

**Enhancing the Well-Being of  
Young Children and Families  
in the Context of Welfare Reform**  
*Lessons from Early Childhood, TANF,  
and Family Support Programs*

Prepared for the  
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# *Executive Summary*

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This report presents findings about emerging approaches to enhance the well-being of young children and families in the context of welfare reform. The project, which has been a partnership between the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) and Mathematica Policy Research (MPR) under the sponsorship of the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, addresses three questions:

- How are child development and family support programs serving low-income families with young children responding to new welfare policies and practices?
- What kinds of partnerships (e.g., state-local, public-private, interagency) are developing between those serving low-income families with young children and those implementing welfare changes?
- What opportunities and challenges are emerging for early childhood programs and agencies implementing welfare changes as they strive to improve outcomes for both adults/parents and young children?

The findings, representing an early point-in-time exploration, are based on information from programs and initiatives identified through nomination forms sent to over 300 key informants, including child care officials, Head Start collaboration directors, governors' early childhood policy advisors, national organizations, researchers, and welfare, child welfare, and mental health administrators. Thirty-five programs and initiatives were nominated, 11 of which were studied in depth.

## **Setting the Context**

Roughly two-thirds of the recipients of federally-subsidized cash assistance are children, nearly half of whom are under age six. Young children who grow up in families with limited incomes face potential exposure to multiple environmental and biological risk factors, which in turn put them at risk for poor outcomes. But a decade of cumulative research suggests that child development and family support programs can make a difference. The most effective programs can positively influence a child's social and emotional development, enhance the likelihood of successful school performance in the early grades, and in some instances, reduce the later risk of involvement with the special education and juvenile justice systems.

Due, in part, to growing knowledge about early brain development and the importance of children's early years, there has been increased interest among policymakers at all levels of government, foundations, and businesses in promoting child development and family support programs. These programs, which emphasize early learning and promote healthy parent-child and child-caregiver relationships, are wide ranging. They include preschool programs that provide comprehensive child and family services, family support programs that combine home visiting with center-based activities, and family resource centers that offer a range of information and support services.

Simultaneous with the growth and expansion of child development and family support programs, welfare reform has dramatically changed the emphasis in America's welfare policy. Under Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) created by the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, the focus has shifted from cash assistance to work. The new legislation sets forth work requirements and allows sanctions for failure to meet them; it also places time limits on assistance. In addition, it strengthens efforts to involve non-custodial parents, typically fathers, in supporting their children. But welfare reform has focused on adults almost exclusively as economic providers for their families. There is virtually no emphasis in the legislation on helping them as parents, particularly parents of young children, by encouraging their involvement in child development and family support programs.

And yet, given this country's interest in promoting family economic self-sufficiency *and* in ensuring that all children enter school ready to learn, integrating child development and family support perspectives with welfare reform could be enormously beneficial. Such approaches are beginning to emerge, and they are the focus of this report.

## **Integrating Child Development and Family Support with Welfare Reform**

*Enhancing the Well-Being of Young Children and Families in the Context of Welfare Reform* explores a variety of efforts to meet the needs of young children and families in the face of changing welfare policies and practices. It profiles 11 programs and initiatives, including stand-alone early childhood programs, Early Head Start sites, welfare agencies, statewide initiatives, and state and local partnerships between early childhood and welfare programs.

These programs and initiatives are implementing a wide range of strategies to facilitate parental success with meeting welfare-related goals while promoting positive outcomes for young children. The strategies include:

- *Using early childhood and welfare staff to educate families about new welfare requirements.* Confusion about the specifics of welfare reform is widespread. Examples of reported strategies to address this confusion include training early childhood program staff on new welfare rules and their implications,

systematically incorporating information about welfare changes into home visiting protocols, and including a representative from the local welfare office on multi-disciplinary teams working with families.

- ***Adapting early childhood programs to better meet the needs of young children and families affected by welfare changes.*** Staff reported a variety of efforts to adapt their programs to better serve families who are facing challenges associated with welfare reform while preserving their core mission to strengthen parent-child relationships and to promote healthy child development. These efforts fall into three major categories.
  - *Helping parents successfully meet work requirements and gain stable employment.* Specific strategies include bringing welfare staff onsite through contracts with TANF agencies and working out agreements to recognize Head Start and Early Head Start employment readiness activities as meeting TANF work requirements.
  - *Reaching out to fathers and helping mothers address paternity, child support, and other related issues.* Specific strategies include encouraging fathers to participate in early childhood program enrollment and activities, offering work training and parenting skill-building opportunities to fathers, and training program staff in welfare-related paternity and child support requirements.
  - *Adjusting hours and staffing to better meet family needs.* Specific strategies include training and adding new staff to address families' self-sufficiency needs and extending program hours to accommodate parents' work schedules.
- ***Promoting access to high-quality child care that addresses family needs.*** Many families with young children who are affected by welfare changes do not need intensive supports, but all need high-quality child care. A number of program and initiative directors reported involvement in collaborative efforts to strengthen child care options for TANF and other low-income families. Examples of reported strategies include blending funding for child care subsidies, pre-kindergarten, and Head Start to offer full-day care with comprehensive services; using Early Head Start staff to offer training to community child care providers (including those offering care in regulated settings as well as informal “kith and kin” providers); and developing community planning teams to improve the supply and quality of care.
- ***Linking welfare agencies and early childhood programs and forging cross-system partnerships.*** Respondents described three types of cross-system activities that are designed to link child development and family support services with TANF programs.
  - *Planning.* Specific strategies include involving a broad range of agencies in countywide planning processes about how to make welfare reform successful for families with young children and developing a shared vision statement, goals, and new procedures across public agencies.

- *Training*. Specific strategies include conducting joint trainings for Head Start, child care programs, and local welfare staff as part of larger partnership efforts and organizing countywide training across multiple systems (e.g., TANF, child welfare, substance abuse, and mental health).
- *Coordinating and integrating service delivery*. Specific strategies include creating statewide or state/local partnerships that formally link welfare agencies and early childhood programs; using TANF dollars to invest in child development, family support, and other programs serving TANF families with young children; and creating multi-disciplinary teams to serve families with multiple barriers to employment.
- *Creating feedback mechanisms for families and those working with them to voice concerns as welfare implementation proceeds*. Many programs reported the need to create opportunities for families and staff to provide feedback to policymakers about how welfare changes are working and about how the needs of young children and their families could be better met. Examples of strategies include providing feedback from networks of early childhood programs and Head Start Policy Councils to state policymakers and bringing decisionmakers to parent support groups and other forums where they can talk directly to families affected by welfare policies.

## Reflections and Observations

Based on these findings, *Enhancing the Well-Being of Young Children and Families in the Context of Welfare Reform* offers a series of observations which highlight points of potential leverage for the future as well as areas of special risk.

- Catalysts for helping early childhood programs respond to the changing needs of low-income families include local program leadership, government at all levels, foundations, and national organizations.
- To date, early childhood program strategies to help parents with employment have, for the most part, focused on obtaining employment rather than on helping families with workplace issues, job retention, and TANF sanctions and time limits.
- Early childhood programs are deeply concerned about the most vulnerable parents and children and the lack of services for them, but few report any systematic strategies to engage in communitywide planning or TANF-linked planning on their behalf.
- The variation in state and local welfare policies (e.g., the length of time mothers with infants are exempted from work, the strictness with which sanctions are enforced, the criteria for exemptions from time limits) frame opportunities, and sometimes set ceilings, for programs seeking to improve outcomes for young children and their parents.

- Most reported strategies to link TANF and early childhood programs are informal and most have been initiated by early childhood programs, not TANF agencies. With some important exceptions, child development and family support programs are not seen as a resource by those implementing TANF, yet such programs are often in a unique position to help families, particularly those likely to have difficulty transitioning to work.
- Experiences with welfare reform have made early childhood program staff more cognizant of families' economic struggles, especially the problems faced by parents who are working but not earning livable wages and who have few prospects for higher wages or advancement.

## **Toward the Future**

The report concludes with a series of recommendations about what early childhood programs and TANF programs can do—separately and jointly—to strengthen programs, policies, and collaborations to better meet the needs of young children and families affected by the changes in welfare.

