obtaining sufficient resources to complete and pay for post-secondary education to the individual. While such measures may
produce cost savings to the Province, the result was viewed by some program deliverers as imposing additional barriers to recipients obtaining higher levels of education. One program deliverer described the policy with respect to prohibiting the concurrent receipt of Ontario Student Assistance Program funding as, “trapping them in the system”. She explained:

[Premier] Harris decided that people on OSAP wouldn’t be on welfare. So in 1996 or 7, he basically turned a $6000 a year welfare check into a $10,000 OSAP loan. Before, you could collect welfare and be at school collecting OSAP, your OSAP was less. Now it is more, but now what happens is you have a client who’s been on social assistance for four years. Congratulations, you’re going to college or university! In September, here’s your $5000. They’ve been living off of 500 bucks a month for the last two years, they blow it. They blow their money. So the middle of October, they’re broke. They don’t qualify for welfare anymore because they’re on OSAP and we have to consider the living allowance. So that 5 grand has to be allotted up over weeks or whatever – 8 months. We have to treat that as income. But, if they quit the course, they qualify. OK, so what do they need to do? They gotta eat! They quit their course! Ah congratulations, you quit! OSAP default – so now you can’t qualify for OSAP anymore.

Program deliverers often observed the efforts to increase efficiency or cost savings within the Ontario Works program as limiting options for welfare recipients and creating additional hardships. More specifically, the focus on cost savings by policy makers was to the detriment of welfare recipients and their sustained transition off of the welfare system. Such strategies that diverted Ontario Works clients into alternative avenues deemed to pose less
economic risk for the *Ontario Works* program, but were often observed to provide inadequate support to welfare recipients, ultimately “setting them up for failure”.

Contracting local organisations to provide direct services such as resume writing, job search skills, and other job skills training for *Ontario Works* recipients was widely viewed to be cost effective by program deliverers. However, the heavy reliance of the *Ontario Works* program on community resources and the impact of widespread increases in service users on local social service organisations was not generally considered or regarded with concern by northern *Ontario Works* program deliverers. Mixed responses emerged when program deliverers were asked about prospective impacts that *Ontario Works* program requirements could have for local social service organisations. Some program deliverers believed *Ontario Works* program requirements significantly impacted community based social service organisations. However, because increased caseloads resulting from the influx of *Ontario Works* recipients accessing employment support services was an expected outcome, many program deliverers did not view the increased demand for local services as problematic. To the contrary, many presumed it to be a welcomed increase in business for the organization.

Although commonly acknowledged in the literature, only a few program deliverers (caseworkers) identified strains on social service organisations as a consequence of the increased demand for services generated by *Ontario Works* program requirements. Of those who did identify pressures experienced by local social service organisations, issues most identified were longer wait times for recipients to access a service and lengthier wait lists for general community members to receive service. Some program deliverers recalled being advised of additional workload experienced by community service providers.
6.6 Summary

The central importance of efficiency within the design and delivery of the Ontario Works program emerged prominently in the interviews with northern program deliverers. Embedded within neoliberal ideologies, principles of new public management underscored practices of efficiency that extended from policy directives developed by the Province to the program implementation by northern program deliverers. For the most part, efficiency, an approach that emphasised minimisation dominated the implementation practices of program deliverers. These practices emerged in the study as transferring risk, expediency, and deterrence and diversion which constituted the minor categories. The situating of responsibility and authority within the Ontario Works program revealed power relations that disadvantaged welfare recipients who, despite the presence of multiple, often insurmountable structural barriers, were held accountable for failure to fulfill program requirements. The adoption of efficiency as a central theme within the design and delivery of the Ontario Works program also revealed an emphasis on expediency, deterrence and diversion as strategies of cost containment. While the connection between these strategies and the welfare cycling phenomenon overwhelmingly witnessed throughout the north seemed less obvious to some program deliverers, the use of expediency, deterrence, and diversion appeared to limit sufficient access to resources that jeopardised the ability of welfare recipients to achieve sustained economic independence.
6.7 Major Category: Enduring Constraints

The third major category that emerged in this study is entitled, *enduring constraints*. Program deliverer encounters with constraints ranging from limited infrastructure, to inadequate resources and human capital deficits among welfare recipients, served to inform strategies adopted in an effort by program deliverers to adapt to the widespread resource shortfalls they experienced. Consequently, the core category of *adaptation* is demonstrated throughout the explanation of the major category, *enduring constraints*.

As strong supporters of the *Ontario Works* program, northern program deliverers assumed that resources and supports necessary to foster employment readiness and economic independence of welfare recipients would be sufficient and available. Contrary to these expectations, the program deliverers struggled with grossly inadequate and inaccessible services and infrastructure, as well as marginalisation that limited their capacity to effectively support northern welfare recipients.

Northern OW program deliverer efforts to make welfare recipients ‘employment ready’ were met with a multitude of implementation challenges experienced as constraints and arising from narrow and rigid welfare policies, insufficient resources within the welfare system, limited social services and infrastructure within northern contexts, and low human capital among welfare recipients. The following sections discuss the nature and scope of these constraints through the emergent minor categories: *living with limited employment opportunities, seeing and experiencing educational and training deficits, encountering mobility issues, encountering child care challenges, witnessing social exclusion, watching displacement, and, shouldering extra work and costs*. 
The high degree of reliance on local social services and infrastructure within the *Ontario Works* program to fulfill program objectives left northern program deliverers with limited capacity and options to support welfare recipients in fulfilling employment based *Ontario Works* program objectives. Precarious and often volatile economic conditions, insufficient employment opportunities, and limited infrastructure and resources created circumstances that overwhelmingly constrained the personal and professional growth of welfare recipients, impeding them from becoming economically self-sufficient. A typical process of ascension and declension experienced by many welfare recipients in the north is diagrammed in Figure 5.0 to illustrate the impact of constraints commonly encountered by welfare recipients (and by extension, program deliverers who were often unable to provide resolutions). The *encountering constraints* category revealed a myriad of implications arising from constraints within the welfare system and northern contexts, and in relation to individual barriers among welfare recipients. These implications were experienced by program deliverers in various ways and comprise the discussion that follows.
6.7.1 Living with Limited Employment Opportunities

In their efforts to facilitate labour market attachment, northern Ontario Works program deliverers identified local economic conditions as creating hardship for many welfare recipients. The volatility associated with limited infrastructure and natural resource based economies was identified as predominating in the north and was understood as
contributing to the precariousness of many of the available employment opportunities. Limited and precarious employment was identified as reducing options for welfare recipients and program deliverers by imposing constraints to being able to successfully attain and sustain employment and fulfill *Ontario Works* program requirements. For example, the predominance of part-time positions among the limited employment vacancies in many northern communities resulted in additional pressures on welfare recipients and program deliverers to ‘make do’ to meet policy requirements. While program deliverers were sensitive to the challenges experienced by many employers to offer full-time employment, local employment conditions still reflected limited options for meeting *Ontario Works* program requirements. A program deliverer explained: “Those that are working part-time and trying to increase their employment - it’s hard because there are no new jobs coming up. They’ve already got them.”

The lack of employment opportunities in many northern communities not only limited the ability of welfare recipients to move off social assistance but also limited opportunities for upward mobility that would help them to move out of poverty. The northern *Ontario Works* program deliverer who commented above added, “Most times when people find employment, decent employment, they’re not leaving right away. Nobody’s giving it up!” Moreover, the absence of benefits for most positions placed additional constraints upon welfare recipients. A program deliverer voiced her concern stating, “A lot of employers, and I don’t know if this is the same down east, but a lot of employers don’t want to hire full-time. It’s part-time so they don’t have to pay the benefits.”

Consequently, through their program implementation efforts, program deliverers came to learn about the complexities associated with insufficient employment opportunities
in their communities. In particular, they recognised the additional challenges encountered by northern welfare recipients when full-time jobs were scarce. A program deliverer explained:

There is no employment there. Like I said, all of the mines have shut down. The stores are closing like crazy. Main Street is [pause] there’s nothing there. The one little strip mall they used to have - I was there a few weeks ago and there’s not much. There is no employment going on there right now. Nobody is hiring. Employers are trying hard to keep their doors open.

Program deliverers also recognised how expectations of employment within the *Ontario Works* program were at odds with the limited capacity of northern labour markets, as evident by a program deliverer’s comments:

You can’t get a full-time job. You have to take two, three, four jobs to get that full-time income and then you have to try to juggle both schedules with all the employers. So basically, they have no home time. They are basically spending a lot of time travelling to and from, you know, three hours here, four hours there.

Recognising the lack of fit between *Ontario Works* employment expectations and the employment and resource deficits within many northern communities, program deliverers were placed in circumstances where *Ontario Works* policy expectations often clashed with northern contextual realities. Moreover, assuming dual roles of providing support and assigning punishment through sanctions when deemed necessary, program deliverers found themselves in situations requiring them to take actions that many of them believed were not warranted because of structural barriers (i.e., limited infrastructure, insufficient employment opportunities). As one program deliverer explained, “It’s quite difficult right now because the focus of the Province is on employment... get them on, get them off. Get them a job.
There’s just nothing.” Despite the limited employment options, it is important to note that some program deliverers also identified employment opportunities as sufficient in their communities. However, employment opportunities that comprised ‘permanent’ or ongoing full-time, well-paid employment with benefits, were often positions limited to the primary sector, reserved for employees possessing specific education, training, and skills. When primary industries recovered from cut backs, welfare recipients remained excluded from these employment opportunities. A program deliverer explained:

There is employment in [Town X]. They were just reopening a plant that went into receivership. However, the people going back there were the people that were laid off from the previous employer. Again, you’re talking about more of a skilled labourer, not necessarily our clients.

Positions accessible to welfare recipients were almost exclusively comprised of low-skilled, minimum wage jobs within the retail and service industries. When available, these positions were often identified within urban-adjacent or non-metropolitan communities with larger local economies and more diversified labour markets. However, mobility issues due to a lack of public transportation as well as low levels of education among welfare recipients often greatly compromised their ability to take advantage of such employment opportunities.

Consequently, northern program deliverer experiences revealed variations in the type and scope of local resources available to fulfill Ontario Works program requirements. The capacity of local areas to support the Ontario Works program appeared to vary based on the type and size of the primary industry in the community; which further dictated the extent of community resources available. The size of the community in addition to its proximity to larger centres also appeared to illustrate disparities in local infrastructure and resources.
between research sites. For example, generally, smaller, more geographically remote northern communities possessed fewer resource options and employment opportunities than larger centres.

Other challenges limiting options included the seasonal nature of many employment opportunities in the north. Seasonal positions were often offered by private contractors, which were identified by program deliverers as having specific challenges. A program deliverer described the situation:

In our area, the majority of jobs are seasonal – they’re either at Christmas time or over the summer when the stores are open, but usually, the bulk of jobs are in the summer and the people who work seasonal don’t have a full-time trade and end up either being on unemployment insurance in the wintertime or they no longer qualify for EI because they don’t have enough hours.

As recounted by a northern Ontario Works program deliverer, “A lot of people do seasonal work. Our caseload seems to go up in the winter. There are people who have done seasonal work but don’t qualify for EI or they were paid cash.”

6.7.2 Seeing and Experiencing Education and Training Deficits

Creating further hardship for welfare recipients and northern Ontario Works program deliverers was the low levels of educational attainment among welfare recipients. Low levels of high school completion among welfare recipients were described as often resulting in their inability to meet minimum education requirements for even entry-level jobs. A program deliverer observed: “We have a lot of people who don’t have an education. I think over 60 percent of our caseload don’t have a grade 12.” A program deliverer recalled, “I notice
when speaking to employers, that when they are interviewing, they screen you, “Have you graduated from 12 [or have a] GED?” It’s a screening tool they use. Not many people have grade 12.” Another program deliverer underscored the gravity of welfare recipients having less than a high school diploma or grade 12 education:

“There are people that, they are [technically] employable but they’re not going to be employable until they get the education. They’re not going to get a job even at Walmart with a grade eight or nine education, but they’re not stupid people.”

An important point concerning the education levels of welfare recipients in the north refers to the northern contextual factors that contribute to poor educational outcomes. In particular, limited education options (i.e., a lack of post-secondary institutions or programs) in the north hampered opportunities for welfare recipients to attend post-secondary education once they attained a secondary school diploma. As indicated by some program deliverers, many welfare recipients did not see the point of pursuing education in light of the shortage of employment opportunities. Learning disabilities comprised another commonly identified factor that contributed to low secondary school completion among welfare recipients. However, while recognising this issue, program deliverers generally were unable to remedy the problem to support impacted welfare recipients. The structure of upgrading programs (e.g. GED) was typically described by program deliverers as packages of materials that were completed individually with limited support from an in-class teacher. Many program deliverers described the instructional support as minimal, reflective of the self-administered nature of the upgrading programs. Hence, many program deliverers expressed concern for welfare recipients with learning challenges but could do little to support them.
In addition to barriers to obtaining higher levels of education for welfare recipients, northern program deliverers encountered challenges that limited their own access to available training opportunities. The substantial distance to training opportunities for program deliverers was identified as a key constraint due to the time and cost factors associated with travelling. Even situations in which training was offered in a northern centre resulted in accessibility barriers for program deliverers located in more rural northern communities. The barriers were compounded in light of the absence of additional funding provided to northern offices to compensate for additional travel costs. A manager commented on the key issue: “They [The Ministry of Community and Social Services] were offering some training in [City X], and we were looking at probably around - it was going to cost us around 1500 to 2000 dollars per worker to send them.”

6.7.3 Encountering Mobility Issues

Limited availability and access to reliable and affordable transportation in northern communities was identified as severely limiting options for employment by preventing welfare recipients from accessing the resources necessary to become employment ready. In many northern communities, public transportation options were virtually non-existent. A northern Ontario Works program deliverer affirmed:

Living in a rural area, transportation is a barrier. There is no public transportation in the district, never mind [Town X]...There is Greyhound et cetera but they are the larger ones, not as reliable, because it’s not as accessible…So the only bus that goes is the Greyhound - so nothing to get clients around.

Northern Ontario Works program deliverers identified long distances that often separated welfare recipients from necessary pre-employment supports. Consequently, the limited and
often complete absence of public transportation options created considerable challenges for both welfare recipients to access employment and pre-employment supports as well as for the program deliverers who were largely unable to address structural barriers. A program deliverer from a northern city described a transportation situation similarly experienced by program deliverers and identified implications for her own work: “We don't have transportation; we have a limited bus service in [City X]. There's nothing else anywhere. No transportation, when you're trying to get families to child care, to school, to community placements or to jobs.”

6.7.4 Encountering Child Care Challenges

While child care funding support was made available to welfare recipients quite consistently across the north, access to child care remained a challenge that limited options for labour market attachment. The low-skilled, low waged employment positions typically filled by welfare recipients often involved working shifts or during hours outside of the daytime norm within which child care providers typically operate. Consequently, welfare recipients were faced with locating child care services offered during nonstandard business hours, a task depicted as highly challenging, daunting, and often unsuccessful. This program deliverer’s sentiment echoed the challenges experienced by many others: “Then you have issues coming up – child care issues, maybe you don’t have a system in place. As much as there is lots of money pumped into child care, there’s still issues with accessibility.” Adding to the challenge was the variability of child care subsidies across Ontario Works offices. A program deliverer commented, “The daycares are only open so many hours and subsidized and affordable child care isn’t always available.”
6.7.5 Witnessing Social Exclusion

Many *Ontario Works* program deliverers identified local cultural dynamics as strongly limiting employment prospects for welfare recipients. Local community attitudes and relations were consistently depicted as limiting access to available employment opportunities for welfare recipients. Four distinct factors related to local culture emerged as highly prevalent in northern hiring practices. These factors which were identified as disproportionately disadvantageous to welfare recipient job seekers include: stigma and stereotypes associated with welfare receipt, the limited access to social networks, the prevalence of nepotism, and the reputation of a welfare recipient based on individual past or present behaviour or rumours.

Refusal of local employers to consider welfare recipient job seekers for positions was believed by many program deliverers to stem from stigma and the negative stereotypes of welfare recipients. The lack of anonymity in small northern towns and the inability of workers to protect the identities of welfare recipients were also believed to contribute to social exclusion and employment discrimination that further disadvantaged welfare recipients. A program deliverer explained this relationship through her team’s experience with a local employer:

We approached one business in particular on several occasions; they had ads in the papers for somebody to work in their clothing store and the bottom line is if we refer them [*Ontario Works* participants] and they knew they were one of our clients, they would not be interviewed or hired. So there’s still a stigma attached to being on social assistance and in a small town everybody knows.
Stereotypes of the poor and those receiving welfare were also thought to shape the hiring decisions. A northern *Ontario Works* program deliverer recounted her experience assisting a welfare recipient through the employment search process:

Having *Ontario Works* on a resume - like they’ll look at you, at your resume and say, “What were you doing here?” And it’s either jail, or *Ontario Works* [assumptions made by employers]. For some reason, the employers here have a really bad attitude about *Ontario Works* - that people are unemployable and they’re here for a reason other than they’re just down on their luck.

