

**Summative Evaluation of the
Single Parent Employment Support Program
(SESP)**

Final Report - June 2002

**Prepared for:
Single Parent Association of Newfoundland (SPAN)
Department of Human Resources and Employment**

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Executive Summary

This summative evaluation of **The Single Parent Employment Support (SESP) Program** was commissioned by the Single Parent Association of Newfoundland and Labrador (SPAN) in partnership with the Department of Human Resources and Employment (HRE). This evaluation is a continuance of analyses of program processes and client outcomes of the SESP program; a discussion of the implications of introduced program changes, in particular the decision to include non high school graduates as potential clients; and, a further analysis of the benefits and costs of the program across a larger number of clients over a longer time period.

The methodology used in the evaluation included: administrative and file review; literature review; review of data from prior formative and summative evaluation phases of SESP; key informant interviews with officials of SPAN and HRE; participant telephone survey; and, benefit-cost analysis.

The Single Parent Employment Support Program (SESP)

The primary objective of SESP is to assist single parents in receipt of income support benefits achieve increased financial independence by helping them prepare for, obtain and maintain employment. The program is designed to provide basic job readiness training, facilitate acquisition of job search skills, and provide employment related supports (e.g. child care, transportation, etc.) to participants. The program provides participants with personal supports during the adjustment to work. The SESP program also provides, subsequent to employment, an Earned Income Supplement (EIS).

Potential participants in SESP must meet certain criteria to qualify for acceptance into the program. Participants must:

- be a single parent (with a dependant under age 18 years).
- be in receipt of Income Support benefits for a minimum of three months.
- self identify as wanting to work, be willing to accept either full or part time entry-level work, and indicate a desire to progress to full time employment as soon as possible.
- be ineligible for Employment Insurance benefits, and
- have a minimum of Grade 10 education.

A total of 318 single parents have participated in the SESP program between August 1998 and December 2001.

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

A summary of the findings and associated recommendations within the major research areas is presented below.

1. Client and employment profiles of SESP participants

- Single parents who participate in the SESP program usually
 - ▶ are between 25 - 44 years old
 - ▶ have one child
 - ▶ have a youngest child between the ages of 6 - 12 years
 - ▶ have spent at least three years in receipt of income support benefits
 - ▶ have worked previously but not in the three years prior to program entry
 - ▶ are female
- SESP participants differ from the general populations of single parents on income support in the province and in the St. John's region, in that they:
 - ▶ are more likely to be high school graduates
 - ▶ are more likely to have post secondary education
 - ▶ more likely to be in receipt of income support benefits for greater than three years, and
 - ▶ are less likely to be parents of children under the age of two years.
- Participants of SESP are finding employment at a higher rate than a comparison group of single parents on income support with similar demographic profiles.
- A total of 103 (32.4%) SESP participants are no longer in receipt of income support benefits.
- Approximately 80% of the participants have obtained employment since their participation in the SESP pilot.
- The majority of participants (65%) are finding their first job within 10 weeks of beginning the program.
- The salaries and hours of work of SESP participants are continuing to increase over time.

- The majority of jobs found by participants are of a part time, permanent nature, and are in the Sales/Service and Business, Finance and Administration sectors.
- SESP participants are retaining employment. 57.4% (54/94) of the participants who began the program 14 to 41 months prior to December 31, 2001 had retained employment for more than half a year and were continuing to work as of December 31, 2001.
- The majority of participants, once employed, remained in their positions until the work ended (eg. temporary jobs) or they moved to another job. Only 34 (<13%) jobs were known to have ended for job performance reasons.

2. Benefits and costs of the SESP program

Analysis of the benefits and costs of the SESP program to participants and the provincial government indicates:

- SESP participants had employment income in ten times the number of months as the comparison groups members while on assistance.
- As of December 2001, only 64% of the participants in the 20 SESP groups were receiving income support payments, as compared with 79% of the Comparison Group participants over the equivalent time frame.
- After 41 months SESP participants have received 19% less in total Income Support payments, as compared to comparison group members, despite much higher amounts for EIS and other exemptions related to employment.
- The average investment per participant-month for SESP clients is \$784 compared to \$735 for the non-SESP comparison group. The difference of \$48 is the estimated monthly investment per client that can be attributed to the SESP program over the initial 41 month period. This estimate is significantly lower than the incremental investment per client of \$317 identified in the initial 21 month analysis.
- The program actually reached a cost-neutral position (for Groups 1 - 9) in only 2 ½ years as compared to the original projection of 42 months; and this cost neutral projection (i.e. 2 ½ years) can be applied to all SESP groups.
- By the end of the December 2001, the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador has accumulated a total net benefit of \$90,152 through investments in the SESP program for the 152 participants in groups 1 to 9. Conservative estimates for the subsequent months show that by the end of June 2002 the Province will have a net gain of over \$296,184

from the initial investment in these 152 individuals.

- The costs associated with the program are incurred over a relatively short time period, while the benefits accrue over the longer term.
- The majority of key informants and participants, as well as findings within the literature, identified other benefits of the SESP program not directly measured in this benefit-cost analysis (e.g. breaking of intergenerational dependence on social assistance, etc.) that would generate substantial benefits to the Province, particularly over the long-term.

The benefit-cost analysis shows that the SESP program has been effective in achieving the primary objective of helping single parents in receipt of Income Support benefits achieve increased financial independence. As an active employment support measure, it is moving income support clients into the labour force, and allowing progress to a position where they no longer require any income support benefits.

Recommendation 1 The Single Parent Employment Support Program cease to be funded as a Pilot Program” and be now considered as part of the generic employment measures utilized by HRE.

3. Assisting participants to prepare for, obtain, and maintain employment

- The majority of participants of the SESP program identified child care issues, and not knowing how to look for employment as the major reasons for non-employment prior to entry in SESP.
- Participants also indicated that the SESP program was effective in supporting them to address these barriers.
- Fewer than would be expected participants with less than high school and participants with partial post secondary obtained employment during the first 14 weeks. More high school graduates and post secondary school graduates than expected obtained employment within the first 14 weeks. However, in the longer term it did not seem that level of education had a significant impact on acquisition of employment.
- Client demographics do not seem to be a factor in retention of employment.

- Support from SPAN was rated as most important by SESP participants who were working (and not in receipt of EIS) with respect to preparing for, obtaining and maintaining employment.

SESP participants who no longer receive the EIS indicate that they have access to those supports/services that are required to enable long term attachment to the workforce. It does not appear that support needs for this group of single parents are different from the needs of single parents who are in receipt of the EIS. It would also appear that as income levels rise and they become ineligible for the EIS these participants are able to afford to continue with needed supports (eg. child care) from their own resources and are still better off financially.

4. Strengths and weaknesses of the current design and administration of the SESP program

- The relationship between SPAN and HRE is positive and supported through effective formal and informal structures.
- The community sponsorship and the multifaceted/flexible nature of the model and the recent inclusion of non high school graduates are major strengths of the SESP model.
- Access to the Earned Income Supplement being restricted only to SESP program participants and non acceptance of Employment Insurance eligible clients into the program were identified as the major weaknesses of the model.
- The majority of informants expressed support for the program and noted several strengths in administration and implementation including: client empowerment, access to needed supports, positive and open communication, dedicated and committed staff, provision of job search skills training, ongoing support during employment, and increased income.
- While there was much positive support for the SESP program, several areas of concern were also noted:
 - a) lack of availability of suitable private child care (especially for children under 2 years of age)
 - b) inadequacies of the current computerized data base for tracking client progress,
 - c) initial transition to work impacted negatively due to method of projection of initial earnings
- Many of the program weaknesses identified in previous evaluations, such as classroom

curriculum, misperceptions regarding job placement function, and inadequate recruitment process, appear to have been adequately addressed

- An adequate case management process is in place within both SESP and HRE with respect to program participants, in particular as related to participants who have less than a high school education.

- Recommendation 2:** **The Single Parent Employment Support Program continue to accept single parents who do not have high school education.**
- Recommendation 3:** **Outcomes achieved (both employment and educational) by SESP participants without high school be separately tracked for an additional 12 months.**
- Recommendation 4:** **Career Development Specialist staff of HRE present to SESP participants during their classroom component.**
- Recommendation 5:** **HRE (Income Support) allow for continuance of Income Support benefits, at previously approved level, for at least a fifteen day period following employment.**
- Recommendation 6:** **HRE clarify its policy regarding calculation of reimbursement for private child care.**

Conclusion

Data collected during the course of this summative evaluation would support the following conclusions:

- SESP has proven effective in assisting single parents in receipt of income support benefits to enter and remain in the workforce.

- ▶ SESP has demonstrated an ability to address existing barriers to employment for single parents and provide the necessary ongoing and follow up support needed by program participants.
- ▶ SESP participants are finding employment, advancing within the labour market, and a significant proportion of participants have left the income support system.
- ▶ Benefits have been accrued at both a client (e.g. enhanced quality of life, increased income) and systems (e.g. cost neutrality, clients leaving the income support system) level.
- ▶ Initial investments made in the SESP program (and associated participants) are modest and are recovered within a 30 month period.
- ▶ The relationship between SPAN and HRE in the design and delivery of the SESP pilot has reaffirmed the value of a collaborative partnership between government and the 3rd sector.

1.0 Introduction

This summative evaluation of **The Single Parent Employment Support (SESP) Program** was commissioned by the Single Parent Association of Newfoundland and Labrador (SPAN) in partnership with the Department of Human Resources and Employment (HRE).

The Single Parent Employment Support (SESP) Program, first announced as a pilot project within the 1998 - 99 provincial budget, was designed as an active employment measure to assist single parents in receipt of income support benefits to enter and remain in the workforce and to progress to a position where they are no longer reliant on income support benefits. The SESP program represents a partnership between SPAN and HRE in offering a program of “flexible and individualized income supports to single parents on Income Support who want to work”. The program accepted its first clients in August 1998, and to the end of December, 2001 had provided support to 318 single parents, within 20 participant groups.

Since its inception in 1998, the SESP program has operated as a pilot program. During this time, a formative evaluation was completed (March, 1999) based on results achieved by participants in Groups 1 - 3. A summative evaluation was completed (July, 2000) which examined the results achieved by the first 10 participant groups. Included in the summative phase was the completion of a comprehensive Benefit Cost Analysis. Both evaluations documented significant positive impacts for program participants. Some of the major findings of these previous evaluations included the following:

- ▶ The SESP program was in full accord with the overall departmental and government goals and objectives as related to the reform process and the provincial strategic social plan
- ▶ SPAN represented an appropriate agency to deliver the Single Parent Employment Support program
- ▶ SESP participants were finding employment at a higher rate than a comparison group of single parents on income support with similar demographic profiles; 75% of SESP participants reported earnings income as compared with 11% of the comparison group
- ▶ Participants were retaining employment and more participants were becoming employed over time
- ▶ Support from the Placement Officer was rated the most important program component

with respect to preparing for and obtaining employment by participants who had found employment

- ▶ The Earned Income Supplement (EIS) was rated as the most important component to maintaining employment by employed participants
- ▶ SESP participants were better off financially, with average gains of \$4,000 per client over members of the comparison group during the initial 21 months
- ▶ The program required initial investment of approximately \$4,018 per client, with movement to a cost neutral position projected approximately 3 ½ years after initial investment
- ▶ The model was found to be most appropriate and effective for persons with significant barriers to employment that included financial disincentive and a need for employment related supports

This current evaluation represents a continuance and update of analyses of program processes and client outcomes as contained within the SESP program. Although findings from previous evaluations were very positive, one of the limiting factors in the interpretation of these findings was that results had been accrued by a relatively small number of single parents over a short timeframe. The current evaluation encompasses the results achieved by 318 clients, across a 3 ½ year time period and thus findings and trends can be assessed with an increased level of confidence.

The SESP program has obviously not remained static since its inception. There have been changes and enhancements introduced, some as a result of natural maturation of the program, others being the direct result of recommendations arising from previous evaluations. During this time, the Department of Human Resources and Employment has also undergone continuing redesign efforts as related to its Income Support and Employment and Career Development strategies. The current evaluation provides an opportunity to comment on the implications of these changes, in particular the decision to include non high school graduates as potential clients.

Finally this evaluation enables a further analysis of the benefits and costs of the program across a larger number of clients and over a longer time period. Addressing these issues enables both SPAN and HRE to determine how successful the program has been in progressing toward its

stated objectives of assisting single parents in receipt of income support benefits to obtain and maintain employment

The Terms of Reference set out 17 issues that needed to be addressed within this evaluation of the SESP program. These original 17 issues have been reorganized into five (5) primary Evaluation Issues/Categories. Each of the original questions/issues identified in the Terms of Reference are incorporated into this revised format. The five (5) Evaluation Issues, and associated sub-elements, are as follows:

Issue 1. What are the client and employment profiles of SESP participants?

- Provision of an updated profile of project participants, including information on current and historical employment and income support pattern
- What jobs do/did participants get? In what sectors?
- What was the nature of the employment e.g. seasonal, part-time, fluctuating hours?

Issue 2. What are the benefits and costs of the SESP program?

- What were the pre and post participation employment earnings of participants
- What was the total investment made per client
 - pilot program related
 - regular Income Support program related
 - other employment program related e.g. Graduate, Linkages, etc.
 - other delivery, administrative and other supports costs
- What were the savings to the Income Support program? to HRE?
- Prediction of a break even point, that is, at what point will savings to the Income Support program be equal to or greater than investment made in the client?
- What are the indirect benefits to clients and to society

Issue 3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current design and administration of the SESP program?

- Describe process for up-front referral, assessment, counseling and placement in SESP, as it works both for clients with and without high school completion or equivalency
- What is the relationship between SESP and the administration of the income

- support program, including consideration of possible changes to overlapping income support payments (as overpayments) at the beginning of employment
- Comment on adequacy of the SESP curriculum

Issue 4. Does the SESP program assist participants to prepare for, obtain, and maintain employment?

- Comment on the importance to meeting pilot objectives of the:
 - six week classroom-based curriculum with instruction in Job Readiness Training, Personal Skills Enhancement, and Resume and Job Search Assistance
 - role of the Job Search Officer and the job search process
 - expanded support of the CSO
 - ongoing support from SPAN
 - group dynamic
- Identify any barriers that “work against” clients attaining and maintaining employment, including how programs and services of HRE and other departments/governments impact on program e.g. child care, student loans, etc.
- What were the most significant determinants of whether employment was/was not achieved; was/was not maintained
- What supports, if any, are necessary to help those who successfully move off income support to maintain employment?

Issue 5. What are the implications and impacts of changes introduced to the SESP program since the July 2000 Summative Evaluation?

- Document and assess the impact of any changes made since the July 2000 summative evaluation, particularly with respect to the lifting of the requirement that participants have graduated from High School.
- Consider how best to ensure that GED tutoring is available to SESP participants and a preliminary assessment of the success of the program for participants without highschool graduation or equivalency

This report is structured as follows:

- Section 2.0 provides a brief description of the SESP Pilot Program.
- Section 3.0 describes the methodologies used, and the noted limitations to the evaluation.

- Sections 4.0 through 8.0 include the summaries of findings as related to each of the five (5) evaluation issues, and recommendations.
- Section 9.0 provides a conclusion to the report

2.0 Single Parent Employment Support Program (SESP)

2.1 Program Description

Objectives

The primary objective of SESP is to assist single parents in receipt of income support benefits to achieve increased financial independence by helping them prepare for, obtain and maintain employment. The program is designed to provide basic job readiness training, facilitate acquisition of job search skills, and provide related support(s) to participants with regard to potential job placements. The program provides participants with personal supports during the transitional adjustment to work. The SESP program also provides, subsequent to employment, an Earned Income Supplement (EIS).