### **What Early Childhood Programs Can Do**

- Ensure that staff and participating families are knowledgeable about all relevant welfare-related policies and potential resources that might help families, including:
  - TANF provisions specific to their state and community,
  - other income-related benefits, such as the federal Earned Income Tax Credit, state income and other tax credits, food stamps, and child support enforcement income, and
  - child-related resources, such as health benefits through Medicaid or the State Child Health Insurance Program, child care subsidies, and if appropriate, early intervention and/or special educational services.
- Continue to work to improve the availability of high-quality child care that is responsive to family needs.
- Develop a support process for families transitioning to work to help them meet the dual demands of work and parenting.
- Expand outreach strategies to fathers whether or not they live with their children.
- Join with other community organizations (e.g., domestic violence, mental health, and substance abuse agencies) to better address prevention and treatment issues for those families who are most vulnerable.

## **What TANF and Other Welfare-Related Programs Can Do**

- Develop formal arrangements at the state and local levels for early childhood programs to carry out tasks related to families' self-sufficiency plans.
- Train TANF and related staff (e.g., child welfare) on a statewide and local basis in family-centered practices and to attend to the developmental needs of young children.
- Ensure that those implementing welfare reform are knowledgeable about child development and family support programs as well as child care resources and that they make referrals to these programs where appropriate.
- Co-locate staff with special expertise (e.g., domestic violence workers, child welfare workers) within TANF offices to facilitate early intervention and prevention.
- Use TANF interviews and assessments to screen and identify those families for whom intensive services are needed and in which young children are likely to be affected adversely by welfare rules (e.g., cases in which families are sanctioned).

## **What Early Childhood, TANF, and Other Welfare-Related Programs Can Do Jointly**

- Team together to develop formal and informal partnerships at both the state and local levels to promote the well-being of young children while promoting economic security and supports for their parents.
- Develop a shared agenda focused on families with the most severe barriers to work and the needs of their young children.
- Promote evaluations of the impact of welfare changes that include attention to indicators of young child well-being (e.g., health status, social and emotional development, school readiness).

# *What This Report Is About*

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This report examines emerging approaches to enhance the well-being of young children and families in the context of welfare reform. It addresses three questions:

- How are child development and family support programs serving low-income families with young children responding to new welfare policies and practices?
- What kinds of partnerships (e.g., state-local, public-private, interagency) are developing between those serving low-income families with young children and those implementing welfare changes?
- What opportunities and challenges are emerging for early childhood programs and agencies implementing welfare changes as they strive to improve outcomes for both adults/parents and young children?

The findings, representing an early, point-in-time exploration, are based on in-depth conversations in the fall of 1998 with staff from 11 early childhood programs and initiatives, as well as state policymakers, foundation officers, and others involved with these efforts either through partnerships or funding strategies. The programs and initiatives profiled reflect both direct service strategies and strategies to promote formal and informal connections between early childhood programs and those implementing welfare reforms. All were identified through a national nomination process (see Box 1 for a summary of the methodology). The project is a partnership between the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) and Mathematica Policy Research (MPR) under the sponsorship of the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The report is organized in four sections. The first sets the context, describing the importance and the challenge of integrating child and family development strategies with welfare policies and practices. The second section presents the findings in three parts: (1) a description of six overall approaches to integrating child development and family support with welfare reform, highlighting the noteworthy and replicable characteristics of the individual programs and initiatives, (2) an analysis of the specific strategies that emerged across the sites, and (3) an overview of common themes and concerns. The third section sets the findings in a larger perspective, offering some reflections and observations based on the insights of the informants. The final section draws out the implications of the findings and observations for TANF administrators, early childhood program leaders, staff, and others seeking to enhance outcomes for young children and to implement welfare reform effectively. Appendix A provides a matrix that summarizes the characteristics of the programs and initiatives studied; Appendix B provides individual profiles. Resources relevant to integrating child and family development with welfare reform are listed in Appendix C.

## BOX 1

### How the Information Was Gathered

During the fall of 1998, the project team sought, via a national nomination process, information about approaches to integrating child development and family support strategies with welfare reform. Nomination forms were sent to over 300 key informants (child care officials; Head Start collaborative directors; welfare, child welfare, and mental health administrators; national organizations; researchers; Governors' early childhood policy advisors; and others known to NCCCP, MPR, and ASPE). Specifically we sought information about programs and initiatives

- addressing different types of children's needs (e.g., child care, health, and mental health);
- serving children and families from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds and from different regions of the country;
- with states or foundations as catalysts;
- based on state- or locally-designed efforts;
- reflecting federal initiatives, such as Head Start and Early Head Start.

For each of the 35 programs and initiatives (covering 18 states) that were nominated, we obtained written information and/or held phone conversations. Where the approach was part of a network, or was linked to a statewide effort, we asked those we spoke with to help us identify a specific program to contact.

Based on these nominations, we selected 11 programs and initiatives to profile in depth. Programs and initiatives not selected included some that were planned but not yet implemented, those that could not describe specific responses to welfare changes, and those that, while innovative, had no clear focus on young children. For the selected programs and initiatives, we used a three-step process to gather information. First, we drafted a profile reflecting our understanding of the approach. Second, we used this profile as a basis for phone conversations designed to elicit more in-depth information about the program or initiative and its relationship to welfare reform. Third, after revising and enriching each profile, we again shared them with the sites for accuracy verification. For approaches that predated welfare changes, our aim was to ensure that we accurately captured the nature of the basic approach, as well as the specific response to welfare reform. For approaches developed entirely in response to welfare changes, our aim was to describe the nature of those strategies accurately. In addition, regardless of whether the approach predated or was a response to welfare changes, we asked our informants to reflect on the impact of welfare-related changes on family and staff and to discuss their perceptions of emerging opportunities and concerns.

# Setting the Context

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It is estimated that roughly two-thirds of the recipients of federally-subsidized cash assistance for families are children, nearly half of whom are under age six.<sup>1</sup> Research suggests that young children who grow up in families with limited incomes face potential exposure to multiple environmental and biological risk factors. This in turn puts them at great risk for poor outcomes—in school, with peers, and ultimately, even with jobs.<sup>2</sup> Many young children, of course, are resilient and thrive. But a decade of cumulative research provides evidence that for many who are not doing well, child development and family support programs, which emphasize early learning and promote healthy parent-child and child-caregiver relationships, can make a difference. The evidence indicates that the most effective child development and family support programs can positively influence a child’s social and emotional development, enhance the likelihood of successful school performance in the early grades, and in some instances, reduce the later risk of involvement with special education and juvenile justice.<sup>3</sup> More recent research, some of it on early brain development, also suggests that paying attention to child development and parent-child relationships as early as the infant-toddler years, especially for low-income families, is critically important.<sup>4</sup>

Due in part to growing knowledge about the importance of the early years, there has been increased policy, foundation, and business interest in promoting child development and family support programs.<sup>5</sup> Child development and family support programs are funded with federal, state, local, and sometimes private dollars and include:

- programs designed to help high-risk, often young, parents learn about parenting and establish positive relationships with their infants and toddlers, often involving a combination of home visits<sup>6</sup> and center-based activities.
- preschool programs with nutrition, health care, and family support components, as well as educational ones, and,
- family resource centers, sometimes linked to schools and sometimes to neighborhood centers, where families can get help in solving problems, support from families with similar experiences, and information about community resources.

These programs are intended to supplement policies that help families with basic supports, such as health care and child care, as well as policies that promote early intervention for children with identifiable developmental delays. An NCCP report found that in 1998, just under half the states were funding one or more statewide programs for infants and toddlers, 34 states were funding statewide programs for preschoolers, and half were funding family support

programs in some form. This represented a slight increase based on data collected two years earlier.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time that momentum has been growing to promote child development and family support programs, welfare reform has dramatically changed the emphasis in America's welfare policy. Under the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), and especially under Title I, the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) block grant, the focus has shifted from cash assistance to work. The new legislation sets forth work requirements, sanctions for failure to meet work requirements, and time limits for assistance. It also strengthens efforts to involve non-custodial parents, typically fathers, in supporting their children.<sup>8</sup> In addition, recognizing that child care is crucial to the success of parental employment, federal funds for child care have been increased, although it is no longer an entitlement for children in families receiving cash assistance.<sup>9</sup> (See Box 2 for highlights of all these policy changes.) Thus, welfare reform has focused on adults almost exclusively as economic providers for their families. There is virtually no emphasis in the legislation on helping adults as parents, particularly parents of young children, by encouraging their involvement in child development and family support programs.<sup>10</sup>

And yet, the adults who are the focus of PRWORA are also parents, many of them parents of young children who are enrolled in or eligible for early childhood programs. This means that close relationships between those implementing welfare reform and those administering child development and family support programs could be beneficial. Early childhood staff, who often have trusting relationships with parents, may be able to facilitate their moves toward economic self-sufficiency, offering peer and other supports, and thus furthering the goals of TANF. Likewise, TANF agencies may be able to encourage families to focus on child development and parenting issues by connecting them with early childhood programs.