While welfare stigma was a significant challenge for welfare recipients generally, the stigma and its effects intensified for welfare recipients who were indigenous. Despite the close proximity of reserves to many small northern towns and centres, the persistence of considerable stigma and stereotypes of First Nations people was clear. Although caseworkers rarely volunteered such information, when asked about the existence of greater stigma for First Nations people generally and for those receiving income assistance, a caseworker responded:

Oh no there is. For sure there is. In a way it’s almost harder when First Nation people live in such close proximity... because people are aware of all the federal dollars that go to First Nations people for things so there’s always that little bit of push and pull and well, “You get that for free.” kind of thing or those services for free… I guess just because of where we live, people are very much aware of the funding and the money that goes to First Nations from the federal government.

Despite recognising stigma towards First Nations people on social assistance, the program deliverers did not generally acknowledge racism as a barrier to their employment. Rather,
the considerably lower education, employment experience, and soft skills more common among First Nations people were cited as the primary barriers to their employment. In this way, employment challenges were linked to individual (human capital) deficits rather than structural barriers.

In addition to stigma and stereotypes, social networks and nepotism were also noted as prominent in limiting employment options of welfare recipients. The extent of social inclusion and in particular, the degree to which welfare recipients were able to gain entrance into local social networks or establish credibility with well-positioned community members, was believed to influence chances to attain employment. In many instances, these factors were understood as exerting more influence than legitimate attributes such as holding adequate qualifications. This issue is apparent in the following program deliverer’s reflection:

You get into a job because you know somebody. It’s not because of your qualifications, but because you know somebody. And that’s in a really small community, which is northern. I guess it’s one of those northern aspects.

In several instances, nepotism was seen as a barrier to employment for welfare recipient job seekers. Limited employment opportunities in the north were considered one reason for the widely recognised practice of business owners showing favouritism towards hiring family members. This practice was depicted as often occurring throughout the year as well as during the summer when the children of local business owners returned home from university or college. A northern Ontario Works program deliverer shared her experience:
There’s one family that owns three businesses - so the grocery store, the gas station, one of the restaurants and from what I’ve seen, also even jobs for the students in the summertime. It’s so and so’s son that always gets the job.

Social networking and ‘having connections’ were recognised as normative aspects of seeking and attaining employment in the north. The informal nature of northern labour markets and the few employment opportunities within them were observed as limiting options for welfare recipients. The heavy reliance on ‘word of mouth’ within informal labour markets for both passing along information about employment opportunities and for vetting potential candidates was believed to be particularly detrimental to welfare recipient job seekers, many of whom were socially isolated and lacked the social skills and connections needed to take advantage of local networks.

The significance of social networking to access positions within northern labour markets was understood as heavily influenced by the reputation one garnered within the community. In particular, rumours were believed to be highly influential in shaping reputations and perceptions of one’s credibility as a responsible, competent, trustworthy, and hardworking employee in the local community. These perceptions translated into a determination of whether or not the job seeker would successfully attain employment. The reputation of an individual was considered critical to their ability to secure and even maintain employment. The serious implications for a person’s work should they fail to maintain one’s reputation was well understood. A program deliverer confirmed, “If you lose credibility…or your reputation with the clients, you’re dead in the water. You can’t do your job. It becomes ten times more difficult.”
Gaining a ‘bad reputation’ whether through one’s own volition or by association with others was identified as severely impacting one’s ability to secure employment in the north. In an effort to mitigate negative perceptions of welfare recipients, some program deliverers provided guidance on the importance of conducting oneself appropriately in public. A northern *Ontario Works* program deliverer described her approach:

I try to tell my clients that what they do outside because it’s a small town, employers see. Like it doesn’t matter that you’re not looking for that job when you’re walking down the street. An employer, when you’re walking past that business, knows who you are… I don’t know but everywhere they go, they spit. And I have people that do that and I say if you’re spitting on the street while passing that business and you go into that business tomorrow looking for a job you think they’re going to hire you? [referring to a welfare recipient] “Well why not? Everybody does it?” I said, that’s the thing employers see in a small town. They know when you’re out there walking, they know what you’re wearing, they know who you’re with, they see you in the bars, they hear your language on the street and then that is a really big thing.

In summary, the increased visibility in northern contexts alongside the informality of networks was largely experienced as a critical barrier to the employability of many welfare recipients. Program deliverers expressed exasperation with their limited ability to influence the behaviours of welfare recipients and helplessness in light of the ‘small town mentality’ that so strongly influenced employability within their respective northern communities.

### 6.7.6 Watching Displacement

A phenomenon emerging from economic conditions as well as the lack of employment opportunities was described by northern *Ontario Works* program deliverers as
the displacement of welfare recipient job seekers by higher skilled, potentially temporarily unemployed workers. Amidst harder economic times in the north marked by few jobs and declining local economies, program deliverers witnessed what many considered to be an encroachment of unemployed skilled workers on employment opportunities that would have otherwise been won by welfare recipient job seekers. Partial and full industry closures and corresponding lay-offs routinely left many laid-off employees in search of employment to ‘tide’ them over until call-backs occurred at the mill or mine. Retirees seeking supplementary income were also thought to be assuming employment positions that would have ordinarily been occupied by welfare recipients. This phenomenon was seen as a fairly recent development believed to have arisen from the intensification of economic hardship in the north. A program deliverer who encountered this phenomenon in her community offered her insight:

What we found was there were 200 people laid off at the mill [in Town X] and a lot of those people have a lot of skills, and they picked up those jobs around town that are only $10.00 an hour. And they will all work here until something else picks up.

She further reflected:

They are just making do, right? While they are thinking, “my wife has a good job. I can take this job up at $10.00 per hour cutting grass at the golf course and in another year I will go back to work in my $30.00 per hour job. I can manage for a year or two until things pick up”… and the same thing with possibly people that were retired, who saw their investments take a little bit of a hit. They thought, “Maybe I will just work for a year and make up that difference; my investments are going to pick up.”
[or] whatever… But those jobs, they are taking away [them] from my people and my people would have those jobs in better economic times.

Such displacement of welfare recipients also occurred as a consequence of their limited skills, experience, or training. A program deliverer discussed such a situation:

Our clients did not have the skill set to work in any of the jobs that are coming up. So they [employers] are importing labour to construct the hospital. In [Town X] some of people that worked in the mill are now working up in the mines in [Town X] but they have a similar skill set. They have worked in the mill and worked in the mine. Our clients in [Town X] don't have the skillset to work in the mines.

Although the program deliverers made special efforts to prepare welfare recipients for upcoming employment opportunities (when known), many identified challenges with advancing the skills of welfare recipients to a level that would enable them to compete for employment opportunities. Generally, welfare rolls primarily comprised welfare recipients with limited education requiring substantial upgrading to become eligible to complete for the most minimal entry positions (when available).

Displacement also occurred in other ways that precluded access to available employment opportunities and other amenities for welfare recipients while altering the community in ways that limited the overall quality of life for local residents. A program deliverer described the nature of this problem as it applied to her community:

Miners work so many days and go out, so they’re not living in the community, but they’re taking up space in the community. Places where maybe the clients could live, they’re taking their place…They [welfare recipients] have to get someone living with them in order to afford it.
Unlike urban southern areas where welfare recipients can be expected to reside in cheaper accommodation typically located further from employment opportunities while still having access through public transportation, housing may not exist in the north, leaving northern welfare recipients with few options. In addition to inflated housing costs, the price of food and clothing was also thought to be impacted. For welfare recipients and the working poor who already had difficulties affording the cost of living, the insurgence of skilled, transient, highly paid workers in northern communities further limited their ability to afford the basic necessities of life.

6.7.7 Shouldering Extra Work and Costs

Northern program deliverers recognised the relationship between the limited options available to support welfare recipients and the additional time and money they routinely incurred as a consequence of inadequate resources and social supports. Consequently, a range of circumstances and constraints resulted in additional work and costs to northern program deliverers and, in many instances, to welfare recipients as well. Service provision challenges brought about by welfare policy, lengthy distances, limited infrastructure, cutbacks to existing services, and low human capital among welfare recipients were common in the north and resulted in additional time, effort, and costs for program deliverers to facilitate access to necessary services.

One of the central constraints encountered by northern program deliverers involved sharp increases in the proportion of clients on their caseloads considered to be ‘hard to serve’ or ‘unemployable’. Supporting welfare recipients experiencing multiple barriers to employment involved considerable time and cost to northern program deliverers and *Ontario Works* program office budgets. A program deliverer explained:
As much as the real world is doing well, people on welfare, our caseloads are still struggling because we’re dealing with harder to serve individuals – individuals with more barriers than before… barriers to employment. So someone who goes on assistance now, it will take more time now to get them off than before. Sure you have your people who need a little break – one or two months and then they’re on their feet and away they go [off assistance]. Those are the exception. So we are dealing with people who will go on and stay on longer or go off because they find part-time employment, then they are dealing with their own personal issues; they can’t handle the job so job retention is also a big issue. It’s easy to find work; it’s a lot harder to keep it so they come back.

Another program deliverer shared a similar perspective:

We find the largest part of our caseload is that they aren’t employable right now. So we have to spend a lot of time and energy on those. Those that are employable, they’re going off to employment. They’re not on with us very long.

Referring to her experience working with hard to service clients, this program deliverer explained:

There’s a lot of time and energy tied up in there and it’s not just a matter of you know, oh you’ve got this, you’ve got [makes gesture of checking off a list] that upgrading that you need to go off [Ontario Works]. It takes more time; it’s a lot more work.

Two related barriers associated with the challenge of securing employment in a non-metropolitan northern centre were identified as the additional work and costs of assisting transient or migrating welfare recipients. While assisting transient people involved
additional costs associated with providing bus tickets to the next town, providing services to First Nations people migrating from northern reserves imposed substantial additional strains on program deliverers’ time and local *Ontario Works* program budgets. Although funding for such migration was thought to be covered by Provincial-Federal government funding agreements, many northern program deliverers cited pressures in terms of increased workload and greater demand for resources to serve these clients. Consequently, the migration of many First Nations people from their reserves was a significant concern for program deliverers servicing areas adjacent to northern Aboriginal communities. A program deliverer discussed her concerns in terms of the extent of supports required by the migration of First Nations families:

> We’re having a migration of First Nations people come into our community and this is having a huge impact on our towns, our homeless population, on our school systems, because the Aboriginal children I think are three years behind, so for our child care centres, there have been some issues identified. Some Aboriginal children are non-verbal. The migration from up north is affecting all of our social services. Certainly, Child and Family Services and *Ontario Works*, the school system - it is affecting all of us. And I don’t know if Toronto recognises that.

She further explained her concerns for future service provision:

> There are going to be a lot of them coming into the job market, unskilled and they’ve got the largest dropout rate. They have a lot of other issues that have to be met with - the large suicide rate up north. So we are going to have a very large cohort of people who don't have their high school education, much less their college or their university if things don't change…They're coming down because they want jobs, but they have
no skills to offer so what kind of job can they get? … None, because they have never had attachment to the workforce. They don't know social norms, they may not speak English well enough, and they lack transportation.

Further time and resource issues arose for program deliverers who found themselves repeatedly providing the same services to migrating First Nations families. A program deliverer explained the situation:

We have had a lot of hard to serve, transients come from [all reserves in] the north, in a crisis situation. They decide they want to live here, we set them up and then they’re gone back to their reserve. It takes about three times for them [three attempts] to live in [Town X] because it’s a culture shock for them. It’s a big difference. Most are coming from the Reserve. In [Town Y], we rarely get people coming off the reserves. We get transients [and provide] a little bit of financial support.

Limited local infrastructure and social services led to additional work for program deliverers who felt obligated to provide supports they believed were needed for First Nations migrants but unavailable in the community and outside of their mandate to provide. A program deliverer explained:

There are people coming to northern communities that don’t have places to live, so you know, you’re trying to help them find places to live and really that’s not part of your role but there’s nobody in the community that does that. So they come here and they want help with everything.

Other situations were identified in which northern program deliverers provided resources to people in the absence of local services. These additional costs were absorbed to limit the inconvenience and hardship for clients who sought assistance through the *Ontario Works*
program for services that should have been provided by the *Ontario Disability Support Program*. A program deliverer described the dilemma she and her colleagues experienced:

Most of the northern offices don’t have a disability office so people on Disability have to send in forms or changes, travel grants. They usually come into the *Ontario Works* office and they want to use the photocopier and the fax because they don’t have that service and there’s no place for them [to go]. Like I know especially in the community of [X]\(^{13}\), there is no disability office, there’s no support, there’s no worker that meets them. They’re lucky if they see a worker once every three years.

Other factors that incurred additional time and costs by program deliverers included arranging and paying for extensive travel required by welfare recipients to access medical services. Cutbacks to Greyhound Bus schedules and routes exacerbated pre-existing geographical barriers by necessitating overnight accommodation and meals. A program deliverer explained the situation:

The bus to access other areas has definitely declined. The local service, it used to be a daily service. You could get from wherever the buses would run but now there’s only certain days it will go. If your client has a medical appointment, you’re advancing travel grants, northern travel grants those things like that. They might have to go two days early on the bus to make it there so those added costs are added to our costs. Something like (City X) which is only two and a half hours away - sometimes it takes them two days to get there because of the buses. It’s the same getting to [Town X] depending what the schedule is…

\(^{13}\) In this instance, the community of [X] was an office run by a single caseworker.
Additional effort and costs were also incurred as a result of inadequate resource allocation within the Ontario Works program. High costs of living in the north created additional financial burdens for northern Ontario Works offices. A particular challenge consisted of housing insecurity. The high cost of rent, the poor construction and condition of dwellings, the loss of previously available housing options, the absence of shelters, and the inability to afford high heat and energy costs posed immense challenges to securing affordable housing.

Primary barriers to affordable housing were identified by northern program deliverers as poor housing conditions, high and dramatic increases in hydro rates accompanied by penalties applied by the electricity company for arrears and reconnection charges, and the inadequacy of the shelter allowance in the Ontario Works program to reflect these costs in the north. A northern Ontario Works program deliverer further acknowledged the compounding problems:

One of the biggest problems for us this winter will be the cost of heat and energy. A lot of our clients live in substandard housing, including social housing because it was built substandard with electrical heat. So you know, they pay 85 dollars a month rent and they are paying 800 a month for heat and they don't get that much money.

The hardship created for welfare recipients was widely recognised. A northern OW program deliverer explained:

The shelter [Ontario Works shelter allocation] is just so out of whack with what the actual cost in the north. I mean, the rent, the rent takes up all of the shelter costs, and the utilities; They [welfare recipients] take that out of their food.
Another northern OW program deliverer identified key contributing factors inhibiting affordability and recognised the issues as presenting barriers to moving welfare recipients off social assistance:

Utilities are extremely high. It costs a lot of money to heat; because you’re dealing with homes that are not well-built, that are old, so they are very expensive to heat. So again, you’re just adding difficulties for these individuals to move on.

In the absence of accommodations by the electric company for people living in poverty at the time of this study, the future of many welfare recipients was evident to the program deliverers. The situation below was depicted as increasingly common:

We have many clients that have their gas cut, their hydro cut off, not in the wintertime because it's illegal, but in the summertime. But in the summer they have to have it reconnected and they have big charges and they have reconnection charges and penalties on it and they have to make huge deposits.

When asked about how welfare recipients manage when unable to afford heating costs, a program deliverer stated, “They don’t. It just comes out of their food or their rent doesn’t get paid.” The lack of options for welfare recipients struggling with high utility bills became even more apparent for one northern program deliverer who attempted to advocate for leniency for a welfare recipient who was in arrears on her utility account. She recounted the abrupt outcome, “It’s your kids or your hydro bill – the hydro said if she can’t pay her bill, she needs to move.” Acknowledging the inability of welfare clients to settle utility accounts, a program deliverer commented, “They just can’t make do. They end up being evicted with a huge bill…”
Northern *Ontario Works* program deliverers expressed great concern regarding the insufficiency of *Ontario Works* program benefit amounts to offset costs of living in the north. Failings of *Ontario Works* policy to account for disparate costs of rent and especially utilities in the north were believed to disadvantage northerners considerably. Reflecting on the inadequacy of *Ontario Works* benefits, one program deliverer stated:

> I couldn’t live on that. I mean that’s how I relate it because there aren’t any allowances in there for expenditures other than basic needs and shelter. There isn’t anything allowing for utility costs. Utility costs exceed their [welfare recipients’] ability to pay and their shelter costs are already maxed out. There just isn’t [funding/money] and we live in the north. It’s cold.

As indicated from the insights of *Ontario Works* program deliverers, the consequences of failing to provide the income needed to afford housing and other expenses was thought to potentially lead to food insecurity, hunger, and to eviction or homelessness. While directly impacting welfare recipients, the challenges associated with the high costs of utilities also impacted northern *Ontario Works* program deliverers. In particular, the additional work required to manage breakdowns in housing arrangements resulting from an inability to afford heat and energy costs was particularly detrimental for program deliverers. An *Ontario Works* program manager briefly described the circumstances for many program deliverers:

> The cost of keeping a roof over your head and keeping it warm is horrendous. And it puts a lot of strain on our workers because there is so much extra work. Because they just can't put it [funds] to shelter and we just don't have as many homelessness programs to get people back into housing. We don't have all those things around here.
The compounding effect of multiple intersecting barriers such as high utility costs and the absence of homelessness shelters further reduced the capacity of northern Ontario Works program deliverers to mitigate hardships experienced by welfare recipients. Efforts to assist welfare recipients with their inability to afford utility costs involved ‘juggling’ monies between a number of ‘pots of money’ allocated to local Ontario Works offices to address a range of incidental expenses. In particular, there was reliance on two funding sources: the Heat and Energy Fund and the Community Start-Up and Maintenance Benefit (CSUMB), as indicated in the following comment:

We pay a lot … through our Healthy Communities fund where we help people in arrears with hydro and where most of our money goes in that fund and we are talking arrears of like $1400.00. People can’t pay their hydro because it is so insane.