Eligibility

Potential participants in SESP must meet certain criteria to qualify for acceptance into the program. Participants must:

- be a single parent (with a dependant under age 18 years).
- be in receipt of income support benefits for a minimum of three months.
- self identify as wanting to work, be willing to accept either full or part time work at the minimum wage level, and indicate a desire to progress to full time employment as soon as possible.
- have a minimum of Grade 10 education
- be ineligible for Employment Insurance benefits.¹

Delivery

The SESP program operates under the auspice of the Single Parent Association of Newfoundland and is staffed by a Program Coordinator, two Job Search Officers (JSO) and an Administrative Assistant position (filled by two part time staff). The program includes a classroom component of

¹ Eligibility for Employment Insurance (or reachback) includes those individuals with eligibility for an active claim, individuals who have received E. I. Benefits within the past three (3) years, and within the past five (5) years for those who have received maternity benefits

six week² duration with instruction in Job Readiness Training, Personal Skills Enhancement, and Resume and Job Search Assistance. The program staff³, and a variety of community experts, are involved in the delivery of this component. The classroom component operates on a daily basis from 9:30 – 12:30. In addition to classroom attendance during this initial six week period, participants meet with the Job Search Officer and complete an individual assessment of their strengths, weaknesses, skills and aptitudes. The objective is to develop an individual strategy for each person regarding job search and employment preparation.

Subsequent to the completion of the six-week classroom based training, participants enter a four-week Job Search phase. During this phase, transportation and child care supports (provided at entry into the program) are continued. This continuance ensures that participants have the necessary supports to conduct a comprehensive job search. During these four weeks, participants have ongoing, call-in access to the Coordinator, Job Search Officers and administrative staff. This contact includes discussion of various job search strategies, potential job openings and possible employer contacts, assistance with updating of resumes and covering letters, and access to technology that may assist in the job search process, such as telephone, computer and facsimile machine. Where necessary, participants are also able to meet with program staff to discuss issues that arise that cannot be dealt with over the phone.

Monitoring and follow up support, provided by the Program Coordinator and/or the Job Search Officers, continues after the participant obtains employment and/or continues with their job search after the 10 week program period. Contact is maintained with participants by program staff on a regular basis, although no minimum level of contact is defined within program policy or practice. Participants, either employed or those continuing job search, can contact program staff as required.

² It is noted that several of the SESP groups attended a five week classroom session. This occurred during the early stages of program delivery as curriculum was still being finalized. At present the classroom session is six weeks.

³ While many key informants include the CSOs as part of the SESP program staff, for the purposes of this evaluation program staff refers to the Program Coordinator, JSOs, and administrative staff only.

Upon finding a job, participants undergo a financial assessment to determine eligibility to receive an Earned Income Supplement (EIS). The EIS is intended to provide increased motivation to single parents to leave the income support system through entry into the workforce by reducing the financial disincentives that may be faced upon employment. The EIS is designed to serve as a financial incentive for single parents to enter and remain in the work force by providing more money to the individual as their hours of work and/or wages increase. It is anticipated that this design feature will encourage participants to continue to actively seek ongoing career advancement (either through higher wages or increased hours of work).

This supplement is based on a maximum of 150 hours of paid employment per month and is calculated by determining existing level of income support benefits in conjunction with allowable exemptions (childcare, transportation, and allowable employment income). An arithmetic formula is then applied which considers the wage earned and the actual hours of employment. The maximum EIS is \$300 per month. The supplement is calculated and managed by the Client Service Officers (CSO) of the Department of Human Resources and Employment assigned specifically to the SESP program. It is provided to eligible participants on a monthly basis.

3.0 Methodology

The approach to gathering and analysing the information necessary to address the research questions was as follows:

3.1 Consultation with Evaluation Committee

The initial meeting with the Evaluation Committee: (1) discussed details of the proposed approach, methodology, and data sources; (2) gathered additional information on the documentation, data, and key informants available to the consultants; and (3) finalized the project schedule and timing of all project deliverables. Other meetings occurred with the evaluation team on an as needed basis.

3.2 Administrative and File Review

Existing administrative data sources within both HRE and SPAN, relevant internal documents, organizational charts, quarterly and annual reports, statistical reports and forms, and program application forms were reviewed. Data collection also included a review of current departmental case management processes (e.g. screening and referral process and criteria), and relevant departmental restructuring/redesign documents. File review consisted of identification of client characteristics, population distribution, client outcomes and measurable success indicators.

3.3 Review of Data from previous Evaluations

During the first two years of the SESP pilot, data were collected with respect to program participants and participant outcomes. The data for these years of program operation (for groups 1 -10) were presented and analyzed in the **Report of the Formative Evaluation of SESP (March 1999)** and **Summative Evaluation of the Single Parent Employment Support Program (July 2000)**. Information on program participants and participant outcomes was collected via in-class surveys and follow-up telephone surveys. Case study interviews were completed with selected participants from Groups 1 to 6 inclusive. A Benefit Cost Analysis was also completed. Information gathered during this time period was used as required, and relevant, in addressing the issues posed within this current evaluation.

3.4 Interviews with Key Informants

A total of 8 group and/or individual interview sessions occurred with a total of 17 officials of HRE, and SPAN/SESP. The key informant interview process included Client Service Officers, Career Development Specialists, Program Supervisors, provincial/regional staff (HRE), and the Program Coordinator and Job Search Officers (SESP).

3.5 Client Surveys

An in-class survey was administered to participants of Groups 18, 19 and 20, using the same instrument (with minor modifications) as was used with Groups 1 - 10 during the formative evaluation period. It is noted that due to a disruption in the evaluation process, in-class surveys were not administered to participants in Groups 11 - 17.

A telephone survey was undertaken for all participants of the SESP program (Groups 1 - 20 inclusive) who had completed the SESP program prior to December 31, 2001 and who were not in receipt of the Earned Income Supplement. This sample included 220 participants who were graduated (e.g. employed and no longer receiving EIS), unemployed and/or deemed as inactive clients. Of the 220 potential respondents in this sample, surveys were completed with 156 (71%) individuals. Of the remaining 64 individuals, 2 refused to participate in the survey, and the remaining 62 clients were deemed “unable to contact” either as a result of no known current telephone number or after a minimum of 4 attempted telephone contacts.

3.6 Benefit-Cost Analysis

A Benefit-Cost Analysis (B-CA) was undertaken to determine the net impact of the SESP program on participants and the net financial impact to the provincial government. Analysis was based on data from HRE FACTS, DACS and SAIP files as well as data collected in conjunction with the SESP pilot project.

In order to isolate the effects of the SESP program, a comparison group of clients was drawn from the HRE data. Earnings, costs and outcomes for the SESP and non-SESP comparison group were calculated for the period from August 1998 to December 2001. Projections were then developed for the future outcomes to determine the likely time period for cumulative benefits to exceed the investment in the program.

Detailed technical notes of the selection of the comparison group, methodology and assumptions in calculating benefits and costs and methodology and assumptions in projecting future outcomes are provided in Appendix A of this report.

3.7 Limitations

The major noted limitation to this evaluation is:

- The initial design of the SESP program did not include the random assignment of clients to active program intervention. Thus no actual control group (i.e. randomly assigned to non intervention) exists against which to compare the outcomes achieved by SESP participants relative to those outcomes which might have been achieved without the intervention. Comparisons must therefore be treated with some caution.

4.0 Client and employment profiles of SESP participants

4.1 What are the participant profiles?

In December, 2001 the number of single parents in Newfoundland and Labrador in receipt of income support, and not eligible for Employment Insurance benefits, was 5,483. This figure represents approximately 19.7% of the total HRE income support caseload (27,793). The total single parent population in receipt of income support benefits, including E. I. eligible individuals, was 6,535. Table 1 displays the distribution of the non E. I. eligible single parent population provincially, for the St. John's area, and for the SESP program participants across a number of characteristics.

Examination of demographic characteristics of single parents across the province, St. John's and SESP groups reveal several differences of note, including the following:

- ▶ Age distribution of single parents across all three populations remains basically the same as reported in the previous SESP evaluation (July 2000), although there is a noted increase in the percentage of SESP participants in the 15 - 24 age category (from 13.4% to 18.2%). SESP participants ranged in age from 19 to 52 years.
- ▶ 76.8% of SESP participants, at point of entry into the program, fall into the age range of 25 – 44 years, as compared to 69.6% and 72% of the provincial and St. John's populations respectively. The finding of less representation in SESP of younger (< 24 years) and older (>45 years) single parents is consistent with client demographics identified in previous evaluations, and reflective of the general demographics of single parents in receipt of income support benefits.
- ▶ Educational levels of SESP participants differ significantly from those of the general provincial and St. John's single parent populations. To date only 25 (7.9%) of SESP participants did not hold at least an equivalent of a high school diploma, compared to 56.9% and 51.7% within the other population groups. This is understandable given that the program did not accept non high school graduates until June 2001 (group 15).
- ▶ A total of 89 participants have attended since the program began accepting clients with

less than high school equivalency (i.e. as of Group 15), and of these clients, 25 (28.1%) have had less than high school equivalency .

- ▶ Of the total SESP clients only 6 were male (1.6%) and while this percentage is lower than that found within the general single parent population in receipt of income support benefits (6.7%) this finding is consistent with findings from earlier evaluations.
- ▶ The majority of participants (76.0%) had a youngest child between the ages of 2 - 12 years. While this is in contrast to the provincial and St. John's percentages of 60.1% and 62.5% respectively it does confirm findings of previous evaluations. A higher percentage of both the St. John's and provincial single parent populations (25.2% and 26% respectively) had a youngest child older than 12 years, as compared to 14.4% for the SESP group. Only 9.4% of SESP participants had a youngest child under the age of 2 years.
- ▶ 91.2% of participants had spent 3 or more years in receipt of income support benefits as compared to 81.4% and 83.6% of the provincial and St. John's populations. Over three quarters of participants (75.6%) had been in receipt of income support benefits for at least 5 years.
- ▶ While the majority of SESP participants had prior work history, 37.4% had not worked in the 3 years prior to enrollment in the program.

In summary, client demographics confirm that SESP participants usually do not seek employment until their children are at least 2 years of age, that most have had some prior attachment to the labour market, and have a long history of involvement with the income support system. This finding is consistent with that found in previous evaluations, and suggests that SESP has been successful in reaching long term income support clients (a client group who typically would not leave the system without intervention). Further, findings (i.e. age of youngest child) suggest continued difficulty by parents of very young children in accessing child care (to permit a return to work). This may change once licensed infant (< 2 years) child care becomes more widely available.

Table 1: Profile of non-EI eligible single parents on income support December 2001

	Provincial n=5483	St. John's ⁴ n=2219	SESP n=318
Age Range	%	%	%
15-24	19.6	16.9	18.2
25-34	37.6	39.4	46.5
35-44	32.0	32.6	30.2
45-54	9.3	9.9	5.1
55-64	1.5	1.2	0
# of Children			
1	58.5	56.0	55.0
2	30.0	31.3	31.4
3+	8.1	8.7	10.7
4+	1.8	1.9	2.8
Age of Youngest Child			
< 2 yrs	13.8	12.1	9.4
2-5 yrs	28.6	30.1	33.6
6-12 yrs	31.5	32.4	42.4
12+ yrs	26.0	25.2	14.4
Education			
< high school	56.9	51.7	7.9
high school	29.5	30.8	28.3
partial post-secondary	5.6	8.4	24.5
completed post-secondary	8.0	9.1	39.2
# of Months on Income Support			
0 -3	1.0	0.8	0
4 - 12	4.5	3.8	0.9
13-36	13.1	11.8	7.8
37-60	12.9	12.8	15.6
60-120	34.7	35.2	45.6
120+	33.8	35.6	30.1
Time since Last Employment prior to SESP			
never	n/a	n/a	10.6
0-12 months	n/a	n/a	33.1
13-36 months	n/a	n/a	18.9
37-60 months	n/a	n/a	11.3
60+ months	n/a	n/a	26.1

SOURCE: Client files and administrative records of SPAN (SESP) and HRE.

⁴ St. John's area includes the districts of St. John's West, St. John's East, St. John's Centre, Conception Bay South and Ferryland.

4.2 What are the employment profiles of SESP participants?

Table 2 presents the employment status as of December 31, 2001 of the 318 participants included in this evaluation.

Table 2: Employment status of SESP participants as of December 31, 2001

Group	Employment Status			Total Participants
	Working	Work Discontinued	Never worked	
1	9	3	0	12
2	14	4	1	19
3	13	6	0	19
4	12	3	2	17
5	11	3	2	16
6	11	7	1	19
7	12	8	2	22
8	9	3	2	14
9	9	5	2	16
10	9	7	3	19
11	6	2	3	11
12	9	1	4	14
13	8	5	3	16
14	12	4	0	16
15	3	2	4	9
16	7	3	6	16
17	4	2	11	17
18	4	2	4	10
19	6	6	7	19
20	6	3	8	17
Totals	174	79	65	318

NOTES:

1. Employment status of SESP participants is displayed in three categories:
Working - employed as of December 31, 2001, including employed persons who had left the area.
Work Discontinued - participants who had employment during program participation but were unemployed as of December 31, 2001.
Never Worked - participants who have had no paid employment since enrollment in the SESP program.

Table 2 reveals that as of December 31, 2001, 253 (79.5%) of participants from Groups 1 - 20 were working, or had worked, since their participation in the SESP pilot. This is a slight increase over that identified (i.e. 76.6%) in the previous summative evaluation. From this finding it is clear that SESP participants have been able to sustain an enhanced “rate of found employment” over a sustained period of time. The significance of this “rate of found employment” is most obvious in considering that during the same time period, only 12% (38/317) of single parents in the comparison group reported earnings from employment. The rate of found employment for the comparison group is also very comparable with that found in previous SESP evaluations (11%).

One of the intents of the SESP program is to assist single parents, over time, to leave the income support system. A review of HRE client files revealed that a total of 103 participants were no longer in receipt of income support benefits. As table 3 reveals, the majority of participants who have left the income support system have “graduated⁵” because their earnings (either from employment income, increases in child support, or employment insurance) made them ineligible for income support even with the increased exemption (earned income supplement). Other reasons for leaving included left the province, formed a family unit, began attending school, or no longer a “single parent” (ie. no dependent children living in the home).

⁵ Graduate is a term used by program staff to describe a participant who no longer receives Income Support benefits due to income reasons.

Table 3: Reasons for leaving the Income Sport system

Reasons for Leaving	#	%
Earnings/Income	52	50.5
Formed a family unit	20	19.4
Left the area	15	14.6
No longer a single parent	9	8.7
Attending school	6	5.8
Unknown	1	1
Total	103	100

The total number of jobs held across the 318 participants was 431⁶. Over 79% of the 318 SESP participants obtained employment since their first involvement with the program. Only 65 (20.4%) of the participants⁷ have not found employment since they became involved with the program and 76.9% of these (50/65) were participants in groups 11 - 20. Only 15 participants from the first 10 groups have not found employment since they became involved with SESP. This is not an unexpected finding in that participants in Groups 11 - 20 have had less time to find employment. The number of jobs held by each of the 243 participants for whom complete job data was available, ranged from 1 - 8, with the majority of participants having only one job. Table 4 displays the frequency of jobs held by participants in the SESP groups.

