

Chapter One | Introduction: Raising Children Where Work Has Disappeared

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TAKE A WALK on North Avenue east across the Milwaukee border, from the suburb of Wauwatosa, Wisconsin. It is late summer, a beautiful, cloudless day in the city with a hint of fall in the air. On the Wauwatosa side, you walk down a busy commercial street lined with a Chinese restaurant, a CD store, fast-food joints, eyeglass, clothing, and flower shops, and the occasional restaurant serving breakfast specials. Although nothing on the street indicates luxury, the street is well paved, traffic lines are clearly painted, and banners line the street, proudly drawing attention to the neighborhood (“East Town Tosa”).

Sixtieth Street constitutes the boundary between Wauwatosa and Milwaukee. It is a cliff, not quite visible immediately because it is as much social, economic, and political as physical. The moment you cross Sixtieth Street and enter what we will call the “North Side” neighborhood, you notice that the sidewalks and pavement are bumpier and the streets are potholed, with faded traffic lines. Shiny SUVs and minivans have disappeared, and in their place are much older cars, many of them in need of repair. Most noticeably, you encounter boarded-up storefronts; two are right on the eastern corners of North Avenue and Sixtieth Street. You have suddenly entered the landscape of deep inner-city poverty. The service establishments disappear, and

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the density of urban commercial life is reduced. In late 2004, on a ten-block stretch of North Avenue, not far from Sixtieth Street, there were twenty-one businesses, but twelve boarded-up storefronts and two vacant lots. (West of Sixtieth Street there were no boarded-up storefronts or vacant lots.) The businesses here are oddly restricted to hair salons, bars, child care centers, and small groceries with very little produce. For parents in this corner of Milwaukee, many everyday tasks, such as filling a prescription, getting eyeglasses repaired, buying children's clothing, or taking the family out to a fast-food restaurant, cannot be accomplished without traveling outside the neighborhood.

In addition to the usual signs of U.S. consumer life, local work opportunities seem to have disappeared on this stretch of North Avenue. The neighborhood centered on North Avenue between Sixtieth Street and downtown has been termed the "epicenter" of urban poverty in Milwaukee.¹ Along with most of inner-city Milwaukee, this neighborhood did not participate in the vaunted economic growth of the late 1990s. Nearly all of the job growth in the metropolitan Milwaukee area between 1995 and 2000 occurred in the suburbs. By the early 2000s, Milwaukee had the sixth-highest unemployment rate among the nation's largest fifty cities (University of Wisconsin Center for Economic Development 2003). The rate of working-age adults (sixteen and over) who were not in the labor force in the North Side neighborhood was 36 percent in 2000.² These statistics show that it is difficult for working-age adults to find and keep jobs in the inner-city neighborhoods of Milwaukee. Despite these odds, the majority of adults in these neighborhoods do find some work.

What are the consequences for children of growing up in bleak labor markets like Milwaukee's North Side neighborhood, where finding work seems to be so much more difficult than in other places? What are the effects of low-wage job experiences on the development of children? This book examines how working below or near the poverty line affects not just parents' well-being but their children's development—their school performance and engagement, their social behaviors, and their expectations for their future. We use a unique dataset: the New Hope study (Bos et al. 1999; Huston et al. 2001). The New Hope Project was a program to provide supports for Milwaukee adults who worked full-time. We use evidence from the Child and Family Study (CFS)—part of the random-assignment evaluation of New Hope—to examine how changes in work involvement and conditions affect family life and children's prospects. The New Hope data, combining longitudinal survey and ethnographic information, come from families in two neighborhoods in Milwaukee; one is the "North Side" just described, and the other we call the "South Side" neighborhood. These neighborhoods are in the two zip codes that were the sampling base for

recruiting participants for the New Hope study. These families were followed over a five-year period from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s.

In this book, we address three sets of questions about the effects of parents' low-wage work on their children's development. The first set addresses parents' experiences of work and the workplace, with an emphasis on how these experiences change over time. How do pathways through the low-wage labor market vary among working-poor parents, and what consequences do those pathways have for their children? Both researchers and the public too often lump the working poor into a single category. After identifying subgroups of the working poor who experience different longitudinal patterns of work, wages, and hours over time, we find great heterogeneity in the work prospects of a large, low-income Milwaukee sample examined over a period of several years. Our evidence reveals six kinds of employment trajectories among the New Hope parents: low-wage work that was mostly part-time; "rapid cycling," or churning from one low-wage job to another; full-time work with wage growth; full-time work with low and stagnant wages; stable employment; and, among a very small group, staying out of the labor market. We describe these employment pathways in depth and use them extensively throughout the book as we argue that there is no one kind of working poor person, job situation, or family circumstance. We then use data on these varied pathways to explore how they influenced outcomes for children. As we will see, some work trajectories, such as full-time wage growth, can have some positive impacts on some aspects of children's development, whereas other trajectories, such as those with very high job instability, can have negative consequences. These questions occupy part I of the book.

In part II, we turn to a second set of questions that address how work and family demands intersect to influence children. New Hope parents were constantly aware of the trade-offs they made between spending more time with their children and making more money for them. What work and family goals did these parents report, and how did they affect their work trajectories and their children? How did New Hope mothers' perceptions of job quality "spill over" to their own well-being and their children's school performance and social behavior? What did money earned from work buy, and how did those earnings influence family and child well-being? What do work pathways have to do with marriage? We will see that job quality does appear to matter for parents' well-being and for their children's academic and behavioral outcomes, as rated by parents and by teachers. We also find that work pathways can make a difference in the probability that single mothers will marry.

Finally, we turn to the question of supports for work. In part III, we ask: How do parents find support, from both informal and formal sources, for

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their navigation through the low-wage labor market of Milwaukee? We consider three types of support: child care; informal social support from family, friends, and coworkers; and formal work support services. Our analysis of work support services benefits from the experimental design of the New Hope evaluation. Both the adults in the New Hope Project and those randomly assigned to the control group were eligible for the Wisconsin Works (W-2) state welfare program during the period of historic policy upheaval known as welfare reform. The experimental-group mothers were eligible for the additional benefits and incentives of the New Hope antipoverty program, which rewarded full-time work with wage supplements, health care and child care subsidies, a time-limited community service job if other work could not be found, and supportive case management. We find in these chapters that the various work pathways of the New Hope parents are related systematically to the types of child care their children received; that informal social supports carried both benefits and costs; and that the two policy environments of W-2 and New Hope felt strikingly different in the daily lives of the parents in our sample. And we will see that the work supports that New Hope added to W-2 mattered for children's school and behavioral development, above and beyond the income effects of its wage supplement.