Another program deliverer described the ‘juggling’ aspect of support efforts to prevent eviction and homelessness:

‘So we are constantly topping up their shelter. Their shelter is not high enough, we use the Community Start Up, and we are using the Emergency Rent and Energy [fund], using the Health [fund] to keep them from becoming homeless.’

Another strategy to protect welfare recipients from losing their homes due to utility debts involved recovering and applying unused Ontario Works shelter allocation to arrears.

Although the high cost of market rents eliminated this strategy as a viable option, it was recognised that welfare recipients residing in subsidised housing might have such a surplus, albeit limited. The process was explained as follows:

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14 Unfortunately, a subsequent interview revealed the termination of the emergency rent and energy fund.
If someone is in arrears, well what they should do if they’re not at their maximum shelter cost and no one is when they’re in subsidised housing and normally you’re not when you’re in [social] housing because it’s based on income. So, if they’re not at their maximum shelter amount, then people can hand in their hydro bills so then we can pay the difference to their maximum allowance. We really encourage that.

Despite their best efforts, the program deliverers encountered shortages of funds necessary to assist welfare recipients in arrears. The demands that arrears imposed on northern OW program budgets resulted in their premature depletion, with serious implications as stated by a program deliverer:

The Homelessness and Energy funds are depleted and the same with the other agencies in town and it isn’t even winter yet. And I won’t get more money until - January to usually February by the time I get the money again.

6.8 Summary

Northern program deliverers encountered a myriad of constraints that both impeded their ability to adequately support welfare recipients and impaired the capacity of welfare recipients to follow through on employment based requirements of the Ontario Works program. The limited availability of local resources and infrastructure posed significant challenges to preparing welfare recipients, the bulk of whom experienced multiple barriers to successful and sustained labour force participation. The limited capacity of local communities and the Ontario Works program to provide many of the supports necessary to sustain initial gains in terms of securing housing, transportation and child care, and obtaining education, training and employment opportunities created ‘revolving door’ conditions.
Hence, northern program deliverers and welfare recipients were often trapped in cycles of welfare recidivism that drew heavily on the limited time of program deliverers and the small budgets of northern *Ontario Works* offices. Divisions of power also appeared to parallel hinterland-metropolis/centre-periphery relations as northern municipalities and program deliverers shouldered responsibilities for additional unanticipated program delivery costs while the Province (“Toronto”) maintained the ultimate authority over decision making.

6.9 Major Category: Navigating Incongruences

*Navigating incongruences* is the fourth and final major category. This final chapter segment explicates strategies that northern *Ontario Works* program deliverers adopted in response to the bureaucratic and northern contextual constraints they encountered. Tensions arising from *Ontario Works* program policy directives and the limited capacities of northern communities to provide for *Ontario Works* program resource requirements created implementation challenges requiring resolutions that reflected northern social, economic, and cultural conditions. In order to deliver the reformed welfare program while coping with bureaucratic constraints and resource shortages, program deliverers generated a range of strategies. These strategies are explicated through the presentation of several minor categories: *generating options through collaboration*, *taking advantage of existing infrastructure and resources*, *assuming responsibility for declining resources and deteriorating initiatives*, *re-working local services delivery structures and processes*, *minimising hardship*, and *recognising limits*. 
6.9.1 Generating Options Through Collaboration

Collaborations or partnerships were heavily relied upon by program deliverers to increase the availability and access to local resources in their communities. The necessity for partnerships underscored what was perceived to be limited local capacity to adequately support Ontario Works recipients to obtain and sustain labour market attachment and the inadequacy of Ontario Works benefit allocations and policies to meet northern needs. Thus, most northern partnerships were sought as a way of fulfilling Ontario Works program requirements by leveraging resources to address deficits in welfare policy and local capacity. Geographic and climatic factors further necessitated partnerships among program deliverers who identified common and persistent challenges in facilitating access to medical and counselling services, employment supports and opportunities, adequate and affordable housing, child care, and transportation. These challenges were due to poor infrastructure, lengthy distances, and harsh climatic conditions. The decision of a northern Ontario Works office to partner with a local community organisation and contribute funding towards development of a local shelter illustrates the serious implications. A program deliverer explained:

They started a program, [program X]. In the wintertime, people were freezing to death so they started a shelter to look after these people and I think it runs about 10 months of the year because we help fund it through Ontario Works. So people come in and they’re eligible in an emergency and stay at that hostel; otherwise they would freeze to death in the streets. People with frozen toes, frozen fingers, I mean, it’s cold in the wintertime here. We can’t have street people.
While the emphasis on seeking and developing partnerships was considered critical as a way to mitigate the severe resource deficits, the limited resources also meant fewer service providers were available to participate in community based partnerships and initiatives. As elaborated by a program deliverer, “A lot of the opportunities to help our clients that the larger centers have are not available; we don’t have the partners for training, for addictions; we don’t have the courses and employment supports that the larger centers have.”

While mutual need in lieu of other options prompted many partnerships, which were not entirely reflective of the stereotypical close-knit, mutual aid culture of the rural idyll, they fostered a mutually agreeable arrangement that served the needs, at least in part, of the parties involved. It was reported that most of the partnerships involved both informal and formal collaborations, which varied according to the specific issues addressed, the parties involved, and the available resources.

In contrast to the greater abundance and availability of support services in social programming in the south, the common reality of declining and closing community based services in the north was understood as the distinguishing factor between northern and southern locales. Thus, the morose situation in the north often compelled program deliverers to join forces with available parties that were in positions to contribute capital or resources. Unsurprisingly, a major theme that emerged consisted of cost benefit considerations.

**6.9.2 Taking Advantage of Existing Infrastructure and Resources**

Leveraging local resources was a common strategy to develop necessary supports and address barriers to moving clients off social assistance. In many instances, partnerships were initiated to resolve specific problems. One example was the decision by some local Ontario
Works offices to access Legal Aid services to challenge ODSP eligibility decisions. The narrowing of eligibility rules within ODSP left many people ineligible for that program who were also considered ‘unemployable’ within the Ontario Works program. Consequently, welfare recipients who would have previously qualified for and moved into ODSP became reliant on the Ontario Works program for financial support. Program deliverers from one of the northern Ontario Works offices described their arrangement with Legal Aid to appeal ODSP ineligibility decisions:

We actually had set up a good rapport with our local legal clinic so what we do is once we’ve handed out the disability packages and they get a notice saying, “You’re not disabled”, we’ll get the group of them to set up then with the legal clinic who will assist them with their appeals and that whole process. We’ve had some really big success with that in getting some of the people off [Ontario Works].

As illustrated above, developing and maintaining relationships was considered important in successfully initiating and completing a process. Additionally, drawing on local resources and infrastructure (where available) comprised initiatives often sought to address multiple barriers. In the instance above, low literacy that prevented ODSP applicants from articulating a convincing case for disability benefits and their limited access to family doctors which led to insufficiently documented medical histories were among the barriers that the legal aid clinics challenged.

Taking advantage of existing infrastructure and resources also involved making supports accessible to Ontario Works clients by subsidising local programs or services through Ontario Works program budgets. A common strategy involved program deliverers
taking advantage of private transportation options in the absence of public transportation in their respective communities. As described by a program deliverer:

In this area there is no transportation anywhere. The only thing people can access is dial-a-rides through the taxi company and he has a program where a guy drives a van. I think it seats 12 people. He goes all over town just in [Town X] within town limits. I think they pay two dollars. We promote that especially for people who are going to job interviews and don’t have any transportation. We’ll cover the costs. This is a big area.

However, as with many efforts to navigate resource constraints, issues such as affordability or restrictions made it difficult to address the transportation needs of most welfare recipients. For example, in addition to the cost absorbed by welfare recipients who did not receive transportation allowances, the option of using taxi services (including dial-a-ride) was further limited for welfare recipients travelling with children because of the absence of car seats. A program deliverer explains the access limitations for families with young children:

They [taxis] don’t have the child seats…, They [taxi drivers] don’t want to be putting the harnesses or whatever it is into their cabs, to do that kind of stuff so unless you’ve got a parent that has a vehicle or a friend that has a vehicle [parents with young children cannot safely or legally use the service].

In other instances, program deliverers used their informal relationships with local professionals to obtain in-kind resources. Unique features of the north afforded program deliverers unconventional opportunities to both obtain and generate resources to support 

*Ontario Works* recipients. One of the more unique examples was an instance in which a program deliverer assisted clients with food shortages by acquiring and distributing moose
meat and fish received through a representative of the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR). Moose meat obtained from vehicle accidents and fish confiscated from anglers who exceeded legal fishing limits was provided to the Ontario Works program deliverer by an MNR representative. The northern Ontario Works program deliverer as well as the MNR representative ensured the meat was appropriately tagged, stored, and distributed.

Another example of how program deliverers worked with existing resources in the interests of their clients was to promote healthy and affordable food initiatives. Some program deliverers provided funding directly to support local food initiatives including food banks while other Ontario Works offices volunteered their time, as described below:

We work with other community partners. In fact [Ontario Works employees] every Wednesday they go and one of the [local organisations] here has a food box preparation where they partnered up with some of the wholesaler distributors in town. Every Wednesday the caseworkers will go in and pack up healthy food boxes and for $20 a month you’ve got fresh vegetables and fruits for your children and some canned goods … so we partner up with them and we help out where we could financially by contributing a lump sum.

Although local resources were identified as scarce and often absent in most northern communities, considerable effort was expended in seeking opportunities to improve local conditions and by extension, the likelihood that Ontario Works clients would receive the supports necessary to prepare them for employment.

The use of wage subsidies to assist local employers with employee salaries was another way existing resources and infrastructure were used to support welfare recipients. Program deliverers offered wage subsidies to local employers as an incentive to generate
employment opportunities for welfare recipients. Despite the economic boost that wage subsidies provided, some program deliverers believed that the temporary nature of the support in addition to the presumed risk of hiring primarily low to no skilled workers limited the impact of the initiative. Nonetheless, in the absence of more attractive alternatives, wage subsidies continued to be offered as long as employers did not demonstrate ‘serial hiring’ practices. In some instances, employers were described as accepting the subsidy, hiring an Ontario Works client and then terminating their employment once the wage subsidy support period expired.

6.9.3 Assuming Responsibility for Declining Resources and Deteriorating Initiatives

In addition to using existing infrastructure to address resource shortfalls, program deliverers preserved resources that were under persistent threat of cutbacks or closure. Therefore, considerable effort was placed on preventing the closure of local resources because further reductions to or the complete loss of a local service typically meant losing the only social service of its kind in the community. The serious implications for Ontario Works recipients in the north with the closure of a key employment training resource illustrates this point. This situation is described by a northern Ontario Works program deliverer (manager):

[Organisation X] was going to close because they were short $35,000. So I was at the meeting, I said, well, if this literacy class closes in [Town X], I have nobody [in the area] who can provide upgrading. You’re committing my clients to a lifetime illiteracy and being on social assistance.
Consequently, many program deliverers believed that participating in partnerships where a portion of their *Ontario Works* budget was allocated to the provision of a local service was not only cost effective, but essential to counteract the chronic underdevelopment and underfunding of local supports in most northern communities that otherwise imposed insurmountable barriers to *Ontario Works* program implementation. Cuts to, or loss of, services were described as often occurring quickly, requiring an immediate and innovative response. Accordingly, the need to respond to crisis conditions seemingly hindered program deliverers’ capacity to effectively plan innovative responses for future challenges. A program deliverer described her efforts to preserve a major local employment support program:

> They were going to cut it and they were going to close it. [Organisation X’s] Job Connect, they were in [Town X]. They had staff there. They pulled the staff out and they were going to close the office and I said, “I’ll give you an office, I’ll give you an office free. Just keep sending your staff once a week. I don’t care how often, just keep providing the service and let me build up clientele for you to build a case that you do need the staff back there;” because they went from an office with full-time staff to an office with staff once a week – maybe once every two weeks and they finally said, “Why are we paying for rent?”, so they closed. They actually stopped paying for rent. So now they’re using one of our offices up there.

Therefore, monitoring and responding to community resource break-downs constituted a distinct part of the *Ontario Works* program implementation process in the north. However, resources obtained or initiatives started by program deliverers in response to decline were often unstable. The following excerpt illustrates the challenges encountered:
The children were all used to getting backpacks and well, now times have changed and 300 people have been laid off and most of them don’t know when they’re going to have a job and the women retired who were running it… So we decided with our [Ontario Works funds] maybe we will just run our own backpack program. We’ll run it next year and see if we have any money left over or not just for the OW children. But it’s hard when you run something and the money isn’t there anymore.

The decision to assume responsibility for purchasing backpacks and school supplies was also explained as a means of compensating for inadequate Ontario Works benefit allocations and broader challenges to maintaining existing resources arising from local economic decline. The limited availability of program funds and local resources, however, often posed considerable challenges to sustaining changes.

### 6.9.4 Re-Working Local Services Delivery Structures and Processes

Another means by which program deliverers navigated issues arising from resource constraints involved adjusting delivery structures, processes, and practices at the local level. In many instances, resources or services were obtained through innovative practices that often involved re-allocating resources in a more purposeful way. Most program deliverers noted that they creatively used Ontario Works program funds to obtain training and educational opportunities for clients. One such arrangement is explained by a program deliverer:

> We set up an agreement with the college with some of the dollars and now we’re getting where we’re using the money creatively. In our regulations, it states we can spend up to $500 a month per person so we’ll make an agreement with the college …
we can provide 500 bucks upfront if they can, at the end of the day, work it out where we’re dispersing funds 500 dollars a month per client in order for them to get some training.

Many program deliverers were uncertain whether their innovations were outside of approved practices, but risked sanctions because they did not believe better alternatives existed. Most workers identified the practice as, ‘stretching it’ while fewer used the term ‘bending the rules.’ The example below illustrates this phenomenon as a program deliverer describes his experience of maneuvering within the Ontario Works program to provide needed supports:

We look at situations on an individual basis assisting her [the Ontario Works client] through our employment related dollars…we really kind of stretched the boundaries of what that meant, but she had to go down there for [several] weeks of training in order to be guaranteed employment. She returned; she’s all set up – full-time employment. So you know, in those cases. But those are really on an individual basis and how close they are to securing employment and what they have guaranteed for employment [are factors for decisions] and that’s one out of 200 so…

A similar example in terms of uncertainty about policy compliance included the purchase of vehicles by several northern Ontario Works offices. In the absence of public transit and the inability of clients to purchase bus passes, several OW offices reallocated dollars earmarked for Ontario Works client transportation to purchase vans that were used to transport clients to jobs skills training. One northern Ontario Works program deliverer identified the decision to purchase vans as a necessary alternative:

I look at it this way, maybe I’m wrong but the city of [X] gives a client 100 per month for a bus pass. To me, the money they spend on bus passes, I’m buying vans and
paying for gas. So that’s how I [justify it] because we can give clients travel and transportation dollars but the reality is that they don’t have a car. So I can give you 18 cents or 20 cents a kilometer but if you have no car, this won’t help you. Like a trip from here to [Town X] might cost $60.00 or $30.00 by cab. When I first came here, we were paying people to go from [Town X] to [Training Centre X] and it was costing 400 bucks a week. We can’t sustain that…

Other program deliverers similarly identified the absence of affordable transportation options as the primary reason for purchasing vehicles. Despite the efforts to resolve barriers to employment by obtaining specific items, many of the complicating factors were not able to be resolved. For example, mobility issues remained a serious barrier for clients who were unable to access reliable and affordable transportation to run errands to purchase affordable food, or to travel to and from daycare and work (when employed). Finding drivers for the vans was an additional challenge for at least one Ontario Works office despite their innovative idea of creating a work placement for Ontario Works participants willing and able to transport Ontario Works clients to and from training and education sessions with the vans: “Right now we have a van and no driver. It’s just sitting there. It would boil down to more resources.” Thus, facilitating access to employment opportunities for welfare recipients involved a range of considerations, many which were made with a high degree of uncertainty with respect to the limits of Ontario Works program policy to accommodate individual circumstances and needs.

Other strategies involved the re-working of Ontario Works funding arrangements, which illuminated the urban bias of Ontario Works program funding allocations and permitted expenditures. In particular, the unique nature of northern challenges often required
solutions that reflected northern realities, which left program deliverers uncertain about what decisions and options were permitted. For example, adaptations were made to Ontario Works organisational structures and processes, such as the purchase of chainsaws to support clients to achieve goals that addressed northern barriers, were affordable, and sufficiently aligned with Ontario Works employment objectives. A program deliverer explains how she adapted her problem solving to reflect northern realities:

Someone needed firewood so we bought him a chainsaw. He wanted to cut his own wood. We’ll consider that part of his fuel costs. So instead of giving him one hundred dollars a month for wood, we gave him a chainsaw and you cut your own.