⁶ This total reflects the number of jobs found to the end of December 2001 or to point of graduation. It is known that graduated participants have held additional jobs since leaving the program but as this data were not complete it was not included in this analysis.

⁷ Data from client files indicate that 75 participants had not gained employment up to the point where they were deemed either inactive or graduated. Follow up telephone surveys however confirmed that 10 of these clients had subsequently obtained employment. While this data are displayed in Table 2 for employment status purposes such was not included in further analysis as complete employment histories were not available.

Table 4: Frequency of jobs held by SESP participants

Number of Jobs held	Frequency	Total # of Jobs
0	75	0
1	137	137
2	61	122
3	26	78
4	9	36
5	5	25
6	3	18
7	1	7
8	1	8
Total	318	431

Table 5 presents these positions summarized within Occupational Categories as per the National Occupational Classification Codes (NOCC).

Table 5: Distribution of participant jobs across occupational categories

Occupational Categories (NOCC)	#	%
Sales/Service	309	71.7
Business Finance and Administration	90	20.9
Trades Transportation, and Equipment Operator	9	2.1
Art Culture Recreation and Sport	7	1.6
Health	6	1.4
Social Science, Education, Government	5	1.2
Natural and Applied Science	2	0.5
Processing, Manufacturing and Utilities	2	0.5
Unique to Primary Industry	1	0.2
Total	431	100

Of the positions held, it can be seen from Table 5 that the majority (92.6%) were within Sales and Service, and Business, Finance and Administration occupations. This finding is consistent with that reported in the general literature and findings from the previous SESP evaluation. Table 6 provides a more detailed breakdown of these occupations by the classification codes.

Table 6: Detailed breakdown of occupational categories of most frequently held positions

Occupational Category	Breakdown	Frequency of jobs
Sales/Service		
	Cashier	79
	Salesperson	44
	Telemarketer	21
	Customer Service	21
	Waitress	17
	Child Care Worker	16
	Home Care Worker	16
	other	96
	Total	309
Business/Finance/Administration		
	Secretary	26
	Office Clerk	26
	Admin Assistant	15
	Accounting Clerk	5
	Other	18
	Total	90

An analysis of the 431 jobs held by SESP participants indicated an average starting salary of \$6.91 (SD = 1.84); with an average end salary of \$7.16 (SD = 1.97). The increase in the provincial minimum wage (from \$5.25 to \$5.50 per hour) would account for some of the noted difference. Table 7 below presents the frequency distribution of wages associated with the 431 jobs held by SESP participants. End salary includes wages paid at end of job, at the time of

graduation, or at December 31, 2001, whichever occurred first. Examination of this table reveals that the majority of both starting and end salaries fell within the range \$5.25 to \$6.50 per hour. However, indications are that salaries within jobs increased over time. For example, at start of jobs, only 69 participants (16%) were earning more than 8.50 per hour whereas at end of jobs, 88 (20.4%) were earning more than 8.50 per hour.

Table 7: Wage distribution of SESP participants at start and end of jobs

Wage Range	Starting Salary	End Salary
5.25 - 5.50	128 (29.7%)	89 (20.6%)
5.51 - 6.50	138 (32%)	150 (34.8%)
6.51 - 7.50	47 (10.9%)	63 (14.6%)
7.51 - 8.50	49 (11.4%)	41 (9.5%)
8.51 - 9.50	21 (4.9%)	28 (6.5%)
9.51 - 10.50	25 (5.8%)	26 (6.0%)
10.51 - 11.50	10 (2.3%)	16 (3.7%)
11.50 +	13 (3.0%)	18 (4.2%)
Total	431	431

As displayed in Table 6, SESP participants held a varying number of jobs. To determine if participants were experiencing any advancement across their jobs, data was analysed such that the beginning hours of work and the starting salary for each of the participants in their first job was compared with the end salary and hours of work at the end of their last job. Table 8 displays these averages for participants across the number of jobs held.

Table 8: The average beginning and end salary and hours for all participants who had work

	Beginning of First Job	End of Last Job
With 1 Job (n = 137)		
Salary	6.85	7.21
Hours	28.7	30.5
With 2 Jobs (n = 61)		
Salary	6.71	7.66
Hours	27.5	30.3
With 3 Jobs (n = 45)		
Salary	6.7	7.59
Hours	26.2	27.6
Total Average (n = 243)		
Salary	6.79	7.39
Hours	27.9	29.9

A further analysis of the data reveals that only 54 of 137 (39.4%) SESP participants who held only one job experienced a raise in pay and only 45 (32.8%) experienced an increase in work hours. Of the 106 participants who had multiple jobs, 67 (63.2%) experienced an increase in pay and 52 (49%) experienced increased hours of work across their multiple jobs. This finding is consistent with that found within the 2000 Summative Evaluation and reaffirms the necessity for SESP participants, if they wish to advance in terms of either increased wages or hours of work, to continue with an active job search.

4.3 What is the type of found employment?

For purposes of this evaluation, the following definitions were used:

- *Permanent*: position designated by employer as permanent at time of initial hiring, with no expectation of position ending.
- *Temporary*: position had a predefined period of employment, with a defined end date.
- *On - Call*: weekly hours fluctuate and employee works on an as needed basis.

- *Seasonal*: any employment that was designated seasonal by employer at point of hiring, usually occurred during Christmas and summer periods, with no exact end date defined.
- *Full time*: 35 or more hours per week, at initial hire.
- *Part time*: less than 35 hours per week, at initial hire

Table 9 below reveals that the majority (64.7%) of the 431 jobs were part time, either permanent or temporary. Approximately a third of the jobs (35.3%) were full time. Table 9 also indicates that the majority (54.7%) of the positions found were permanent. This latter figure does not include the seasonal or on-call data since permanent or temporary status of these positions was unknown. Data regarding the type of found employment is very consistent with that discovered in the previous summative evaluation (2000) and confirms an approximate 1/3 - 2/3 split between full time and part time employment. Data collected during this evaluation does however indicate a slight decrease in the number of permanent positions found (54.7% as compared with 58.2% in previous evaluation). The percentage of “on call” positions also increased (from 11.2% to 13.7%). While unable to confirm from client employment data it is expected that many of these on call positions may in fact be considered permanent part time positions.

Table 9: Type of found employment

Type of Employment	Full Time		Part Time		Totals	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Permanent	82	(19.0)	154	(35.7)	236	(54.7)
Temporary	58	(13.5%)	52	(12.1)	110	(25.5)
Seasonal	5	(1.2)	21	(4.9)	26	(6.0)
On Call	7	(1.6)	52	(12.1)	59	(13.7)
Total	152	(35.3)	279	(64.7)	431	

Table 10 displays the average hours at beginning and end of jobs across the types of jobs held by SESP participants. In this table, permanent and temporary full time and part time categories have been collapsed. This reveals very little change in the average hours at start and end of full time

employment, seasonal employment or on-call employment. An increase of 2.4 hours was noted in the average number of hours worked between the beginning and end of part time employment. This finding is consistent with results from the previous evaluation and indicates that SESP participants, once in the workforce, attempt to work the maximum hours available.

Table 10: Average hours at beginning and end of jobs across type of jobs

Type of Job	Average Hours Begin	Average Hours End
Full Time	37.8	37.8
Part Time	22.2	24.9
Seasonal	26.9	25.4
On Call	19	22
Total	27	28.6

Of the 243 participants who have had employment and for whom detailed employment histories were available, it took an average of 12.9 weeks from program commencement to find their first job. Length of time to finding first employment ranged from 0 to 160 weeks. Table 11 displays the distribution of times required for first job finding.

Approximately 74.1% (180/243) of SESP participants found their first paid employment within 14 weeks of program commencement and 24.3% (59/243) participants found their first job prior to or within the first week of classes. Both of these findings are very consistent with results detailed in the previous evaluation and reaffirm a conclusion that job search activity for SESP participants is given priority by the program prior to the completion of the formal classroom component.

Table 11: Weeks to obtaining first job

Number of weeks	Number of participants
0	51
1 - 5	54
6 - 10	53
11 - 14	22
15 - 20	22
21 - 30	23
31 - 40	3
41 - 50	2
51 - 100	10
101 - 150	2
151 +	1
Total	243

In the previous summative SESP evaluation, based on outcomes achieved by groups 1 - 10, participants took an average of 8.6 weeks to find first employment. While the current data indicates a longer average time to first employment this increase can be explained by the 13 participants who took in excess of 51 weeks to gain first employment. While increasing the average time to first employment, this finding can be viewed as positive in that it confirms that SESP participants continue their job search activities well beyond the end of the classroom and formal job search periods.

4.4 Are participants still seeking employment?

Employed as of December 31, 2001

A total of 52 SESP participants, employed as of December 31, 2000 and who were not in receipt of the Earned Income Supplement (EIS), were contacted during the telephone survey. Of these participants, 18 (34.6%) indicated a continuing active job search. The four *primary* reasons (multiple answers permitted) given for the continued job search were a desire for:

- increased pay (83%);
- increased hours (22%);
- job permanency (22%);
- work more related to career goals (5%).

This finding is interesting for a number of reasons. First, the continued job search activity among this group of SESP participants (48.1% of whom are earning in excess of \$10 per hour) suggests a strong desire for continued career advancement within the workforce. Second, continued job search activity does not appear to be motivated by a mismatch between current employment and longer term career goals. Finally the high number of these participants not actively engaged in continuing job search activity indicates satisfaction with both type of employment and associated wages.

When asked to rate their ability (on a scale of 0-10) to look for employment while being actively employed, the average rating was 9.1. On average these participants had applied for approximately 6 jobs since current employment started.

Work Discontinued as of December 31, 2001

Telephone surveys were also completed with 51 SESP participants unemployed as of December 31, 2001 but who had employment since beginning the SESP program. Of these, 20 (39.2%) indicated being engaged in a continuing active job search. Since their last employment had ceased, these respondents had applied for, on average, 15 jobs.

Of the 31 respondents who indicated that they were not actively searching for employment, the reasons cited were returned/returning to school (14), health problems (5), family problems (3), maternity (2) and child care difficulties (2). Three respondents indicated that while currently unemployed they were awaiting a call back from their previous employer and thus not actively seeking other employment. Two respondents cited a desire to be at home with their children as the primary reason for their inactive job search.

The primary reason given for employment cessation was that employment was of a temporary nature. Only five participants indicated that additional supports might have enabled them to

continue in their previous position. The needed supports cited were more flexible child care arrangements (2), transportation (2), and increased support from SESP (1). When asked of the likelihood (on a scale of 0 - 10) of finding employment within the next six months, these respondents had an average rating of 7.9. When asked if there were additional supports or services that might increase the likelihood of future employment, 20 (39.2%) respondents indicated a need for further post secondary education and 11 (21.6%) indicated a need for further specialized training. It is a positive finding that of these 31 participants who indicated a need for further educational upgrading, 14 have enrolled (or indicated upcoming entry) in post secondary options.

Never worked as of December 31, 2001

A total of 53 SESP participants who had not obtained employment since program start were contacted during the telephone survey. Of these participants, 30 (56.6%) indicated a continuing job search, while 23 (43.4%) indicated that they were no longer looking for employment. The primary reasons given for the cessation of job search activities included no longer interested in employment (6), health problems (5), family problems (5), return to school/training program (5), and wanting to be home with child (3).

When asked to indicate the reasons for their unsuccessful job search to date, the primary reasons cited were: need for additional education (15), lack of work related experience (13), not motivated to go to work (10), and family/health problems (9). When asked to rate (on a scale of 0 - 10) the likelihood of finding employment within the next six months, the average rating was 5.9.

Job search status of SESP participants contacted during the telephone survey is summarized in Table 12 below. Of the 54 participants no longer actively looking for work (in the work discontinued/never worked categories), 19 indicated that they have entered some form of post secondary educational training. This can be viewed as positive in that although these participants are not employed, they have decided and/or been supported to move toward options that may increase their employability, either with respect to obtaining initial employment or to enable enhanced subsequent employment.

Table 12: Job search status at time of interview

Search Status	Working	Work Discontinued	Never Worked	Total
Looking	18	20	30	68
Not looking	34	31	23	88

As was found in the previous evaluation, a relatively large number of employed participants indicate a continuing job search. This finding can be interpreted as support for the primary tenet of the pilot: that participants will be motivated to increase hours and wages upon entry into the labour force. Indeed current data indicate that this motivation continues even in the absence of anticipated increases to the EIS payments.

Data collected during this evaluation indicate a number of SESP participants who, for a variety of reasons, have completely discontinued job search activities. Of the 104 unemployed participants contacted during the telephone surveys, 54 (51.9%) are no longer attempting to find employment. When the participants who have returned to school (and thus not available for work) are discounted this number drops to 35 (33.9%). This represents a similar finding to that indicated in the previous evaluation (i.e. 33%).

4.5 Do participants retain employment?

In discussing the issue of job retention the different start times for each participant group must be acknowledged and considered. Some participants had been in the program for approximately 41 months while others had entered less than 10 weeks prior to the start of the current evaluation. Therefore, in order to comment on employment retention, attention was focussed on the 230 participants in the first fourteen groups. These participants all began their classroom component prior to October 30, 2000 and thus had a potential 12 months continuous employment prior to the commencement of this evaluation, i.e. from January 1, 2001 to December 31, 2001. Examination of this 52 week period revealed that 96 of the 230 had graduated by December 31, 2001 and 40 had been deemed inactive. Of the remaining 94 participants who continued to be active for the entire year, 81 (86.2%) had employment during that period and these participants had worked an average of 37.8 weeks during the year. Table 13 displays a frequency distribution of the number

of weeks worked by participants.

Table 13: Groups 1 - 14. Number of weeks worked from January 1 to December 31, 2001

Weeks Worked	Participants (n=94)
0	13
1-13	7
14-26	12
27-40	18
41-51	13
52	31

A review of Table 13 reveals that 31 (33%) of these 94 participants in groups 1-14 worked for the full year (52 weeks). Sixty-two (66%) had worked at least 27 of the previous 52 weeks, with 54 of these (87.1%) continuing to work as of December 31, 2001. *Thus, 57.4% (54/94) of the participants who began the program 14 to 41 months prior to December 31, 2001 had retained employment for more than half a year and were continuing to work as of December 31, 2001.* Further, it is known from the follow up telephone surveys that at least 37 of the participants who had graduated had also worked the entire period from January 1 - December 31, 2001.

Of the 431 jobs acquired by SESP participants, 157 were still held by participants at the time of the graduation or on December 31, 2001, whichever occurred first. One graduate held two jobs at the time of graduation and one participant held two jobs on December 31, 2001. Table 14 below provides the reasons for leaving the remaining 274 jobs.

Table 14: Reasons for job leaving amongst SESP participants

Reason for job loss	Participants	
	Number	%
Quit	120	43.8%
had another job (60)		
medical/health reasons (11)		
personal reasons (13)		
unable to perform duties/job unsuitable (15)		
dispute with employer (8)		
school entry (4)		
child care problems (2)		
financial (2)		
unknown/no reason given (5)		
Laid off - shortage of work	82	29.9
Temporary work ended	50	18.2
Dismissed	19	6.9
Worker's compensation	3	1.1
Total	274	100

As revealed in the table, 43.8% of the participants “quit” the jobs they left, however, 50% of those who quit did so to take up another job. Data indicate that the majority of participants, once employed, remained in their positions until the work ended (eg. temporary jobs) or they moved to another job. Only 34 jobs were known to have ended for job performance reasons.