We conclude this book by describing the implications of our findings for policies and supports for working poor families and children. Policies and programs for the working poor can be improved in such a way that children's prospects are a priority in their own right rather than a corollary of parents' work effort. We recommend policies that recognize the diversity of work trajectories, improve workplace climates and flexibility, and support the incomes of parents so that they can afford the supports to obtain good jobs as well as provide for their children.

To answer our three sets of questions about work and children's development, we use a combination of quantitative data from comprehensive, repeated surveys filled out by mothers and teachers and in-depth qualitative data. The qualitative information was collected over a three-year period by interviewers talking to families in their living rooms, visiting their child care and school settings, and getting to know their daily routines, dreams, and struggles intimately. We always start with the experiences and perspectives of the workers, parents, and families themselves, using qualitative and ethnographic evidence to tell the stories of how they find and sustain work, struggle to earn more, and deal with the difficult and often marginal world of low-wage work. These qualitative accounts also include what they told us about their goals and values—what they want to achieve in their caregiving and breadwinning and what is most meaningful to them. These rich stories are followed by quantitative analy-

ses of data from parent surveys, administrative records, and assessments of children using tests and teacher reports.

In this book, we describe the circumstances of working-poor parents and children and work contexts using integrated, mixed methods. All of the members of our analytic team conducted both qualitative and quantitative analyses. It is important to combine these two kinds of data sources, we believe, because each provides a window into low-wage employment, family life, and child development that complements the different perspective provided by the other. Our interdisciplinary team of researchers worked together over several years to develop these ideas and to cooperate in using qualitative and quantitative evidence in tandem. This approach ensured a closer relationship between the study of narrative and numbers than is common in most current “mixed-methods” research. Together, these two types of data allow us to examine the fluctuating picture of the intimate interconnection between changes in parents’ well-being and children’s development and the sometimes smooth, sometimes halting, never easy pathways through low-wage work in Milwaukee at the end of the twentieth century.

In the rest of this chapter, we describe the historical context and policy environment of Milwaukee, particularly the inner-city areas of the city where the New Hope families lived. We then review what is known about the effects of low-wage work on children. Finally, we provide an overview of the sample and the methods we used and an outline of the book.

EMPLOYMENT IN MILWAUKEE’S INNER CITY

Over the last fifty years, there has been a steady erosion of the career blue-collar jobs that once offered the majority of lower-educated workers in the United States the security, benefits, and job advancement opportunities to raise children comfortably and spend time with them after school, during dinner, and in the evening (Wilson 1999). Only a minority of low-wage workers now work standard daytime hours (see Hsueh, this volume; Presser 2003). Unionized jobs, the ones most likely to offer benefits for workers with lower levels of education or skills, represented only 14 percent of jobs in the United States in 1999, a lower proportion than during the recession of the early 1990s.³ Temporary jobs, in contrast, have become increasingly available.

What are the roots of this decline in good jobs for those with lower levels of education? The story is familiar in cities across the Northeast and the “Rust Belt” of the Midwest—manufacturing jobs, legacies of America’s industrial revolution, first began disappearing during the Great Depression, then declined further in numbers in the 1950s and 1960s in an accelerating process

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that continues up to the present day. This story is no different in Milwaukee, but it has taken shape there in specific ways that have profoundly influenced the daily experiences of the families we describe in this book. We outline this story very briefly here.

The city of Milwaukee grew out of a trading post set on the bluffs above Lake Michigan, on the banks of the Menomonee River. In 1795 the North West Company established a footing in Milwaukee to trade fur. The post grew as its location directly between the larger trading posts of Fort Dearborn (now Chicago) and Green Bay made it strategic. The city's mature industrial period spanned the years of 1870 to 1930, though its population continued to grow until 1960. As the fur trade declined, flour-milling, meatpacking, and leather-tanning grew as the prominent industries. The beer-making expertise of immigrant German settlers also led to the rise of breweries in these decades. Until 1960, Milwaukee's population was overwhelmingly white, with most residents tracing their roots back to Germany or Poland (Gurda 1999).

The city grew rapidly in the early decades of the twentieth century: its size doubled between 1900 and 1930, and then doubled again between 1930 and 1960 (Orum 1995). In a harbinger of more recent tensions between the city and the suburbs, efforts to expand into the areas that surrounded Milwaukee's city limits in the years after World War II were met with resistance by suburban residents, who feared increased taxes. Beginning in the 1950s, an enormous demographic shift occurred in what became known as the center of "inner-city" Milwaukee, or the "Inner Core." An area just west of downtown where the land slopes down from the higher land by the lake, this section includes the Midtown, Walnut Hill, Halyard Park, Washington Park, Sherman Park, and Metcalfe Park neighborhoods and encompasses one of the two neighborhoods sampled for the New Hope study. In 1950 these neighborhoods were overwhelmingly white. Milwaukee was not one of the midwestern cities, like Chicago or Detroit, that drew the great African-American migration from the South prior to the 1940s. But during the 1950s and 1960s, the percentage of African Americans in this neighborhood grew. Racial covenants established by property owners steered black families to areas with lower property values and housing quality. In 1960 a report commissioned by Mayor Zeidler documented what are now familiar U.S. urban problems: low-quality public schools, few recreational resources, and high rents for low-quality housing in the Inner Core. The commission's recommendations—to expand community policing and connect new residents to job and schooling opportunities in the city—were largely ignored (Orum 1995). By the mid-1980s, racial segregation in Milwaukee was deeply entrenched. In 1940, 68 percent of the white population in the metropolitan Milwaukee area had lived in the city. By 1960 this figure had declined to 56 percent, and by 1985 to 36 percent (Levine and Zipp

1993; Levine 2002). By the 1980s the Inner Core of Milwaukee was overwhelmingly black. The city had become one of the most racially segregated in America, with only 2.5 percent of African Americans living in the suburbs. And a high proportion of Inner Core households were single mothers on Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Single-parent households made up 7 percent of all households in the city in 1960, and 40 percent in 1985.