A similar instance in which an Ontario Works client identified a resolution to employment barriers they experienced is identified below:

I mean a 10 speed bike, we had a client who wanted to get to work and she had a kid but she worked at the mall at the end of town and the babysitter was at this end of town and she had no way in the morning to get the kid to the sitter and to work; so she suggested a 10 speed and I said go for it. In this particular circumstance, it makes sense. Now, it’s not that I want - to go out and buy everybody 10 speeds, but she needs transportation, and it was her idea. She came up with it.

The above example is indicative of how systemic infrastructural barriers impact Ontario Works clients in the north. While well-intentioned and potentially empowering to Ontario Works clients however, supporting resolutions that involve balancing a child on a 10 speed bicycle while travelling across town to a child care provider and then between work and home offers little in the way of an effective solution to the mobility issues that the northern welfare recipients encounter. On the contrary, while such proposals might provide an
apparent resolution, in fact, they might maintain barriers by failing to fully address challenges that require more comprehensive resources (i.e., safe mobility solutions during the winter months).

Other suggested solutions involved different challenges. In the instance below, the purchase of chainsaws was required to facilitate an *Ontario Works* client’s access to an employment opportunity. The program deliverer’s explanation highlights challenges due to conflicting responses by the municipality and the Province, with serious implications:

There was a job cutting wood. I needed chainsaws for the job. Ten clients, 5 on the provincial side and 5 on the municipal. The municipality said, “No, we’re not buying them chainsaws.”; The Province said, “Yes”. The five guys from the provincial caseload, I don’t know why the Province said yes, but it did; They all got jobs for six months. So, 500 bucks for the chainsaw, they saved six months of welfare. These guys [the municipality] said, “No it’s not in the rules”, but anyway, these guys stayed on welfare so...you need an administrator, but you also need the flexibility to make local decisions.

The above excerpt provides an excellent example of innovations exercised by northern program deliverers as well as their limited autonomy. It demonstrates the nature of the power relations encountered and juggled by program deliverers when attempting to access resources and privilege local knowledge and perspectives in resourced-based decision-making.

Examples of other strategies to obtain needed services and resources by re-working local service delivery structures included approving major car repairs that were generally considered to be outside of common practice. As noted, northern circumstances including
the absence of public transportation were often at the forefront of such decisions. Also consistent with cost containment priorities, program deliverers who approved car repair service costs beyond those generally considered acceptable, did so to achieve cost savings. A program deliverer explained the rationale:

We have examples of clients; a client is working at Tim Horton's. Her transmission goes. She lives in [Town X]. Our budget or entitlement is 1000 dollars. She's only getting $200 because she's working. So we are taking a percentage off her cheque for earnings per child benefit or whatever, and her tranny goes. Her tranny is eight hundred dollars. Well technically I'm not allowed to do that. But I sit down and I go, okay if I don’t give her a transmission, she gets fired. She loses her job. The project will be one thousand dollars for me. This is going to jump up from two hundred to one thousand dollars. If she does that for three months, it's costing me $3000. So I have to spend the 800 dollars to keep her at work or the game is over. For me, if you write it up and document it properly, no one in their right mind is going to question you.

Although there is acknowledgment that the practice of approving such items as major car repairs remains outside of approved directives, the savings generated far exceeded what would be possible through conventional practice. Moreover, the lack of transportation alternatives for northern Ontario Works clients necessitated the approval of car repairs. As with others who have considerable experience with the welfare system (GWA and OW), the northern Ontario Works program deliverer above expected her superiors to support her decision and in particular to understand its cost-effective rationale.
Efforts to facilitate greater access to resources and the labour market also involved initiating changes to local office structures and practices. Often fueled by pressures to be more efficient in terms of time spent on a range of tasks, office re-structuring efforts were adopted throughout the north. Re-structuring or re-organising efforts typically varied between generalist and specialist teams and in some cases, offices moved back and forth between the two formats. Generalist teams or workers were often referred to as the ‘super-worker’ model, and were adopted more often by smaller, more remote regions to accommodate smaller staff compliments and caseloads as well as isolated service delivery situations. The operation of satellite offices to provide services in isolated, remote areas often involved one or two workers who were required to provide a range of services. An Ontario Works manager from a large northern centre discusses the differences between the models:

The smaller DSSABs have to have the multitask worker because they can’t afford to have two or three workers in [Town X]. They can’t have a family support worker, and a case manager, and a program review officer all at the same time so they have to become one person that does housing. They do housing, they do child care - the ‘super-worker’ model; where in our centre, we are more individuals and we specialise in areas because of the amount of staff I have and because everything’s done in our office and not in the outlying offices. I think sometimes you get a little better product that way. There’s a lot of knowledge you have to know with the Ontario Works Act and especially the health part and the discretionary benefit part so I have workers that are specialised in those areas. You have to remember we cover everything from funerals here to supplying baby beds. So, that that’s the gamut. Certainly there are
challenges and then I have teams that will just handle clients, their cheques and their address changes and I have other teams that help get people onto different pensions. So, they’re specialised. It’s okay to do that as long as you have the staff, but once you start losing staff, that’s when you run into you know difficulty with being able to produce along that line.

Efforts were made to structure delivery models to accommodate the *Ontario Works* program’s employment focus as well as local conditions. Several offices chose to develop hybrid models in which service delivery teams comprised ‘super-workers’ as well as one or two ‘specialised’ positions that were typically focused on fostering labour market attachment. Offices maintained this specialised focus on employment in various ways, as illustrated by the accounts of two program deliverers:

The odd time someone gets in and doesn’t demonstrate any barriers to employment; they have a work history and we think they are quite employable. That’s when we would refer to [Worker X] and she would work intensively work with them to get them employment as soon as possible.

In smaller areas, specialised workers were shared among several offices.

[Worker X] and I both work what we call the, ‘employable’ clients and we manage them as a file – their financial aspects and everything. We just recently hired a caseworker who is dealing strictly with employment. She’s not carrying a caseload, but she’s working with them finding jobs and going out meeting with employers. We’re starting to offer some incentives to the employers to hire some of our clients. She’s doing a wonderful job and she’s also being shared within the district so she’s travelling.
Many program deliverers engaged in efforts to respond to program and northern constraints by enhancing the resources available to clients to the greatest extent possible. Identifying and taking advantage of opportunities within the *Ontario Works* program to provide more resources to *Ontario Works* clients included a number of strategies. Among the most common were those involving educating potential clients about the benefits available within the *Ontario Works* program. A program deliverer explained her approach in the context of her work with youth:

I strongly encourage the kids especially to get jobs because it’s not deducted from their OW as long as they’re in school. So that a 16 year old could get an 18 dollar an hour job for the summer and it’s not deducted because they’re returning to school. Most clients, if I see that they’re even trying, whatever loop hole I can find, whatever grey area, I’ll give them the assistance.

Another northern *Ontario Works* program deliverer explains her approach to accommodating those in need, “If I have to bend something, I will to a degree. Case by case - careful not to set precedents.” “… we have to make a decision – we’re talking about families and children. I have to get them something.”

Concerns regarding the well-being of welfare recipients remained a major motivation for workers who sought to maximise resources for clients. However, standard allocations within OW policy also served to direct program deliverers’ decisions. A program deliverer recalls her practice of providing *Ontario Works* clients with maximum entitlements to sustain a full-time confirmed employment opportunity:

If they’re moving out of town to get a job if it’s full-time and for that you have to verify full-time employment then they get 500 dollars; then of course you can figure
out the Community Start Up in there because they’re moving for a job. So that could give them 800 dollars; and if they have to pay a babysitter up front and they can somehow verify that, you can give them child care costs.

The knowledge of Ontario Works program resource options positioned the program deliverers well for ensuring clients received ‘entitlements’ as they progressed through the system. As illustrated in the excerpt above, clients who successfully secured full-time employment became eligible for a range of resources depending upon their individual needs (i.e., child care, relocation). However, the distribution of such resources was largely dependent on caseworkers’ knowledge of the Ontario Works system and in some circumstances, their discretion or judgement.

Another means by which resources were provided to Ontario Works clients involved multiple Ontario Works program funding sources or ‘pots of money’ made available to program deliverers through the Ontario Works program to enable them to accommodate specific client resource needs. Most program deliverers regarded these ‘pots of money’ as providing them with the flexibility to respond to client needs that was not available anywhere else in the Ontario Works system. A northern Ontario Works program deliverer discussed her observations of how Ontario Works caseworkers utilise these funding sources:

So the challenge for the workers is that they have a challenge in front of them and say, “Okay and I can't do this under Ontario Works - can I do it under Healthy Communities under Homelessness? No? Under Rent Bank? No? Under any fund? No? Under Water Fund? No? Ok, how about the National Child Benefit Program? Can I cover this request under any of these programs? So, we're basically mixing and
matching these programs to serve the customer? To serve the individual client – the actual need.

Although these various funding options were made available, many inherent restrictions limited the program deliverers’ ability to mitigate hardships for clients. The reflections of this program deliverer illustrate this point:

We do have pots of money to help in those situations but once you’ve accessed it, you can access it today, but you can’t access it for a while. Well, if you look at the Community Start-Up benefits, yeah, it’s available but you can access it one time in 24 months... Then we have pots of money like the Community Fund, then we can assist, but again those are one time only.

Consequently, limitations imposed on the available supports were experienced as constraining the program deliverers’ capacity to adequately respond to many of the client needs. A northern Ontario Works program deliverer explained:

We have dollars out there to help people in those situations. We can’t help them all. We can’t solve all of your problems. One thing I always tell the clients is that I’m not going to say ‘no’ right off the bat. It depends on your situation, what’s going on, what [funding sources] you’ve used, what you haven’t used. I try to take a little bit of money here, a little bit of money there and make it happen but sometimes [pause] I am always, always realistic.

Efforts made by program deliverers to ensure resource availability and access to welfare recipients involved implementing a range of innovative practices. However, the implementation of these efforts appeared to be influenced by several factors. Program deliverer willingness to engage in innovative practices appeared to be influenced by the
extent to which their personal ideology supported the action, the extent of their familiarity with *Ontario Works* program policy, and the degree of support they anticipated receiving from their manager. On this point, program deliverer practices appeared to reflect the ideological positions of their respective managers. Although some program deliverers indicated having a different ideological perspective than their managers, they adopted practice approaches they perceived to be acceptable to their managers. Consequently, the nature and scope of the interventions adopted by program deliverers had the potential to vary suggesting implications for unevenness in service delivery within and across northern service areas.

### 6.9.5 Minimising Hardship

Addressing resource constraints often included efforts to buffer or protect welfare recipients from some of the negative aspects of the program. A particular challenge in mitigating client hardships was the contradictory role program deliverers maintained in supporting welfare recipients while also perpetuating hardship as agents within the highly punitive *Ontario Works* program. Key examples of this practice emerged in the interviews with caseworkers responsible for ensuring *Ontario Works* clients pursued child support payments from absentee parents.

While recognising that they could not forego their responsibility to obtain information, these program deliverers made efforts to minimise embarrassment and harm to the client, as explained:

I have to ask some delicate questions sometimes especially when you get down to, well, he doesn’t believe the child is his and its paternity. I have to ask, “are you absolutely sure that he’s the father? [Recalling the response of the *Ontario Works*
“well eee well… [making uncertain sounds of the mother].” and they go like this [gestures]. They’re embarrassed. I understand the questions are personal. I try to ask them - to treat it like going to a doctor and he’s doing an examination. That’s what he’s there to do. This is what I’m here to do and help you through. I’m not here to judge you and I try to make that really clear to them…

Although obtaining information remained a priority, the sensitivity employed indicated a sincere desire to avoid contributing to further stress of the Ontario Works client. Deeply aware of the multiple and complex challenges experienced by clients, many program deliverers expressed concern about further stressing the clients. In related situations, program deliverers chose to accept responsibility for mandating Ontario Works clients to seek child support payments from absentee parents. A northern Ontario Works program deliverer explained her approach and rationale:

I try and make myself the bad guy because the client is generally a mom with children and she doesn’t need that; she doesn’t need that extra burden. It’s hard enough being on social assistance but to approach an absent spouse to say, “You know, now I need child support”; so I will make the initial overture. “When she’s on social assistance, she doesn’t have a choice. She must pursue child support” [as if telling this to the person]; so it’s the option that is open to her now. She can do it through private agreement where you don’t have to go to court or the option is if you don’t want to do that, then she must take you to court.

Acknowledging that gender dynamics are often evident since the majority of mandated Ontario Works clients are single mothers and the majority of absentee parents are fathers, the program deliverers work to minimise retribution that might be levied by the fathers on the
mothers. In cases of identified domestic violence, a program deliverer explained, “If there’s a domestic violence situation, we waive her obligation to pursue support. We’re not going to put a person through that.”

In other situations, entire Ontario Works offices engaged in a particular practice aimed at lessening client hardship. The practice of collecting overpayments from Ontario Works clients varied across Ontario Works offices with some choosing to follow the program protocol more strictly than others. One worker shares the more compassionate practice adopted by her office:

Some offices will actually send the things to collection …Chances are, they’re [Ontario Works clients] not in really high paying jobs… and to call them and not accept anything that they give you and send it off to collection, that’s going to hurt them financially. Again no one wants to be harassed by collections, so we’ll accept any payment. Whatever they can afford, we’ll accept.

Despite the commitment by some northern OW program deliverers to mitigate hardships due to policy directives, others were less compassionate or did not perceive outcomes to be sufficiently detrimental to clients. The thinking and practice of program deliverers who chose not to employ measures to mitigate financial hardship among lone parents when the absent parent failed to pay child support until after the 30 day arrear period passed, constitutes one such example. A worker discusses her perspective:

So that at the end of the month, she’d be reimbursed. Sometimes we talk to them and ask if they want us to speak to landlords. Sometimes that helps. But they’re not

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15 Because Ontario Works benefits are deducted from the sole parent’s allocation dollar for dollar, single mothers with children can be technically left with a substantial underpayment of benefits for over a month if the absentee parent fails to pay child support.
going to get kicked out within two weeks anyway. The eviction process does take longer than that anyway. She’s not going to get kicked out in 2 weeks. We certainly wouldn’t see them out in the street.

In this approach, the assumptions that there is minimal harm or inconvenience in instances of late child support payments appears to underlie the reasoning and actions of the program deliverer. It is noteworthy that several program deliverers identified feeling conflicted with this policy due to the economic and psychological hardship it created for single mothers and their often young families.

Exempting *Ontario Works* clients from participating in *Ontario Works* employment based requirements was a further means of minimising or preventing hardship among clients who were temporarily unable to fulfil *Ontario Works* program requirements. Exemptions to *Ontario Works* program participation were often granted by program deliverers to clients experiencing debilitating health issues or to those awaiting consideration of *ODSP* applications.

Poor economic conditions yielding an insufficient type or number of employment opportunities was identified as often necessitating exceptions to standard *Ontario Works* program participation requirements. For example, a mismatching of local employment opportunities to client job skills and experience was often managed with exemptions of the clients from participating in the labour force and substituted with community placement opportunities [where used].

Higher incidences of health problems among welfare recipients (Vozoris and Tarasuk, 2004) and northern residents (Mitura and Bollman, 2003) were consistent with the circumstances encountered by northern *Ontario Works* program deliverers and added
challenges to program implementation efforts. Program deliverers received medical
documentation from many clients who required exemptions from participating in the *Ontario
Works* program. Many program deliverers expressed frustration and while several indicated
they did not necessarily support the deferral or found the client’s assertion questionable, they
followed the policy. A northern *Ontario Works* program deliverer shared her experience and
thoughts on the issue of medical exemptions:

> I don’t even think you can go to an on call doctor anymore. I think you have to sit in
> emerg [emergency] for 20 hours until...So a lot of our clients will say they have a
> medical deferral or whatever so they have to go to the doctor and get the medical note
> filled out saying they can’t, they’re not employable at this time. So that’s sort of a
> pain too; so we know they’re not going to get in for however long, so we defer them.

In addition to health problems, the shortage of local physicians extended the duration of
exemptions required. Lacking sufficient access to physicians in the north meant longer wait
times for clients to receive care and as illustrated by the excerpt above, it contributed to
further delays in clients resuming participation activities.

Accompanying efforts to reduce challenges and hardships encountered by welfare
recipients, decisions to compensate for inadequate *ODSP* services or absentee *ODSP* workers
by providing some *ODSP* services themselves created risks for the program deliverers.
Although considered to be an act of compassion, providing services that were intended to be
delivered through another program (i.e. *ODSP*) was sometimes met with criticism and
punishment. A northern *Ontario Works* program deliverer explained:

> The *ODSP* offices are not staffed properly. Their caseloads are something like 800
each. So they are seeing clients every few years -say six years they'll see their clients.
A lot of times we will call on behalf of the client. “There is a client here, help him”.

And at the end of the day, if it’s between that client getting a job, we will just do it
[provide for client’s needs] and take the consequences.

Faced with the prospects of ODSP clients being unable to access employment opportunities, some program deliverers felt compelled to assist. Unfortunately, audits often revealed such practices and resulted in sanctions applied to the northern Ontario Works program deliverers. For many program deliverers, such punitive actions further reinforced their perceptions that the Province or ‘the South’ ultimately overlooked northern realities.

In spite of the challenges and potential sanctions, many program deliverers recognised the benefits of working to obtain required supports for clients even in the absence of supportive organisational structures and policies. A program deliverer who regularly adapted the system to meet her clients’ needs shared her perspective:

As you grow and experience the program you can manipulate the system without breaking the rules. Using discretion in making the program fit the client rather than the client fitting the program. And I guess that comes with your comfort level to deliver the program and what you hear that goes on elsewhere and if your managers can allow you to go that extra step. So it’s a combination of everything and with experience, you can adapt the program.

