

Program: Life Works Program

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Agency: [Community Action Opportunities](#)

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Purpose

Community Action Opportunities established the Life Works Program to help low-income individuals and families develop the skills and income they need to rise above federal poverty guidelines.

Description

[Community Action Opportunities](#) designed the [Life Works Program](#) based on the agency's Guiding Belief that all people need access to economic and educational opportunities and the choice to improve their physical, mental and social well-being. A [Life Works brochure](#) (Spanish version also available) summarizes the program.



The framework for Life Works follows a [Self-Sufficiency Case Management Model](#). The model builds on nine basic assumptions that are summarized as follows:

1. Some individuals are not appropriate for self-sufficiency projects at the time they request services.
2. All individuals and families have strengths and resources that can be applied to meeting their needs.
3. Customers participate in developing self-sufficiency plans and completing activities that contribute to their self-sufficiency.
4. Customers needs vary widely.
5. Not all customers have the same goals, skills, and interests. Not all progress at the same rate, nor are ready for services at the same time.
6. Family participation increases program effectiveness.
7. A wide spectrum of services is needed by customers to overcome barriers to self-sufficiency.
8. Communities offer a range of services and resources to assist low-income individuals overcome barriers to self-sufficiency.
9. The purpose of case management is to link customers and community strengths and resources to meet customer needs so that they may achieve self-sufficiency.

An extensive overview of the program has been developed through presentation of [The Life The Lifeworks Program: Helping People, Changing Lives](#).



OUR PARTNER
Each man is different. Children and their fathers. Children who have spent time with their fathers are more likely to be successful in school, work, and life. They are also more likely to be healthy and happy. Life Works helps fathers who have spent time with their fathers. We do this through a variety of services, including:
• Case Management
• Stabilization Services
• Supportive/Transition Services
• Employment Training
• Job Development/Placement
• Education Services

[Life Works for Fathers](#) serves single fathers, intact families, incarcerated

fathers, teenage fathers, and teenage males before they become fathers. This component of Life Works helps men to:

- Navigate the child support system and prepare for other legal and financial situations
- Increase their financial and emotional support of their children
- Become more aware of their parental rights and obligations
- Improve their parenting skills
- Resolve visitation and custody issues
- Develop and maintain healthy relationships with their children and other adults in their children's lives
- Establish paternity
- Identify and use a variety of community resources for families

A [Life Works Program Application](#) must be completed to be considered for the program. Once enrolled, participants are involved in a variety of activities:

- Case Management
- Stabilization Services
- Supportive/Transition Services
- Employment Training
- Job Development/Placement
- Education Services

A range of outcomes are identified at different phases of the program:

- Immediate outcomes – short-term achievements including (a) referrals made to community services in accordance with case plans, (b) customer has basic life skills (home management, money management, parenting, etc.), (c) customer abilities in problem-solving, conflict management, self-reliance, and resilience are increased, (d) customers experience fewer crises that impede participation and can manage these, and (e) customer is enrolled in job placement, education, training program.
- Intermediate outcomes – progress toward long-term goals including (a) completion of an education, employment training program, (b) employment at a predetermined minimum hourly rate with employee benefits or self-employed, (c) reduced use of social welfare programs and reduced dependence on

system-provided personal and family interventions.

- Final outcome – Family Self-Sufficiency

Life Skills is staffed with a [Self-Sufficiency Program Manager](#), [Lead Coach](#), and [Life Coaches](#). Staff credentials included MSW degrees and experience with human services. Staff training is a vital aspect of Life Skills and includes (a) Family Support Training using a family assessment scale developed in conjunction with Appalachian State University and (b) Case Management Training. An annual staff retreat is conducted to maintain staff skills, including the development and utilization of ROMA scales for use with the assessment tool. Individual goals are developed for each staff member and performance appraisals are conducted annually along with on-going supervisory review and feedback.

Each Life Coach serves between 30-35 customers in a program year with active caseloads of 15-20 customers. The role of a Life Coach includes:

- Provide orientation
- Complete initial and ongoing assessments
- Examine constructive ways to resolve work-related and family-related issues
- Mutually (customer and coach) develop strategies for self-sufficiency
- Identify responsibilities of both the customer and the coach in facilitating completion of plans
- Plan and monitor activities in the customer's [Action Plan](#)
- Provide referral and advocacy

[Direct Assistance funds](#) are available to help customers overcome a barrier(s) to completing an activity that will lead to accomplishment of a goal in the Customer's Action Plan. The funds are not available to meet needs for emergency assistance.

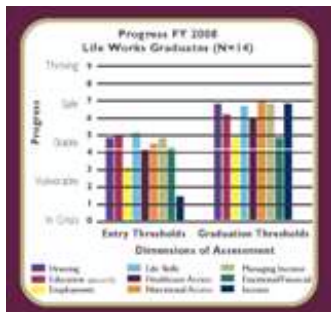
A web-based database has been developed for Life Works. Information is maintained on Family Characteristics and Demographics, Case Management Activities, Family Budget, Services Provided, Action Item Reminders, Progress, and Referrals Made. The database enhances case management efforts and supports continuous program improvement and reporting needs. Contact [Community Action Opportunities](#) for further information, including access to a prototype of the Life Works database.

A [Customer Advisory Committee](#) involves both current and former customers in a variety of ways described in a [Customer Advisory Committee Agreement](#). The role of the Committee includes providing input and feedback, as well as helping with fundraising in support of self-sufficiency activities. Various recognition events are held including an annual banquet and recognition of achievements at Community Action Opportunities' annual meeting and in the agency's annual report.

Outcomes

Life Works Outcomes

[FY2008 outcomes](#) include a Life Works Success Story, along with data on the progress of Life Works graduates and a presentation on the Social Return on Investment (S.R.O.I.) to be \$6.52 for every \$1 invested in 22 Life Works customers seeking employment - also see [Life Works for Fathers Success Story](#).



Life Works Data Base

The Life Works database further substantiates program outcomes using various measures including:

- [Change in Income and Efficiency Rates](#)
- [Average Hourly Wage Rate](#)
- [Entry Self-Sufficiency Thresholds for Currently Active Customers](#)
- [Current Self-Sufficiency Thresholds for Currently Active Customers](#)
- [Entry Self-Sufficiency Thresholds for Successfully Discharged Customers](#)
- [Current Self-Sufficiency Thresholds for Successfully Discharged Customers](#)

The Life Works database also generates reports on:

- [Contacts with Customer by Type of Contact](#)
- [Referrals by Type of Agency](#)
- [Provision of Services with a Financial Component](#)
- [Discharge Rates by Group](#)
- [Threshold Improvement Between Initial and Most Recent Ratings](#)
- [Employment Income Changes for Graduates and Dropouts](#)
- [Initial Education Level of Graduates and Dropouts](#)
- [Marital Status of Graduates and Dropouts](#)

Life Works Evaluation Study

Various mechanisms are employed to document outcomes for Life Works. An [evaluation study](#) was conducted in August 2003 through the [Center for Assessment and Research Alliances \(CARA\)](#) under Mars Hill College. One finding indicated an annual increase of \$13,428 in average family income from employment among Life Works graduates (compared to an increase of only \$2,061 for Life Works dropouts). The program was also found to make a difference in the lives of customers by its 37% rate of successfully moving families from quite desperate, marginal life situations to economic stability.

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