In other words, given this country's interest in promoting family economic self-sufficiency *and* in ensuring that all children enter school ready to learn, welfare agencies and early childhood programs are potentially natural partners. And yet, it is not clear to what extent partnerships between them are emerging.<sup>11</sup> This report explores this question. It documents new approaches to integrating child development and family support perspectives with welfare reform, whether these are spurred by early childhood programs or welfare agencies or both. The aim is to promote the healthy social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development of young children while helping their parents in their dual roles as parents and economic providers.

## BOX 2

### Highlights of the Changing Policy Context for Young Children and Families

#### *Key Provisions of TANF*

- Limits lifetime assistance with federal funds to a maximum of five years and gives states the option to adopt shorter time periods.
- Requires states to engage a specified percentage of adult recipients in federally-defined work activities. As of fiscal year 1999, the required work participation rate is 35 percent for all families (rising gradually to 50 percent in fiscal year 2002) and 90 percent for two-parent families. States receive credit toward participation rate requirements for caseload reductions since fiscal year 1995 not due to changes in eligibility.
- Establishes a minimum number of hours that adults must participate in allowable work activities to count toward the federal work participation rate.
  - As of fiscal year 1999, single parents must participate for at least 25 hours per week, increasing to 30 hours in fiscal year 2000. The requirement is 20 hours for single parents with a child under age 6.
  - Two-parent families must participate for a combined minimum of 55 hours a week if they receive federally-funded child care assistance (and are not caring for a disabled child) and for a combined minimum of 35 hours a week otherwise.
  - States may require recipients to participate for a greater or lesser number of hours than needed to meet federal work participation rates and may allow recipients to participate in work activities other than those allowable under the federal requirement.
- Allows states to exempt single parents of infants under age one from work requirements and disregard them in the calculation of work participation rates for up to 12 months.
- Authorizes states to establish sanctions that limit or eliminate cash assistance for families that do not comply with work requirements.
- Permits states to use TANF dollars in flexible ways (e.g., for child care or other early childhood or family support strategies).

#### *Key Child Care Changes*

Because child care is key to enabling parents to work, there have also been a series of related changes in federal child care laws. These include:

- The Child Care and Development Fund combined four separate federal programs into one block grant to the states. States now have more discretion about how to use federal child care monies, although the funds must largely be spent to provide subsidies to low-income families.
- Although federal funds were increased, the new legislation eliminated a previous entitlement to child care for families receiving public assistance who were working or preparing for work.
- States are permitted to transfer up to 30 percent of TANF funds to the child care block grant.

### BOX 3

#### What Child Development and Family Support Programs Do

- Provide quality early care and learning experiences directly to young children and with sufficient intensity to improve their social, emotional, and cognitive development.
- Help parents access basic resources for their young children, such as regular health care.
- Help parents identify and address any special needs their children may have.
- Improve parent-child relationships by providing information to parents about what to expect, by creating opportunities for them to talk with other parents, and, for those parents who themselves have had poor parenting, opportunities to model and try new ways of relating to their children.
- Help adults develop new skills, for example, engaging families in literacy or GED programs.
- Help parents address more intensive needs, such as those related to substance abuse, domestic violence, and mental illness.
- Reduce loneliness and isolation among family caregivers and provide them with support and information about parenting (including parents, grandparents, and others who are primary caregivers).



# The Findings

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This section analyzes 11 programs and initiatives that integrate child development and family support efforts with welfare reform. To capture the richness of these early point-in-time responses from the field, we present the findings in two ways. First, we describe the programs and initiatives, highlighting overall approaches to meeting the needs of young children and families in the context of welfare reform. Some of these approaches have been generated by early childhood programs or welfare agencies themselves. In other instances, the catalysts have been external—community partnerships, foundation invitations, or state-led efforts. After examining the individual sites, we analyze specific clusters of strategies for addressing the needs of young children and families affected by welfare reform. (For a matrix summarizing all the programs and initiatives, see Appendix A. For detailed profiles of the individual programs and initiatives, see Appendix B.)

## Approaches to Integrating Child Development and Family Support with Welfare Reform

The programs and initiatives profiled in this report represent six types of approaches to integrating child development and family support efforts with welfare reform. They are:

- Tailoring statewide child development and family support programs to meet the needs of families affected by TANF.
- Adapting a national program model, Early Head Start, to address welfare-related needs.
- Creating community approaches to improving child care.
- Using the welfare agency to provide leadership and outreach to the early childhood community.
- Helping families who are coping with domestic violence, substance abuse, and other risk factors.
- Developing formal partnerships linking early childhood programs and welfare agencies at the state and local levels.

Each approach is illustrated below with examples.

## Tailoring Statewide Child Development and Family Support Programs to Meet the Needs of Families Affected by TANF

The 11 programs and initiatives studied include two examples of child development and family support programs which are being adapted to better meet the needs of families with young children in the face of welfare reform. The first is the Parent-Child Center Network in Vermont, and the second is the Ohio Early Start Program. The approach in Vermont uses existing program strategies in new ways, while in Ohio, the approach extends an existing statewide program model to a new target population. The Vermont example illustrates a deliberate effort on the part of the state to use the early childhood community as a resource in changing welfare,<sup>12</sup> while the Ohio effort illustrates a creative use of TANF dollars to support child development activities.

### *Parent-Child Centers (PCCs) and the PCC Network, Vermont*

The statewide strategy to integrate an early childhood focus into welfare reform in Vermont builds on 15 of the 16 Parent-Child Centers (PCCs) that form a network of early childhood programs throughout the state. Both the centers and the center network are key to the implementation of Vermont's welfare reform strategy for teen families and families with young children, particularly infants and toddlers. Through contracts with the state, the PCCs hire their own welfare workers (known as "Reach-Up" workers), who receive the same training as other PCC staff, as well as welfare-related training. In addition, the network of center directors, supplemented by task forces and committees, provides a forum for the PCCs to address policy issues and to provide feedback to the state welfare implementation team, formally as well as informally.



#### **Vermont Parent-Child Centers and the PCC Network**

- ✓ Reach Up (Vermont's welfare-to-work program) workers are stationed onsite at the Parent-Child Centers and receive the same training and orientation as other PCC staff. They also receive training provided by those administering welfare.
- ✓ The Network works collaboratively with the state welfare implementation team, offering feedback about how policies are, or are not, working for young children and families and helping to design more effective policies.
- ✓ Individual Parent-Child Centers model new approaches to reach out to special populations. If these are effective, they can then be adapted for other centers. One current model with potential for expansion is a program that reaches out to young fathers.
- ✓ The Parent-Child Centers help train state welfare staff in family-centered practices.

## *Early Start, Ohio*

In 1996, Ohio launched the Early Start program in response to research indicating the critical importance of the first three years of life to a child's long-term development and overall health and well-being. The program complements the state's commitment to early intervention and child abuse prevention by providing flexible funding to identify infants and toddlers at risk of developmental delay or child abuse and neglect based on the presence of multiple risk factors (such as low birth weight, teen parents, poverty, and addiction) and to provide comprehensive support services. With the implementation of TANF, Ohio made the decision to allocate TANF funds to expand Early Start for teen and other mothers with young children participating in Ohio Works First, the state's TANF program. The aim is to promote economic self-sufficiency among the parents while also promoting the kind of strong parent-child relationships early in life that are known to be crucial for later healthy development. Services are provided through home visits, center-based activities, and referrals to and coordination with other appropriate supports.



### **Ohio Early Start**

- ✓ Using TANF funds, Ohio has adapted a pre-existing program for infants and toddlers explicitly to meet the needs of families with infants and toddlers who are affected by welfare reform.
- ✓ Counties can provide Early Start services either through the self-sufficiency contracts signed by families participating in Ohio Works First or as part of efforts to support families who are transitioning off or who have been “diverted” from cash assistance.
- ✓ Early Start activities can fulfill 10 of the 30 hours of work-related activities required weekly under Ohio Works First.
- ✓ The state has developed explicit outcome goals and tracking mechanisms, as well as Early Start training and quality assurance tools.
- ✓ The state has encouraged counties to develop innovative approaches to sharing resources across programs for young children. (In one county, for example, family support activities are provided through a Head Start Adult Learning Center.)