6.9.6 Recognising Limits

Despite many innovative efforts, northern Ontario Works program deliverers recognised when options to support a client had been exhausted or when conditions prevented program deliverers from assisting or that making further efforts would be futile. In most instances, the contextual and organisational barriers resulting in demands were
identified as exceeding the available resources. Consequently, program deliverers often expressed frustration at their inability to adequately respond to local conditions. A program deliverer’s experience illustrated this point: “When I hear we have organisations there that are looking for some skilled trades people and they’re begging, they’re literally begging for people and I can’t supply them…”

In addition to an inability to fill skilled employment vacancies, the futility was recognized as moving *Ontario Works* clients into even low skilled employment opportunities while they continued to experience multiple and co-occurring barriers to employment. Unresolved issues were often considered insurmountable barriers to obtaining and sustaining employment, such as obtaining affordable housing, locating a reliable and trustworthy child care provider, overcoming learning disabilities in order to benefit from the upgrading services offered, adequately addressing health and mental health concerns including addictions and/or locating reliable and affordable transportation.

In other instances, the hardships incurred by *Ontario Works* clients for failing to respond to *Ontario Works* policy directives were thought to create circumstances that remained unresolvable with the resources available. A northern *Ontario Works* program deliverer explained:

It falls apart when *CAS* comes to take the children. When *CAS* comes to take the children they [the parents] have a big debt with *OW* because they don't bother telling *OW*. They don't have any children [justifying their shelter allotment because they were removed by *CAS*], so they get into debt. They get into debt with housing. It just goes on and on and it gets deeper and deeper and deeper. And people just never get their way out.
The insurmountable challenges for clients who failed to follow directions or expectations were commonly seen by program deliverers, who despite recognising the nature of the problem (i.e., failing to submit required information), were unable to reverse the consequences. The example shared by a northern *Ontario Works* program deliverer below illustrates this point:

This young girl she’s got four young children and housing was doing a review and asked her for information, and she never sent it in. So they put her up to market rent. She was paying some rent, she had gone on *OW* and can't pay market rent. So she ended up getting evicted and has a bill for thousands of dollars. ‘Cannot get housing now and she cannot find anywhere to live that she can afford.

Unfortunate and often preventable circumstances were identified as creating or exacerbating challenges experienced by welfare recipients. The severity of the problems considered arising from the *Ontario Works* system left many caseworkers without options to move *Ontario Works* clients toward employment. For example, an inability to obtain affordable housing or address crushing debt in order to ensure welfare recipients could obtain and sustain employment was recognised as ‘trapping’ people in ‘the system’. While program deliverers ultimately refused to give up on clients, many saw no other option than to resort to following the status quo. As many program deliverers recognised early on in their experiences of implementing the *Ontario Works* program, following conventional practices or the status quo often discounted or overlooked the contextual challenges in the north that intensified already difficult circumstances.
6.10 Summary

Northern program deliverers struggled to manage a multitude of resource and bureaucratic constraints arising from northern geographies, economic conditions, and social factors in addition to organisational constraints exacerbated by residual and urban-centric welfare policies. The major category, navigating incongruences, described strategies adopted by program deliverers to facilitate labour market attachment among welfare recipients amidst such barriers. Initiating partnerships with community service providers, accessing existing infrastructure in innovative ways, and taking over responsibility for declining resources or services involved the development of strategies primarily focused on preserving or preventing the complete loss of local resources. These strategies also served to mobilise limited local resources in new and innovative ways. Other efforts involved strategies to minimise the impact of resource limitations such as altering service delivery structures, maximising the allocation of benefits where possible, and minimising harms to welfare recipients originating from welfare policies and local resource deficits. However, the additional time spent by program deliverers attempting to address resource inadequacies was believed to be largely overlooked by the Province. Moreover, the urban-centric nature of Ontario Works policy created conditions that were largely insurmountable for northern program deliverers leaving them little recourse but to adopt status quo practices that did not reflect northern realities.
Chapter Seven: Discussion

7.1 Chapter Overview

This study is unique in identifying and exploring factors that influenced the delivery of work-first social assistance in northern contexts. Through qualitative interviews, northern Ontario Works program deliverers’ shared their experiences of encountering and managing a range of constraints in their efforts to deliver the program. The research process afforded an understanding of the nature and scope of the contextual and organisational constraints encountered by program deliverers as well as an understanding of how program deliverers responded in order to fulfill Ontario Works policy directives in northern settings. Analyses of program deliverer experiences revealed that narrow and rigid policy directives from the urban-centric welfare system and insufficient resources are largely incompatible with the socio-economic reality of the north.

The infrastructure deficiencies in the north significantly inhibited efforts to support welfare recipients in fulfilling the employment based requirements of the Ontario Works program. This resulted in major challenges for the program deliverers and welfare recipients. The analysis of this research offers an important contribution to this understudied topic. Canada is a vast country with a large rural landmass that contributes significantly to the profile of this country. Understanding the experiences of the residents of northern communities and their unique challenges can assist policy development that is both responsive and equitable to Canadians.
This chapter begins with a brief review of the core category and findings presented in the previous chapter and then proceeds to analyse these findings. Adaptation, as the core category, is discussed in relation to its development as an overarching response to the precarious and continually changing organisational, economic, and social factors identified by northern program deliverers.

Constraints that influenced the capacity of northern program deliverers to adequately provide supports necessary to facilitate economic self-reliance are discussed in four parts that coincide with the emergent major categories. The first part, building and maintaining controls, offers an interpretation of the key findings associated with the welfare system. The second part entitled, adopting efficiency as a practice, discusses the motivations behind and implications of the central emphasis on efficiency and accountability within the Ontario Works program. The third section, encountering constraints explicates the key findings that emerged within the major category, encountering constraints; and the fourth part explains the key findings that emerged within the major category, navigating incongruences. These sections offer interpretations of the constraints encountered by northern program deliverers as well as the strategies they adopted in response to program implementation challenges. The analysis of the major empirical findings of this study are linked, where possible, to the relevant literature and the theories discussed in chapter four. This section is followed by an elaboration of the strengths and limitations of this research study followed by a discussion of the implications of the findings for social assistance policy development, program design, and implementation in northern contexts. Considerations for future research and concluding comments complete the chapter.
7.2 Adaptation

The core category, adaptation, was selected because of its extensive presence in the efforts of northern Ontario Works program deliverers to respond to constraints arising from welfare system policy rigidities and resource deficits linked to northern geographies. Adaptation comprised the primary activity in which northern Ontario Works program deliverers engaged. Specific adaptations included the continual adjustments and accommodations made throughout the process of providing the Ontario Works program locally. Program deliverers regularly modified or adjusted their practices to address or function within (adapt to) the extensive and diverse range of policy and resource constraints they encountered. The core category reflects responses to the constraints identified within the emergent minor and major categories including the strategies used by program deliverers to compensate for and address barriers to program implementation in the north.

These responses or adaptations comprise the core category of adaptation and include accommodations frequently made by program deliverers in order to adequately manage oversights within welfare system policies. Such oversights were generally perceived and experienced as inadvertently disadvantaging northern program deliverers and welfare recipients. Accordingly, many areas of program implementation required adaptation on the part of northern program deliverers. In particular, the program’s focus on repositioning itself as an employment support program and its heavy reliance on local infrastructure and social services required northern program deliverers to employ strategies that focused on navigating the local culture’s reliance upon welfare stereotypes, rumours, reputation of individuals, and their positions within local social networks as key determinants to access employment opportunities. Adaptation to practices was also necessitated by the inadequacy of local
infrastructure and support services needed to facilitate labour market attachment among welfare recipients. Lower education levels, along with limited work experience and job skills among northerners required resources and supports that were routinely inadequate and often unavailable in the north. These challenges in addition to the lack of preparatory training and skills of northern program deliverers to take on an employment counselling routinely involved efforts on their part to adapt to unfamiliar practice situations (e.g., welfare recipients in need of support to pay exorbitant heating bills or face eviction in an environment with routinely limited and poorly insulated housing) and develop strategies to facilitate labour market attachment without the necessary resources and supports (e.g., purchase vans to transport clients to training in the absence of public transportation).

In addition, the centralised design of the program and the corresponding constraints and limits imposed upon local autonomy within the Ontario Works program reinforced dynamics of centre-periphery (heartland-hinterland) relations and the marginalised status commonly experienced by (periphery/hinterland) northern residents in arenas of political decision making and influence over local labour market outcomes. Although the centralised authority of the Ontario Works program (power and key decisions maintained at the provincial level) does not constitute a new arrangement for social assistance in Ontario, the continuance of provincially driven policy and administrative decisions fostered and reinforced conditions of dependence and marginalisation among northern program deliverers. In contrast to expectations for greater autonomy and control over the local administration and implementation of the new employment based form of welfare among northern program deliverers, they experienced a range of provincial Ontario Works program policies that defined a universal amount for basic needs irrespective of place-based conditions, a pre-set
list of approved expenditures for which northern program deliverers were expected to abide with or ‘make a case’ to the Province for exceptions, requirements imposed requiring program deliverers to set progressively greater performance (caseload reduction) targets despite the volatility of northern economic conditions. This expectation remained despite the volatility of the natural resource based extractive industries that dominated northern economies and determined local economic prospects.

Standard budget allocations and permitted expenditures determined by the provincial government typically reflected southern urban perspectives leaving northern program deliverers to navigate and adapt to the circumstances. These circumstances often placed northern program deliverers in positions of having insufficient funds or authority to address contextual realities of the north. Requirements for alternative or additional funding arrangements to provide welfare recipients access to shelters and addictions services, training opportunities where services did not exist locally, or additional funds to support First Nations people migrating from reserves to northern centres constituted common examples of circumstances that necessitated the adaptation of practices among northern program deliverers in order to meet Ontario Works program requirements.

Moreover, the universal funding standard determined by the Province that allocated the same amount toward basic living costs irrespective of place was highly problematic Ontario Works program policy for northerners. While providing a standard allocation for living expenses, this approach assumes similar living costs across geographic service areas (north and south, rural, remote, non-metropolitan, and metropolitan), thereby overlooking unique differences in geographies and northern settings in particular. While program implementation and living costs can be argued as high in southern urban areas, unique
conditions in the north were identified as increasing costs and limiting options and affordability due to geographic distance. These involved increased costs arising from greater distance required to transport food and other goods, the lack of a critical mass (client/consumer base) necessary to benefit from economies of scale that would in turn, attract investment capital and educated, skilled workers, increase labour market opportunities, expand the local tax base and local infrastructure, lower food, clothing, and utility costs, and increase the availability of health and social services. Consequently, resources necessary for welfare recipients preparing for labour market participation were often inadequate or unavailable resulting in barriers to employment, longer periods of welfare receipt, and additional costs and efforts on the part of northern program deliverers to adapt their practices fulfill program requirements. Adaptation to these conditions by northern program deliverers routinely included investments of additional time and money to maintain existing resources and compensate for other services reduced or lost to funding cutbacks.

Northern program deliverers adapted their practice in response to local resource deficiencies by locating supports for welfare recipients that would typically be provided by community service providers or would be otherwise available in urban settings (e.g. developing additional job skill training sessions to accommodate small, widely dispersed groups of welfare recipients, arranging transportation and accommodation to facilitate client access to healthcare services located in another town or centre, assisting with locating housing in the absence of local service providers, exploring child care solutions due to a lack of local child care centres or providers, juggling and draining available program funds to help welfare recipients pay off heating bills in order to avoid eviction and homelessness, and in
the absence of public transportation, pooling funds allocated for the purchase of bus passes to purchase vans in order to transport welfare recipients to training opportunities).

Factors reflective of the constraints program deliverers perceived as impacting welfare recipients (e.g. family composition, gender, age, education level, work experience, motivation, social skills) determined, in part, how practices were adapted by the program deliverers. Deeply aware of the deleterious implications for welfare recipients and their families and faced with their own obligations, program deliverers felt compelled to find ways to address these challenges. For example, the continually changing policies and guidelines within the Ontario Works program often created restrictions and barriers to accessing resources. These barriers were generally exacerbated by poor economic conditions, limiting outcomes for residents in the community. Understanding the circumstances of clients left many program deliverers with a sense of moral obligation to assist. Although the workers interviewed did not use this language, in effect, they were put in extremely conflictual and contradictory situations. Moreover, program deliverers felt inordinate workload pressures that often necessitated the need to adapt practices although they rarely identified this issue directly. In particular, the need to respond to multiple problems encountered by welfare recipients or experience the potential loss of local resources required a reprioritising and adapting of strategies to help people who were experiencing difficult circumstances.

Although the dearth of research in the area of northern social assistance precludes the inclusion of much literature supporting the core category of adaptation, welfare research examining the local experimentation of devolved social assistance indicates similarities with some aspects of the adaptation phenomenon identified in this study. In particular, the extent to which workers experimented with options in the implementation of social assistance
programs involved the use of discretion which is consistent with the spirit in which practices were adapted by northern program deliverers. In their book, Sunley, Martin & Nativel (2006) discuss the relationship between welfare devolution and local experimentation as one involving varying degrees of discretion among program deliverers that have not typically benefitted welfare recipients. Despite the promised benefits of increased local control over decision making, concerns such as cutbacks to welfare spending and entitlements have been more common (Peck, 2001). Government efforts to limit discretion have been challenged as the devolution of welfare (work-first) programs have led to a host of local welfare experiments and discretionary practices as program deliverers introduced different delivery options in Ontario (Herd, 2002). This local experimentation, while limited by policies imposed by centralised authorities, has still enabled program deliverers to engage in practices involving more discretionary powers than in the past (e.g. the GWA program). These discretionary practices are reflected in the adaptation strategies developed by northern program deliverers in this study.

The adaptation practices in which northern program deliverers engaged are reflective of uneven development within northern rural and non-metropolitan contexts. Accordingly, several theoretical positions (theory and frameworks) have been drawn upon in this study to provide a foundational understanding of the potential influences of uneven economic development and the centre-periphery relations on the implementation of work-first social assistance in northern areas. The central importance that local economic well-being maintains in relation to employment based social assistance demonstrates the relevance that staples theory and the heartland-hinterland thesis hold in this study. Doreen Massey’s divisions of labour theory (1995), and Young’s (2000) theoretical analysis of marginalisation
within employment provide explication of labour relations that both guide and reinforce place-based (centre-periphery) and class divides within employment structures and processes. Consideration of factors, relations, and processes that shape economic conditions as well as employment opportunities and structures in northern contexts is enabled through the foundational understandings provided within the aforementioned theoretical perspectives. These perspectives provide particular insights in relation to the core category of adaptation.

Limited employment opportunities and infrastructure combined with a northern demographic of rapidly aging residents, a population of predominantly low skilled workers with low educational attainment, and a high rate of youth out-migration, required extensive efforts on the part of northern program deliverers to develop and implement strategies that adapted to the challenges within the northern context. Staples theory and the heartland-hinterland framework which explicate economic (and labour market) implications of overreliance on natural resource based industries for peripheries (e.g. Canada) provide critical insight into the nature of the struggles encountered by program deliverers in their efforts to adapt interventions to human capital and local labour market realities of the north. Explication of the dependency relationship northern Ontario maintains with the south as well as how such relations of dependence constrain local control over economic and political decision making in the north provide a basis for program deliverers to navigate the economic conditions and employment landscape in the north. It also facilitates an understanding of the relations and processes that maintain and reproduce the dominance of core regions over peripheries. For example, staples theory and the heartland-hinterland framework offer an analysis that explicates the north’s reliance on staples commodities that in turn thwart economic development and limit resources and employment opportunities necessary for
northerners to become financially self-sufficient. Moreover, partnerships initiated by northern program deliverers to identify and plan for future economic development and employment opportunities in the north require an understanding of the interrelations between centre and peripheral regions that ultimately determine employment and development prospects necessary to fulfill *Ontario Works* program employment requirements. Massey’s spatialised understanding of capitalism’s role in creating uneven development as well as her analysis of capitalism’s implications for employment within periphery regions provides a contextual understanding of labour dynamics that identify and explicate the perpetual economic and political disadvantage routinely experienced in rural (northern) areas. Massey provides a critical perspective on the nature of employment barriers encountered by northern program deliverers which serves to inform adaptive strategies necessary to more effectively respond to such barriers. For example, the aforementioned theoretical perspectives on uneven development as well as Young’s (2000) perspective that explicates the perpetual marginalisation of low skilled workers challenge the traditional practice of welfare workers that focuses on social skill development and individual deficits over addressing structural barriers to employment. In summary, theoretical insights into the processes that create and maintain uneven relations with capital and development between centre and periphery regions provide a necessary foundation upon which to more strategically and effectively target supports and resources to northern welfare recipients.

### 7.3 Building and Maintaining Controls

In the social welfare literature, social assistance is often regarded as a mechanism for regulating the behaviour of the poor and particularly those receiving public welfare (Peck,
Historically, regulatory mechanisms were used extensively in the provision of welfare programs as a means to control the poor and to promote and reinforce a dominant ideology that holds individuals responsible for their own wellbeing. Within this perspective, individual self-sufficiency through active labour market participation is regarded as the primary method of wealth distribution (Lightman, 2003). Anyone falling outside of the labour market, especially the young and able, are deemed lazy, dependent and non-productive. This perspective persists and aspects of it were obvious in my research.