5.0 Benefits and Costs of the SESP Program

Analysis of data was conducted to determine the benefits and costs to program participants and benefits and costs to HRE of the SESP program. The information that follows is a summary of the analysis. The complete report on the Benefit-Cost Analysis (B-CA) methodology and assumptions is provided in Appendix A of this report.

This Benefit-Cost Analysis is an update of analysis conducted in 2000. At that time, the program had been in place only 21 months and data were available only on the initial 9 participant groups. The preliminary findings suggested the costs of the program are incurred during a relatively short time frame, while the benefits accrue over a longer period. The first study looked at the benefits and costs from the perspective of SESP participants and that of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. However, this update will focus on the implications to the provincial government.

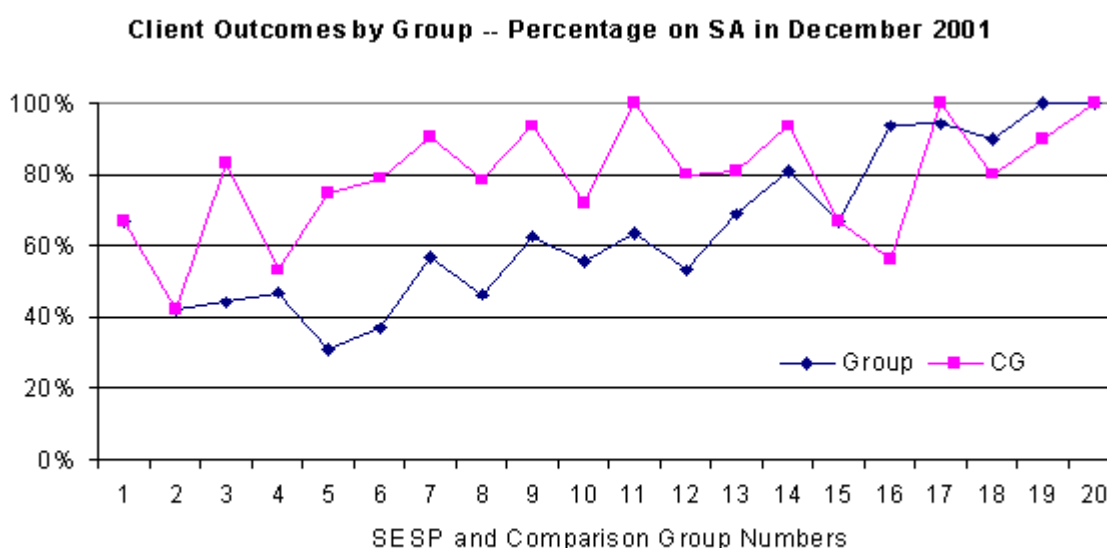
Data up to December 31, 2001 were used in this analysis, providing a picture of the SESP over its first 3 ½ years of support services to single parents in the St. John's area. Benefits calculated included the "savings" to Social Assistance Payments achieved through the reduction in costs of delivering the Income Support program to the client group and the "savings" to the Drug Card payments achieved through a reduction in the costs of providing drug card coverage to SESP participants. Costs that were calculated included the SESP Program delivery costs plus incremental costs attributable to SESP for licensed child care subsidy, direct purchase of transportation, salary of Client Service Officers and direct costs for other employment programs used by clients in conjunction with SESP.

To determine the net impact of SESP, benefits and costs of SESP were compared to benefits and costs that would have occurred for participants if the program had not been implemented. A comparison group was selected to provide a proxy for the scenario without SESP. This allowed us to isolate the effects of the SESP program. Details of the process and limitations of the comparison group selection are discussed in Appendix A.

5.1 General Outcomes and Investment Levels

Considering all 317 participants in the 20 SESP groups, we find that in December 2001, 64% were receiving income support payments. This is 15 percentage points lower than the Comparison Group participants over the equivalent time frame, with 79% still receiving income support. Figure 1 shows this outcome by group number.

Figure 1. Client Outcomes by SESP Group



The SESP groups (particularly groups 3 through 14) have achieved better results in this outcome measure. While the Comparison Groups have some variance from group to group, overall the trend is somewhat flat with little difference in the earlier and later starting groups. In contrast, the SESP groups show a definite progression of improved outcomes the longer they are in the program. It appears that the groups do not demonstrate consistent positive outcomes (e.g. exit from social assistance system) until after about one year on the program.

While on assistance SESP participants also had employment income in ten times the number of months as the comparison groups members.

Table 15 shows the total Social Assistance amount disaggregated to show the difference in composition of this payment between the SESP and Comparison Group clients.

Table 15: HRE Social Assistance Payments to Clients, August 1998 - December 2001

	SESP	Comparison Group
Earnings Exemptions	\$329,250	\$33,000
EIS amount	336,319	0
Private Child Care exemption	177,227	27,404
Transportation for employment exemption	110,457	14,250
Supports for NewFoundJobs	37,754	9,728
Placement allowance for post secondary study	2,328	15,958
Balance of Income Support payments	2,835,972	4,603,935
Total HRE SA payment amount	\$3,829,307	\$4,704,275

In the initial B-CA study conducted with 21 months of data, total Social Assistance payments to clients were not substantially different between SESP and Comparison Group clients, with only a \$30,891 (2.5%) difference in favour of the SESP clients. After 41 months, we now see a \$874,968 (18.5%) difference, with SESP clients receiving smaller total payments despite much higher amounts for EIS and other exemptions related to employment.

Table 16 combines the costs of the SESP program to the Province with the total SA and Drug Card payment amounts to determine the total investment in the SESP and non-SESP clients.

Table 16: Total Investment in Clients, August 1998 - December 2001

	SESP	Comparison Group	Incremental Investment in SESP
HRE SA payment amount	3,829,307	4,704,275	-874,968
Drug Card payments	236,389	265,140	-28,751
SESP program delivery	867,388	0	867,388
other HRE employment supports	249,188	68,944	180,244
HRE CSO costs	159,865	59,950	99,915
other incremental costs	103,031	10,332	92,699
41 month Total investment	5,445,168	5,108,641	336,527
Investment per Participant - Month	\$784	\$735	\$48
21 month Total Investment (April 98 - April 2000)	1,850,739	1,240,012	610,727
Investment per Participant - Month	\$963	\$645	\$317

The level of investment per client varies depending on their length in the program and requirements. Applying a crude measure of average investment per participant-month, we find that the investment for SESP clients is \$784 compared to \$735 for the non-SESP comparison group. The difference of \$48 is the estimated monthly investment per client that can be attributed to the SESP program over the initial 41 month period. This estimate is significantly lower than the incremental investment per client of \$317 in the initial 21 month analysis. This demonstrates the impact of cumulative benefits over time, as the SESP participants collect less social assistance payments.

5.2 Benefits and Costs

The primary benefit to the provincial government of supporting the SESP program is that it will potentially lead to reduced spending on Social Assistance payments. Total payments (SA and

Drug Card payments) to SESP participants over the 41 months of the program were just over \$4 million, compared to approximately \$5 million for the comparison group representing the likely level of payments without the SESP program. The difference of \$903,719 is the net benefits attributed to the SESP program over the 41 months.

The costs to the provincial government of the SESP program include the direct program delivery costs as well as areas where the SESP program can be seen to have had incremental increases in other program costs. Total costs for SESP participants were \$1.4 million over the 41 months compared to just \$139,226 for the Comparison Group, for a difference of just over \$1.2 million in costs attributable to SESP.

The following table summarizes the total net impact of SESP for the provincial government over the initial 41 months.

Table 17: Net Impact of SESP for the Province, August 1998 - December 2001

	Clients with SESP	Without SESP	Net gains to Nfld. government
Benefits	4,065,696	4,969,415	903,719
Costs	1,379,472	139,226	1,240,246
Total			-\$336,527

During this 41 month period, the net gains are still negative. This is not surprising, as most of the costs to government are up front while the benefits accrue over time. It is the cumulative effect of the benefits over time that will balance these initial costs. These results are actually less negative than when the initial BCA was conducted using 21 months of data, demonstrating the positive impact the SESP program is having over time.

5.3 Projections for Cost-Neutral Programming

While the information in the previous section provides a snapshot of the total benefits and costs incurred by the 20 SESP groups over the period from August 1998 to December 2001, it does not provide us with a clear picture of how the investments in any given group are being recouped

over time. As noted earlier, costs tend to be made up front while benefits are accrued over a longer period of time.

A model was developed for the initial B-CA study to project the outcomes of SESP and non-SESP comparison groups and to determine the cumulative savings over time. This projection model was applied to the first nine groups. It was estimated that the net costs of the SESP program would be offset by savings to social assistance payments within 3 ½ years of the initial investment in a particular group.

Taking this projection for groups 1 to 9 and updating it with actual data, we find that the program actually reached a cost-neutral position in only 2 ½ years. This improved situation is primarily due to the higher number of SESP participants permanently leaving social assistance during their second year of the program. The following chart compares the projections to the actual outcomes for SESP groups 1 to 9.

Figure 2. Actual versus projected number of SESP participants leaving Income Support (Groups 1 - 9)

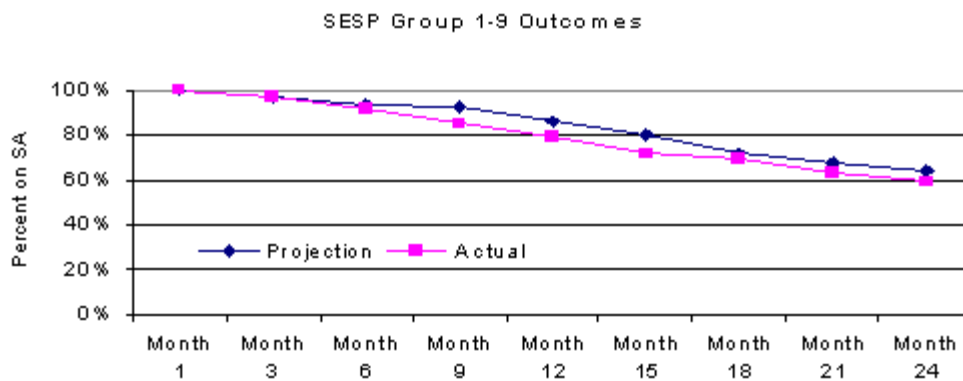


Table 18 shows the original projections for groups 1 to 9 along with the updated data showing actual cost-neutral date to be 4th quarter of 2001, or an average of 2 ½ years from the time of initial investment.

Table 18: Cumulative Benefits and Costs for Groups 1 to 9

	Net Cumulative Benefit $\sum PB_{Ni}$	Net Cumulative Cost $\sum PC_{Ni}$	Net Cumulative Benefit- Cost $\sum PB_{Ni}-PC_{Ni}$
Aug 98 to Apr 00	(\$30,508)	\$584,796	(\$615,304)
May-Jun 00	\$38,514	\$592,096	(\$553,582)
3rd qtr 00	\$126,941	\$603,046	(\$476,105)
4th qtr 00	\$220,263	\$613,996	(\$393,733)
1st qtr 01	\$333,062	\$621,295	(\$288,233)
2nd qtr 01	\$470,530	\$628,594	(\$158,064)
3rd qtr 01	\$599,553	\$635,893	(\$36,340)
4th qtr 01	\$733,344	\$643,192	\$90,152
1st qtr 02	\$840,836	\$646,843	\$193,993
2nd qtr 02	\$946,678	\$650,494	\$296,184
3rd qtr 02	\$1,037,886	\$654,145	\$383,741
4th qtr 02	\$1,109,953	\$657,796	\$452,157

By the end of the December 2001, the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador has accumulated a total net benefit of \$90,152 through investments in the SESP program for the 152 participants in groups 1 to 9. Conservative estimates for the subsequent months show that by the end of June 2002 the Province will have a net gain of over \$296,184 from the initial investment in these 152 individuals.

It was found that the later SESP groups exhibit almost identical patterns to the initial nine groups in terms of the rate of leaving assistance over time. The cost and benefit profiles were also found to be consistent. We conclude that the projection model is sound and that the outcomes can be applied to all SESP groups. We extended the model slightly to 30 months to provide an estimate of the percentage of clients who would be off social assistance by the 2 ½ year (30 month) period when the SESP group reaches the cost-neutral position.

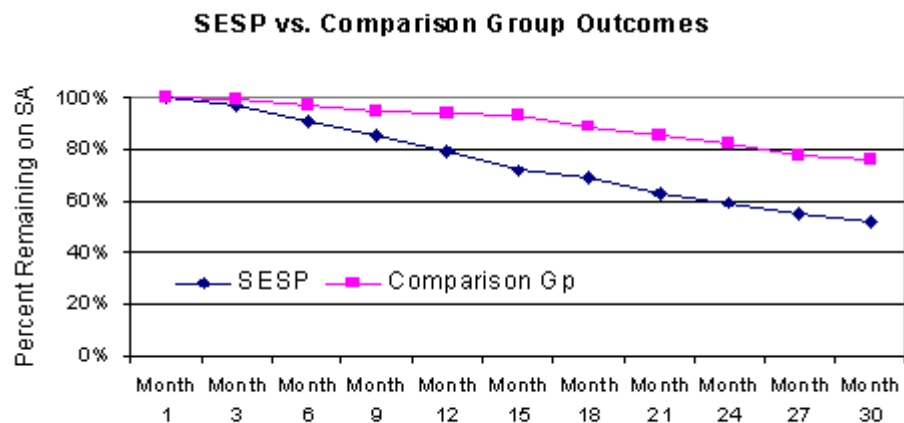
Figure 3. Comparison of SESP and Comparison Group Outcomes to end of 30 months

Figure 3 compares the outcomes for SESP and non-SESP comparison group members over time. The gap represents the difference attributable to SESP. By the end of 30 months, 24% more SESP clients will have left HRE assistance than would have in the absence of the SESP program.

5.4 Conclusions of the B-CA Analysis

This study was an update of analysis conducted in 2000. The following table compares summary findings from that original analysis with those found in this report:

Table 19: Comparison of 2000 and 2002 B-CA Findings

June 2000 Report Conclusions	Current Analysis (June 2002)
Costs of the program are incurred during a relatively short time frame, while benefits accrue over a longer period of time.	Same conclusion supported.

The SESP program required incremental investment of approximately \$610,727, or \$317 per client per month more than the comparison group over the initial 21 month period.

The SESP program required incremental investment of \$48 per client per month over the initial 41 month period. The impact of SESP over time has already lowered this investment level from \$317 in the earlier study.

The program moves to a cost-neutral position within approximately 3 ½ years from initial investment. This predicts investment in groups 1 - 9 will become cost-neutral by the 4th quarter of 2002.

The average time frame for the SESP investment in any group to become cost-neutral occurs within 2 ½ years. The program moved to a cost neutral position for groups 1 - 9 by the 4th quarter of 2001 - a full year ahead of earlier projections.

There are many other benefits of the SESP program not measured in this analysis that could generate substantial benefits to the Province, particularly over the long-term.

Same conclusion supported.

The data clearly illustrate that SESP clients experience more employment while on assistance than the comparison group members. A much higher percentage of SESP clients also leave social assistance altogether. The impact of SESP builds slowly over the initial year, with notable shifts in patterns of clients leaving income support during the second year. By the end of 2 ½ years, almost 25% more SESP clients have left social assistance than would have without the SESP program.