## **Adapting a National Program Model, Early Head Start, to Meet Welfare-Related Needs**

Early Head Start (EHS) is a relatively new initiative of the Head Start Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, that provides comprehensive, intensive services designed to enhance child development and support families during the critical first three years of a child's life. Parents can enroll before the birth of their children. EHS programs emphasize the needs of children

(promoting children’s health, resiliency, social competence, and cognitive and language development), families (enhancing family development, the home environment, family functioning, and economic self-sufficiency), staff (encouraging professional development and strong staff relationships with families), and communities (encouraging partnerships to improve the quality of services available to all families). EHS programs have now been implemented in over 600 communities. The examples below highlight how two EHS programs, one in Kansas City, Kansas and one in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, are responding to needs that have emerged in the context of welfare reform. Both programs target low-income families in which there is an infant, toddler, or a pregnant woman, and both offer home-based as well as center-based services and activities.

### *Project EAGLE, Kansas City, Kansas*

In 1995, Project EAGLE (Early Action and Guidance Leading to Empowerment) became one of the first Early Head Start sites. Since its inception, the program has emphasized the healthy growth and development of infants and toddlers as well as family economic self-sufficiency. Project EAGLE is a home visiting program that works closely with community child care providers to enhance the quality of care they provide. In addition, the program has developed a number of strategies that respond directly to welfare reform.



#### **Project EAGLE**

- ✓ To address families’ confusion about TANF time limits, work requirements, and sanctions, the program developed an easy-to-understand document that provides basic information about cash assistance, SSI, and child care subsidies. A section of the document helps families plan, track their own benefits, and set goals and timetables.
- ✓ Project EAGLE views the year that mothers with infants are exempt from TANF work requirements as a “window of opportunity” during which to provide skill training and other job readiness activities as well as to promote healthy parenting.
- ✓ Family support staff receive extensive training, both internal and external, including training provided by the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services, which administers TANF.
- ✓ The program works with community child care providers to create individual development plans to improve the quality of care.
- ✓ Project EAGLE reaches out to fathers by encouraging them to participate when their families enroll and offering special services that explicitly target fathers.
- ✓ The program participates in forums for local employers to encourage the hiring of TANF recipients and to educate them about how to support newly working parents.

## *Pittsburgh Early Head Start, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*

Pittsburgh Early Head Start, which is a home visiting program supplemented by group and family activities at four centers in the Pittsburgh area, has implemented a variety of strategies to help families transitioning from cash assistance to work. Most notably, the program is employing multiple strategies to ensure that participating families have access to quality child care, whether center-based or with relatives or neighbors.



### **Pittsburgh Early Head Start**

- ✓ In a formal collaboration with a local Head Start expansion project, Pittsburgh EHS is working to create slots for EHS children in Head Start family child care homes and to implement quality improvement measures.
- ✓ Working with a local child care resource and referral agency, Pittsburgh EHS reaches out to informal child care providers and offers them training in child development, appropriate care practices, and health and safety measures.
- ✓ The program supports families and children using informal care by having home visitors serve as liaisons between parents and care providers and visiting children in informal care settings.
- ✓ Staff receive training on TANF and mandated Medicaid managed care.
- ✓ The program provides supports to staff to help them help parents balance the day-to-day requirements of work with longer-term goals for their children and their families, as well as to cope with their own stress.
- ✓ Some staff provide services on weekends and during evening hours to accommodate the schedules of working parents.

## **Creating Community Approaches to Improving Child Care**

Two of the programs and initiatives profiled are collaborative efforts to involve community leadership in strengthening child care across a range of settings, from regulated, formal child care to informal care provided by neighbors and relatives. They are the Training/Child Care Center in Bibb County, Georgia and the Joining Forces child care initiative in the state of Michigan.

### *The Bibb County Training/Child Care Center, Bibb County, Georgia*

The Bibb County Training/Child Care Center emerged from a collaborative partnership among the county Department of Family and Children Services, the Housing Authority, the Board of Education, a local medical center, River Edge Behavioral Health Services, and a local technical institute. Collectively, the collaborators provide governance for the initiative. Individually, the partners provide services to support the successful implementation of welfare

reform. The aims of the Training/Child Care Center are twofold: to provide child care to families receiving cash assistance while the parents look for work and until other child care arrangements can be made, and to recruit and train potential child care providers from those receiving public assistance. Leadership to create the collaborative came initially from a county human services administrator who anticipated welfare reform and sought to build a community planning process to foster its successful implementation.



### The Bibb County Training/Child Care Center

- ✓ The Training/Child Care Center serves as a transitional child care setting for families on TANF and for children in foster care. Each family works with a multidisciplinary team that helps families access community services.
- ✓ The collaborating partners provide health screenings, immunizations, and psychological testing, as well as speech and movement therapy for young children enrolled in the Center.
- ✓ The success of the main child care center led to the development of four more, with two specifically targeted to teen parents and two located within public housing projects.
- ✓ The governance structure of the child care network permits a flexible response to need. Right now, the collaborating partners are determining whether to designate more child care slots for infants and toddlers.
- ✓ TANF recipients interested in child care as a career are offered a 90-day training placement at the Center and, if they decide to continue, enrollment in the local technical institute for work towards a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential.
- ✓ Bibb County's network of centers is being replicated in two other Georgia counties.

### *Joining Forces: Caring Communities Child Care Initiative, Michigan*

The Joining Forces: Caring Communities Child Care Initiative is a collaborative effort among the W. K. Kellogg, Skillman, and Frey foundations. The three foundations are funding nine sites across the state of Michigan for a five-year initiative that seeks to improve the child care systems building capacity of individual communities. Each site has engaged a broad array of community stakeholders to develop plans to build a local child care system that addresses the needs of low-income families. Although the initiative predated welfare reform, TANF's emphasis on work has given the effort added urgency. Some of the nine sites are responding directly to the child care needs of families on or leaving TANF, while all are helping such families indirectly by improving the child care options available to low-income families.



## The Joining Forces Child Care Initiative

- ✓ Participating sites are funded for five years (contingent upon successful progress each year), with the first year devoted to planning and building community partnerships.
- ✓ The initiative emphasizes building the infrastructure necessary to address child care capacity, quality, and affordability beyond the life of the grants by building relationships among relevant stakeholders, creating ongoing financing mechanisms, and overcoming regulatory barriers.
- ✓ Programmatic goals and strategies vary from site to site, depending on community needs. Overall, the sites are attempting to increase the quantity and quality of child care serving low-income families, expand infant care, provide care during non-traditional hours, provide care for sick children, and ensure the inclusion of children with special needs in child care options.
- ✓ Explicit welfare-related strategies include facilitating close collaboration between child care resource and referral services and the county Family Independence Agencies (which administer TANF), co-locating resource and referral services and TANF administration, and training TANF workers about how to better link families with appropriate child care services.

## Using the Welfare Agency To Provide Leadership and Outreach to the Early Childhood Community

In some places, the welfare agency assists in cross training and/or in promoting linkages with other programs and services. In the county highlighted below, the Department of Human Services (DHS) is the focal point for developing new early childhood initiatives, serving as the catalyst for the development of the county wide, broadly representative, Alliance for Kids.

### *The El Paso County Department of Human Services, El Paso County, Colorado*

The El Paso County Department of Human Services (DHS), which houses both the TANF and child welfare programs, has made a commitment to using TANF services as a primary prevention mechanism for child welfare to prevent the needless out-of-home placement of children and family disruption. Using the guiding principles summarized in Box 4 and a model described as the “7 P’s” (Protection, Prevention, Preservation, Placement, Permanency, Partnerships, and Proficiency), the DHS is engaging in multiple system changes simultaneously, working with a broad network of community partners that includes the local early care and education network. While the approach is intended to help all families, the Deputy Director notes that a significant percentage of the families, including grandparents, are raising young children. The approach is being funded with flexible TANF funds.



## The El Paso County Department of Human Services

- ✓ The county DHS convened a task force on welfare reform and child care which developed a range of strategies to improve child care for low-income families.
- ✓ The agency committed TANF dollars to support the first local child care market rate survey, increase reimbursement rates, and guarantee child care slots and full-day, full-year care to parents transitioning to employment.
- ✓ Working with the Alliance for Kids, the agency developed an onsite child care resource and referral database in the county welfare office, which also houses other support services, such as substance abuse counseling and employment information.
- ✓ The DHS developed a special program to help grandparents raising children. Using the slogan grandparents make “grand parents,” the agency offers support groups, help with establishing guardianship, and financial and other supports as necessary. The agency also provides outreach and support services to teen parents.
- ✓ The county welfare office has joined forces with the child welfare unit—both of which are part of the DHS—to develop a shared vision for families and a common set of guiding principles which govern resource allocation, program design, staffing, and training.
- ✓ The DHS is investing TANF funds in services to help families. The agency is currently considering investing in a model home visiting program.