As identified in this research, regulatory mechanisms within the *Ontario Works* program were employed through reinforcing dominant ideology that advocated and legitimised employment based welfare as the most socially and fiscally responsible approach to providing social assistance. Consistent with seminal work completed by Piven and Cloward (1971) and more recent analysis completed by Peck, (1996, 2001), regulation in my study was identified as a key regulatory mechanism within the *Ontario Works* program and often appeared as various measures to regulate behaviour. In my study, such measures were adopted by both the centralised provincial welfare authority and local program deliverers and maintained a focus on fostering compliance to *Ontario Works* program policy. For example, the shift in emphasis from welfare dependence to active labour market participation determined by the provincial government required ‘buy-in’ from the community (employers, service providers), *Ontario Works* program deliverers, and welfare recipients as a means of ensuring participation and compliance to program policy. Accordingly, the introduction and promotion of ideological perspectives and the implementation of policy directives from the centralised authority comprised a key mechanism to shape desired behaviour (‘buy-in’ and compliance).
Moreover, regulation was also introduced through the adoption of business-oriented language within the *Ontario Works* program that promoted dominant welfare discourse emphasising neoliberal and marketised values. This discourse consistently promoted the benefits of active welfare policy (i.e. mandated employment activities in exchange for financial support). As identified by northern program deliverers, these regulation objectives reflected priorities that appear to fit more readily with southern, urban labour market conditions where, among other things, job opportunities are typically better and in greater supply (Peck, 1996; Massey 1984).

Reinforcing dominant neoliberal ideology through policy directives and language were strategies used extensively as a regulation measure to generate support for employment based welfare and ensure program compliance. Consequently, dominant discourse promoting the benefits of employment based welfare as a means of resolving high caseloads and corresponding costs while improving the lives of welfare recipients was widely accepted by northern program deliverers. Other controls were introduced by the Province as program design features that assigned specific roles and responsibilities along north-south lines with sanctions for noncompliance.

Another key regulation mechanism included the degree and conditions of autonomy granted to local program deliverers. The nature and extent to which local autonomy and decision making were permitted within the program was determined by the Province and held significant implications for local program implementation in the north. In particular, the concentration of decision making power in the urban south generally outweighed objections from northern deliverers resulting in the determining of policy and practice directives that did not reflect contextual realities of the north.
Other implications arising from the program’s centralised concentration of power and control included the ways power differences were reproduced by local program deliverers toward welfare recipients. Despite program objectives that articulated outcomes of self-sufficiency and independence, practices reflected power relations in which program deliverers maintained authority over the goals and decisions made in planning the transition of welfare recipients into the workforce. Therefore, while expectations and accountabilities were placed on welfare recipients to become economically independent, they were permitted only a narrow range of options (see Morgen, 2001). Consequently, power differences between program deliverers and welfare recipients, while not directly acknowledged by most northern program deliverers, appeared to play a significant role in terms of providing the autonomy and options to welfare recipients necessary to foster self-sufficiency.

Accordingly, the relations of power identified within the Ontario Works program and its implementation demonstrate links to the uneven division of power between the southern (heartland) centre and northern (hinterland) periphery. These relations raise issues that are consistent with theorising within the heartland-hinterland framework (Howlett, et al., 1999; McCann and Gunn, 1998). Centre-periphery relations discussed in chapter four draw attention to the uneven power relations that exist in urban and rural areas (Heartland-Hinterland) which, according to the heartland-hinterland thesis of uneven development, privilege southern, urban centres while marginalising northern rural settings. More specifically, northern program deliverers described their encounters with the centralised welfare authority (in Toronto) as reflecting relations that maintained a concentration of power in the south with little power or control over decision making permitted in the northern periphery. Consistent with the theoretical proposition advanced by McCann and
Gunn (1998), natural attributes of an area, such as highly diversified economies, the ability to attract capital investment, and a highly skilled labour force foster strong economic conditions in the urban south (Greater Toronto Area) by concentrating resources and power in the core region. Meanwhile, less desirable attributes located in the periphery (e.g., the north) lead to the limited infrastructure, insufficient services and other deficits that result in barriers to employment (i.e., low educational attainment, limited work experience and job skills among northern residents) commonly experienced in northern communities. Accordingly, Ontario Works program policy making that defined local program delivery directives was experienced by northern program deliverers as primarily conducted in the urban south while only limited and highly regulated control over local autonomy was permitted at the local level.

Divisions of centralised and local authority and relations between north and south within the Ontario Works program also reflected theoretical insights articulated in the work of Doreen Massey (1984; 1995). Massey’s analysis of the branch plant phenomenon which demonstrates the implications of uneven power relations on the labour divisions and between centre and periphery regions provides insight into the manner in which decision making power is concentrated within the southern urban core (i.e. the Province/Toronto). Massey identifies the ways in which core or centre regions develop rules and introduce systems in periphery areas that reflect urban priorities and objectives and disproportionately benefit the south. Similar to divisions of authority and concentrations of power in the south discussed by Massey (1995), northern Ontario Works program deliverers encountered similar circumstances in which they were presented with policy directives designed by southern
bureaucrats that privileged urban areas with little consideration of implications for northern settings.

Another key finding concerned the tension workers demonstrated in terms recognising structural barriers experienced by welfare recipients while expressing widespread support for employment-based welfare and dominant discourses and often attributing welfare recipients’ circumstances to poor decision-making, inadequate socialisation towards employment, and/or lacking the desire to work. Many program deliverers witnessed the structural barriers and hardships experienced by welfare recipients, yet maintained largely conservative, individualistic perspectives. Whether due to the adoption of dominant welfare reform discourse, maintaining personal values consistent with a ‘frontier’ mentality that emphasised self-reliance (through employment), and/or fear of job loss in a setting with few employment opportunities, northern program deliverers maintained a strong commitment to employment based welfare in light of their awareness of structural barriers to employment in the north. As agents of the state, program deliverers facilitated processes of employment preparation in communities typically lacking the infrastructure, resources and employment opportunities to fulfill the program’s employment objectives, which suggests that some northern program deliverers became instruments of regulation themselves.

The irony of such a situation lies in the similar circumstances between behaviour regulation measures applied by the provincial government to northern program deliverers and those applied by northern welfare recipients to welfare recipients. Similar to a rural welfare study that found work-first program supervisors to be frustrated by program rules, performance measures, and surveillance imposed upon them by the state (Taylor, 2014),
northern program deliverers in my study also expressed resentment and frustration at being subjected to *Ontario Works* caseload reduction targets, reporting requirements, and sanctions. However, program deliverers seemed unaware of the parallels they experienced with welfare recipients despite the imposition of performance measures, the continuous monitoring of activities, and sanctions implemented for non-compliance with program requirements. While northern program deliverers were required to set and fulfill welfare caseload reduction and labour market participation targets, welfare recipients were expected to set (in collaboration with their caseworker) and achieve employment oriented goals within participation agreements. Despite experiencing similar constraints, program deliverers did not identify the link between the regulation they and their clients collectively experienced. Additionally, both groups were subjected to extensive monitoring and surveillance as well as sanctions in the form of audits and funding claw backs and the suspension or termination of benefits respectively. Consequently, efforts made by northern program deliverers to adapt their practices to the centralised urban-centred welfare policy directives and their northern contexts were also influenced by the lack of understanding maintained by some program deliverers about broader program issues. A greater awareness and appreciation for the parallel dynamics experienced by program deliverers and welfare recipients might lend support toward the development or adaptation of practice approaches that maintain greater degrees of empathy towards welfare recipients.
7.4 Adopting Efficiency as a Practice

The centrality of efficiency as both policy and practice within the *Ontario Works* program resulted in the decision to raise the status of this concept from a minor category to a major category. Efficiency constitutes a central objective and tool within the *Ontario Works* program. Its emphasis on cost minimisation and cost containment represent an extension of the accountability focus within the program that is identified and discussed within the major category, *building and maintaining controls*. In the context of the *Ontario Works* program, accountability represents a means by which to assign responsibility and ensure compliance by introducing rewards or sanctions for the successful or unsuccessful fulfillment of program delivery responsibilities. Efficiency was identified as a style of practice that shaped the nature and options (resources) available to program deliverers and welfare recipients while also holding them accountable for program outcomes.

Several key strategies for exercising efficiency emerged in the analysis and were presented in the minor categories. These strategies include, the transferring of risk or accountability for program outcomes from the centralised (provincial) authority to northern program deliverers and onto welfare recipients, implementing expediency within program delivery, and adopting measures to deter and divert costs away from the *Ontario Works* program. Each of these strategies represent a method of practice that legitimises residualism in social services. For example, the transfer of risk or risk reduction, a key strategy of the *Ontario Works* program, was revealed within practice directives that transferred much of the accountability for social assistance provision onto local program deliverers and welfare recipients. In many respects, the introduction of employment based welfare placed additional
responsibility and accountability for the fulfillment of program objectives onto welfare
recipients (i.e. finding and keeping employment). Northern contextual constraints such as
limited employment opportunities, high cost of living, overextended and limited local
resources, and considerably low levels of human capital led to challenges fulfilling *Ontario
Works* employment requirements. Pressures to exercise expediency in practice, another
efficiency strategy, involved the minimal use of resources accompanied by the transition of
welfare recipients off of the system as quickly as possible (without encouraging recidivism or
welfare cycling). The introduction of performance measures that monitored the duration of
welfare receipt in addition to continual monitoring of resource use and expenditures
comprised mechanisms to ensure compliance to expediency objectives.

Meanwhile, the emphasis on diverting costs away from the program primarily
involved moving welfare recipients into other programs such as ODSP and EI whenever
eligible. While the emphasis on efficiency was believed by northern program deliverers to be
fiscally responsible, many also recognised the implications of this focus as impeding their
ability to adequately support welfare recipients to access and sustain employment.
Moreover, the introduction of performance targets encouraging caseload reduction that
threatened claw backs and cuts to base funding to local *Ontario Works* offices caused
additional distress for northern program deliverers who were generally understaffed and
under-resourced and unable to compensate for the volatile economic conditions within their
communities (i.e. implications of mill or mine closures). Interestingly, study findings
suggest that the focus on minimising and containing costs potentially created conditions of
recidivism among welfare recipients because they were often moved into the labour market
while structural issues such as reliable child care, transportation, housing, and health issues
remained partially or completely unresolved. In many other instances, welfare recipients were ‘unemployable’ due to health issues that were not severe enough to qualify them for ODSP or experienced a multitude of other barriers including child care needs, limited work experience and job skills, and low education levels requiring additional time to address within under resourced northern contexts. In turn, the multiple barriers experienced by these welfare recipients created additional work and resource requirements for northern program deliverers that was not recognised by the centralised authority (“Toronto”). The urban-centric program design that based efficiency protocols on southern urban contextual realities (i.e. availability of employment opportunities, social services, and public transit) largely positioned northern program deliverers as unprepared and ill-equipped to adequately support the unique needs of northern welfare recipients. Moreover, the centrality of efficiency within the Ontario Works program that was identified as co-occurring with welfare recidivism suggests serious implications of privileging cost minimisation over providing adequate resources to support welfare recipients. For example, the experiences of northern program deliverers revealed implications of inadequate program funding for recidivism. Many program deliverers attributed the insufficient universal basic needs amount for welfare recipients and their limited spending allocations and authority as factors contributing to challenges moving recipients off of welfare and sustaining employment. Consequently, insufficient resources were perceived as contributing to the return of welfare recipients to the program resulting in additional resource spending to recommence the labour market transition process. This finding also suggests that the conflation of program effectiveness with efficiency accomplishes little in the way of addressing the structural barriers (particularly in the north) that perpetuate the ongoing need for social assistance.
Theoretical linkages to these findings include Massey’s (1995) and Young’s (2000) insights into the marginalised status and labour relations and dynamics that perpetuate socio-economic divides, powerlessness, and exploitation among (northern) periphery program deliverers. The disadvantaged status northern program deliverers consistently experienced as being physically and figuratively situated on the periphery of key decision making and policy setting within the Ontario Works program appears to parallel their marginalised status as branch plant communities (i.e. external ownership of local industry and having limited control over decisions that impact the local community). Limited control over Ontario Works policy decisions that in turn, demonstrated a lack of fit with many northern realities (e.g. the limited availability of employment, the high competition for entry level jobs, and the displacement of welfare recipients by the working poor or displaced primary industry workers) comprised a key challenge identified by program deliverers. Similar to the vulnerabilities described in Massey’s (1995) theorising of the branch plant phenomenon, northern program deliverers experienced pressures to conform to external priorities that were imposed upon them by the centralised authority and that were detrimental to local program outcomes. The high vulnerability that branch plants experience in relation to the influence and demands of external forces also illustrates parallels with northern Ontario Works program offices that are subjected to conditions that not only constrain their capacity to respond to unique northern issues, but that also place them in the tenuous position of having to decide whether to ‘bend rules’ in order to fulfill program implementation requirements.

The endorsement of efficiency within the Ontario Works program by the centralised welfare authority, while perceived as fiscally responsible by most northern program deliverers, was recognised as incongruent with northern priorities in terms of its southern
urban-centric conceptualisation. While few northern program deliverers objected to the concept of performance measures, the application of performance targets as a means of achieving caseload reductions was problematic in the north where welfare recipients were observed as having extremely low human capital and very limited resources to address the multiple and compounding nature of employment barriers encountered.

Moreover, Massey’s (1995) recognition of the increasingly neoliberal style of capitalism as creating and sustaining economic and political disparities provides insight into the efficiency-fueled tensions identified by northern program deliverers. In particular, the emphasis on efficiency as a value and a means of demonstrating efficacy (see Gross-Stein, 2002) of the Ontario Works program is reflective of the changes occurring within capitalism and within (neoliberal) welfare state restructuring. For example, the growing integration of business values and principles within social programs, the adoption of active labour market policies within the Ontario Works program as social assistance, as well as the central role cost minimisation and cost containment maintain within the program are consistent with neoliberal capitalism.

7.5 Encountering Constraints

Constraints arising from economic, social, cultural, and geographic conditions in the north as well as experiences working within a system of market-based welfare structures comprised the primary program implementation issues encountered by northern program deliverers. The central issue however, was that the heavy reliance maintained by the Ontario Works program on local infrastructure and social services to fulfill program objectives held expectations that were beyond the capacities of many northern communities. Premised on
urban-based notions that local communities have the capacity to provide sufficient social supports in addition to adequate public transportation, affordable housing, accessible child care, education, training, and employment opportunities to enable welfare recipients to obtain and sustain employment, it became clear that the Ontario Works policy overlooked unique conditions within northern settings.

In particular, the overreliance of most northern communities on single natural resource based industry created volatile economic conditions that in turn, generated a precarious and insufficient number of employment opportunities and services. The limited ability to attract capital investment, skilled workers, and higher waged work further reinforced poor economic conditions in the north. Thus, weak economic conditions experienced in most northern communities limited employment opportunities and created widespread resource deficits that limited the capacity of northern communities to fulfill Ontario Works program objectives.

Despite the economic insecurity across the north (i.e. the often sudden cutbacks and closures of primary industries) that made it impossible for northern program deliverers to accurately predict local labour market trends, each year program deliverers were required to increase their performance targets. Consequently, the setting of performance targets was an especially difficult exercise that held northern program deliverers accountable to standards that could not be met in the midst of volatile economic conditions and persistent economic insecurity. As explicated in chapter six, such policies placed northern program deliverers in the precarious position of promising outcomes that were often beyond their capacity to deliver. Despite some leniencies granted by the Province (i.e. granting Ontario Works program managers an opportunity to re-set targets), many program deliverers remained very
concerned about failing to fulfill performance targets and understood the consequences of failing to meet targets as resulting in reductions in future funding.

The findings in this study generally support the existing body of literature that explores structural barriers in rural welfare design and delivery (Arsneault, 2006, Bartik, 2000, Findeis, Henry, Hirschl, Lewis, Ortega-Sanchez, Peine, and Zimmerman et al., 2001). In particular, program implementation constraints arising from weak local economies, underdeveloped infrastructure, and severe resource deficits reported in the literature are consistent with my findings. The study findings further provide support for the literature documenting the volatile and deteriorating conditions that are becoming more pronounced in northern communities.

The findings are also consistent with the literature examining the delivery of social assistance in rural areas. Most social assistance delivery efforts in rural areas have been found to be hindered by local characteristics including severe resource deficits, an insufficient number of employment opportunities, limited and underdeveloped infrastructure (Tickamyer, et al., 2002), as well as human capital deficits among welfare recipients (Arsneault, 2006; Gibbs, 2002; Pindus, 2001; Tickamyer et al., 2002). A lack of adequate public transportation, education and training supports, and child care services which were found to comprise major barriers to employment for rural welfare recipients (Curtis and Copeland, 2003; Tickamyer et al., 2002; Pindus, 2001) also emerged as prominent employment barriers for northern welfare recipients in the current study.

Employment challenges that emerged in the study are also strongly supported in the research literature on rural welfare. Specifically, employment challenges were widely recognised as common to rural areas as evidenced by higher rates of unemployment,
underemployment, and poverty (Gibbs, 2002; Southcott, 2013). Moreover, the nature of rural labour markets which include a high proportion of part-time and seasonal work as well as a growing number of low-skilled, low-waged service sector jobs in light of the declining primary sector in many areas (i.e., manufacturing, forestry, mining, fishing) was perceived to play a major role in a community’s capacity to support welfare to work employment objectives in both the current findings and within the body of rural welfare research (Arsneault, 2006; Gibbs, 2002).