During the same decades that racial segregation soared in Milwaukee, manufacturing jobs were disappearing at an astonishing rate. Factory jobs in Milwaukee had been centered most prominently on the banks of the Menomonee River, which cuts through the city from west to east just south of downtown, but these jobs were also scattered all over the central city. For example, after many large breweries (such as Schlitz, Pabst, Miller, and Blatz) were established in Milwaukee in the early 1900s, the city became the brewing capital of the United States. By the 1990s, however, only Miller was left.⁴ The fates of the city's principal manufacturing industries—automotive parts, electrical, and heavy machinery—were similar. In 1960, 123,000 jobs in the city (41 percent of all jobs) were in manufacturing; by 1980 this figure had shrunk to 90,000 jobs, and by 1985 to 72,000 jobs. There were many reasons for the decline in manufacturing in Milwaukee's inner city, including new production technologies, foreign competition, and the increasing preference of employers for suburban locations.

The last three decades also witnessed an increasing divide between the central city and the suburbs in the concentration of jobs. Job growth in the metropolitan area occurred mainly in the suburbs, probably owing in large part to what many employer studies have found: employers strongly prefer white workers over black workers, all other credentials being equal (Wilson 1999). Increasing racial segregation, white flight, and the departure of manufacturing jobs from the central city were all factors that facilitated the isolation of Inner Core residents from jobs.

By the dawn of the 1990s, over 15 percent of Milwaukee's families were on welfare, with much higher percentages in inner-city neighborhoods (Schultze and Held 2002). Eighteen percent of the city's families were living in poverty. Federal policy to reduce the growing number of families on welfare (the Job Opportunity and Basic Skills program, implemented as a result of the Family Support Act of 1988) had recently focused on job training and education. Pressure grew during the early 1990s, however, to institute more radical reforms to reduce the rolls. By 1995 an experimental program, Work Not Welfare, had been started in two Wisconsin counties; it required recipients to work and limited their time on welfare to twenty-four months. By the end of 1995 this program was unveiled as Wisconsin Works, or W-2, and it would make Governor Tommy Thompson a leading figure in welfare reform. W-2 became a model for what, after a long and excruciating policy

battle, became federal welfare reform—the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996.⁵

The focus in W-2 was on immediate employment positions rather than on intensive job training or basic education. Job “trial periods,” such as a workfare program and transitional subsidized jobs, were limited to twenty-four months each, and a cumulative lifetime limit of sixty months was introduced. Additional supports included subsidized child care; transportation assistance; referral to Wisconsin’s Medicaid and family health care program, BadgerCare; and changes in the child support system, with payments made directly to custodial parents. All of these changes were implemented through the Job Centers, where caseworkers’ duties shifted from eligibility checks to assisting with job searches, workfare, and community service jobs (Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development 2004).

Welfare rolls plunged in Milwaukee after these programs were implemented. In fact, they had dropped by a stunning 66 percent in the city in the two years leading up to full implementation of Wisconsin Works statewide in September 1997. They declined even further after passage of the federal welfare reform law. However, by 1999 the rates of family-level poverty in Milwaukee had dropped only 1.1 percent. Why? Simply put, transitions from welfare to low-wage work do not guarantee a move out of poverty. A longitudinal study in Milwaukee County explored the work experiences of over one thousand applicants for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) beginning in 1999, and then again between sixteen and twenty-four months after the first survey (Dworsky, Courtney, and Piliavin 2003). At the outset, 12 percent of survey respondents were employed; during the following year, 77 percent were employed at some point. Between one and two years later, their median earnings were low—just \$4,131—and there was little difference (\$212) between the group that participated in the meantime in the W-2 program and the group that did not.⁶ Including TANF and food stamps payments, the W-2 group had a median income of \$8,583 over the first year, compared to \$3,380 for those who did not participate in W-2. But the median for the W-2 group was still far below the poverty line for the typical family in the sample (a family of three with two children).⁷ For a multitude of reasons we discuss in the next section, the well-being of children whose mothers work below or near the poverty line is still very much a matter of debate in Milwaukee in the post-welfare reform era.

LOW-WAGE WORK DYNAMICS AND CONDITIONS: DO THEY AFFECT CHILDREN?

Several books have recently been written about the working poor in the United States (DeParle 2004; Edin and Lein 1997; Ehrenreich 2001; Heymann

2000; Newman 1999; Shipler 2004). This book differs from these studies in that we explore the implications for family life and children's development of working yet being poor by providing evidence for diverse work trajectories and utilizing the unusual combination of experimental and ethnographic data in New Hope. Our primary focus is on the effects of maternal, not paternal, low-wage work. This is because the data from the Child and Family Study, which includes the child assessments and the ethnographic sample, unfortunately include relatively few fathers as primary informants. We therefore have little information on fathers' employment that is of the depth and breadth of the data on mothers' employment provided by the CFS.⁸ The working poor have been too narrowly represented as single women with children. Though our sample does not enable us to study this in depth, we believe that bringing men who work out of poverty is of crucial importance, just as it is for women, as discussed in the chapter in this volume by Gassman-Pines, Yoshikawa, and Nay, as well as at various other points in the book. New Hope was explicitly intended for all adults, not only single women with young children, and New Hope in fact increased employment and earnings for men and adult women without children (Bos et al. 1999).

In this section, we review patterns in maternal employment among the poor and what is known about the effects of low-wage work on children's school performance and social development. As will become apparent, research to date is weak in describing how *changes* in low-wage work and its conditions over time affect children's development, and the effects on children of different conditions of low-wage work, such as wages, hours, benefits, and other dimensions of job quality, are not well understood. Part I addresses these topics.

Maternal employment among the poor surged in the late 1990s. Over the years of the New Hope study (that is, between 1995 and 2001), the rate of work among single mothers with children in the United States increased from 69 percent to 78 percent, a rate of increase that is nearly unheard-of in this statistic (Smolensky and Gootman 2003). Policy analysts agree that some combination of three factors was responsible for this unprecedented increase: the welfare reform of 1996, the strong economy of the late 1990s, and expansions in the earned income tax credit (EITC), which provides an incentive to increase work effort among low-income families.⁹

As urban poverty and reliance on cash welfare grew in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s, researchers examining maternal employment and child well-being began to incorporate some theorizing about families in poverty. Some researchers suggested, for example, that additional earnings in higher-income families may make less of a difference to children because they build on a more stable base of economic resources

in the family (Desai, Chase-Lansdale, and Michael 1989). This argument implies that lower-income children benefit more than their higher-income counterparts from their mothers' work. In addition, maternal work may positively affect children because of the benefits of a more regular routine, additional economic resources, or improvements to parenting and psychological well-being from the mother being a working role model to her children.¹⁰ Studies comparing lower-income families to their better-off counterparts also found greater benefits of work for maternal sense of control among lower-income mothers (Hoffman and Youngblade 1999).