It is noted that SESP participants accessed other employment interventions including various wage subsidy and/or short term training subsequent to starting the program. Further analysis of individual outcomes of SESP alone or in combination with other interventions may point to the more important elements or most cost effective means of achieving similar results.

There are limitations to using a comparison group to predict the outcomes of SESP participants. While care was given in the selection process, factors such as motivation cannot be estimated. These findings also occurred during a period of generally positive and stable economic conditions in the St. John's area. Different local labour market conditions would obviously have an impact on achieved results.

The benefit-cost analysis shows that the SESP program is an effective employment support measure, moving clients into the labour force and allowing many to progress to a position where they no longer require income support. The time frame of 2 ½ years to achieve a cost-neutral position is very fast, and represents an excellent investment decision for the Province.

5.5 What are the indirect benefits to clients and society?

The benefits of a program such as SESP cannot be fully measured from a direct financial (cost savings) perspective only. While indicators such as the number of jobs found, the number of participants leaving the income support system, job retention, reduced income support payments, etc.(as described in the preceding sections of this report) are important in commenting on the overall success of the pilot, there are also many other benefits derived by both SESP participants, and society in general.

These indirect benefits have been well documented by previous researchers within the area of “welfare to work” programs, and have been confirmed by data from both previous formative and summative evaluations of the SESP pilot program. Most notable among these identified indirect benefits, and of greatest relevance to the SESP program as confirmed through the key informant interviews, include the following:

- Increased initial and sustained levels of self-confidence, self esteem among participants;
- Access to a peer group that can provide them with personal support and networks for obtaining employment;
- A more positive outlook on life;
- Increased sense of individual empowerment and control;
- Increased awareness of available supports and services;
- Enhanced social life and participation in community activities;

- Benefits to family members because the parent is happier and more economically self-sufficient;
- Improved quality of life for the whole family (eg. able to have nicer homes);
- Able to be better role models for their children;
- Discontinuance of reliance on income support as the primary source of family income;
- Self-esteem of their children improves;
- Cycle of income support dependence across generations is broken;
- Changes society's perception of single parents and what they are capable of;
- Reduction in family problems and dysfunction generating from financial circumstances;
- Reduced usage of the Health Care System;
- Career advancement within the workforce;
- More people working and contributing to society, resulting in stronger communities;
- Increased opportunities for single parents to be contributing employees and citizens.

During the telephone survey, respondents were asked to use a scale of 0-10 to indicate their disagreement (strongly disagreed = 0) or agreement (strongly agreed = 10) with statements relating to how the program affected them. As noted previously, the telephone survey conducted for this evaluation involved only those SESP participants not in receipt of the EIS (i.e. participants who had left the program, working but not eligible for EIS, work discontinued, or had not yet found employment). Table 20 below provides a summary of the average participant rating given to the various statements.

Table 20: Participant ratings of indirect program benefits on a scale of 0 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree)

	Working n = 52	Work Discontinued n = 51	Never Worked n = 53
Increased Self Confidence	7.9	9.8	8
Improved Parenting Skills	3.5	4.2	4.9
Reduced use of Health Care System	2.3	2.7	3
Increased involvement in community	4.1	4.4	3.5
Improved financial situation	7.8	6.7	0.8

	Working n = 52	Work Discontinued n = 51	Never Worked n = 53
More positive outlook on life	8.2	8.2	7.8
Increased participation in social activities	5.1	5.8	5
Caught up on Debts	5.6	5.9	2.5
Repayment of Student Loan	3.6	3.5	0.2

A review of Table 20 reveals that participants, regardless of their current employment status, most strongly agreed with the statements “Participation in the SESP program has increased my self confidence” and “Participation in the SESP program has given me a more positive outlook on life”. This finding is consistent with earlier findings within the formative and summative evaluations. Of particular note however is that SESP participants report a maintained increase in self confidence over time (for some participants this may be as long as 41 months) . This is an important finding in that increases in levels of self confidence/self esteem are generally reported in the literature as being short term in duration (i.e. returning to previous levels soon after program completion). This finding may underscore the importance of having the capacity for continuing contact with and support from program staff as a method of achieving and sustaining high levels of participant self confidence. Many respondents within the telephone interview indicated that this enhanced self confidence was of benefit to them across different environments, and not just specific to their ability to look for employment.

While participants in the telephone survey did not indicate any significant increase in their involvement in social (average rating of 5.3) or community activities (average rating of 4.0) as a direct result of their involvement in SESP most respondents reported that the quality of these interactions had improved tremendously. Most reported feeling much more confident in social situations, particularly those respondents who were employed. In discussing their involvement in community and social activities many respondents reported being “too busy” to partake in these activities. Most reported that working and caring for their children took up most of their time. This was viewed by participants as a positive, not a negative, and represented a very different lifestyle to that of being reliant upon income support payments.

One of the major findings from previous evaluations of the SESP program was the reported

increased level of monthly income as a result of employment. Table 20 reveals that participants, both those employed as of December 31, 2001 and those whose employment had discontinued, agreed with the statement that the program had improved their financial situation. Furthermore, they indicated mild agreement with the statement that participation in SESP had enabled them to “catch up on outstanding debts”. Participants who had not worked during their participation in the program strongly disagreed with the statement concerning improved financial situation. They also disagreed with the statement that participation in SESP had enabled them to catch up on debts. These findings further indicate that participants who find employment through the program do view themselves as financially better off as a result. Of note also is that several of those participants who had not yet obtained employment reported that even though their income had not increased, the classroom instruction received in the area of budgeting and financial management had enabled them to better manage their finances.

When asked if participation in the SESP program had been of any benefit to them, the majority of the 156 respondents in the telephone survey responded positively. Only seven respondents indicated that participation had been of no benefit to them. Five of these participants were in the work discontinued category and indicated that they felt the program simply did not meet their needs. Table 21 below provides a summary of the benefits most frequently cited by respondents within the telephone surveys.

Table 21: Prioritized Benefits of participation in SESP (multiple answers allowed)

	Working n = 52	Work Discontinued n=51	Never Worked n=53
Increased Self Confidence and/or Self Esteem	80.7%	56.9%	73.6%
Access to Supports (e.g. daycare, transportation)	51.9%	35.3%	50.9%
Improved Job Search Skills	15.4%	47.1%	37.7%
Increased motivation to work	34.6%	35.3%	37.7%
Access to SESP staff	23.1%	27.5%	22.6%
Help with Resumes	17.3%	23.5%	22.6%

Of particular interest in reviewing the benefits of involvement in SESP, as rated by participants, is that direct employment and/or financial benefits were not rated highly by these participants. Indeed it would appear that the indirect benefits are given greater value by participants. Data reveals that participants place great value and benefit on the increased levels of self confidence and self esteem that are attributed to their involvement in the SESP program. Participants also reported an increased motivation to work as a major benefit of their involvement in the SESP program.

5.6 Implications of Benefit Cost Analysis

The results of the current benefit-cost analysis of the SESP program confirm the program to be effective in achieving the primary objective of helping single parents in receipt of income support benefits achieve increased financial independence. Program results have demonstrated that it has been effective in assisting income support clients to both enter and remain in the labour force, and has enabled many to progress to a position where they no longer require any income support benefits. The time frame of 2 ½ years to achieve a cost-neutral position represents a considerable improvement over that previously reported based on results attained during the initial 21 months of program operation. It is suggested therefore that SESP represents an excellent investment decision for the Province, particularly given the additional unmeasured benefits that may be realized.

Recommendation 1: **The Single Parent Employment Support Program cease to be funded as a “Pilot Program” and be now considered as part of the generic employment measures used by HRE.**

6.0 Assisting participants to prepare for, obtain and maintain employment

6.1 How important are the different program components to meeting the SESP pilot objectives?

As part of the telephone survey, SESP participants not in receipt of the EIS were asked to rate (on a scale of 0 -10) the importance of 1) the classroom component, 2) Support from the Job Search Officer (JSO), 3) Support from the Client Service Officer (CSO); 4) Job Search help, 5) Peer Support, and 6) Support from SPAN, in terms of preparing for, obtaining and maintaining employment. Participants who were employed at the time of survey were asked to rate model elements across all dimensions; those participants who had worked, but were not currently working, rated relative to preparing for and obtaining employment; and those who had not yet found any employment were asked to rate program elements relative to preparing for employment only. Table 22 displays the program components which were rated most and least important by SESP participants.

Table 22: Participant ratings of importance of program components

		Working	Work Discontinued	Never Worked
Prepare for	Most	SPAN (8.6)	JSO (8.9)	SPAN (9.4)
	Least	Peers (6.1)	CSO (6.6)	CSO (6.3)
Obtain	Most	SPAN (8.0)	JSO (7.7)	-
	Least	Peers (4.7)	Peers (4.0)	-
Maintain	Most	SPAN (5.6)	-	-
	Least	Peers (0.2)	-	-

The following is a summary of findings relevant to the importance of each of the program components:

CLASSROOM

The classroom component received its highest participant rating with respect to “preparing for” employment, but was viewed as much less important to either obtaining or maintaining employment. Data collected during the telephone surveys from employed participants indicated that they derived maximum benefit from the classroom component while they were completing it (e.g. increased self esteem, peer contact, etc.). The majority of participants surveyed reported that the most important elements of the classroom component were the acquisition of job search techniques, resume writing, and job interview skills. Although generally not rated highly as related to obtaining or maintaining employment, 20 of the employed participants (38.4%) contacted during the telephone surveys indicated that they felt skills acquired during the classroom training (i.e. increased self confidence, people skills, budgeting) were of benefit to them in maintaining their current employment.

Data collected during this summative evaluation confirmed that while participants generally rated the classroom component favourably, for many it was not considered a “required” element to successful entry into the workforce. This conclusion is supported by the fact that 59 (24.3%) of the SESP participants who were or who had worked as of December 31, 2001,) obtained employment prior to, or within the first week of, the classroom component. This percentage is lower than reported in the previous summative evaluation (i.e. 29.8%) and thus means that participants in Groups 11 - 20 were more likely to attend more of the classroom component prior to acquisition of first employment.

JOB SEARCH OFFICER (JSO)

Participants who had previous employment but were unemployed as of December, 2001 rated support from the Job Search Officer (JSO) as the most important program element with respect to both preparing for and obtaining employment. This finding is consistent with that found in the previous SESP evaluation.

Employed participants generally rated support from the JSO highly (it was the second most important element within preparing for, obtaining and maintaining). This represents a different finding than that of the previous evaluation in which employed participants rated this element as the most important in both preparing for and obtaining employment. One possible explanation

for this slightly reduced level of importance is that many of these participants were no longer in their original jobs, and many participants (19/52 - 36.5%) indicated that these current positions had been obtained without direct assistance from the JSOs.

In the previous summative evaluation of the SESP program two major points of concern were identified with respect to the JSOs. First, many participants felt that there was insufficient time to meet with the JSOs⁶ on an individual basis, and second, several participants mentioned being “pressured” to take the first available job. Data collected during this current evaluation did not reveal any evidence of these issues, and this indicates that corrective action has been taken by SESP program staff. In addition, when asked to identify the major strength of SESP, the most frequent response of participants (65/156) was “program staff” (i.e. JSOs, Program Coordinator and secretarial support).

CLIENT SERVICES OFFICER (CSO)

Consistent with the findings of the first summative evaluation, SESP participants spoke highly of the individualized and responsive support received from the Client Services Officers (CSOs) assigned to the SESP program. It should be noted that the role of these CSO positions has changed slightly since the last evaluation in that they do not now become responsible for the SESP participant file until after employment is secured. Support from the CSOs received its highest rating from employed participants as related to obtaining employment. This group of participants spoke highly of the additional support they had received from the CSOs, especially when they obtained their first employment. Examples cited included assistance with needed clothing and work related items, child care, clarification of existing HRE policy and, in a few instances, assistance with housing issues. Both the employed and work discontinued participants reported that the CSOs handled their EIS payments appropriately and in a timely manner. In assessing the comments received during the telephone interviews it must be remembered that these are clients who do not now receive any EIS payments and thus have no (or very limited) current contact with the CSOs assigned to the SESP program. Evidence gathered from all sources (especially HRE and SESP staff interviews) affirmed the value of dedicated CSO resource to the SESP program.

⁶ Note that in the previous evaluation these positions had been titled Job Placement Officers.

JOB SEARCH

While not rated as the most important element with respect to either preparing for, obtaining or maintaining employment, the job search component was generally given positive ratings (average = 6.7 - preparing for; average = 7.6 - obtaining) by participants contacted during the telephone interviews. As expected, this element was rated lowest as related to maintaining employment. As was identified in the first evaluation, two issues need to be considered when interpreting value placed on the job search component. First, for many participants the job search was an ongoing process, not one limited to the formal four week “active job search” component, and second, for others it was not very applicable as they had begun their employment either prior to or within the first week of class. However, those participants who had obtained employment after the six week classroom component spoke highly of the value and necessity of having child care and transportation costs covered during this additional four week period. These participants expressed a view that without these supports they would not have been able to engage in activities necessary to obtain employment. Participants, especially those whose employment was discontinued or who had not yet found employment, suggested that these supports be extended for at least another month, and/or be reinstated if employment is discontinued.

In contrast to findings from the first evaluation, participants did not indicate any confusion (or disappointment) that the SESP program did not include a “job placement” function. This would indicate that SESP and HRE staff have taken necessary action to ensure that the program is fully explained to potential participants prior to entry into the program and that single parents understand that the program consists of an active, self directed job search. The change in job title of SESP staff from “Placement Officer” to “Job Search Officer” also likely contributed to the clarification of this issue.

GROUP DYNAMICS

The SESP participants who were working at the time of telephone surveys rated the group dynamics/peer support as the least important factor in preparing for, obtaining and maintaining employment. The highest rating for peer support was given by the SESP participants who had not yet found employment. This finding is consistent with that found in the previous SESP evaluation.

During the telephone surveys respondents indicated that attending class with fellow single parents was indeed a very positive experience and that it enabled a sharing of common experiences. While a few participants related maintaining contact and friendship with classmates, the majority of respondents reported no further contact with classmates once the classroom component had finished.

SPAN

Support from SPAN was rated as most important by SESP participants who were working (and not in receipt of EIS) with respect to preparing for, obtaining and maintaining employment. It was also rated as most important (as related to preparing for employment) by those who had not yet found initial employment. For employed participants this is a different finding than that of the first SESP evaluation, in that previously support from the JSO had been rated as most important. Given that telephone surveys conducted during this evaluation were only with those participants not in receipt of the EIS (i.e. graduated) this latter finding may reflect their less contact (on average) with JSO staff of SESP.

6.2 What are the identified barriers to attaining and maintaining employment?

The barriers to employment experienced by single parents making the transition from income support to employment have been well documented in the literature. The barriers most frequently cited, and confirmed by previous evaluations of the SESP program included: financial disincentives, access to adequate child care, transportation, disability, health or behaviour problems of children, domestic violence, and low basic skills/educational levels.

During telephone interviews conducted with the 156 participants who were not in receipt of the EIS as of December 31, 2001, participants were asked to identify the major reason they were not employed prior to involvement with SESP. Twenty eight (17.9%) respondents did not indicate any particular reasons/barriers that prevented their entering the workforce. The responses from the remaining 128 participants are summarized in Table 23.