A key result of this research that resonates with the rural welfare research literature is the intersecting nature of these structural barriers that in turn, compounded the challenges of attaining and maintaining employment for welfare recipients (Arsneault, 2006; Blank, 2005; Gibbs, 2002). Studies in the area of rural welfare provide support for these findings where structural barriers to employment are noted as occurring as multiple rather than single barriers (Arsneault, 2006; Blank, 2005; Milbourne, 2010; Pindus, 2001; Riemer, 2010). Structural barriers to employment that characterised rural conditions of underdevelopment were most often experienced as multiple barriers that intensified challenges to achieving financial independence. For example, northern Ontario Works program deliverers encountered welfare recipients who struggled not only with spatial mismatch in terms of living a significant distance from employment opportunities (Fisher & Weber, 2002; Harvey et al., 2002) and resources, but also who did not have access to public transportation.

The nature of labour market challenges experienced in the north is well articulated in the theoretical work of Doreen Massey, which recognises employment challenges for periphery regions as well as differences between northern and southern labour market opportunities. Massey argues, for example, that branch plants are implicated in creating
stratified labour market conditions between the north and the south (Massey, 1995).

Recognising the path dependent nature of labour divisions, Massey (1995), Reed (2003), and Young (2000) identify the stratification within labour that ultimately results in concentrations of lower waged, lower skilled employment in rural (northern) areas while higher waged, higher skilled, more plentiful and secure employment opportunities thrive in southern urban contexts. The work of these theorists explicates and affirms that northern areas (hinterlands) tend to experience disadvantage in terms of having the capacity to provide employment opportunities and resources that can meet the needs of the work-first welfare programs and offer the job mobility necessary for welfare recipients to transcend poverty.

In other instances, the lack or absence of child care services in rural communities exacerbated challenges for welfare recipients who were expected to conduct job searches, and attend education and training sessions. In contrast to studies that identified rural families as primarily relying on relatives to provide child care (Pindus, 200;1 Tickamyer, 2002), the northern Ontario Works program deliverers reported arranging child care funding for the majority of their clients. This disparity could be attributed to some northern welfare workers providing child care for all welfare clients as a means of countering social development deficits perceived as more common among low income families. Limited options for family care were experienced by many welfare recipients however, because family caregivers often endured similar socio-economic circumstances requiring them to work low-waged, shift work, thus limiting their availability to provide care. In other instances, mental health and addiction issues experienced by family members made them unsuitable child care providers.

In addition to the myriad structural barriers found in studies of rural welfare, many rural welfare workers identified low human capital among welfare recipients as posing
significant barriers to finding and keeping work. In describing human capital deficits, personal characteristics of welfare recipients were observed by welfare workers as imposing serious impediments to obtaining employment. Addiction and mental health issues were often cited as barriers to employment for welfare recipients. Also of interest was the tendency for program deliverers to identify structural barriers as ‘individual barriers to employment’, suggesting that the responsibility for these barriers was with the individual. Low educational attainment, limited work experience, low literacy levels and limited ‘soft or social skills’ were commonly identified as individual barriers to employment without acknowledging the structural barriers that produced them (i.e. limited educational opportunities in the north). Consistent with the current findings, supply side studies of rural welfare found that low levels of education, limited work skills and a lack of work experience among welfare recipients limited their ability to attain employment (Fisher & Weber, 2002). Also consistent with the findings in the current study, this body of research identified the relationship between low educational attainment and the limited ability for welfare recipients to find living wage jobs (Arsneault, 2006; Fisher & Weber, 2002; Gibbs, 2002).

Educational deficits among welfare recipients represented a major constraint encountered by northern program deliverers when working to move welfare recipients into employment. The low levels of educational attainment by welfare recipients marked a substantial challenge for program deliverers because of the dramatically low levels of education completed and the considerable proportion of welfare caseloads in which welfare recipients lacked the most minimum education requirements necessary for entry level employment. Most program deliverers managed caseloads in which an estimated 40 to 60 percent of welfare recipients had less than a grade 12 education. A related challenge
involved problems providing additional supports required by welfare recipients to successfully complete upgrading. For example, consistent with many rural welfare studies, educational upgrading programs (for GED) were available in most northern communities (Pindus, 2001), however, additional supports to assist welfare recipients who had learning disabilities or whose literacy levels were extremely low were often unavailable. For the most part, educational upgrading programs were designed as primarily self-administered programs with minimal teaching support. Consequently, northern Ontario Works program deliverers experienced considerable challenges obtaining such educational supports for clients.

A further key finding includes the varying capacities of northern communities to fulfill Ontario Works program employment requirements. In particular, program deliverer accounts revealed variations in the type and availability of social and employment supports across the north. Fewer services and employment opportunities in the more rural and remote communities were common. This very pertinent finding was not found in the body of rural welfare research available. While Arsneault (2006) identified the same finding in terms of the variation of welfare implementation between rural sites in rural Kentucky, no findings on the issue could be located for northern contexts. Accordingly, the unique challenges that northern contexts raise in the delivery of social assistance require further research.

7.6 Navigating Incongruences

Efforts to deliver social assistance in the north required strategies to mitigate constraints encountered within the local northern context as well as others embedded within the institutionalised welfare system. Consequently, interventions developed by northern program deliverers were almost entirely consumed with efforts to adapt practices that
balanced *Ontario Works* program objectives and performance expectations with persistent conditions of underdevelopment and under-resourcing. The extensive resource deficits encountered by the program deliverers contributed to a perpetual state of stress for program deliverers whose efforts continually addressed implementation problems while anticipating others.

Constraints from workload issues arising from the need to place additional effort and costs toward addressing resources deficits yielded further challenges. In addition to the implications for providing services to clients (i.e. the reduced capacity of program deliverers to provide support to welfare recipients because a considerable amount of their time was spent responding to resource deficits), inadequate resources ultimately compromised the strategies program deliverers advanced. In particular, innovative strategies were often initiated at times of crisis and confined by the same constraints reserved for welfare recipients, namely, reactionary, under-resourced, and short-term interventions to long-standing complex problems. Also, because strategies were typically initiated in times of crisis (i.e. the impending closure or cutback of a support program), northern program deliverers had limited opportunities to engage in reflective, long-term planning. Moreover, *Ontario Works* policies that privileged per capita funding models based funding resource allocations on the caseload numbers, precluding the receipt of funding necessary to make the program work in the north. That is, such policies disproportionately disadvantaged northern program deliverers by neglecting to consider additional service delivery costs incurred as a result of geographic distance to services, population dispersion that demanded service delivery to geographically separated small cohorts of clients, rural decline that limited the availability of local resources, and devolution that added program costs to municipalities (placing pressure
on already low local tax bases). This finding is supported by Slack, Bourne, and Gertler, (2003) who recognise the challenges faced by small local tax bases in that small communities are typically unable to afford infrastructure and local social services.

Other factors also influenced the nature and scope of interventions developed. In particular, the perceived severity of the issue encountered was considered by northern program deliverers in relation to the availability of resources. Funding sources readily available and accessible through established (standard) Ontario Works program allocations permitted a relatively straightforward approach to responding to issues (from an urban-centric lens). Conversely, resources needed to address service deficits that were not provided by the Ontario Works program required a different level of commitment in terms of time, effort, and skills (i.e. community economic development) that was not equally possessed by northern program deliverers. Consequently, the capacity of workers to engage in specific initiatives was also a determinant in the interventions advanced by program deliverers. The extent of experience or familiarity that program deliverers had with the program also appeared to influence interventions or strategies adopted. Workers with more familiarity with the program described a greater willingness and ease adapting their practice to changing conditions and a greater confidence in applying program policies. Such disparities in experience might potentially contribute to different or uneven levels of resource allocation between similarly eligible clients, not only in light of individualised service plans and discretionary preferences of the worker, but their knowledge of and confidence to obtain resources for clients from policy.

In addition to having access to sufficient funding, time, and skills, the ideological persuasion of program deliverers also seemed to influence the efforts taken to address
challenges. For example, program deliverers with managers who maintained a more conservative, individualistic view of welfare tended to adopt more conservative interventions than program deliverers working under managers who embraced a more humanistic view. In such instances, workers were encouraged and expected to use exemptions where possible and engage in efforts to minimise hardship by maximising discretionary resource allocations and avoiding the use of sanctions.

Despite efforts on the part of program deliverers to initiate interventions or adapt practices to mitigate constraints encountered, it is important to recognise that program deliverers were forced to maintain contradictory roles. Loyalties divided between supporting welfare recipients (e.g. in recognition of resource inadequacies or personal barriers compromising labour market attachment) and adhering to the central program objective of moving welfare recipients off welfare revealed contradictory and conflictual roles as many workers sought to provide as much support as possible while also angling to transition welfare recipients off the system as quickly as possible. Additionally, the influences of urban, southern conceptualisations and understanding of welfare which were not recognised by northern program deliverers may have also played a role in shaping the options program deliverers perceived to be available or possible in the north. The uncritical adoption and application of (urban-centric) practices by northern program deliverers appeared to reflect the dominance of urban southern perspectives of poverty and the limited authority provided to northern program deliverers to develop context specific interventions. Northern program deliverers were generally expected to adopt the practice directives developed by the centralised (southern urban) welfare authority.
Welfare system structures and processes found to underlie the delivery of welfare to work programs were experienced by northern Ontario Works program deliverers as maintaining strong urban assumptions about poverty and welfare. Similar to findings of Tickamyer, White, Tadlock, and Henderson (2002), program deliverers were continually confronted with urban-biased assumptions and practice directives within the welfare system. Moreover, the program’s structure that almost exclusively features and promotes individualised interventions may have inadvertently discouraged northern Ontario program deliverers from pursuing more place-based interventions (as opposed to person or individually oriented solutions).

To conclude, the constraints and strategies identified by northern program deliverers stem from their perception of bureaucratic and regulatory controls situated within Ontario Works program policies largely set within a centralised welfare authority (the Province). Infrastructure and resource constraints arising from underdevelopment throughout the northern region were considered to be key contributors to the creation of structural constraints and individual (human capital) deficits. Consequently, the core category of adaptation was identified as comprising a collection of strategies used by northern program deliverers to address bureaucratic and resource constraints that presented barriers to moving welfare recipients into employment. The adaptations to practices routinely undertaken by program deliverers to adjust to limited and/or declining infrastructure and resources involved a range of strategies in response to urban-centric policies (e.g., the universal allocation of basic living amount which overlooked living costs across place, and the initiation of partnerships with community service providers in an effort to pool limited resources to maintain existing services). Urban-centric assumptions underlying many Ontario Works
policies revealed approaches to social assistance provision that were experienced as incompatible with northern contextual realities. The extensive reliance on and presumed assumption within *Ontario Works* policy that all communities possessed infrastructure and resources that could adequately support and sustain the transition from welfare to work overlooked contextual realities within many northern communities that failed to acknowledge the limited infrastructure, under-resourced social services, and the additional costs associated with rural and remote northern geographies. Moreover, provincial expectations that required program deliverers to set and meet progressively greater caseload reduction targets were typically experienced by northern program deliverers as unrealistic in light of lower educational outcomes, fewer skilled workers, and limited employment opportunities within highly volatile economic conditions (i.e., boom and bust business cycles that are more pronounced in natural resource extractive industries which predominate in the north).

Theories of uneven development drawn upon in this study provide a solid understanding of economic implications for northern contexts. The north’s reliance on natural resource extractive industries and resulting dependence on the urban south as a consequence of limited attractiveness for capital investment and underdevelopment provides needed insight into the nature and extent of constraints encountered by northern program deliverers in their efforts to transition welfare recipients into the labour market. Greater attention to the spatialised nature of capital discussed by Massey (1995), and Harvey (2006) offer critical insight into the implications that forces such as economic globalisation, deindustrialisation, and the neoliberal focus of welfare state restructuring have on the capacity of northern communities, *Ontario Works* program deliverers, and northern welfare recipients to fulfill employment based welfare requirements. Massey’s (1995) theorising on
labour divisions and the branch plant phenomenon foster an increased understanding of the space and capital as well as the path dependent nature of employment, the specific nature of employment opportunities, and upward mobility available to periphery regions. Massey’s (1995) and Young’s (2000) work recognises worker status and power relations as embedded within labour processes that in turn can determine and reinforce marginalised status of low-wage, low status work. The ramifications of participation and entrapment in low skilled, low waged employment identified through Massey’s (1995) and Reed’s (2003) divisions of labour analysis suggest limitations for northern welfare recipients who are required to transition into jobs that lack options to increase status and wages. This analysis further draws attention to concerns poverty scholars have identified in regards to social assistance as failing to address poverty.

7.7 Strengths of the Study

This study’s focus on exploring how the implementation of welfare in northern communities is influenced by northern contextual and organisational factors offers an original research contribution that responds in part to the dearth of research on welfare in northern remote, rural, and non-metropolitan contexts. Additionally, the qualitative research design adopted for this study creates a space for the experiences and voices of northern Ontario Works program deliverers to be recognised. The area of the study advances our understanding of multiple subject areas inclusive of Canadian welfare as well as the intersecting influences of geography, regional development, rural studies, and social policy and program implementation on the northern landscape. The range of implementation issues that emerged in the study offered increased awareness and more comprehensive
understanding of social assistance delivery challenges common to northern contexts. Additionally, the nature and implications of the intersecting tensions between northern non-urban and southern urban relations captured dynamics that provide an understanding of northern welfare and acknowledge the unique relations between Canada’s heartland and hinterland.

The adoption of a qualitative approach further strengthened this research by permitting an in-depth exploration of implementation challenges encountered by northern *Ontario Works* program deliverers as well as the issues faced by northern welfare recipients. The use of a grounded theory methodology fostered a comprehensive understanding of the many challenges influencing the implementation of welfare in northern contexts by making the perspectives and social constructions of these challenges by those directly implementing the program explicit and accounting for the influences of social locations, local culture and conditions and welfare bureaucracies on those perceptions. Moreover, using a qualitative grounded theory approach facilitated linkages to theoretical explanations of the emergent findings. This provided an explanation for the strategies adopted by northern *Ontario Works* program deliverers to navigate and overcome constraints encountered as well as insight into the role social circumstances played in the decisions made by northern *Ontario Works* program deliverers. It is important to note however, that the study design, methods, and methodology of this study are limited to an exploratory study of welfare in northern contexts and the study was therefore unable to confirm causal relationships.

Efforts initiated at the onset of the study by Professor Ernie Lightman to gain endorsement for this research study from key members of OMSSA and NOSDA are believed to have contributed to my ability to access a range of northern *Ontario Works* program
deliverers as willing research participants. Additionally, my identity as a northerner
(originally from a rural community in northern Ontario where I lived for approximately 25
years) as well as a social worker and a PhD student seemed to afford me a degree of ‘insider
status’ with many northern Ontario Works program deliverers. Many program deliverers
indicated respect for my familiarity with challenges associated with living in the north as
well as the duration and range of my clinical experience. Finally my level of education
appeared to be regarded with respect by many northern Ontario Works program deliverers
which may have added legitimacy to the research and further served to gain their trust and
participation in the study.

The identification of the responses adopted by northern Ontario Works program
deliverers to counter the implications of structural, economic, cultural, and organisational
barriers they encountered provide an in-depth understanding of the dilemmas faced by those
delivering the Ontario Works program in the north and may serve as a basis for informing the
development of welfare policies programming that better acknowledge and account for
place-based influences.

7.8 Limitations of the Study

Despite its many contributions, some limitations of this study require mention. The
decision to use a grounded theory methodology, while an appropriate choice for this study,
was difficult to implement given the challenges associated with accessing the research
participants across considerable geographic distance and harsh climates.

Constraints specific to northern areas also posed limitations to this study. In
particular, smaller and more widely dispersed populations and Ontario Works program office
sites in the north resulted in challenges accessing research participants to conduct the interviews. Although the increased availability of technology is often assumed to address barriers to communication in northern or rural areas, northern *Ontario Works* program deliverers who I was unable to meet in person rarely agreed to participate in the study. Exceptions included instances in which an *Ontario Works* supervisor or manager expressed their enthusiasm for the study and also ‘vouched’ for me as a competent and ethical researcher. However, heavy workloads were often cited by northern *Ontario Works* program deliverers as reasons for declining to participate in follow up interviews agreed to during the in-person interviews. Difficulties in conducting subsequent interviews may have reduced the degree of saturation achieved despite contingency measures adopted that included increasing the sample to ensure sufficient access to research participants. More specifically, access to research participants was impacted by distance, climate, and affordability. As a graduate student residing in Toronto at the time of the data collection, the cost of travel which involved several nights of accommodation as well as air and ground transportation to multiple northern research sites was prohibitive. Additional challenges arose from the harsh climatic conditions and the duration of winter conditions which imposed further limits on travel times due to dangerous winter driving conditions. Consequently, the limited window for safe travel resulted in challenges scheduling interviews with *Ontario Works* program deliverers who were often very busy.