But consider other trade-offs of work at the low end of the pay scale. Increased work can bring on stress in the form of difficulties finding and maintaining child care, long commutes, unpredictable and often nonstandard work hours, repetitive and unrewarding work, and, not least, added child care, transportation, and other expenses that cut into the relatively low levels of take-home pay (Crouter and Bumpus 2001; Edin and Lein 1997; Repetti and Wood 1997; Scott et al. 2001). Although all working parents face these issues, they are intensified for low-wage parents. Together, these stressors may swamp any positive effects of work. In line with this trade-off hypothesis, recent reviews have concluded that maternal employment *per se* has only small effects on the cognitive outcomes or social behaviors of children in poverty. That is, when studies compare children in and near poverty whose mothers work to those whose mothers do not work, the differences are small. But they tend to be positive: children of mothers who work show somewhat higher school performance and lower levels of behavior problems than children of mothers who do not work (Hoffman and Youngblade 1999; Perry-Jenkins, Repetti, and Crouter 2000; Smolensky and Gootman 2003; Zaslow and Emig 1997). Most of this literature is subject to selection bias; that is, it is difficult to conclude that maternal work actually causes these outcomes in children. It may be that unmeasured family factors, such as motivation to work, influences both work effort and children's development.¹¹

A variety of work conditions shape the effects of work on children. For example, some studies have found that when duties are simple or repetitive and worker autonomy is low, the effects of maternal employment on the quality of mothers' parenting, and in turn on their children's socio-emotional development and school performance, are more likely to be negative (Parcel and Menaghan 1990, 1994a, 1997).¹² Although these studies have for the most part been carried out on mixed-income, national samples, these particular work conditions are more likely to be experienced by low-wage workers. Other indicators of job quality, such as discrimination in the workplace, have never been examined as influences on children.

Pay and benefits are basics of work life that may affect children in poverty. One study found that maternal work is associated with lower levels of child behavior problems only when wages are above \$7.50 an hour (Moore and Driscoll 1997). Another study found that higher mothers' wages, controlling for other background factors, are associated with higher job aspirations among children in poverty (Ripke, Huston, and Mistry 2005). Almost no studies link benefits at work to the development of children in poverty. Jody Heymann (2000) has conducted several studies showing that low-wage jobs are particularly likely to lack flextime, sick leave, vacation leave, and health benefits. Nearly one-third of low-wage workers do not have access even to the unpaid leave provided by the Family and Medical Leave Act, which provides such leave only to employees who have worked 1,250 hours or more in the past twelve months in firms with at least fifty employees (Waldfogel 2001). This lack of benefits may not only increase parents' stress levels but also make it difficult to keep a job when work and family conflicts arise. Using national data, Jody Heymann and her colleagues (Heymann, Earle, and Egleston 1996) estimated a "family illness burden" (the number of sick days of all children in the family that require sick leave) and found that more than one in three families have a family illness burden of two weeks or more each year. If parents have no sick leave, then a mother may leave a sick child home alone or send the child to school or day care, she may have to take unpaid leave, or she may even have to give up her job (Heymann 2000).

One set of conditions particularly relevant to lower-wage workers is shift work. In a series of studies, Harriet Presser has described the increases in rates of work on nonstandard and shifting schedules in the United States.¹³ She finds that both of these work conditions are more prominent among low-income families (Presser 1995, 2000, 2003; Presser and Cox 1997). However, we lack information on whether these work schedules and hours have consequences for the development of low-income children. One study on a national sample showed that nonstandard work schedules are associated with lower scores on cognitive assessments of young children (Han 2005).

Several recent studies have found that the timing of maternal employment in children's lives also makes a difference to their development. Specifically, studies on three national datasets found remarkably consistent results about the timing of the return to work following the birth of a child. Specifically, full-time work in the first six months of life appears to lead to lower cognitive ability in early childhood and into middle childhood (Brooks-Gunn, Han, and Waldfogel 2002; Han, Waldfogel, and Brooks-Gunn 2001; Waldfogel, Han, and Brooks-Gunn 2002). Although these studies were carried out on national samples covering a wide range of incomes, the researchers did not find that effects differed by parents' prior incomes.

What is missing from this research literature on the effects of work on children? Astonishingly, almost none of the studies on maternal work and children's development examine the impact of changes in maternal work and its conditions on children. In this book, we examine such work pathways and define six kinds of work trajectories. Economists, working with national panel data, have examined several dynamic work patterns: job stability, job instability, and job mobility. Job instability is defined as work spells interrupted by periods of nonwork. All workers tend to have high job instability early in their careers (think of the typical work of high school or college students or recent graduates). But workers with low levels of education are more likely to experience job instability—transitions from jobs to non-employment—than job-to-job transitions, which are termed job mobility (Johnson and Corcoran 2002; Royalty 1998; Topel and Ward 1992). They are also more likely to experience it longer into their work careers.

Although job mobility is generally accompanied by earnings growth, it is also more likely to occur among more skilled workers. The working poor are more likely to leave jobs for non-job-related reasons because other parts of their lives—child care, partners, informal supports—have less “give” in the context of poverty. The breakdown of one part of a low-resource system may have more serious repercussions on other aspects of the system. In an analysis from the Women's Employment Study, which followed an initially welfare-receiving sample in Michigan, researchers documented women's reasons for job exits. The largest proportion of reasons (57 percent) were not job-related and included difficulties with child care, health problems, transportation problems, and family pressure. Of the rest, 21 percent reported being fired or laid off, while another 21 percent reported quitting because of dissatisfaction with the job (Johnson and Corcoran 2002).