Table 23: Reasons for non-employment prior to their involvement with SESP as cited by SESP participants

	Working n = 48	Work Discontinued n=39	Never Worked n=41
Child Care issues	22	15	17
Did not know how to look for employment	3	12	12
Worked previously and was between jobs	7	1	1
Attending School	7	4	6
Inadequate transportation	2	-	2
Family Problems	3	5	1
Better off on Social Assistance	3	2	1
Health Reasons	1	-	1

In reviewing Table 23 it can be seen that the primary reason given by SESP participants across all employment status categories were issues related to child care. Respondents generally indicated that they either had chosen to remain at home (and out of the workforce) with their children, could not afford the cost of child care necessary to enable them to take a job, or that they were unable to find suitable child care options. The identification of child care as the primary barrier experienced by SESP participants confirmed findings of the previous SESP evaluation. The second most common reason cited by respondents within the telephone survey was a reported lack of skills necessary to engage in a successful job search. Data collected during this evaluation, as within the previous evaluation, would confirm that the SESP program, in consideration of the high rate of job acquisition and job retention, has been very successful in addressing these two primary barriers to employment for program participants.

6.3 Impacts of other government programs

The previous summative evaluation of SESP (July 2000) identified concerns as related to two government programs, namely the Day Care Subsidy program and the Canada Student Loans

program. Evidence gathered during this current evaluation suggests that these issues have been effectively addressed and/or at least no longer present as major issues for SESP participants contacted during the telephone interviews.

Day Care Subsidy Program

Key Informant Interviews, especially with SESP staff and CSOs, indicated that previously noted delays in having day care subsidies (required by SESP participants in order to obtain employment) assessed and approved by officials of Health and Community Services have now been corrected. Informants reported that a previous existing backlog in day care subsidy applications had been cleared up and that since this time no undue delays in processing of these subsidies has been noted. It was further reported that subsequent to the July 2000 Evaluation a HCS official (with responsibility for day care services) joined the Operations Committee. This action was deemed to be helpful in addressing this issue and currently the HCS representative attends Operations Committee meetings only as needed.

Only 2 of the 51 participants whose previous employment ended indicated that inadequate child care was the primary reason for job loss and in these instances the issue was related to private child care arrangements, rather than licensed day care. None of the participants who had yet to find employment cited child care as a reason for unsuccessful job search. The one issue that did emerge among a minority of employed participants was that the income cut off level for the day care subsidy was too low and should be raised so that more families would be eligible for at least a partial subsidy.

Student Loans

The majority of SESP participants (110/156) contacted for the telephone survey indicated having a current student loan. For those participants currently unemployed or who had not yet found employment the issue of repayment of the student loan was not a concern in that while in receipt of income support benefits, repayment of student loans is not required. Interviews with participants currently employed, 30 of whom had outstanding loans, did not reveal any major concerns with the repayment of these loans. Seventeen of these individuals indicated making regular payments toward their student loan (2 reported that they had paid off the loan since becoming employed), and the remaining participants had either not yet begun payments or were

in the process of arranging for repayment to begin. None of the participants who were making loan payments identified this as an undue financial hardship.

This finding is in contrast to that reported in the previous SESP evaluation wherein many SESP participants expressed serious concerns regarding their capacity to repay their outstanding student loans. Many of these participants further expressed a view that the issue of student loan repayment might be a major reason for not seeking/maintaining employment. No evidence however was found during this current evaluation that would indicate that this is still a predominant concern of SESP participants. There are several possible reasons for this finding. First, increased attention is now given within the classroom component to specifically address issues and concerns regarding student loans. SESP informants further noted that this issue is closely tracked during client follow up and where concerns are expressed, clients are referred for individual assistance (to the instructor who teaches the financial management component of the classroom curriculum). A further factor possibly influencing this finding is that employed participants included in the telephone survey were those individuals not in receipt of EIS and thus had higher incomes.

Other employment supports/services of HRE

By design, SESP participants also have access to other employment supports/services of HRE. To date, a total of 104 SESP participants have used other career and employment services of the department. The majority of use (73/104) has involved one time payments for work related expenses within the NewFoundJobs program (clothing for work, uniforms, equipment, etc.) and/or costs of supplemental training (tuition). Thirty-one participants have obtained employment in wage subsidy positions funded via either NewfoundJobs (14), the Graduate Employment Program (9), the Employment Generation Program (6), SWASP (1), or the Seasonal Employment Program (1). While use of other employment programs does increase the incremental costs of the SESP pilot, current usage does not appear excessive, and occurs within the context of an individualized case managed approach.

6.4 What are the determinants to obtaining, and maintaining employment?

Obtaining

In order to identify any possible determinants of obtaining employment, the characteristics of

employed and unemployed SESP participants were examined at 14 weeks after start of program and at December 31, 2001. The two periods of time were examined to 1) identify any demographic differences between participants with respect to initial acquisition of employment, and 2) determine if demographic differences between employed and unemployed participants change over time. Appendix B contains a detailed frequency distribution of a number of key demographics portrayed based on the Working/Work Discontinued and Never Worked status of SESP participants. As the participants in group 20 were not involved in the program for 14 weeks at the time of this evaluation, their data are excluded from this analysis.

Chi-square tests of independence were used to analyse these client characteristics relative to the worked/never worked dimension. This analysis yielded a statistically significant ($p < .05$) relationship between level of education and whether or not participants gained employment before 14 weeks. Examination of the data indicates that fewer than would be expected participants with less than high school and participants with partial post secondary obtained employment during the first 14 weeks. More high school graduates and post secondary school graduates than expected obtained employment within the first 14 weeks. However, in the longer term it did not seem that level of education had a significant impact on acquisition of employment. This suggests that high school and post secondary graduates might be quicker to take up employment but that over time participants who do not have high school education or have not completed post secondary do begin working at similar rates to those with other levels of education.

In order to ascertain whether the absence of high school education impacts on acquisition of employment, the 88 participants from groups 15 through 20 were compared by level of education and their work or non-work status effective December 31, 2001.

This comparison is displayed in Table 24. This analysis revealed no statistically significant differences among the groups.

Table 24: Level of education as related to obtaining employment.

	Worked (n = 48)	Never Worked (n = 40)
Education Level		
Less than high school	13	12
High school	6	11
Partial post secondary	7	6
Post secondary	22	11

Maintaining

In order to comment on the determinants of maintaining employment, the characteristics of the participants from groups 1-14 were examined. These groups were chosen because all participants in these groups would have had the potential to have worked for a minimum of 60 weeks prior to the summative evaluation period. Retention was defined as working 26 or more weeks and continuing to work as of December 31, 2001. A total of 105 people met this criteria. These 105 people were compared with the 50 participants from groups 1-14 who had worked for 26 or fewer weeks and were not working as of December 31, 2001. The detailed comparison of the demographic profiles of these two groups is contained in Appendix C..

Chi-square tests of independence were used to analyse the client characteristics of participants in groups 1-14. This analysis did not yield any statistically significant results, indicating that client demographics do not seem to be a factor in retention of employment.

6.5 What supports and/or services, if any, are needed by single parents who successfully leave the Income Support system?

One of the major findings of the previous SESP evaluation was that available supports and services had met the full range of employment needs of the majority of SESP participants, and that there were no major gaps, as identified by single parents, in available supports or services.

The current evaluation enabled a more detailed analysis of those supports and/or services which

had importance to those clients who were employed, no longer in receipt of the EIS and thus had successfully left the income support system. When the 52 participants who were employed and not in receipt of the EIS were asked if there were any supports or services not received that would be important to keeping their current job, 78.8% (41/52) indicated no additional services were required. Of those respondents that identified a need for additional supports the most frequently cited were transportation (7), drug card (6), and child care (6). It is to be noted that where child care was cited as a need this did not mean that child care was not being used, but rather that the respondent desired access to some form of subsidy.

In discussing the supports that they currently used these “graduates” indicated that access to quality child care was the most important service they used to enable their continued employment. Ten of the respondents indicated still being in receipt of a drug card from HRE. Many of these respondents (18/52 - 34.6%) indicated that ongoing support from SPAN/SESP was a critical support to their continued employment and sense of well being. It is important to note that the majority of these respondents did not indicate any type of regular contact with SESP/SPAN but rather placed great value on the capacity to contact and obtain assistance/support as needed.

The great majority of these participants expressed much satisfaction with their current jobs (92.3% indicated an intent to keep current job indefinitely) and reported (96.2%) as feeling better off financially as compared to when they were in receipt of income support.

Of the 52 participants who had successfully left the income support system, 25% (13/52) reported that they had attended an educational (10) and/or employment (3) program since they had completed the SESP program. Eight of these participants had received some form of financial assistance from either HRE or HRDC to enable attendance, while two had obtained Canada Student Loans.

Data collected during this evaluation with respect to employed SESP participants who no longer receive the EIS indicate that these individuals have access to those supports/services that are required to enable long term attachment to the workforce. It does not appear that support needs for this group of single parents is different from the needs of single parents who are in receipt of

the EIS. It would also appear that as income levels rise and they become ineligible for the EIS these participants are able to afford to continue with needed supports (eg. child care) from their own resources and are still better off financially.

7.0 Strengths and weaknesses of the current design and administration of the SESP program

7.1 Strengths and Weaknesses of the SESP model

Key informant interviews, participants surveys, and document review yielded the following strengths and weaknesses of the SESP model.

7.1.1 Strengths

1. Sponsorship by a Community Agency.

All key informants interviewed indicated that the partnership between HRE and a community agency such as SPAN in the design and delivery of the SESP program was a positive and effective element to the program model. The Single Parent Association was noted by informants to have a natural and positive connection to this population that could not be easily, if at all, duplicated by a government department. Many informants indicated that it was perhaps this enhanced connection to the single parent population that contributed in a significant way to the overall success of the pilot. Participants of the program indicated that they were pleased with the provision of the SESP program via SPAN, and that such sponsorship also gave them access to other services offered by the organization (eg. clothing and food bank, housing, and support groups). Participants also commented that given the nature of SPAN it was more likely that staff would be more understanding (than perhaps government staff) of their needs, and the challenges faced by single parents.

2. Multifaceted approach.

The inclusion within the SESP model of four distinct, yet connected, components was viewed by the majority of key informants, at all levels, as the strongest design feature. Informants felt that by having classroom, job search, financial supports (including Earned Income Supplement), and follow-up components, the program was more likely to be able to meet the needs of a wider range of client and address different barriers of the various participants. Informants also indicated a belief that the use of a self directed job search rather than a job placement approach was a major strength and one that would in the longer term result in increased client capacity and enhanced job retention. The other design feature most often cited involved the capacity of SESP

to remain connected to clients once they entered the workforce and to provide follow up support and crisis intervention as and when needed. A majority of SESP participants noted this as a positive feature of the program, stating that while they did not require contact on any type of formal or scheduled basis, it was comforting to know that program staff were available if needed. Even clients who were “graduated”, had been working continuously for several years, and had no active contact with SESP, frequently commented that “I know they (the staff) are there for me if I need them”.

3. Flexibility

Confirming findings from the previous evaluation, key informants noted that one of the major strengths of the program was its capacity to enable and support participants to engage in job search at any point in the program. The program does not operate in a formal linear fashion, in that participants are not required to complete one phase of the program before moving to the next. For example, 51 participants (20.9%) did not attend the classroom component but did avail of the support offered by the Job Search Officer and the Earned Income Supplement. The program has also enabled several participants who did not complete the classroom component initially (due to obtaining employment) to return to complete this component once employment ceased. In addition, as the screening process for SESP occurs on a continuous basis, some participants may be selected 6 - 8 weeks in advance of the actual group start date. This allows them to avail of supports (e.g. help with resumes, cover letters, access to job listings, etc.) prior to official program commencement. In some cases this has held to the attainment of employment prior to classroom commencement.

4 Inclusion of non high school graduates

One of the major weaknesses noted within the previous SESP evaluation was the restriction of program participation to those single parents with at least a high school education or equivalent. Data collected during this current evaluation confirms that this “weakness” has been corrected and as of group 15 non high school graduates have been deemed to be appropriate candidates for inclusion within the program. The majority of key informants viewed this program development as positive, and rated it as a strength of the current model. Where concern was expressed as to the inclusion of non high school graduates it was directed toward a potential that some single parents might be attracted to the workforce rather than pursuing further educational options. Data

collected does however indicate that both SESP and HRE are cognizant of this potential and have established a screening mechanism (via an enhanced case management approach) to ensure that all options are fully explored with these single parents prior to acceptance into the SESP program.

7.1.2 Weaknesses

1. Earned Income Supplement linked to Program participation

Informants at several levels, most notably HRE staff and a minority of SESP participants, questioned why the EIS was not available to single parents who entered the workforce without using the SESP program. Several of these informants cited the previous SESP evaluation's recommendation that the EIS be made available in isolation (on a pilot basis).

2. Restriction to non Employment Insurance eligible clients

Currently the SESP program is available only to those single parents who are not E.I. eligible. Key informants, especially staff of SESP/SPAN viewed this restriction as a major weakness of the current model. In discussing this issue it was contended that needs of this population are the same as the single parents currently served and that the SESP program would be both applicable and beneficial to this population.

7.2 Strengths and Weaknesses of program delivery

Key informant interviews, participants surveys, and document review yielded the following strengths and weaknesses associated with the current administration and program delivery of SESP. These are displayed in Table 25. A brief discussion of some of these identified strengths and weaknesses follows the Table.

Table 25: Strengths and weaknesses in administration and delivery of SESP

Strengths	Weaknesses
1. Structure/Organization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Community based sponsorship ● Committee structures ● Capacity for issues resolution ● Joint decision making 	1. Structure/Organization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Inadequacy of current computerized client data base ● Limited involvement of participants (either past or current) on Board or Program Committees
2. Communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Good, open communication between partners involved in delivery 	2. Communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● none identified
3. Personnel <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Committed and dedicated HRE/SPAN staff ● Agency (SPAN) knows and understands clients ● Increasing clarity regarding roles of HRE and SESP staff ● Ongoing availability of support from Job Search Officers 	3. Personnel <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● none identified

Strengths	Weaknesses
4. Delivery <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Empowerment of participants ● Provision of supports to address barriers to employment (eg. EIS, child care, transportation) ● Job search skills training ● Classroom curriculum modified based on feedback from participants ● Flexible and responsive to individual needs and interests of participants ● On-going, problem-solving support after employment ● Group dynamics - participants networking and providing personal support 	4. Delivery <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● lack of availability of suitable private child care (especially for children under 2 years of age) ● initial transition to work impacted negatively due to method of projection of initial earnings
5. Outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Builds self-esteem ● Increased income for clients (Earned and EIS) ● Increased motivation to work; ● Clients are finding and sustaining employment 	5. Outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No major weaknesses noted.
6. Evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● On-going evaluation of program and outcomes 	6. Evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Non use of a random assignment evaluation design

7.2.1 Structure/Organization

Data collected during this evaluation indicates a much enhanced (as compared to that found in previous evaluation) exchange of information between HRE and SESP with respect to client status and outcomes. Information gathered during this evaluation revealed that a complete listing

of all participants (with group assignments, employment, graduation and active/inactive status) is prepared on a regular basis and shared between CSO and SESP staff.

Both SESP and HRE CSO staff maintain client/program files on SESP participants. In compiling the updated client employment profiles it was the experience of the researchers that such was still very much a labour intensive activity and that needed client and employment data was not readily available nor up to date in an electronic format. Although well organized and maintained HRE client files are still in paper format. While details of client pay and EIS calculations are computerized, the majority of required employment data have not yet been computerized. While SESP does have, and maintains, a computerized data base, informants indicate that it is in need of revision so as to enable easy tracking or manipulation of client data. The current system does not, for example, lend itself to producing summary reports of required client data and statistics.

