“Hi my name is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and I'm here to describe an exciting new opportunity.”

This year, the state of Illinois was selected to take part in a national study, funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to learn whether new, enhanced services help recipients of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) get good jobs and move toward self-sufficiency. This study will make it possible to provide new SNAP Employment and Training services that have never been available before in Illinois.

The Illinois Department of Human Services in collaboration with the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and Illinois Community College Board was selected by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food, and Nutrition Service to develop and test new services that can potentially move SNAP recipients from public assistance to financial independence.

The program that we are testing is called EPIC, Employment opportunities, Personalized services, Individualized training and Career planning. The goal of this study is to learn how the EPIC program helps people, such as yourself, gain technical skills, work experience, and a job with wages that can support you and your family. A team of program evaluators led by Mathematica Policy Research (Mathematica), have been funded to conduct the study. The study will provide important information that will help create better programs for SNAP recipients in Illinois and possibly nationwide. To conduct this study we need people like you to take part.

“Okay, so what do I have to do to take part in the study?”

Taking part is easy. First, you must complete the application and eligibility steps. If you are eligible, we will need to get your agreement to participate in the study. By signing an informed consent document, you're saying that you agree to participate in the study. Signing the consent document also gives the study team permission to collect personal information about you from public agencies for up to seven years.

Over several years, the study team will collect information from the state and federal agencies about your employment and earnings history, your receipt of government services and benefits, the credentials or classes you complete, and any employee-related services you might receive through the Core SNAP Employment and Training program or through services provided through the EPIC employment and training program.

Additionally, you may be asked to participate with up to three phone surveys and a possible in-person interview or focus group; if you choose to participate with the surveys, interview or focus group, you will receive a small payment.

“Is that all? Are there any other forms?”

Next, if you agree to participate, we will gather some information from you such as your age, race, social security number, education and work experience. This information will be entered into the study team’s computer system. Providing this information is a requirement of participation in the study.

We will also ask you for the names of two contacts who will know how to get in touch with you. If the study team cannot reach you, this information will help the study team find you so they can ask you to participate in the surveys. However, providing two contacts is not required to participate in the study.

EPIC staff is responsible for entering your consent form and information in the study team’s computer system. They are also available to answer any questions you may have and help you complete the consent to participate document and any other information needed for program intake.

“Okay so I sign the consent to participate form and provide basic information, then what?”

Once EPIC program staff has your signed consent form and information in the study team’s computer system, they’ll use the computer program to randomly select who will be enrolled in the EPIC program. Randomly selecting people eligible for the program is kind of like flipping a coin it has nothing to do with your age, race, gender, or anything else about you.

“Why do you have to use this random process? Why can't we all get services?”

Well, one reason is that it is important for policymakers to learn how this program helps people like you and this random selection process is the best way to produce reliable results. Another reason is that there are limited spaces available in this program and there isn't enough funding to serve everyone. Using this random selection process means everyone who agrees to participate in the study and is eligible for the program has an equal chance of getting into the program.

“The study sounds fine what if I don't want to participate can I still get help with training and finding a job?”

I understand, and no, you don't have to participate in the study. Deciding whether to participate in a study is completely up to you. If you decide NOT to take part in the study you will work with your DHS case manager to be placed in services that are available under the traditional SNAP Employment and Training program. However, if you want to have the chance to receive EPIC services, you DO have to participate in the study

“Sounds good so what do I have to do next?”

After you complete this orientation, your DHS case worker will schedule you for an appointment. At this appointment the staff will have you sign the consent to participate document, they will enter information in the study team’s computer system, and then you will be assigned to a service group. After you are randomly assigned, the DHS case manager will provide you with instructions about your next steps.

So that's it, we hope you do decide to participate in the EPIC study since it's a great way to improve programs for people just like you.