### BOX 4

#### Guiding Principles for a System of Care to Families Affected by Welfare Reform: Lessons from the El Paso County, Colorado Department of Human Services

- The system of care must be family driven and include extensive family leadership.
- Systems and programs must be effectively integrated.
- The system must build community capacity to serve families.
- Services must be strength based and delivered in the least intrusive manner possible.
- Services must be accessible, accountable, and comprehensive.
- Services must meet the individualized needs of families.
- Services must be coordinated across systems.
- The system of care must emphasize prevention and early intervention.
- Smooth and seamless transitions must accompany families as they develop.
- The system of care must protect the rights of families.
- The outcomes of services must be evaluated.
- All services must be culturally respectful and delivered by competent staff.

Source: Berns, D. & Drake, B. (1998). Promoting safe and stable families through welfare reform. *The Prevention Report: The National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice (2)*, pp. 4-8.

## **Helping Families Who are Coping with Domestic Violence, Substance Abuse, and Other Risk Factors**

Recent research on early brain development is providing compelling new data on the importance of strong nurturing relationships in the earliest years if children are to grow and thrive.<sup>13</sup> Helping families in which these relationships are already compromised because of multiple family risk factors, such as domestic and community violence, depression and other mental illness in parents, substance abuse, and the risks of child abuse and neglect, is recognized as a great need.<sup>14</sup> Among the 11 programs profiled are two that target vulnerable families with young children. One, the California Safe and Healthy Families (Cal-SAHF) program, is an intensive home visiting model that enrolls “overburdened” families, i.e., families with multiple personal, economic, and social problems, with the aim of preventing the out-of-home placement of young children, including those in families affected by TANE. The other, Project BEFORE, is administered through a community mental health center. Its target population is similar, families with very young children in which there is substance abuse or mental illness.



## *California Safe and Healthy Families (Cal-SAHF), California*

The California Safe and Healthy Families (Cal-SAHF) program is administered by the Office of Child Abuse Prevention of the California Department of Social Services. The program targets families who are confronting multiple burdens, primarily those with very young children who may be at risk for out-of-home placement. Using multidisciplinary service teams, many of which include staff from CalWORKS (California's TANF program), the program combines intensive home visiting with center-based services. Based on a best-practices approach, the Cal-SAHF model aims to incorporate the strongest elements of nationally-recognized home visiting models, while promoting community flexibility in its implementation.



### **California Safe and Healthy Families (Cal-SAHF)**

- ✓ The state is currently funding seven Cal-SAHF sites working with families with children three years or younger. (Services may begin prenatally.)
- ✓ Cal-SAHF uses a multidisciplinary team approach to streamline and coordinate the provision of services to families who are likely to be involved with multiple systems and multiple services providers. In response to welfare reform, many teams include a CalWORKS staff person.
- ✓ Cal-SAHF staff have received multiple trainings regarding the changes in welfare. During home visits and parenting classes, they help families to understand CalWORKS rules and requirements.
- ✓ By inviting them to parent support groups and to talk to individual families, the program has tried to give policymakers and their representatives a first-hand understanding of the issues faced by families affected by welfare changes, especially those with multiple barriers to employment.
- ✓ The state Office of Child Abuse Prevention, in collaboration with the Office of Criminal Justice Planning, has developed a statewide comprehensive prevention and treatment initiative called Answers Benefiting Children (ABC). The initiative aims to create integrated services and funding, collaboration among providers, and systemic change at the county level. Services to be integrated include the Cal-SAHF family support home visiting model, family resource centers, and child abuse treatment services.

## *Project BEFORE, Southeast Kansas*

Project BEFORE (Bridging Empowers Families to Overcome Risks and Excel) is a behavioral health home visiting program that supports families with substance abuse and mental health disorders and very young children. The program, which serves a four-county rural area in Kansas, was one of seven demonstration programs focusing on high risk young children and their parents funded by the Center for Mental Health Services of the Substance Abuse, Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) of the Department of Health and Human Services.<sup>15</sup> Combining strategies from Healthy Families America (a home visiting model) and a family involvement planning process known as “family wrap-around,” Project BEFORE focuses on a very needy, but largely ignored, group of young children and their families.<sup>16</sup> To help families meet the challenges of welfare reform, the program has stepped up efforts to help parents address barriers to employment.



### **Project BEFORE**

- ✓ Project BEFORE responds to the needs of a target population of great concern but for whom there have been few focused services.
- ✓ Project BEFORE supplements the strategies of a well-known home visiting program, Healthy Families America, with behavioral health services targeted to parents with substance abuse and mental health disorders.
- ✓ In response to welfare reform, the program has increased efforts to help mothers address work-related issues, worked to enlarge child care options, conducted cross training with TANF personnel, and provided more intensive supports to staff.
- ✓ Project BEFORE has found that effective staffing strategies for this challenging population include using home visitors who themselves are in recovery and providing both group and individual supervision and staff problem-solving opportunities.
- ✓ An evaluation of Project BEFORE showed significant improvements in outcomes for 205 families served, including improved utilization of physical and behavioral health services and increased work-related activities. At the time of intake, 17 percent of the mothers were working or going to school. After six months of receiving support, 67 percent were working and 19 percent were in school.

## **Developing Formal Partnerships Linking Early Childhood Programs and Welfare Agencies at the State and Local Levels**

Two examples of cross-agency and intergovernmental partnerships involving early childhood and welfare programs are the Washington Partnership (in Washington state) and the West Virginia Partnership Challenge Grant. In both instances, the Head Start State Collaboration Project is involved.

## *The Washington Partnership, Washington State*

Washington state has developed an intergovernmental partnership involving state, local, and federal agencies. A direct response to welfare reform, the partnership links the state's existing network of early childhood programs, including federally- and state-funded Head Start programs and the state-funded Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP, the state's pre-kindergarten program), with the state agencies implementing welfare reform. The state partners include the state Department of Social and Health Services, the Department of Employment Security, the Department of Community Trade and Economic Development (which funds ECEAP), and the Head Start State Collaboration Project. Federal partners include Head Start and child care administrators from the Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services, Region X office. The Puget Sound Educational Service District, which administers Head Start and ECEAP in two counties, is a partner in a local pilot project, along with the local administrators of WorkFirst, Washington's TANF program.



### **The Washington Partnership**

- ✓ The initiative is a formal collaboration among federal, state, and local early childhood and welfare partners whose stated goal is to address the needs of young children and parents as families move toward economic self-sufficiency.
- ✓ The Partnership has promoted the blending of funds across Head Start, pre-kindergarten (ECEAP), and child care subsidies to provide full-day, full-year child care with comprehensive services.
- ✓ The local pilot project builds on the employment training programs that the Puget Sound Educational Service District (PSESD) has provided since 1994 to families enrolled in Head Start and ECEAP. Through contracts with the state, the PSESD provides employment services specifically designed for TANF families, which satisfy WorkFirst requirements.
- ✓ As part of the pilot project, nine "triads"—comprised of contact persons from the local welfare and employment offices and one from Head Start/ECEAP—come together periodically to improve communications and to better meet the needs of families that the agencies serve in common.
- ✓ The Partnership promotes cross-agency training among the partners in family-centered practice and principles, as well as training related to welfare implementation.
- ✓ An ongoing evaluation has provided corrective feedback to the effort, particularly around training. The evaluation has also helped the partners clarify their vision and goals and has provided guidance for replicating the initiative in other parts of the state.\*

\*These results are described in *Report of Findings from the Evaluation of the Washington Partnership*, which was prepared by the Evaluation Center of the Northwest Institute for Children and Families, School of Social Work, University of Washington-Seattle.

## BOX 5

### Lessons on Collaboration from the Washington State Partnership

- Acknowledge and honor the differences among the partners and build on the strengths of each.
- Develop a common vision and goals early in the process to help overcome differences in agency culture and emphasis.
- Establish and maintain solid interpersonal relationships and communication.
- Build the support of high-level state and federal partners and keep them informed.
- Respect and enable local creativity and energy. Identify the potential for success at the local level and understand that dynamic action happens at this level.
- Since staff turnover at all levels is predictable, develop a plan to keep the vision and momentum for the partnership ongoing.
- Develop a plan to facilitate decision-making.
- Keep records.