7.2.2 Communication

Positive, appropriate and open communication between SESP, HRE and its client group was cited by all key informants as one of the major strengths of the SESP initiative. Data collected during this evaluation affirm findings from previous research and indicate a continued positive relationship between SPAN/SESP and HRE. This positive relationship is most evident within the ongoing Steering and Operational Committees meetings which occur on a regular (and/or as needed) basis. These committees were viewed by all informants as appropriate forums in which to raise and resolve issues related to the pilot program.

Contact between SESP staff and HRE staff (most notably the CSOs assigned to the program) remains frequent and positive. Evidence gathered would indicate that necessary collaboration and problem solving occurs between the Program Coordinator/JSOs and the CSOs as needed with respect to client needs. Program informants further report a positive relationship between SESP and other CSO and CDS staff of HRE.

A final strength of the SESP program (with respect to communication) exists between clients and program staff. The great majority of SESP participants (whether employed or not) expressed high levels of satisfaction with the lines of communication between themselves and SESP staff. Participants reported SESP staff to be very approachable and contactable. Participants confirmed

that SESP staff contacted them on a regular basis (unless they were deemed to be inactive) , but more importantly from their perspective, they reported feeling very comfortable in contacting SESP when they needed help (be it for employment related or personal reasons). This “they are there if we need them” belief was valued very highly by both current and former participants.

7.2.3 Personnel

As noted above, program participants involved in the telephone survey expressed much satisfaction with and appreciation of the efforts of SESP staff (i.e. Program Coordinator, JSOs, and administrative support staff). Participants invariably commented on the commitment and sensitivity of staff to issues specific to single parents. In addition to the expected support from the Coordinator and JSOs, many participants specifically remarked on the invaluable help they received from the administrative support staff with respect to such issues as updates/revisions to resumes, cover letters, etc. Participants also commented, again in a most complimentary manner, on the CSO staff of HRE. Participants indicated that these staff were sensitive to the needs of single parents, and had been very helpful in providing needed clarification on issues related to the EIS. They also assisted, where necessary, in accessing other required supports.

In the previous evaluation of SESP approximately 14% of SESP participants reported feeling unsupported by SESP staff and/or “pressured into taking the first available job”. No evidence was found during this evaluation that would indicate this perception still exists. Indeed, of the 156 participants contacted during the telephone surveys, only six individuals (3.8%) reported any concerns or issues related to SESP staff. Conversely when asked to identify the major strength of the SESP program, “staff” was cited by 41.7% (65/156) of respondents. In contrast to findings from the previous evaluation, only four participants reported feeling pressured to take any job, and none of these respondents were from groups 11 - 20.

7.2.4 Delivery

In general, informants at all levels expressed satisfaction with current delivery mechanisms and practices of both SESP and HRE (as related to the SESP program). As described in section 7.1, strengths noted most frequently by respondents included the flexibility of the program and the multifaceted approach used. Current data also indicate that a majority of participants endorse the self directed job search process of SESP. In discussing the program, many participants

interviewed indicated that “SESP helped, but I got the job on my own”. This can be viewed as an indication that participation in SESP is an empowering experience for many single parents.

While no evidence of significant weaknesses/flaws in delivery was found during this evaluation, there were a number of issues (either previously identified or newly emerging) that warrant further comment. These are discussed in brief below:

Recruitment

Both previous formative and summative evaluations of SESP identified concerns regarding the adequacy of recruitment efforts. It had been recommended that optimal class size, from both an instructional and cost effectiveness perspective, would be 25 participants. It is noted that for groups 1 - 20 this class size target has never been achieved. The average class size is approximately 16 participants (largest being 22, with a range of 9 - 22 participants).

On a positive note, however, informants within both SESP and HRE expressed much satisfaction with the results of a recent mail out (by HRE) to all single parents in receipt of income support benefits in the St. John’s area. This has significantly increased the number of inquiries from potential participants and may, in the short term, lead to increased class size. Evidence also indicates that during the past several years, referrals from HRE have increased, and that SESP continues to be highly promoted (to friends and relatives) by current and former participants. Based on the data obtained from the in-class surveys for Groups 18 - 20, participants had become aware of the SESP program via friends (33%), mail out (29.6%) and HRE staff (25.9%). It appears, based on feedback from informants and the shifting referral pattern, that previous recruitment problems have been addressed satisfactorily.

EIS

Participant feedback received during the previous evaluation indicated that a large percentage of participants felt the EIS calculation was “too complex”. During the telephone surveys for this evaluation, of the participants who were either working or had work discontinued (and thus had received EIS in the past) only five expressed any concern regarding the EIS. It may be that over time, the EIS monthly amount becomes more clear to participants or perhaps as participants work for longer periods of time the necessity for rigid budgeting (and thus the increased value to

knowing exactly what the EIS will be) decreases. It is further noted that in discussions with CSO staff it was pointed out that the EIS is but one component of the monthly supplement that most employed SESP participants receive and it was suggested that perhaps it is this amount, not the EIS specifically, that participants have greatest difficulty predicting. Another contributing factor to the noted clarity regarding the EIS may also be that, as of Group 8, the CSO completes a second presentation on the EIS to participants addressing any specific questions/issues that may have arisen.

Prior explanation of the Program

Evidence gathered indicates that since the last evaluation period significant improvement has taken place with respect to ensuring that participants have a full understanding of the SESP model and delivery practices. Approximately 20 % of participants in groups 1 - 10 reported, as documented in the previous evaluation, an assumption that SESP involved job placement. Data gathered during this evaluation strongly suggests that participants now have a much clearer understanding of the program intents and no longer assume a job placement function. When asked “did the program meet all your expectations”, 89.1 % (139/156) responded yes. For the 17 participants who replied negatively, only 10 (6.4%) cited an expectation for job placement. It is further noted that all of these individuals were from groups 1 - 10. It would appear that more careful explanation of the program to potential participants by both SESP and HRE staff, and also changing the job title from Job Placement Officer to Job Search Officer, has effectively addressed this previously noted program weakness.

Classroom Curriculum

Within the previous formative and summative evaluations concern had been expressed by both participants and many key informants (especially HRE staff) regarding the relevance and appropriateness of the classroom curriculum utilized by SESP. During the telephone survey, when asked “What do you see as the major weakness of the SESP program?”, only 14.1% (22/156) of participants indicated “some classes not relevant” as a major weakness (in contrast to 23.1% in previous evaluations). While previous participant feedback had identified issues such as enhancing class relevancy, increasing focus on job search skills, and spending more time on resume development and job interview techniques, the current evaluation did not find similar results. No participant, as reflected in data collected in either the telephone or in class surveys,

suggested that any part of the current class curriculum should be discontinued. Participant ratings (of both usefulness and quality of instruction) of the classroom training component of SESP gathered from participants in groups 18 - 20 remained high, with average ratings ranging from 4.33 - 5.0 (on a scale of 0 - 5).

In discussing this issue with SESP informants, it was noted that participant feedback is gathered on a continuous basis from program participants and that, based on this feedback, specific sessions within the classroom component undergo regular revision and update. Thus, it appears that, to the greatest extent possible, the classroom component is geared to meet the specific needs and interests of each group, while remaining within the parameters of the prescribed outline. Results obtained during this evaluation reveal that positive changes have been introduced into several components of the classroom sessions, most notable the financial management, resume development, and job interview skills. While the relevance of the classroom training component of SESP will certainly remain an issue requiring constant monitoring and ongoing updating/revision, at present it appears to adequately meet the stated needs of program participants.

Child Care

Previous research in this area has clearly documented child care as one of the most critical supports necessary to enable income support recipients to make a successful transition to employment. For the majority of SESP participants, this issue has been adequately addressed. However, a minority of participants, supported by feedback obtained from key informants, report some ongoing difficulties. The concerns center mainly on the difficulty related to obtaining child care for children under the age of two years, and the current income support rates for the purchase of private child care. The issue of obtaining child care may, in the longer term, be addressed through the introduction of licensed infant (<2 years) care within the province. As this option becomes more widely available, it will certainly provide greater choice and flexibility for parents of infants who are entering the workforce. With respect to the current income support rates, many participants simply report it as being inadequate to purchase quality care. Further it would appear that HRE has no clear policy as to the disbursement of the private day care rate (i.e. only monthly maximums) and thus there are noted inconsistencies in approvals across districts. For example, it was reported that some CSOs, in calculating hours for reimbursement of private

child care, do not allow for necessary travel time to and from work, while others do.

Overlap of Income Support payments with employment earnings

Results of ongoing evaluation of the SESP program indicate that participants rate themselves “better off” financially after employment as compared to using income support payments as their sole source of income. However, almost without exception, participants relate that the first several weeks after they become employed are frustrating and, for many, cause significant financial hardship. This issue, if not addressed and resolved, may impact on the long term viability of the program as it violates the primary tenet of the program design - that participants will experience a financial gain by choosing to become employed. Indeed the EIS supplement was designed to ensure that the financial disincentives to employment faced by single parents were adequately addressed.

In reviewing this issue, it appears the essence of the “problem” rests with the manner in which Income Support policy deals with employment earnings, particularly how earnings are projected and how these projected earnings affect subsequent income assistance. At present, when a SESP participant obtains employment and receives their first paycheque, these earnings are projected for the next 30 days and the client’s income assistance amount is based on this projected income. This invariably leaves the client with significantly less money than if they had received their regular income support payment and for many also leads to situations where they cannot afford to pay rent and/or utilities. It also means that these clients do not have available funds to meet the additional costs that are usually associated with entering the work force (e.g clothes, lunches, up front child care costs, etc.). While it cannot be stated with certainty that this issue has caused SESP participants to leave, or not take, employment, case study interviews conducted during the formative evaluation of the pilot confirm the significant financial hardships encountered. It may also be an issue that reduces the “attractiveness” of the program to other single parents on the income support caseload.

In discussing this issue with both participants and key informants, the suggestion most frequently offered as a solution to this issue is to allow an overlap between income support payments and earned income for a 15 day period. In essence this would enable the participant to retain all initial income earnings and not have their income support payments decreased for the first weeks after

employment. In doing so this would enable the client to address existing costs that have been typically included in the income support payment (eg. rent, utilities etc) and also have increased disposal income to address any additional employment related costs. This action would not only remove the financial disincentive still present when first entering the workforce but may also act as a significant financial motivator for increased numbers of single parents to enter the workforce.

If Income Support policy were changed to accommodate this suggestion it would obviously increase program related expenditures. This evaluation did not permit detailed analysis of the cost of such a policy revision however a crude projection can be supplied. If it is assumed that, on average, income support payments equal approximately \$500 (for a 15 day period) and to date about 250 SESP participants have obtained employment, this policy would have incurred an additional \$125,000 over the first 41 months of the pilot. Projected forward and based on an average of 75 SESP participants becoming employed in each subsequent year, such a policy revision would cost approximately \$37,500 per year. It is noted that actual expenditures would most likely be considerably less than indicated as many participants would have income supports payments of less than the \$500 figure used for calculation purposes.

If such a policy change were introduced certain program “restrictors” would also need to be set in place. For instance, it may be necessary to restrict this overlap to only once within a 12 month period for any one client. Additionally if the client, after receiving the overlapping payment, leaves employment (for voluntary reasons) within a short period of time (e.g. less than 3 months) then it may be necessary to set up an overpayment, and recover the funds accordingly.

This issue presents as a major concern within the SESP model and certainly warrants additional review, discussion, and a more detailed financial analysis, by HRE officials and members of the SESP Steering Committee⁷. Consideration of this issue must also include a discussion and consideration of the implications for other income support clients who become employed.

⁷ The authors are aware that an internal HRE proposal, containing similar suggestions as contained in this report, has been previously prepared and submitted; and is under active consideration by the department.

7.2.5 Outcomes

Data gathered within both the formative and summative phases of the evaluation identified many positive outcomes experienced by the single parents involved in the SESP program. Many of these are described in more detail in other sections of this report and include an increased rate of employment, positive patterns of job retention, reported increases in participant-family income levels, and an overall high level of satisfaction with the access to and availability of required support services.

In response to the open-ended question inquiring how the program had been of benefit to them, the most frequent responses (multiple answers allowed) given by the 143 respondents during the telephone survey were:

- emotional support (43 - 32.1%)
- financial benefit (41 -30.6%)
- increased confidence (33 -24.6%)
- increased motivation to work (32 - 23.9%)
- support from peers (27-20%).

Only nine of the 143 respondents felt that the SESP program had been of no benefit to them, with five indicating that they had not “learned anything new”.

7.3 What is the current client services management process?

Since the inception of the SESP program several changes have occurred within the program and HRE that have impacted upon the overall service coordination/case management process utilized. Most notable among these developments has been the inclusion of participants with less than high school education, the increased numbers of SESP participants who are entering and remaining in the workforce, the adoption, by HRE, of a more proactive case management approach to client services, an expanded role for CSOs, and the creation of the Career Development Specialist (CDS) positions.

The service coordination process begins at point of referral. Potential participants of the SESP program can be referred via a number of different means including self-referral, referral from HRE, another government department, or from another community agency. As noted previously

in this report, the majority of participants self-refer after hearing about the program from friends or relatives. An increase in the number of HRE referred clients has been noted and can most likely be attributed to increased contact between CSOs and clients on their caseload who are single parents. HRE is also expanding its use of the Early Screening Assessment (ESA) and thus many more clients who are being deemed employable are now referred to other departmental staff (i.e. CDSs) or community agencies such as SESP. HRE and SESP also collaborated on a mail out to single parents in the St. John's area and it appears this has resulted in greater awareness of the SESP program by single parents currently in receipt of income support benefits. It should be noted that this mail out has allowed SESP to discontinue other forms of advertising (i.e. newspaper ads, etc) that were less effective.

Once referred, individuals are screened to ensure that they meet the basic eligibility requirements of the program. This screening can occur on the telephone or in person by SESP staff, and in addition HRE runs a check via the FACTS system to ensure eligibility (non E.I. eligible, etc).

Following referral and initial screening, potential participants who have a minimum of high school education are interviewed by the SESP Program Coordinator and a Job Search Officer. At this interview the program is fully explained to the potential participant, questions regarding the program, its intents, and delivery are answered, and a decision reached as to whether or not the program is the most appropriate option for the person. If accepted into the program, the single parent is assigned the same Job Search Officer who took part in the initial interview. Given that a large percentage of SESP applicants, upon presentation to the program, are already engaged in job search activity (reported by SESP officials to be about 1/3 - 1/2 of applicants), the Job Search Officer may begin to work with the client immediately (i.e. prior to actual class commencement).

Single parents who express an interest in attending the SESP program, either by self referral to SESP or in discussion with their CSO, and who do not have a high school equivalency, are referred to a CDS staff of HRE. This referral procedure is required to ensure that all single parents without a completed high school education are able to explore other possible options (such as return to school) with a career counsellor prior to making a decision to enter the workforce. The CDS staff provide the applicant with information regarding educational programs, supports available, other possible HRE programs that may be relevant, and applicable

labour market information. Depending on the outcome of this career counselling the single parent may choose a different option or be referred to SESP. Data gathered during this evaluation indicate that this process has been strictly adhered to for all non high school graduates who have been referred to SESP. If referral to SESP is deemed appropriate for the client, they then proceed through the same interview and intake process with SESP as prospective participants with high school education.

