

## Higher Ground

### New Hope for the Working Poor and Their Children

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**Higher Ground** tells the story of a group of committed activists and business leaders in Milwaukee who propelled their passion and pragmatism into a fresh approach to addressing one of the country's most enduring problems, poverty.

The experiment was called **New Hope**. Through the eyes of three women, Inez, Lakeisha, and Elena, readers see first-hand how well-designed policies can make a difference in the lives of working poor adults and their children.

"If you work you should not be poor," New Hope designers believed. With poverty rates on the rise and with lower-wage service sector jobs replacing manufacturing and other higher-paying jobs, that belief resonates even more today. In 2004, 5.7 million adults were *working full-time* but still living in poverty, affecting 6.8 million children.

New Hope was designed to help working poor families by offering an income supplement that lifted them above the poverty line, subsidized health care and child care, and offered them a job when they couldn't find one. New Hope was a social contract—not a welfare program—and participants were required to work at least 30 hours a week.

The New Hope designers knew well the history of many failed antipoverty policies. Therefore, they put their experiment to the test, hiring a group of leading researchers to **evaluate its impact** in the most scientific and rigorous way.

#### The results are highly encouraging

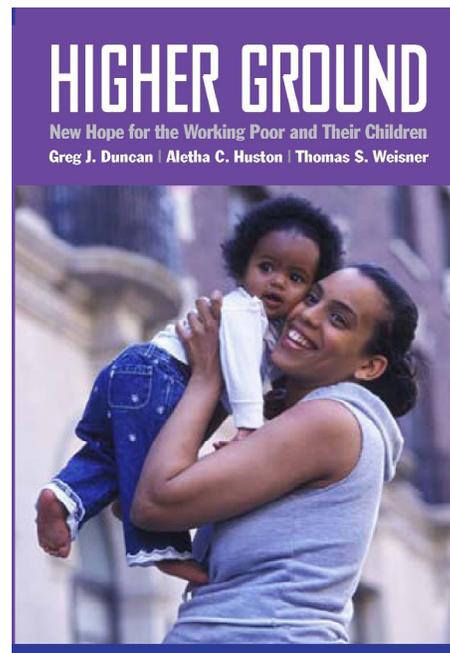
- Poverty rates declined
- Employment and earnings increased among participants who were not initially working full-time.
- For those who faced just one barrier to employment (such as need for child care or a spotty employment history), these gains lasted several years.
- More medical needs were met

#### Children also benefited

- School performance improved, especially for boys
- Behavior problems declined.
- Enrollment in child care centers increased
- Participation in out-of-school activities increased

#### Blueprint for Antipoverty Policy

As America takes stock of the successes and shortcomings of the Clinton-era poverty and welfare policies, the authors convincingly demonstrate why New Hope could be a model for state and national efforts to assist the working poor. Evidence-based and insightfully written, *Higher Ground* illuminates how policymakers can make work pay and improve the lives of children in families struggling to escape poverty.



**"Higher Ground puts the word 'hope' back into the debate about poverty, offering compelling evidence that government can make a difference in the lives of the poor."**

—Kathryn Edin

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