For other resources on collaboration see Knitzer, J.; Collins, A.; Oshinsky, C.; Stout, L.; Weiss, H.; Schilder, D.; Riel, E.; Smith, J. C. & Strategic Partners from the Starting Points Sites. (1997). *Starting points: Challenging the "quiet crisis:" A description of the Starting Points sites*. New York, NY and Cambridge, MA: National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia School of Public Health and Harvard Family Research Project, Harvard University Graduate School of Education; Melaville, A. I.; Blank, M. J.; & Asayesh, G. (1993). *Together we can: A guide for crafting a profamily system of education and human services*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement; and National Center for Services Integration. (1993–1999). Resource Brief Series. Des Moines, IA: National Center for Service Integration, c/o Child and Family Policy Center.

### *The Partnership Challenge Grant, West Virginia*

The state of West Virginia has also developed a partnership effort. It involves the West Virginia Head Start Association, the Office of Family Support (which administers West Virginia Works, the state's TANF program), the Head Start State Collaboration project, and the state's welfare reform coalition. The impetus for the partnership came from informal focus groups with Head Start families in West Virginia. These revealed significant confusion and anxiety among Head Start families about what welfare changes would mean. Serendipitously, the National Head Start Association, with support from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, was offering small challenge grants to the Head Start community to promote smoother implementation of welfare reforms for Head Start families.<sup>17</sup> This served as the immediate catalyst for the formation of the West Virginia partnership. The initial aim was to ensure that Head Start parents and staff were well informed about the changes in welfare and the implications of those changes. The initiative has evolved to address a broader set of issues related to the implementation of welfare and the needs of families with young children.



## The West Virginia Partnership Challenge Grant

- ✓ West Virginia Head Start and the Office of Family Support established a Memorandum of Understanding which outlines their shared vision for families. There are also efforts to make the Head Start Individualized Family Service Plan and the West Virginia Works Personal Responsibility Contract compatible.
- ✓ Head Start now provides families with information about West Virginia Works, and the Office of Family Support encourages families to participate in Head Start for child care and education, parenting classes, and the development of job readiness and literacy skills.
- ✓ The Partnership has promoted statewide cross training between Head Start personnel and Office of Family Support staff. Cross training also occurs at the local level.
- ✓ To foster local activities, the Partnership provides mini-grants to individual Head Start sites. One site used a mini-grant to convene local businesses and the Chamber of Commerce to share information with employers about how to maximize job opportunities and employer support for families transitioning from cash assistance.
- ✓ The partners anticipate that the ties forged through the challenge grant will continue to seed new initiatives.

## Some Overall Implications

It is clear that many of the approaches described here could be replicated elsewhere. The examples from the states reflect approaches that are within the scope of what virtually all the states could do. Most states support early childhood programs and/or have federal early childhood programs that serve low-income children. States may have TANF surpluses that could be reinvested. All states are in a position to develop formal state and local partnerships to promote the healthy development of young children in the context of welfare reform. Most states have state or community foundations that could serve as catalysts for new initiatives. And all states have the kinds of creative early childhood staff and directors who, working with the families themselves, can develop or adapt programs responsive to the emerging needs of families.

## Specific Strategies to Meet the Emerging Needs of Families with Young Children

The previous section focused on overall approaches to integrating welfare reform and early childhood agendas that are emerging at the state, community, program, and foundation levels. This section focuses on the “how to’s.” It examines what is being done to both facilitate parental success with welfare requirements and work and to promote positive outcomes for young children. From the information we gathered, across the programs and initiatives, five clusters of strategies emerge:

- Strategies to use early childhood and welfare staff to educate families about new welfare requirements.
- Strategies to adapt early childhood programs to better meet the needs of young children and families affected by welfare changes.
- Strategies to promote access to high-quality child care that addresses family needs.
- Strategies to link welfare agencies and early childhood programs and to forge cross-system partnerships.
- Strategies to create feedback mechanisms for families and those working with them to voice concerns as welfare implementation proceeds.

Examples illustrative of each of these types of strategies are highlighted below. Further details may be found in the program profiles in Appendix B.

### **Strategy 1: Use early childhood and welfare staff to educate families about new welfare requirements.**

As is true with any new major policy, there is often initial confusion and misinformation among those affected by it. This confusion seems particularly great with respect to new welfare rules and regulations, in part because states have so much discretion about how to implement the changes. Preliminary data, for instance, suggest that only one-fourth of a sample of parents and primary caregivers enrolled in or eligible for Early Head Start knew that the new rules required them to work to get cash assistance or to work after a specified time period (see Box 6). Confusion about who can get help with child care and how to access it also appears to be widespread, as reported in our sample and elsewhere.<sup>18</sup> Reported strategies to address this confusion include:

- Training child development and family support staff on new welfare rules and their implications for families.
- Including a representative from the local welfare office on multi-disciplinary teams working with families participating in intensive home visiting.
- Developing and widely disseminating family-friendly educational materials that clearly explain welfare requirements.

- Systematically incorporating information about welfare changes into what is discussed at Early Head Start and Head Start home visits.
- Training parent leaders, such as Head Start Policy Council members, on welfare requirements.

#### BOX 6

##### Parents' Knowledge of New Welfare Rules: Preliminary Findings from Early Head Start

Preliminary findings from research conducted in late 1997 and early 1998 with 985 parents and primary caregivers in 13 states who are part of the national evaluation of Early Head Start suggests that most families affected by TANF were either unaware of, or confused by, the new welfare requirements.<sup>19</sup>

All parents or primary caregivers (such as grandparents caring for young children) who completed the survey had incomes below the poverty level and most were likely to be affected by the new welfare rules. About one-half of the parents/caregivers were enrolled in Early Head Start. All of the women were either pregnant or had a very young child. About two-thirds were single parents, and more than two-fifths had less than a high school education. Just over one-third of the parents were teenagers. About one-third of the parents/caregivers were African American, nearly one-fifth were Hispanic, nearly two-fifths were Caucasian, and the remainder were from other ethnic groups. About one-third of the parents/caregivers were receiving Temporary Assistance for Need Families (TANF) at the time they enrolled in the research. The survey was administered soon after programs began to serve families and provides a baseline for ongoing study of the effects of welfare reform on Early Head Start as well as other families.

Confusion or lack of knowledge about the new welfare rules and child care assistance was common among the parents/primary caregivers in the research. More than half (54%) reported that they felt uninformed about the new work requirements or did not know how well-informed they were. Even more (80%) said that they were not well informed about child care rules and services. Parents/primary caregivers who were receiving TANF when they enrolled in the research were more likely than those not receiving TANF to feel well-informed, but even so, one-third of them did not feel well-informed about the work requirement and two-thirds did not feel well-informed about child care rules and services.

When asked what they knew about the new work requirement, very few parents/caregivers described the work requirements, time limits, or school attendance requirement. Only one-fourth of the parents/caregivers indicated that they must work to get cash assistance or that they must work after some period. Even fewer (14%) mentioned the time limit for working or receiving cash assistance. Parents/primary caregivers who were receiving TANF when they enrolled in the research were more likely to mention the work requirements (38%), time limits (20%), and school attendance requirement (14%), but the majority did not.

The parents/caregivers got whatever information they had about the new requirements from a variety of sources. The most common sources mentioned were welfare agency notices (16%), friends or family members (15%), television (14%), and someone from another agency (13%).

*Prepared by Ellen Kisker and Carol McAllister based, in part, on a policy brief developed by the Early Head Start Welfare Reform Work Group (Kathy Thornburg, Ellen Kisker, John Love, Helen Raikes, Carol McAllister, Mark Spellmann, Jean Ann Summers, Mark Swanson, Norman Watt, and Jane Wellenkamp) in collaboration with members of the Early Head Start Research Consortium based on data collected by the Consortium and analyzed by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., under contract 105-95-1936 with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The information in this box does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.*

## **Strategy 2: Adapt early childhood programs to better meet the needs of young children and families affected by welfare changes.**

Under welfare reform, mothers of young children face many challenges. They must participate in the work force, often for the first time. They must balance parenting with working between 20 to 30 hours a week—a difficult challenge for two parents with adequate incomes, let alone single parents with marginal incomes. They must address barriers to employment, such as depression, domestic violence, and substance abuse. And sometimes, because of paternity requirements, they must deal with their children’s fathers in new ways. Welfare reform has also put more pressure on non-custodial fathers to support their children.