Although economists have been interested in economic predictors and consequences of job dynamics, only a handful of studies have examined how job dynamics are associated with child development. In one study, Vonnie McLoyd and her colleagues found that periods of unemployment and work interruptions were associated with greater psychological distress among African-American adolescents of low-income mothers (McLoyd et al. 1994). In two recent studies of low-income families, job instability was associated with higher levels of withdrawn behaviors in middle childhood and higher levels of high school dropout among teens (Kalil and Ziol-Guest 2005; Yoshikawa and Seidman 2001).

In sum, research shows that employment among lower-income workers can have positive effects on children under certain conditions: higher pay, greater income support, and more complex job responsibilities. Negative effects seem to occur when full-time employment is experienced early in a baby's life or with high levels of instability. However, few studies have

examined how changes in employment conditions affect family life and children in the context of poverty. And no studies have examined how changes in employment are experienced in tandem. For example, do those workers who experience the highest job instability also experience the lowest wages? How does the combination of wage growth and job stability affect children? How do lower-income mothers experience differing pathways through low-wage work environments, especially in labor markets as tough as Milwaukee's inner city? Part I of this book considers these questions.

THE WORK-FAMILY BALANCE AMONG LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

So far, we have discussed the characteristics of employment that might affect children but have given little attention to the question of how. What are the processes that might explain how maternal employment affects children's psychological, social, and academic development? Beginning with the very earliest work on parental work and children's development, family processes such as parenting behaviors and parent well-being were identified as factors most likely to explain the link. Research from the 1950s on maternal employment and children's development by Lois Hoffman, for example, established some links between work and parenting practices such as praise and positive affect (Hoffman 1961; see also Siegel et al. 1959; Kanter 1977). Interestingly, some of the central hypotheses at that time about mothers' feelings about their jobs centered on guilt, reflective of societal views of maternal employment as a social problem.¹⁴ Melvin Kohn (1969), in a classic study conducted in the 1960s, found that fathers in jobs with higher complexity of duties and providing more autonomy are more likely to value autonomy and independence in their children. Kohn's research suggested that parents' work can shape their values and beliefs related to parenting.

In the next decades, these themes of parent practices and values as mechanisms explaining the effects of maternal work on children were expanded and other mechanisms were proposed. Toby Parcel and Elizabeth Menaghan's work, for example, showed that parents' work conditions, including wages, occupational complexity, and benefits, indirectly affect children through parents' provision of a warm and supportive home environment (Menaghan and Parcel 1991; Parcel and Menaghan 1994b). A large set of studies on aspects of work stress uncovered the conditions under which stress at work affects the family system, and vice versa (see, for example, Crouter et al. 1999; Hughes, Galinsky, and Morris 1992; Larson and Almeida 1999; Lerner 1994; Repetti and Wood 1997). In addition, as a recent review by Maureen Perry-Jenkins, Rena Repetti, and Ann Crouter (2000) pointed out, a new literature has emerged on how working parents

balance the roles of worker, parent, and partner. Interestingly, the goals of low-income working parents concerning their jobs and their family lives have only rarely been studied. Work from the ethnographic study of *Urban Change*, a four-city study of families before and after welfare reform, showed the complex trade-offs between quality and quantity of time with children and between the roles of caregiver and breadwinner that mothers experienced in Cleveland and Philadelphia (London et al. 2004). Work by Adrie Kusserow (2004) and Annette Lareau (2003), among others, suggests that social class, work, and the neighborhood conditions parents and children face influence parenting goals and practices in the United States. Although individualism is a dominant value, its expression and meaning depend on work and danger. Kusserow, for example, contrasts what she calls the “soft offensive” individualism of the upper middle class in New York, with its emphasis on self-esteem, emotional expressiveness, uniqueness, and individuality, with the lower-class “hard, defensive” individualism, which emphasizes self-defense and protection against violence and poverty. The latter is a truer reflection of the world facing the working poor. In part II of this book, we consider how mothers in the New Hope study balanced their work goals with other personal goals and whether parental goals and values made a difference for their children’s development.

The majority of studies examining work and family issues as predictors of children’s well-being have focused on middle-class families or national studies across socioeconomic levels. Relatively little in the work-family literature considers the experiences of parents in poverty. The large literature on partner or marital relationships and work, for example, has only recently been extended to low-income families, most notably through the *Fragile Families* study, a national study of single parents and their infants and young children. Researchers from that study have begun to examine the economic predictors, for example, of single mothers’ entry into marriage (Gibson-Davis, Edin, and McLanahan 2005). In addition, surprisingly little attention has been paid to the economic dimensions of work and family life. Kathryn Edin and Laura Lein (1997), in their landmark study, examined household budgeting to explain how mothers on welfare combine formal work, informal contributions from their networks, welfare, and side jobs to make ends meet. Welfare payments alone could never have been sufficient to support their families, yet it was not known at the time how parents managed to keep going financially. The influence of money from earnings and other sources on children, however, through economic well-being and expenditures on children, continues to be understudied. Part II examines questions regarding the relationship between work dynamics, relationships and marriage, and household budgeting to create new perspectives on the work-family interface.

PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SUPPORTS FOR WORK AND THEIR EFFECTS ON CHILDREN

Part III addresses a final set of questions about work and children: How do low-income parents obtain support for their often difficult trajectories through low-wage labor markets? Do the forms of support they utilize—from child care to informal help from social networks and formal work support services—make a difference for children?

The massive increase in work effort among mothers in poverty in the 1990s was predictably accompanied by a surge in the need for child care. State and local child care systems were ill-prepared for this surge in the need for slots. Although federal funding for child care doubled between 1997 and 2000—through the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) and money from the TANF program (Mezey et al. 2002)—this increase built on a low initial level of support and was not enough to meet the surge in demand. Estimates of the percentage of eligible children who received child care subsidies, based on multiple state studies conducted in the early 2000s, ranged from 12 to 25 percent (Collins et al. 2000). How did the New Hope mothers cope with their need for child care as they embarked on a variety of trajectories through work in the late 1990s? We consider this question in part III.

Informal assistance from family, friends, and coworkers is also important to working parents, yet it has been neglected in studies of parental work and child development. Material or instrumental support, such as help with transportation to and from work and with child care or money to cover bills when unexpected expenses arise, can help buffer the frequent shocks to the fragile system of child care, jobs, and schedules that low-income parents maintain. In addition, emotional support for work varies among partners, friends, and family members to a surprising degree. Few studies have examined the implications of these kinds of support for the career trajectories of the working poor or for their children's development. We examine this topic in part III as well.