The case management process for SESP participants is a responsibility shared primarily by the SESP Job Search Officers and the Client Services Officers, HRE. The JSO carries out aspects of case management related to gaining and maintaining employment. They have frequent contact with participants, especially during the classroom and four week job search components. Through class discussions, individual meetings, and telephone contacts, the JSO supports clients in their efforts to find and maintain employment. As more participants, over time, became employed the follow up support provided by the JSO has taken on increased importance. Regular contact is maintained with employed participants, and the JSOs remain available to these clients on an as needed basis. This latter program feature is rated by program participants as a critical component to successful provision of support. The JSO position represents a valuable source of job leads, assistance with resume development/revision, and employment counselling particularly for those participants who have not yet obtained employment or whose employment has been discontinued.

SESP participants continue to be supported by their district CSO until such time as they obtain employment. When the participant obtains employment, the district CSO assists with the first post employment issuance of income support supplement and then transfers the client file to one of the CSOs assigned to the SESP program. The CSO assigned to the SESP program then has ongoing and primary responsibility for assisting the client to access financial supports such as income support, Earned Income Supplement, and private child care. In order to obtain the EIS, (and other HRE entitlements), employed participants are required to submit payroll records on a regular basis. This information is then used by the CSO to determine specific eligibility.

The Client Services Officer makes two formal presentations to the participants during the classroom component to explain the EIS (first presentation) and clarification of the financial

implications of participation in SESP as related to the work process (second presentation). CSO staff also make themselves available to participants to explain, on an individual basis, eligibility for the EIS and, as reported by participants, also assist with clarification of related HRE policy and entitlements.

Consideration of service coordination / case management cannot be limited only to the roles of staff directly involved with the SESP program. It must also acknowledge the key role and impact of other HRE staff (most notably the CSOs and CDSs). Since its inception in 1997, HRE has undergone significant structural changes and modifications. In recent years efforts have been ongoing to move toward a more dynamic and proactive service coordination model. This model involves a “case managed” approach to the client caseload of staff, in particular the CSOs. Extensive efforts are currently underway to ensure that appropriate needs assessments and contact is established and maintained with clients of CSOs. This will enable more active and timely intervention (directed toward enhanced employment and educational outcomes) for clients now in receipt of income support benefits. This enhanced role of the CSOs will improve tracking and monitoring of clients, increase capacity to identify client needs, and ensure appropriate referral to other employment/educational options both within and outside the department.

With respect to the single parent population, informants report that this process (which at point of completion of this evaluation was only in the transition stage) has resulted in increased referrals to SESP, identification of other HRE supports that may be of benefit to the single parents (i.e. wage subsidies, Graduate Employment etc.), and increased referrals to the Career Development Specialists for more comprehensive career counseling.

In addition to the changing role of the CSO, one of the key components to HRE’s enhanced client services management process is undertaken by the Career Development Specialist. These staff are seen as vital to the provision of appropriate career counseling to recipients of income support (including single parents), as well as other client groups. This career counseling will, it is anticipated, enable clients to make more informed decisions regarding their employment and/or educational options, and lead in the longer term to a reduction in the continued use of income support benefits.

As noted previously single parents expressing an interest in attending the SESP program and who do not have a high school education are required to meet with a CDS prior to program acceptance. Data confirms that this process has been followed for all applicable clients. In general, however, it appears that single parents (at least those who are currently in the SESP program) do not partake of career counseling as offered by CDS staff. During the telephone survey 34.6% (18/52) of employed participants, 49.1% (25/51) of those who had work discontinued and 26.4% (14/53) of participants who had never worked indicated that they had met with a Career Development Specialist of HRE.

One of the major issues emerging with respect to case management as related to clients common to both SESP and HRE involves those single parents who do not have high school equivalency. Several key informants suggested that caution must be exercised to ensure that single parents without high school do not rush into employment (perhaps influenced by potential access to the EIS) to the detriment of furthering their education. These informants expressed concern that in doing so these single parents might find themselves trapped in entry level jobs and, due to inadequate educational backgrounds, unable to advance. Further it was noted that once in the workforce these single parents may find it difficult, if not impossible, to further their education at a later point.

Given the recency of the decision to accept non high school graduates and the low numbers of participants to date, it is not yet possible to comment with any certainty as to the legitimacy of these concerns. However, based on outcomes achieved by the approximately 25 non high school participants, it appears that 1) they are receiving appropriate career counseling prior to entry into SESP, and 2) they are obtaining jobs at a rate higher than would be expected in the absence of program participation. It is too early to comment on the ability of these participants to maintain employment over the longer term and/or if they demonstrate career advancement. It is important, however, that progress of this client group be tracked over the longer term to ascertain if any issues do emerge.

For those single parents who do not have a high school equivalency there are several options available for furthering their education. These include Grade Equivalency Diploma (GED), Adult Basic Education (ABE) or high school credit program. As referenced earlier these options are

discussed in detail with SESP participants prior to entry into SESP by both the Program Coordinator and CDSs. Additionally SESP informants report that they continue to discuss possible educational options with participants even after they enter the program and begin an active job search. Data collected during the telephone survey indicate that nine of the participants without high school have, since their entry into SESP, obtained their high school equivalency. Of these nine participants, four had never worked, three were unemployed but had employment since program participation, and two were currently employed. All indicated that they had completed an ABE program.

In reviewing the issue of access to GED and/or ABE it was noted that these programs are available at a number of different locations within the St. John's area. No evidence was gathered that would indicate extensive waiting lists and during the telephone surveys all respondents indicated satisfaction with capacity to return to school, if desired. With respect to ABE, HRE does fund a number of seats (approximately 90) within the program offered by College of the North Atlantic, and this appears to be sufficient to meet current demand. It is noted however that as HRE obtains a better understanding of the educational/employment needs of single parents currently in receipt of income support (via increased CSO contact, administration of ESAs, etc) there may be an increased need for this service. Several key informants indicated a possible benefit to SESP providing GED tutoring but no evidence was gathered during the course of this evaluation that would, at this time, warrant such action. If current demand should increase perhaps this suggestion might be given additional consideration. In doing so it is suggested that such a service be vested with SPAN, not SESP, and that it be made available to all single parents not just those participating in SESP.

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| Recommendation 2: | The Single Parent Employment Support Program continue to accept single parents who do not have high school education. |
| Recommendation 3: | Outcomes achieved (both employment and educational) by SESP participants without high school be separately tracked for an additional 12 months. |
| Recommendation 4: | Career Development Specialist staff of HRE present |

to SESP participants during their classroom component.

Recommendation 5:

HRE (Income Support) allow for continuance of Income Support benefits, at previously approved level, for at least a fifteen day period following employment.

Recommendation 6:

HRE clarify its policy regarding calculation of reimbursement for private child care.

8.0 Implications and Impacts of Changes Introduced

The previous Summative Evaluation of SESP (July, 2000) made a number of recommendations regarding possible program enhancements and/or changes. One of the intents of the current evaluation was to determine what, if any, changes had been introduced and identify the implications of such. Many of these changes have already been identified and discussed in previous sections of this report, however, the following section provides a summary of all recommendations made in the previous evaluation, and a brief comment on the action taken.

1. SESP staff ensure appropriate, regular contact with participants who are unemployed after the 10th week.

The SESP JSOs are required, as per program policy, to maintain contact with participants who are still unemployed after the completion of the formal job search period (i.e. > 10 weeks). This contact is generally conducted by telephone on a weekly basis. Data gathered during the telephone survey (from those participants not yet employed) confirms adherence to this policy. All participants, excluding those deemed inactive, who had not yet obtained employment indicated contact with SESP with the majority (58%) reporting contact on at least a biweekly basis, 22% on a monthly basis, and 19% reported contact occurring on an as needed basis.

2. Formal follow up contact be made by SESP staff with all participants from Groups 1 - 10 who are currently unemployed.

Information collected from SESP staff confirms that this action has been completed with these participants with the exception of those clients who were deemed inactive or who have left the St. John's area.

3. The Single Parent Employment Support Program continue to be funded on a pilot basis for an additional 24-36 months, with a requirement for annual reviews.

Since the Summative Evaluation (July, 2000) the SESP program has continued to receive annual funding from HRE on a pilot basis. The current evaluation represent fulfilment of the commitment to ongoing evaluation of the pilot project.

4. A participant of SESP be appointed to the Steering Committee.

Key informants reported that after due consideration by the Steering Committee, it was decided that this recommendation would not be implemented. Members of the Steering Committee questioned the benefit of appointing a SESP participant to the Committee. It was also reported that such an appointment would prove problematic for SESP participants given their work and/or family responsibilities.

5. A working committee comprised of representatives of SESP, HRE staff, and program participants be created to review and recommend revisions to the SESP curriculum.

This recommendation has not been implemented. Data collected from key informants does however indicate that feedback regarding classroom curriculum is solicited from participants on a regular basis and that changes have been introduced accordingly. Data also indicate an increased level of overall participant satisfaction with the content and relevancy of the classroom component.

However it must be noted that concern was still expressed, particularly by informants of HRE, as to the adequacy of the classroom curriculum. It would appear that many HRE staff are still unclear as to the specific content of the classroom curriculum and whether such represents best available practice. It may thus be advisable to consider implementation of this recommendation.

6. HRE adopt a systematic and comprehensive approach to ensuring that all appropriate HRE clients are referred by HRE staff to the SESP program.

Data collected indicate an increase in the number of referrals being made to the SESP program. This can be attributed, in part, to the mail out of information regarding SESP to single parents on the income support caseload in the St. John's area. In addition, the development and implementation by HRE of an active Client Services Management process has resulted in CDSs and CSOs becoming more aware of the program. This process will ensure that the needs of single parents in receipt of income support benefits are better identified and, where applicable and appropriate, referrals are made to the SESP program.

- 7. The current data base for SESP participants be updated and enhanced to enable efficient tracking and analysis of client progress. Particular attention should be given to ensuring that this system is used to capture and generate the type of data required for ongoing program decision making.**

Data collected indicate that SESP staff have updated and maintain the existing computerized data base. This system still, however, needs revision and upgrading particularly as related to its capacity to generate useable summary reports of client demographics, employment statistics, etc.

- 8. The current method of calculation of the EIS be fully reviewed and efforts made to develop a simpler method of calculation.**

This recommendation has not been implemented. It is noted that while the rules for calculation remain the same, a computer program has been developed to facilitate such calculation and is now being used by the CSOs. Data collected during this evaluation indicate a reduction in expressed concern by program participants regarding the EIS, and thus implementation of this action is probably no longer warranted.

- 9. The job title “Placement Officer” be changed to better reflect the duties of the position.**

Subsequent to the July 2000 Evaluation the Placement Officer position was re-titled “Job Search Officer”.

- 10. An official of Health and Community Services (Day Care Services) be appointed to the Steering Committee.**

Upon consideration of this recommendation it was decided that such an appointment would be more valuable at the Operations Committee rather than the Steering Committee level. This action was taken after the summative evaluation was completed, and it is reported that the addition of this resource person to the Operations Committee enabled many of the outstanding issues relative to the Day Care Subsidy program to be addressed and resolved. At present the HCS representative is not a formal member of this Committee but attends, if and when required, to address specific issues.

11. Participants from Groups 1 -7 be offered the opportunity to attend classroom or evening informational sessions on the Canada Student Loan Program.

This action was not completed as originally recommended. Upon further consideration of this recommendation it was decided by program officials that such formal sessions did not represent the best method to address this issue (in consideration of work/family commitments, need for additional child care, transportation difficulties etc). Rather, as SESP staff contact program participants, the issue of the student loans is discussed on an individual basis. If necessary, the participant is referred to an appropriate financial planner. Data collected from SESP participants during the telephone survey reveal that this issue is no longer identified as a major concern by the majority of SESP participants.

12. HRE provide, on a pilot basis, access to the EIS in isolation of other program components.

This action has not been implemented although HRE officials do indicate that such an option may be pursued in the future if current negotiations can identify sufficient funding.

13. To ensure appropriate referrals and placement within the SESP program, a pre-screening process be established that would enable 1) careful examination of individual barriers to employment faced by potential participants, and 2) determination of whether the barriers identified would be best addressed by the SESP model.

The current client services management process utilized by HRE addresses this recommendation. The process involves a more active case management role by the CSOs via increased client contacts, administration of the ESA and appropriate referral based on identified needs. In addition clients having less than high school education are required to meet with a Career Development Specialist prior to acceptance into the SESP program. This latter action ensures that client decisions are made only after full consideration of all other possible options.

14. Single parents with less than high school education be deemed as eligible clients of the SESP program.

With effect as of Group 15 program admission criteria were changed to include single parents

with a minimum of Grade 10 education. While only a limited number of non high school graduates have to date participated in SESP, data collected during this evaluation indicate these clients experience similar enhanced employment outcomes as a result of program participation as do those clients with high school and/or post secondary education. Outcomes achieved by non high school graduates will need to be tracked over the longer term but to date evidence gathered reveal SESP to be an effective employment intervention for this client group.

15. HRE engage in discussions with the federal department of Human Resources Development Canada to explore the possibility of working collaboratively with them to assist single parents who are EI eligible to access the SESP program.

The SESP program is still restricted to non Employment Insurance eligible single parents in receipt of income support benefits. HRE key informants report that discussions have, however, continued with HRDC officials and that preliminary work has been completed regarding a possible Self Sufficiency Program (Pilot Project) that would include EI eligible clients.

9.0 Conclusion

The Single Parent Employment Support Program (SESP) has, since inception in August 1998, demonstrated its effectiveness in assisting single parents, in receipt of income support benefits, to enter and remain in the workforce. Results achieved by program participants indicate the program has been able to address the existing barriers to employment, provide personal and employment related supports necessary to obtain employment, and provide required supports to enable/enhance the long term retention of employment. Not only are participants finding employment at a rate higher than would be expected in the absence of the program, documented client outcomes indicate that many participants are advancing within the labour force to a point where they are no longer dependant upon any form of support from the income support system.

The benefits and costs of the SESP program have been examined in detail, from both a qualitative and quantitative perspective. Data collected at all stages of the evaluation process (both formative and summative) confirm the many real and sustained positive benefits accrued by a majority of single parents by virtue of their participation in the program. Such benefits included increased and sustained levels of self confidence and self esteem, enhanced job search skills, individual empowerment, and generally noted enhancements to overall quality of life. From a financial perspective, the SESP program has proven to be a very sound investment in income support clients. The level of incremental investment required in the short term is quite modest, and the program reaches a cost neutral position within approximately 30 months. Indeed, as of December 2001, based on actual outcomes achieved by participants in groups 1 - 9, the province had attained a positive net financial position (approximately \$90,000) relative to its investment in these participants. This positive position can be expected to increase as more individuals leave, and remain off, the income support system.

Finally, the SESP program has affirmed the capacity of government to work in partnership with the 3rd sector toward achievement of mutually agreed upon goals and objectives. The partnership between HRE and the Single Parent Association has remained strong and positive throughout the pilot, with both organizations demonstrating an ability and inclination to address and resolve issues in a timely and appropriate fashion. The SESP pilot has significantly contributed to the capacity of SPAN to respond to one of the most important needs of single parents (i.e. employment). In turn, the SESP pilot has provided valuable input into the ongoing policy

development efforts of HRE, relative to demonstration of employment intervention strategies for its client groups.