How early childhood programs adapt to these new realities while preserving the core of their programs is a central question. That core involves providing experiences that strengthen the development of young children and help parents nurture their children, and themselves, more effectively. The strategies reported to address the changing needs of families affected by welfare changes while holding fast to this core mission are highlighted in three categories:

- Helping parents successfully meet work requirements and gain stable employment.
- Reaching out to fathers and helping mothers address paternity, child support, and other related issues.
- Adjusting hours and staffing to better meet family needs.

*Helping parents successfully meet work requirements and gain stable employment.* Many of the families served by the programs and initiatives profiled in this report have had little or no labor force experience. For such families, as one program director put it, a “dizzying array of small challenges” must be overcome to obtain and maintain employment. Issues such as getting up at the same time everyday and following basic job protocol (e.g., calling in when sick or in a family emergency) present minor but seemingly endless difficulties. Others, such as controlling anger, having a back-up plan for sick child care, or dealing with car crises, pose even greater hurdles. Reported strategies to help families manage and balance TANF work requirements, transitions to employment, and family needs include:

- Bringing welfare staff onsite through contracts with state or local TANF agencies.
- Using the time that parents with infants are exempt from work requirements to prepare them for employment.
- Working out agreements to recognize Head Start and Early Head Start job readiness activities as meeting TANF work requirements.

- Training interested TANF recipients for careers in child care.
- Reaching out to local employers to help them understand and anticipate the issues faced by families with young children entering the labor force.

*Reaching out to fathers and helping mothers address paternity, child support, and other related issues.* One of the premises of the PRWORA is that fathers have a responsibility to their children both as economic providers and as nurturers. Based on our sample, this has affected early childhood programs by highlighting the need for programs to reach out to fathers, as well as the need for staff to help mothers understand and deal with paternity-related issues that may affect their access to public assistance. Reported strategies to address these challenges include:

- Encouraging fathers to be part of the enrollment process in early childhood programs and offering them peer support groups.
- Creating work-training and parenting skill-building opportunities for fathers within early childhood programs.
- Training staff about the paternity and child support-related requirements of the PRWORA and helping them address the conflicts and dilemmas these requirements sometimes raise for mothers and their children.

*Adjusting hours and staffing to better meet family needs.* In addition to adapting their programming to address the emerging welfare-related needs of families with young children, some early childhood programs have adjusted their hours of operation and staffing practices. Reported strategies include:

- Extending program and service hours to evenings and weekends to accommodate parents' work schedules.
- Training and/or adding staff to address employment readiness, focus on fathers, provide mental health support to families and staff, and to address other emerging needs.
- Providing increased supports to frontline staff to help them manage their own stress as they deal with families who are overwhelmed, angry and/or feeling hopeless.

### **Strategy 3: Promote access to high-quality child care that addresses family needs.**

Many families with young children who are affected by welfare changes do not need intensive supports. They want to work, but they need access to jobs with livable wages and reliable transportation, and they need high-quality child care. Several program directors reported involvement in broader efforts (i.e., beyond their own programs) to strengthen the network of child care available to families affected by TANF. They reported the following strategies:

- Blending funding for child care subsidies, pre-kindergarten, and Head Start to offer full-day care with comprehensive services.
- Using Early Head Start staff to offer training to child care providers caring for infants and toddlers.
- Establishing child care resource and referral programs within welfare agencies for families receiving TANF or transitioning to work to provide them with easy access to information.
- Developing community planning teams to assess and address gaps in child care (e.g., care during non-traditional hours, infant care, and care for children with special needs).
- Training and certifying child care workers, raising salaries, and providing education and experience in child care to interested and qualified TANF recipients.
- Increasing subsidy reimbursement rates to providers and improving the timeliness of payments.

#### **Strategy 4: Link welfare agencies and early childhood programs and forge cross-system partnerships.**

Cross-agency and cross-system activities—whether formal or informal—can help generate solutions to problems that programs cannot solve on their own. Although such cross-agency and cross-system efforts, especially those that also cut across governmental levels, are not yet widespread, connections are beginning to be made, especially those that link early childhood programs and community planning mechanisms with TANF. Helping various stakeholders, especially staff from different agencies and systems, to understand each other’s goals, roles, and expectations seems to be critical to promoting the kind of integrated planning and services that families find most helpful. Reported strategies involving cross-system activities fall into three major categories:

- Planning
- Training
- Coordinating and integrating service delivery

*Planning.* Several cross-system strategies involve planning and facilitating communication among stakeholders. They include:

- Involving a broad range of agencies in a county-wide planning process about how to make welfare reform successful for families with young children.
- Developing a shared vision statement, goals, and new procedures across public agencies.
- Creating opportunities through formal partnerships to promote cross-system dialogue at both state and local levels.

- Developing forums to inform the larger community about the changes in welfare at a general level, as well as how they impact families with young children in particular.

*Training.* Reported cross-system training strategies include:

- Conducting joint trainings for Head Start and local welfare staff as part of larger partnership efforts.
- Training welfare workers onsite at parent-child centers to educate them about family support perspectives and strategies.
- Orchestrating county-wide cross-system training involving TANF, child welfare, substance abuse, domestic violence, and mental health.

*Coordinating and integrating service delivery.* Over half the programs profiled reported concerns about families having to deal with multiple agencies and systems to get the services they need, emphasizing the stress and conflicts this sometimes creates. Strategies they are implementing to address these issues include:

- Creating statewide or state/local partnerships that formally link welfare agencies and early childhood programs to streamline service delivery to families with young children.
- Investing TANF dollars in child development, family support, and other programs serving TANF families.
- Co-locating welfare and child care programs to make services more convenient and to reduce transportation barriers.
- Using multi-disciplinary teams with representatives from multiple systems, including TANF, to help home visitors coordinate service delivery to families.

### **Strategy 5: Create feedback mechanisms for families and those working with them to voice concerns as welfare implementation proceeds.**

Any policy change as sweeping as the restructuring of the nation's welfare system in 1996 will inevitably produce some unexpected results that may require finetuning or reworking. Thus, many programs reported the need to create opportunities for families and service providers to provide feedback to policymakers about how welfare changes are—or are not—working and about how the needs of young children and their families could be better met. Reported strategies for doing so include:

- Holding focus groups with families to assess their needs.
- Using a network of knowledgeable providers and the families they serve to provide formal and informal feedback to the state welfare implementation team.

- Providing feedback from Head Start Policy Councils to policymakers through a state/local partnership.
- Bringing decision-makers to parent support groups and on home visits so they can better understand the issues faced by families affected by welfare policies.

In sum, the strategies reported by this small group of programs and initiatives strongly suggest that early childhood programs and, to a lesser extent, welfare agencies are actively engaged in trying to find new ways of providing family support and continuing to promote the well-being of young children in the context of welfare reform. Some programs are focusing on ensuring that families get all the help they are allowed. Others are training or adding staff to assist parents in preparing for jobs, helping them to understand what to expect in the work place and what is expected of them. Many are trying to find ways to celebrate family strengths in coping with the changes that they are experiencing. Still others are working to create peer networks of families or to create mechanisms to give families a greater voice. All are finding small or large ways to respond to the new realities facing families in their programs.

## BOX 7

### The Challenge Ahead

In a recent article, David Berns and Barbara Drake of the El Paso County, Colorado Department of Human Services, which administers TANF, articulate the challenge ahead.

*“Despite [the] good news [lowered caseloads and sometimes lowered child welfare utilization], we know that many of our communities and families still have many needs. The low paying jobs many former welfare recipients have secured may offer more money than their TANF payment, but such jobs are still not sufficient to move these families out of poverty. An appropriate strategy needs to be set in place to help formulate and support long-term self-sufficiency goals: to develop skills to move into higher paying jobs, to manage family demands competently in the face of requirements for good daily work performance, and to attend to family development tasks, so that the next generation can build on the successes of this one. Addressing these complex and challenging issues is, in the final analysis, more important to the long-term success of the TANF program than simply getting people into the labor force.”*

Source: Berns, D. & Drake, B. (1998). Promoting safe and stable families through welfare reform. *The Prevention Report: National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice (2)*, pp. 4–8.

## Common Themes and Concerns

We asked those with whom we spoke to share their reflections about welfare reform at this point in time, including observations, concerns, and issues that remain to be addressed. The responses cluster in three categories: family issues, issues related to child development and family support programs, and issues related to child care for working families.