Finally, we turn to the role of formal work support services and policies. Do policies that shape maternal employment—most obviously, welfare reform and its variants—affect children's development? This is one area of the research literature where experimental data are available. A series of sixteen experiments were conducted in the early to late 1990s by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) and some other policy institutes to test a variety of welfare and work policies for low-income families. Three types of programs were tested: those simply mandating work by introducing reductions in welfare benefits, or sanctions, for failing to work; those "making work pay" by providing earnings supplements to reward increases in work; and those that combined either of these approaches with

time limits. In each of the experiments, low-income parents (most often, welfare recipients) were randomly assigned to one of these three types of programs or to a control condition that represented the usual AFDC rules and regulations. In most of these experiments, those assigned to the control condition were not required to work, and there were no time limits on benefit receipt.

Researchers and founders had the foresight, in two- to four-year follow-ups of families in these experiments, to assess indicators of children's school performance and social behaviors (acting-out and withdrawing behaviors). Most of these data were reported by parents, but in some of the studies standardized tests or teachers' reports of children's school performance were collected. These studies showed that the earnings supplement programs were the only programs that had positive effects on children's school performance and social behavior. That is, only the programs that increased both employment and income, and did so without a time limit, benefited primary-grade children (Morris et al. 2001). The other two types of programs—mandatory work programs and those with time limits—had few discernible effects on children, and these were as likely to be negative as positive. The lesson of these experiments thus far is that increasing maternal employment can have positive effects on children's school and social outcomes, but only if the work results in increases in income. Across the programs that made work pay, the increases in income ranged between \$1,300 and \$1,700 a year—not a lot from a middle-class perspective, but sizable for a low-income family, and enough to bring about small but detectable improvements in the children's outcomes.¹⁵

For adolescents, these experiments told a different story. Regardless of the policy approach, the programs produced small negative effects on mother-reported adolescent school progress: increases in dropout and suspensions and decreases in ratings of overall school performance (Gennetian et al. 2002). However, these mother reports were not supplemented in any of the studies with teacher reports or standardized tests. And the Three-City study, the largest non-experimental study of the effects of welfare reform on children, found, using more extensive measures, that transitions from welfare to work after passage of federal welfare reform were not associated with negative effects for adolescents (Chase-Lansdale et al. 2003). In fact, adolescents of mothers who made transitions from welfare to work reported lower levels of psychological distress on one measure.

New Hope plays an important role in the literature on employment-policy experiments because it is one of the earnings-supplement programs evaluated in the set of studies conducted by MDRC. It is uniquely valuable among these experiments because it had the additional benefit of an ethnographic study, conducted with a random subsample of parents from the

experimental and control groups. We are therefore able to compare parents' experiences of the Wisconsin Works welfare reform program (in the control group) with the additional support services and earnings supplements that New Hope provided (in the experimental group). We make this comparison and ask how work support services in the two groups affected children in the final chapter in part III.

THE NEW HOPE PROJECT: DESIGN, DATA, AND DESCRIPTION OF THE CORE EMPLOYMENT ANALYSIS

The New Hope Project was a program in Milwaukee that offered supports to adults who worked thirty or more hours a week. The idea that "if you work, you should not be poor" fits with the view of many Americans today and was the guiding philosophy behind the New Hope Project. New Hope was in the American social contract tradition of the relationship between citizenship and public investment. New Hope brought supports to working-poor adults who showed an interest in or evidence of working full-time; those supports included child care, health care, income supplementation, and a short-term community service job if needed. The presumption in the program of a "fair, equitable exchange" was part of the kind of policy that Americans today generally support (Strauss 2002). As a goal for U.S. employment policy, and as a goal for assisting families with children, this idea seems appealing. It is difficult enough in the United States today, at most any level of income and across most kinds of jobs, to juggle parenting and work. It is all the more difficult if a parent is hovering around the poverty line, can find only low-wage work, has rapidly cycled among jobs, and enjoys few if any fringe benefits associated with work.¹⁶ The jobs at the bottom of the labor market in the United States often do not pay enough for families with children to be able to survive on a single paycheck (Edin and Lein 1997). This is particularly true for households headed by a single parent.

The state of Wisconsin was a national leader in the 1990s in trying new programs that would assist women with children in moving off of welfare programs and into paid work. Both state agencies and nonprofit community-based organizations (CBOs) were involved in these efforts. One of the more successful programs was the New Hope Project, a CBO initiative based in Milwaukee that operated between late 1994 and 1998 (Bos et al. 1999).

The New Hope Project was conceived by leaders in Wisconsin who were troubled by the existing AFDC welfare system and wanted to start a program that might move more people out of poverty who were able to work. The goal was to make sure that such work would provide many of the same benefits that higher-wage workers receive—wages that would bring participants above the poverty line and offer them health care insurance and

child care. The founders of New Hope, among many others, included David Riemer, the author of *Prisoners of Welfare: Liberating America's Poor from Unemployment and Low Wages* (1988), and Julie Kerksick, a member of the Congress for a Working America, a group committed to providing every American who wants one with a decent job (for a more detailed account of the program's development, see Duncan, Huston, and Weisner 2007). Based on advice from an advisory committee, and supported by the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development and a variety of federal and foundation sources, a random-assignment evaluation was funded to determine the effects of the program on economic and household factors.¹⁷ This evaluation was conducted by MDRC, a policy institute with extensive experience conducting random-assignment, longitudinal evaluations of employment, welfare, and education programs.

Families targeted by New Hope had to meet four eligibility criteria: they had to live in one of the two targeted neighborhoods (zip codes) in Milwaukee; be older than eighteen; have an income at or below 150 percent of the poverty line; and be willing to work thirty or more hours a week. Those who volunteered for the program were randomly assigned either to New Hope or to a control group that was ineligible for the program. The New Hope group offered a suite of benefits to eligible participants: a wage supplement (to ensure that a participant's total family income was substantially above the poverty threshold for that family); subsidies for affordable health insurance; child care vouchers; and a full-time community service job opportunity for those unable to find work on their own. Members of both the control and experimental groups were free to seek help from any federal or state public assistance programs, but only individuals in the experimental program also had access to New Hope benefits. So practically speaking the goal of the program was to lift out of poverty those who were willing to work thirty or more hours a week, on the premise that anyone willing to work full-time should not be poor and would be eligible for all of the New Hope benefits.