Additional challenges associated with northern communities were also encountered. In particular, issues including concerns associated with protecting the identity of research participants were frequently voiced by participants, the majority of whom demonstrated considerable concern about the potential for retribution from their employer. Although
participants were assured of the protection of their anonymity and confidentiality to the greatest extent possible (interviews were conducted at Ontario Works program offices), their concerns regarding employer retribution resulted in several northern Ontario Works program deliverers requesting that specific statements they made be stricken or omitted from the interview transcript. Other participants openly questioned whether or not to permit specific statements they made in the interview to remain on record. Although considerable effort was made to reassure the participants and provide them with opportunities to have their disclosures stricken from the record during and following the interview, many were uneasy about potentially making disclosures that might be interpreted by their employer as criticisms of the organisation. Consequently, concerns expressed by many program deliverers regarding employer retribution may have inhibited research participants from offering greater details of their personal feelings and experiences implementing the Ontario Works program in northern settings, thus restricting their participation in the study and potentially limiting the scope of the data collected. Although constructive grounded theory methodology’s emphasis on attaining explicit and implicit data afforded some allowances to this situation, such constraints on data collection are worthy of mention.

7.9 Implications for Policy

The findings of this study suggest a number of implications for welfare policy and implementation practices. Some of the most apparent implications include the urban-centric nature of welfare practices in Ontario, the lack of local level autonomy, and the lack of adequate resources within the devolution model adopted within the Ontario Works program,
and the lack of attention to the highly influential factors of geography, culture, and gender within the *Ontario Works* program.

The privileging of urban perspectives within *Ontario Works* policy and practice directives was perceived as both overlooking the unique nature of rural poverty and disadvantaging the north due to its reliance on single industry natural resource based economies that hinder the north’s capacity to meet welfare employment targets. Moreover, there was an apparent minimisation and even dismissal of some factors including the widespread northern underdevelopment, economic insecurity, and sparse and widely dispersed populations within *Ontario Works* policy. Conversely, repositioning *Ontario Works* policy priorities and program objectives to recognise and accommodate place-based barriers specific to northern contexts would serve to address the structural deficits that are largely responsible for longer periods of social assistance reliance in the north. For example, adopting policy priorities that shift the current overemphasis on individual accountability to addressing structural deficits in northern infrastructure and resource access would ensure better positioning of supports for northern *Ontario Works* program deliverer implementation activities. Moreover, alternatives to current *Ontario Works* program per capita funding policies would ensure resource allocations that more accurately match the nature and true costs of *Ontario Works* program service provision in northern settings. Instilling measures to address structural barriers relative to distance and costs factors that impede participation of program deliverers at decision making tables as well as modifying existing policy on devolution to grant local program deliverers greater autonomy over local policy, practice, and resource allocations decisions were also identified as necessary changes to *Ontario Works* policy to take northern contextual factors into account.
In addition, the devolved model of welfare adopted for the implementation of the Ontario Works program was experienced by northern program deliverers as a highly paternalistic model that restricted local autonomy to make decisions on policy and practice issues specific to northern settings. Although concerns persist regarding allocating DSSABs or municipalities a greater degree autonomy as it believed it might potentially compromise the necessary balance of program standardisation provided through a centralised authority (the Province), the current structure is inadequate as it overlooks northern realities and marginalises northern program deliverers and welfare recipients. Increasing northern budgets to better reflect costs of northern living and permitting northern Ontario Works program deliverers to exercise greater authority over the allocation of their budgets would comprise an important step towards ensuring welfare better reflects northern conditions and meets the needs of northern welfare recipients.

Better established linkages between provincial government ministries, municipalities and contracted social service organisations are also needed to address the highly fragmented nature of Ontario Works policy and program delivery. Many northern Ontario Works program deliverers identified challenges in accessing and working with other departments, programs, or organisations due to policies creating conditions of scarcity and competitiveness for limited resources, restricting information sharing between civil servants, and encountering interpretations of government policy by colleagues in ways that hindered collaborative partnership and in particular, the equal distribution of power, responsibility, and accountability in the relationship.

Greater responsiveness to cultural and gender specific factors within Ontario Works policy and program implementation would address current oversights within the program
which largely do not account for specific needs of Indigenous populations and women. For example, the migration of many First Nations people from their reserves to northern cities and towns in search of a better quality of life was found to add additional pressures to the *Ontario Works* system and to northern program deliverers despite Federal government funding for Indigenous people during the first year of receiving *Ontario Works* benefits. In general, northern First Nations recipients had significantly lower educational and literacy levels in addition to English as a second language challenges, limited or no prior labour market experience, child care needs, and limited knowledge of how to complete basic living tasks such as finding accommodation, paying bills, mailing a letter, or using public transportation. These challenges increased demand for support services exponentially given the substantive supports required to prepare this population for employment.

Lastly, study findings suggested that women comprise the majority of *Ontario Works* program participants either as singles, part of a family unit with two adults, or as lone parents, yet they are not generally accommodated with the provision of gender-specific services and supports. Although some support services available through the *Ontario Works* program focus on women-specific issues, most service providers and welfare workers provided gender-neutral or generic services. Committing *Ontario Works* program resources to gender-specific needs such as supports for women fleeing abusive relationships and single mothers would serve to more effectively and efficiently use precious resources by directly targeting resources to issues specific to gender. Similarly, the unique service needs of First Nations populations could also be accommodated by providing more culturally appropriate services and supports.
7.10 Implications for Research

Several questions emerging from the findings of this study suggest a need for additional research. In particular, queries concerning further investigation of northern welfare as well as comparative research of differences across northern contexts (i.e. remote, rural, non-metropolitan, and urban-adjacent) and how specific place-based factors might influence welfare outcomes in northern and southern Canadian contexts are warranted.

Further research exploring and examining the implications of place-based factors on welfare implementation and outcomes in northern contexts would offer an important contribution to an area of research requiring additional attention. As well as qualitative studies necessary to add to the very limited body of research providing an in-depth understanding of intersecting northern conditions and welfare, quantitative research studying the impact of place-based variables on welfare outcomes across remote, rural, and non-metropolitan northern communities is essential to provide a broader understanding of social assistance. Additionally, quantitative research identifying and explicating variations in welfare outcomes in northern settings that are adjacent and non-adjacent to urban centres is necessary to fill a substantial gap in the area of northern welfare research. Comparative research that examines north-south implications for welfare outcomes would also offer a valuable contribution to understanding the unique differences between employment barriers encountered by southern and northern Ontario Works program deliverers.

The limited understanding of how community resource providers including social service organisations have been impacted by the introduction of welfare’s work-first emphasis in Ontario suggests the need for additional research. Research determining whether increases in the demand for services brought about by welfare impacts the capacity of
northern social services agencies to provide services is important given the limited scope of services available in the north. Longitudinal studies that explore and examine welfare outcomes as well as impacts of welfare policy on northern capacities to develop human capital among welfare recipients and the working poor would also offer a substantial contribution to northern welfare research.

7.11 Conclusion

This study revealed that northern Ontario Works program deliverers experienced a range of constraints that impeded their efforts to deliver social assistance. These constraints arose from rigidities within the welfare system as well as the limited capacities of many northern communities to provide the employment supports and opportunities required by the Ontario Works program. Consequently, the provision of social assistance to northern welfare recipients was heavily impacted, resulting in increased time and money spent on efforts to offset inadequate infrastructure, inadequate Ontario Works program funding, and insufficient local services to meet the needs of welfare recipients.

These factors alongside a highly centralised model of program delivery were recognised as contributing to a range of adaptive responses developed by northern Ontario Works deliverers to overcome barriers to implementing social assistance in their respective northern communities. Local program delivery innovations appeared to be influenced by the availability of resources (which varied by the local economic conditions of an area), the extent of experience and familiarity northern Ontario Works program deliverers had with Ontario Works policies, the personal ideology espoused (i.e. neoliberal, human rights) by individual caseworkers and their managers, and the degree of managerial and administrative
support for a particular style or practice ideology. Due to the exploratory nature of this study and the lack of attention to this area, further research in the area of northern social assistance is recommended to better understand the nature and influence of geographic and organisational conditions on welfare provision and outcomes in northern communities.
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Appendix A: Study Information Sheet and Consent Form #1

Study Information & Consent Sheet: Welfare Reform in Northern Rural and Non-Metropolitan Ontario

Research Project: “An Exploration of Welfare Reform in Non-Urban Contexts in Ontario”

Dear Participant:

You are invited to take part in a research study that is exploring how the administration and implementation (delivery) of Ontario Works (OW) has been influenced by the northern, rural, non-metropolitan settings in which the work takes place.

What is the purpose of the study?
Northern rural and non-metropolitan areas often experience different challenges and opportunities than urban, southern areas. The study seeks to explore how local economic, cultural, social, and/or political factors influence the local OW administration and delivery in northern locations. Since little is known about how local conditions in northern rural and non-metropolitan communities influence welfare reform, this study is being conducted.

What will I be asked to do?
If you consent to participate in this study, you will be invited to take part in an individual interview and/or focus group interview to answer questions about your experience with administering or delivering the Ontario Works program in a northern rural and/or non-metropolitan setting. You may ignore any questions that you do not want answer. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded so that it can be transcribed. If you prefer the interview not be audio-recorded, the interviewer will take notes instead. The interview should take approximately 60 to 90 minutes to complete.

What are the risks and benefits of the study?
It is anticipated that your participation in this study will help to advance knowledge and understanding about the unique issues associated with administering and/or delivering Ontario Works in northern rural and non-metropolitan settings. By increasing this understanding, greater consideration and accommodation for the uniqueness of northern contexts will be facilitated in policy and program development for northern regions. As the interview results will be aggregated in order to protect anonymity and confidentially, there is minimal risk to participating in this study.

Is the study voluntary and confidential?
The decision to participate or not is voluntary and will be kept completely confidential. Only the University of Toronto Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work project team and the research assistants will know who has consented to participate in the study. All the
information collected in the interview will be **strictly confidential**. The names of participants will not be used at any stage of the research. Each participant will be identified by a number code to ensure privacy. The consent forms will be kept in a separate cabinet with no links to the interview transcripts. All data will be kept on a secure computer and access to the computer will only be available by specific passwords known only to the research team. No information will be released or printed that would disclose any personal identity. All data will be destroyed seven years after the study is completed, in October 2016.

**Results of the Study**
The results of the study will be made available to participants, in the form of a research report and will be distributed to participants upon request.

In research reports and presentations, no data will be presented that could identify you as a participant. If you would like to receive a copy of the research report, or if you have any questions about participating, please contact Anita Vaillancourt, at the phone number or email address below.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, please contact Jenny Peto at University of Toronto, Health Sciences Ethics Review Office, at 416-946-3273.

**Consent**

I, __________________________ hereby consent to participate.

(Please print first and last name)

(Please print first and last name)

___________________________________
Signature of participant

(____) __________________________
Phone Number

___________________________________
Date
Appendix B: Study Information Sheet and Consent Form #2

September 17, 2009

Invitation to Participate:

Research project: Welfare Reform in Northern Rural and Non-Metropolitan Ontario

Two years ago, Anita Vaillancourt, a PhD student at the University of Toronto interviewed a number of Ontario Works managers, supervisors, and front-line workers asking how the administration and implementation (delivery) of Ontario Works has been influenced by the northern, rural, non-metropolitan settings in which we work.

On October 27, 2009, Anita will be returning to conduct a second round of interviews, to explore how changes in local economic, cultural, and social, and/or political developments within the last 2 years have influenced the local OW administration and delivery in northern locations. Major policy changes including the introduction of the Ontario Child Benefit and evolving developments associated with the devolution of OW responsibility to municipalities will also be explored.

Interviews will provide an opportunity for participants to offer information in an informal setting and format. We extend an invitation to participate in the research project to managerial and front-line staff who have previously interviewed with us as well as other staff who have not yet participated. Findings will preserve the confidentiality and anonymity of all participants. Reports will be available following interview transcription and analysis and will be distributed to participants upon request.

If you are agreeable to participating in this important initiative, kindly advise Anita of your interest by sending an email to her at: anita.vaillancourt@utoronto.ca. Please note that interviews will be conducted in your area on October 27th, 2009.

Thank you in advance for supporting this research.

Sincerely,

Anita Vaillancourt
Appendix C: University of Toronto Ethics Approval #1

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
Office of the Vice-President, Research and Associate Provost
Ethics Review Office

PROTOCOL REFERENCE #20946

August 30, 2007

Prof. Ernie Lightman  Ms. Anita Vaillancourt
Faculty of Social Work  Faculty of Social Work
248 Bloor Street W  248 Bloor Street W
Toronto, ON M5S 1A1  Toronto, ON M5S 1A1

Dear Prof. Lightman and Ms. Vaillancourt:

Re: Your research protocol entitled "An Exploration of the Functioning of Welfare Reform in Non-Urban Contexts in Ontario"

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<tr>
<th>ETHICS APPROVAL</th>
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<td>Expiry Date:</td>
<td>August 29, 2008</td>
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We are writing to advise you that a member of the Health Sciences I Research Ethics Board has granted approval to the above-named research study, for a period of one year, under the REB's expedited review process. Ongoing projects must be renewed prior to the expiry date.

The following consent documents (received August 24, 2007) have been approved for use in this study: Consent Form. Participants should receive a copy of their consent form.

During the course of the research, any significant deviations from the approved protocol (that is, any deviation which would lead to an increase in risk or a decrease in benefit to participants) and/or any unanticipated developments within the research should be brought to the attention of the Ethics Review Office.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your project.

Yours sincerely,

Jenny Peto
Ethics Review Coordinator

xc: Ms. S. Scott (Research Partnership Officer & Grants Officer, Social Sciences & Humanities)
Appendix D: University of Toronto Ethics Approval #2

PROTOCOL REFERENCE # 20046

August 27, 2012

Dr. Izumi Sakamoto
FACULTY OF SOCIAL WORK

Anita Vaillancourt
FACULTY OF SOCIAL WORK

Dear Dr. Sakamoto and Anita Vaillancourt,

Re: Your research protocol entitled, "An Exploration of the Functioning of Welfare Reform in Non-Urban Contexts in Ontario"

We are writing to advise you that you have been granted annual renewal of ethics approval to the above-referenced research protocol through the Research Ethics Board (REB) delegated process. Please note that all protocols involving ongoing data collection or interaction with human participants are subject to re-evaluation after 5 years. Ongoing research under this protocol must be renewed prior to the expiry date.

Please ensure that you submit an Annual Renewal Form or a Study Completion Report 15 to 30 days prior to the expiry date of your protocol. Note that annual renewals for protocols cannot be accepted more than 30 days prior to the date of expiry as per our guidelines.

Any changes to the approved protocol or consent materials must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process prior to its implementation. Any adverse or unanticipated events should be reported to the Office of Research Ethics as soon as possible. If your research is funded by a third party, please contact the assigned Research Funding Officer in Research Services to ensure that your funds are released.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research.

Yours sincerely,

Judith Friedland, Ph.D.
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Appendix E: Interview Guide

Interview Questions

What do you believe are the most important considerations when working with OW participants in your region (northern, non-urban context)?

What events in your community do you believe have influenced or currently influence how you deliver OW? (ie. Mill closures, skill level, culture-cultural expectations) How?

Challenges:

What challenges have you experienced in administering/implementing OW in your region/community? (Prompt: if not “experienced”, then use “perceived”)

To what extent do you believe implementing OW in a northern, rural/non-metropolitan area contributed to the challenges you’ve experienced administering OW? (Prompts: employment, transportation, housing, education, skill level, lack of community resources, OW structure). Can you tell me more about that?

How do you think these challenges impacted OW participants in your community/region?

Opportunities:

What opportunities have you as an OW administrator/worker experienced in your role implementing OW because of being in a northern, rural/non-metro area?

To what extent do you believe being in a northern, rural/non-metropolitan area contributed to the opportunities you’ve experienced administering OW?

How have these opportunities impacted OW participants in your community/region?

OW participants:

What specific challenges/barriers do you see OW participants experiencing in your area? (Prompt: barriers experienced due to living in a northern area? Non-urban area?)

What specific opportunities do you see OW participants experiencing in your area? (Prompt: barriers experienced due to living in a northern area? Non-urban area?)
In your opinion, what factors most impact OW participant outcomes in a northern, rural/non-metro environment? In what ways? (Prompt: How does living in a northern, non-metro area influence this?)

**Local resources:**

How often do you use (or do you know of) local community resources to help OW participants? Which resources do you typically use/access? How successful have you been in accessing these resources for the OW participants you serve (any challenges in access – availability, access issues)? How successful have OW participants been in accessing community resources?

Have new needs developed? re: lack of resources.

**Place-based questions:**

How do you think interventions you use with OW participants differ from those used in urban contexts? (Prompt: can you tell me a little about the interventions you use when working with OW participants in a northern/non-urban context?)

Have you ever had to shape the OW program or its policies in order to “make it fit” into the northern, rural/non-metro realities of living and working? If so, in what ways?

In what ways do northern, rural/non-metropolitan conditions influence the administration/delivery of OW?

What do you consider to be successful outcomes for the OW clients you serve?

a) Do you think your answer to this question would be different if your clients lived in an urban area? Why or why not?

In what ways do you think OW could be better equipped/designed to more effectively respond to the rural/non-metro realities of OW participants?

**Managers:**

How has the decentralisation of welfare reform in Ontario influenced your ability to design local solutions?

What opportunities/limitations do you see in your role as an administrator for more effectively implementing welfare reform policies and practices in non-metropolitan/rural areas?