

# Barbara Small

## From Welfare to Work

"At times, I wanted to give up, when things were really hard," Small says of being on and off welfare during those years of struggle. "If it hadn't been for the children's support, it would have been very, very difficult. They have helped with housework, running errands—I don't have a car—and doing shopping."

"You have to have an inner faith. You want to do the best for your family and you keep trying. I always try to do a good job, no matter what."

"My case worker kept encouraging me to go for a regular, full-time job. She made me believe I could do it."

Living in a rural area limited her job opportunities. She took a risk by moving to a new area to accept an "on call" position in an AFS branch office. There, she was on public assistance part-time and working part-time.

Small took a temporary position with the agency's Personnel Office, "to get a foot in the door" of state government. When a permanent position opened, it was offered to her through the client hire project. She took it, and has been employed full-time with AFS for the last year. Her enthusiasm and willingness to learn new duties rate high marks from her supervisor.

"I love this job," she says of her clerical specialist position. She enjoys the work and would like to become an administrative assistant, eventually working her way up to personnel officer. She's had some business classes but would like to take more training and develop her skills.



Barbara Small works for Northeast Portland AFS office.

Part of what she likes about the job is the contact with branch staff she knew when she was a welfare client. "I've gotten a lot of positive feedback."

That encouragement is something she wants to share. Next month, she'll be speaking to a group of women who are still on welfare. She wants them to know they can succeed in becoming independent.

When AFS started the project in August 1985, its goal for the two-year period ending June 30, 1987 was to hire 76 clients. In December 1986,

there were 139 former welfare clients on the agency's payroll, in central and branch offices.

While the project started at AFS, other Department of Human Resource agencies have also hired clients, with an additional 186 clients employed as of December 1986.

Putting welfare recipients to work is a major commitment of Oregon's welfare agency. That commitment starts with the agency itself.

While the JOBS program at Adult and Family Services Division (AFS) helps agency clients find employment in the private sector, the agency has added a project to hire recipients in its own offices as well. Most of the "client hire" positions are at the entry level, but pay enough to make clients self-sufficient—and to take them off welfare.

When the current biennial budget ends on June 30, AFS will have exceeded its goal for successful placements. But the numbers aren't the whole story.

One of the people who made it off welfare through the program is Barbara Small, who now works for AFS in Salem.

Small is a twice-divorced parent raising four children by herself. She receives very little child support and has often worked two jobs at a time to make ends meet. The jobs include waitressing, hotel maid, clerical, home care for the elderly, housekeeping, and working at a country grocery store and gas station. "You name it, I've done it," she laughs.

# AFS Client Hired

Zerelda Hicks used to be a client of Adult and Family Services. Now she's an employee at the Northeast Portland AFS office.

Ms. Hicks was hired in March as part of a special AFS project to help clients become employees. She started as a temporary but the office soon found a permanent spot for her. "I really appreciate being here," she says. "Everyone pulled for me to get the permanent position."

She's a clerical specialist at the branch, answering phones, staffing the reception desk and—most importantly—operating a computer terminal to process the paperwork that helps welfare clients get their checks.

What's her favorite part of the job? "There's nothing I DON'T like," she says enthusiastically. "It's lots of fun, there's variety and the people are nice. I can go to anyone with a question."

While it's not easy working and being a single parent, she says her three daughters encouraged her to go back to work. "I was ready. And they help at home . . . that makes things smoother and makes work easier."

"And I like being independent. I feel good about myself and I can really help my daughters get a good start."

Hicks had worked before her children were born, doing secretarial work and cashiering, but that had been quite awhile ago. She brushed up on her skills at Portland Community College and regained her confidence. "Staying up until 2 a.m. paid off; I was on the honor roll twice." And she worked at keeping up her skills at home on a typewriter and 10-key machine.

How was the transition between home and work? "My JOBS worker

was really supportive. He kept encouraging me and helped me upgrade my skills." Once she got her confidence back, going to work was easier. "The child care payments really help. And since I was a client, I already knew some of the terms and programs here. The state only pays workers once a month but I was used to getting an ADC check once a month so I



already knew how to manage."

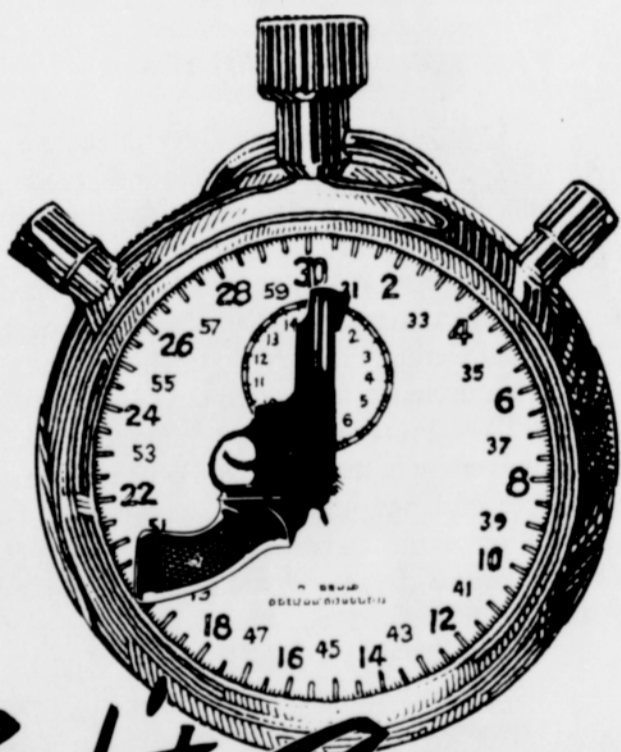
What would she like to say to other women who'd like to get off welfare? "Get your G.E.D. or some vocational training. Once you learn something, no one can take it away from you. When you have a skill, you get confidence—you know you can do it!"



Zerelda Hicks was hired by Northeast Portland AFS office.

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