Over a period of sixteen months, starting in the fall of 1994, staff for the New Hope Project recruited 1,362 adults from the North Side and South Side neighborhoods in Milwaukee who met the eligibility criteria to participate in the study. This sample received a follow-up assessment at two years, but there was relatively little emphasis in the surveys and administrative data collected on their children's development. (Most of the data collected pertained to employment, income, household changes, service use, and use of public benefits.) Through funding from the MacArthur Foundation's Research Network on Successful Pathways Through Middle Childhood and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, a Child and Family Study was added to the evaluation. This smaller sample of 745 con-

sisted of all parents with children between the ages of one and eleven (or more specifically, thirteen months and ten years, eleven months) at baseline. Among them were 54 fathers; we exclude this group of father-headed households from the analyses in this book because they are too few to analyze statistically with any reliability, though they are important for policy purposes. Adult men, whether heading a household or not, were important participants in New Hope. Thus, what we refer to as our full CFS survey sample in this book is a group of 696 mothers. They were followed up at two and at five years with a lengthy survey tapping perceptions of work, well-being, parenting, relationships and marriage, social support, and children's behaviors and activities. In addition, teachers of the children in this sample were asked about their school performance, school engagement, and social behaviors at the two- and five-year follow-ups. Finally, the five-year follow-up also included standardized assessments of children's reading and math achievement.

We present the characteristics, measured at baseline, of the 696 mothers in our survey sample in table 1.1. New Hope mothers were, on average, twenty-nine years old, with children five years old. Fifty-seven percent of the mothers were African American, 26 percent were Latina, and 14 percent were white. The Latina mothers were from a range of backgrounds, including Puerto Rican, Mexican, and Central American, with no single group predominating. Eighty-eight percent of the New Hope mothers were single; the majority of those had never been married. Forty percent were currently working, and 83 percent had worked full-time at some point in their work careers. Fifty-one percent had a high school diploma or GED. Eighty-four percent were receiving some form of government assistance (with just over 70 percent receiving AFDC).

The three-year New Hope Ethnographic Study (NHES) began in the spring of 1998, during the final year of the New Hope experiment, and lasted until the summer of 2001 (Gibson-Davis and Duncan 2005; Gibson and Weisner 2002; Weisner et al. 2000). The NHES took a stratified random sample of forty-four families from the full Child and Family Study, stratified for equal representation of both the experimental and control groups. (Initially forty-six were included; two families dropped out early, one each from the control group and the program group.) In all cases the parent who had been recruited into the larger CFS was recruited into the NHES. Two did not begin until the spring of 1999, leaving a final sample of forty-two NHES parents and their families, who were followed for the entire ethnographic period. Of these, we use as our sample in this book the forty mothers in the NHES, excluding two male-headed households. In return for their participation, each NHES parent was given \$50 for every three months of their participation in the study.¹⁸ Thomas Weisner led the NHES fieldwork team through

Table 1.1 Characteristics of New Hope Mothers at Baseline

Variable	Percentage or Mean (Standard Deviation)
Mother's age in years	28.8 (6.4)
Ethnicity	
African American	56.5%
Latina	26.4
White	13.6
Native American	3.4
Single-mother household	88.1
Three or more children	47.5
Youngest child two years old or younger	49.7
Currently working	40.2
Ever worked full-time	83.1
Currently receiving government assistance ^a	84.4
Has high school diploma or GED	51.0
Has access to a car	44.2
Child age in years	5.2 (2.89)
Child female	47.7%

Source: Authors' compilation.

Note: N = 696.

^aIncludes any of the following: AFDC (welfare), general assistance, food stamps, Medicaid.

a series of planning meetings, training, and periodic team meetings over the three-plus years of the fieldwork itself. The fieldwork team included psychologists, anthropologists, and sociologists (graduate students and graduates) from area universities (Northwestern, the University of Wisconsin at Madison, the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee).¹⁹

Field-workers visited families roughly every ten weeks, most often in the families' homes, but also in a variety of community settings (Weisner et al. 2002). When visiting families, field-workers used open-ended interviews to engage parents in conversations about their lives, their concerns and hopes, and their everyday routines. The fieldwork team jointly developed a comprehensive set of topics to organize these discussions and home visits and to probe for material relevant to all of them. One topic that received a lot of attention was work life: employers, earnings, hassles at work, work and career goals, juggling work and family. We also covered topics relating to parenting and managing the household: budgeting and debt, child monitoring, school, child care, and parents' goals and fears about their kids. We included a range of other important topics that were sometimes difficult but

that we thought would influence work and parenting: partners and husbands, drugs and alcohol, family supports and conflicts (including abuse), and parents' and children's health. We also asked parents their opinions on race, politics, and the welfare system. Field-workers participated in family activities (such as eating meals, shopping, running errands, and going to church) and talked with the children about their home lives, school, and friends. There were no "false negatives" in our interviews and field notes: we made sure that all families were asked about every topic, even those that did not come up naturally during interviews.

After each ethnographic visit, field-workers wrote up the conversations they had with the NHES families in visit summaries and wrote out their observations in more complete descriptive field notes. These field-note entries were based on tape recordings made during each family visit and on written notes taken during and after the day's visit. The data were entered into a database for storing the notes and linked to all the other project data being collected—the EthnoNotes system (Lieber, Weisner, and Presley 2003). In our presentations of case studies of families, quotations from parents about what they think about their lives, and summaries of qualitative patterns in work and family life, it is this EthnoNotes field-note database that we used. We also used these qualitative and ethnographic data files to describe specific topics, such as child care, social supports, or working non-standard hours, or to detail the different employment trajectories that parents followed. In all analyses, we used the entire corpus of field notes and interview data rather than "cherry-pick" a few apt families or examples.