### Family Issues

Staff report both gains and risks for families under welfare reform.

- Almost all programs reported that for some families, working has been a positive experience, building a sense of pride and accomplishment.
- Almost all programs reported widespread concern about increased stress levels among other families, particularly those affected by substance abuse, mental illness, domestic violence, and/or physical illness. Most also stated that there are few community or state planning efforts on behalf of this vulnerable population and few intensive services that staff can turn to on behalf of these families.<sup>20</sup>
- Staff worry about what will happen when time limits hit the small group of families who are unlikely to obtain and maintain employment (e.g., parents with developmental or emotional limitations and parents whose children have severe developmental or emotional limitations). In some states, policy decisions about who will be exempt from work requirements have not been made, creating confusion at the direct service level.<sup>21</sup>
- To a lesser extent, there were also expressions of concern about how welfare changes are affecting children, as they try to adjust to increased separation from their parents (who are spending more time in employment-related activities) and to increased parental exhaustion and stress.

Staff members also expressed concern about what lies ahead for families. Most often cited were the following:

- Concerns about how families will manage if parents meet work requirements but earn wages that are too low to support their families.
- Concerns about what will happen to working families who remain on TANF to supplement meager wages but exhaust their benefits (by reaching time limits), leaving them unprotected in the future.
- Concerns about how parents who must accept low-wage jobs in the short-run will get the education and training they need to earn more money for the long-run. (Under the 1996 welfare law, strict rules govern education and training, making it difficult for low-skill workers to increase their skills and earnings potential.)

- Concerns about what will happen to families who manage to leave cash assistance for employment but find they are no longer eligible for child care subsidies or health benefits.

### **Program Issues**

- There is a perceived tension between the imperatives of welfare reform and the customary approaches of many early childhood and family support programs. Staff feel that their success with families facing challenges depends upon their ability to build positive and trusting relationships with them, a process that takes time. Some programs explicitly try to provide a “reparenting” experience to parents, modeling for them new ways of interacting so they can in turn try new ways of relating to their children. Others simply try to help families by working on issues of most concern to the family. TANF puts new time constraints on these processes.
- Some staff reported increased difficulty in enrolling families in child development and family support programs.<sup>22</sup> Others worry about how they can promote strong parent-child bonds when parents are so focused on meeting TANF requirements.
- Some programs report more difficulty engaging parents in leadership building activities, such as governance councils, and other community activities. In the past these have been important steps in building confidence in parents, who have then gone on to play leadership roles in the community, returned to school, or found better jobs.

### **Child Care Issues**

- Almost all of the respondents expressed concerns about child care. The concerns ranged from an inadequate supply of regulated care to poor quality to families not having access to subsidies. Taken together, problems with child care capacity, quality, and subsidy policies resulted in many families being forced to rely on a patchwork of arrangements with multiple caregivers, instead of stable arrangements with well-trained and supported caregivers.
- Despite the efforts of some states and localities to increase the capacity of regulated child care, some programs reported that it remains insufficient. Some staff expressed concern that there was no regulated care available for non-traditional hours (although others stated that many parents who require overnight care prefer informal arrangements). Staff expressed concerns about the quality of care across all settings, from regulated center-based care to care by relatives. (In the case of relative care, one program expressed concerns that parents were forced to rely on relative caregivers who had difficulties performing their own parenting roles.)

- Some programs reported concerns about subsidy policies, some of which were specific to their state or community. These concerns included providers not being reimbursed adequately or in a timely way, narrow eligibility criteria, and high co-payment requirements which made care unaffordable.

### **Some Overall Implications**

A few of the issues and concerns discussed above point to additional strategies that could be generated from within. For example, some early childhood program staff expressed concerns about families losing child care and health benefits upon transitioning to employment, yet few sites mentioned strategies to inform families about how to ensure continued access to benefits for which they are eligible. Under the provisions of the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) created by federal legislation in 1997, states have greatly expanded health insurance eligibility for children, so that most children need not be uninsured.<sup>23</sup> But families cannot avail themselves of such benefits if they are not aware of them or do not know how to access them. This suggests that both early childhood programs and welfare agencies could do more to make comprehensive information available to families about how to secure various benefits for which they are potentially eligible. These include not only child care subsidies and health insurance but also the federal Earned Income Tax Credit, state income tax credits, and food stamps, as well as more specialized programs and services.<sup>24</sup>

It is important to note that issues or challenges reported by some programs were opportunities for innovation in others. For example, the child care programs and initiatives profiled in this report, as well as some of the child care strategies reported by other programs, address many of the concerns expressed above. This suggests the importance of disseminating strategies widely.



# Reflections and Observations

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The strategies reported here for promoting and enhancing the well-being of young children while ensuring parental success in the transition to work are only one component of a bigger picture. That big picture is reflected in the observations below, which includes points of potential leverage for the future as well as areas of special risk.

*Catalysts for helping early childhood programs and welfare agencies respond to the changing needs of families take many forms.* In the approaches highlighted in this report, most typically, the catalysts came from within the programs themselves, generally as staff and directors responded to the concerns and confusion of families. But outside forces, such as government at all levels, foundations (for example, the W. K. Kellogg, Skillman, and Frey foundations in Michigan), or national organizations (such as the National Head Start Association) can also be important, providing some combination of challenge grants, vision, and resources.

*Early childhood program strategies to help parents with employment have, for the most part, focused on obtaining a job. Few programs reported support groups or other strategies to help families deal with workplace issues (e.g., anger management), retain jobs, or cope with TANF sanctions.* It has been said that getting off and staying off welfare is a process, not an event. Indeed, from one perspective, welfare changes are just beginning. It is not uncommon for major federal legislation to be in effect for many years before a clear picture of impacts and issues emerges. But this legislation ticks to a new policy clock. It involves getting information about the new rules, getting jobs, retaining jobs, and avoiding sanctions and time limits. Not surprisingly, early childhood programs have not been able to address all of these issues.

*Early childhood programs are deeply concerned about the most vulnerable families, but few report any systematic strategies to engage in community-wide planning or TANF-linked planning on their behalf.* Vulnerable families are viewed as those likely to be sanctioned or to reach time limits without adequate income. They encompass many families with severe family and work-related barriers, including substance abuse, domestic violence, and mental illness, but their needs are just beginning to be recognized.

*The variation in state and local welfare policies has significant implications for programs for young children and families.* Perhaps most characteristic of the implementation of TANF is the reality of enormous state-by-state and even community-by-community variation. State-level policy decisions set ceilings or frame opportunities for programs seeking to improve outcomes for young children and their parents. Whether early childhood programs, or only employers

and employment programs, are seen as a resource in implementing welfare reforms makes a difference. Whether early childhood programs have an opportunity to influence decisions about the implementation of TANF makes a difference. Whether early childhood programs working with infants and toddlers see the time period that mothers are exempted from work requirements (which varies by state and even by county) as an opportunity makes a difference. Whether programs can intervene with a particular parent to address a particular barrier makes a difference. All these things matter in ways not true in the past.

*With some notable exceptions (such as the programs in Ohio and El Paso County, Colorado profiled in this report), child development and family support programs are not seen as a resource to those implementing TANF.* For those young children and families affected by welfare reform who are enrolled in early childhood programs, parents tend to trust the staff and the programs. This means that staff can be allies in helping families understand and accept changing rules, often more easily than strangers. Further, early childhood programs, if given the right supports from other community agencies, may have the special capacity to reach and motivate the most distressed families.

*Most reported strategies to link TANF and early childhood programs are informal. The links have been deliberate but not systematic; most have been initiated by early childhood programs.* This report reflects a cross section of the types of early childhood programs serving families affected by TANF. As such, it provides a map for TANF administrators and planners interested in using the early childhood community more deliberately as a resource in the successful implementation of TANF.

*Among the early childhood programs profiled, there were only a few instances in which programs had been able to influence policies related to TANF or to partner with community and state welfare administrators to address emerging policy issues.* Relatively few programs reported the opportunity to participate in policy decisions about welfare implementation, or even to provide decision-makers with feedback about how the process is working either at the state or the community level, even though they know first-hand how families and young children are being affected.

*The experience with welfare is making questions about family income more salient for early childhood program staff.* Virtually all those with whom we spoke commented on the issue of “livable wages,” recognizing that even when jobs are available, they often pay too little, provide too few, if any, benefits, and do not offer long-term opportunities for advancement.