For an overview of how we conducted our qualitative and quantitative analyses, as well as more details on recruitment, data collection, and measures, see appendix 1.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

The story we tell here about working-poor parents and children offers new evidence and theory. To begin, we note that there is a fundamental fact about the working poor that, however well-known to researchers and parents, is not typically reflected in the policy and political discourse: the working poor are diverse, and their employment pathways are also diverse. The working poor differ substantially in their employment trajectories. Some experience a combination of wage growth and full-time work, while others are stuck in low-wage jobs at full-time hours. Some have rather stable job histories, but others cycle in and out of multiple jobs without much gain in income or job benefits. Still others struggle perpetually because they never really get or keep jobs. So although the heterogeneity of the working poor and their employment pathways is not news to researchers, the empirical demonstra-

tion of this in terms of specific groups of employment trajectories is, as are the implications of these varying employment trajectories for children's prospects and other aspects of work and family life. Our evidence indicates that working-poor parents who were in full-time work with some wage growth were the parents whose children were faring better on a range of child outcomes. High levels of job instability, in contrast, presented a risk to children's academic and social behaviors.

Another important part of the story we tell is that context matters. We consider the family-work interface as well as other contexts that can support work, such as child care, social support, and work support services. As we consider these varied contexts and their relationships to parents' diverse work trajectories and to children's lives and development, what emerges is that no one feature of family life or work circumstances dominates the story—that is, no one variable predicts outcomes or work by itself. Rather, a web of supports is required to support positive job trajectories and children's development. This is a theme across many chapters. The same is true theoretically: we find that a number of theoretical perspectives on how and why income, work, family, and individual characteristics matter for adult and child outcomes deserve some consideration. No one theoretical perspective, taken alone and out of context, predominates. From the family's point of view, their whole cultural ecology contributes to their responses to work and parenting (Weisner 2002). From the point of view of the New Hope Project, the suite of benefits (used in different combinations by families) and the respect shown to families all had some effect on work and child outcomes (Duncan, Huston, and Weisner 2007). Our evidence suggests that the fullest account—and the richest understanding—require economic, developmental, family, sociocultural, and policy perspectives.

The chapters in this book are organized in three parts. Part I describes the world of work, as experienced by New Hope Project participants. These chapters address the dynamics of work over time, their consequences for children's development, and experiences of job quality, work schedules, and discrimination in the workplace.

Chapters 2 and 3 present the results from our core analysis of work trajectories, using both qualitative and quantitative methods. These chapters describe the work trajectories of the New Hope Project members, their antecedents, and the consequences of these trajectories for the parents' well-being and their children's development. In chapter 4, Noemí Enchaute-guilde-Jesús, Hirokazu Yoshikawa, and Vonnie McLoyd address job quality by describing what parents in New Hope viewed as the most important dimensions that distinguish good jobs from bad ones. Using the survey data, they also investigate the consequences of job quality for parents' and children's well-being. In chapter 5, JoAnn Hsueh addresses an inescapable fact of low-

wage work in the United States: nonstandard hours and shifting schedules. New Hope parents reported wrenching trade-offs related to these work schedules. In quantitative analyses, Hsueh finds associations between nonstandard and shifting schedules and children's school performance and social behaviors. Finally, in chapter 6, Amanda Roy, Hirokazu Yoshikawa, and Sandra Nay examine the understudied topic of discrimination in the low-wage workplace. The New Hope mothers describe race- and sex-based discrimination experiences that were worrisome in their high prevalence and extent of overlap.

In part II, we describe how families balance work and family and how family processes help explain the effects of low-wage work on children's development. Chapter 7 examines how goals for family and work life affect career trajectories and outcomes for children. Thomas Weisner and his colleagues explore participants' personal goals and motivations as they affected and were affected by work. For many of the New Hope parents, low-wage work was a domain of rather high goals and expectations, but too often also a domain of limited growth and opportunity when these goals were thwarted. Breadwinning and caregiving goals were deeply intertwined.

In exploring what work buys for parents and children, chapter 8 integrates economic and psychological perspectives on how work affects economic and psychological processes in the family. Rashmita Mistry and Edward Lowe examine different types of expenditures and the different types of well-being they bring about. They examine parents' well-being, in turn, as it influences their children through effective parenting practices. They find that increases in earned income affect children's school performance and test scores by lowering levels of material hardship and financial worry and thereby increasing effective child management.

In chapter 9, Anna Gassman-Pines and her colleagues find that goals and experiences related to work affect relationships and marriage. In the qualitative data they find, in agreement with recent work on the Fragile Families study, that low-income single mothers state that improvement in their work and economic lives is a prerequisite to feeling ready for marriage. What is new here is their finding that in the New Hope survey data wage growth in the first two years of the study was in fact associated with a greater probability of getting married by year five. In a surprising finding, they discover that the New Hope experiment nearly doubled the rate of marriage among single mothers who had never been married at the beginning of the study. This effect appears to be related to New Hope's impact in increasing income. Entry into marriage in this group, in turn, appears related to children's social behaviors. In qualitative analyses, they explore in richer detail why work and income dynamics may be related to marriage (for example, through changes in relationship quality).

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In part III, we conclude by examining child care and other supports for work in the lives of the New Hope mothers. In chapter 10, Lowe and Weisner depict how New Hope mothers juggled child care and work, balancing what they wanted from their children's care providers with their work schedules, available child care, and shifting informal support. The relationship of child care use to work trajectories is also a subject of this chapter.

Finally, Eboni Howard (chapter 11) and Godfrey and Yoshikawa (chapter 12) explore informal and formal work supports. Howard finds that social support was a mixed bag for New Hope parents, bringing with it both benefits and costs. Godfrey and Yoshikawa contrast the work support systems of Wisconsin Works and New Hope. How do New Hope mothers experience the array of work supports in these two very different contexts, one provided by the government in reconstituted welfare offices, the other by a CBO in two neighborhood storefronts? Chapter 12 also investigates whether work support services matter for later employment experiences and children's school performance and social behavior. Godfrey and Yoshikawa find that they in fact do matter, and that utilization of work support services appears causally related to increased income.

It is our hope that the reader will learn in depth the experiences of working parents living in the North Side and South Side neighborhoods of inner-city Milwaukee. We aim to shed some light on the mystery of how children fared as their parents negotiated the daily rhythms of low-wage work at the turn of the twenty-first century. In the concluding chapter, we summarize the major findings of the book and outline recommendations in three areas: income support, work support services, and workplace policies. The goal of our recommendations is to help working parents achieve wage growth and job stability, experience flexibility at work, and obtain the resources to afford important supports for work like transportation and child care. It is our belief that the package of policies we recommend could make a tangible difference in helping working-poor parents not only make ends meet but improve the lives of their children.