

The Impact of US Welfare Reform on Children's Well Being: Minnesota Focus

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This chapter presents what is known about the impact of welfare reform on children's well being in the United States (US). Trends in the US and Minnesota since national welfare reform was introduced in 1996 are reviewed. Then outcomes in the Phillips neighborhood of Minneapolis (Hennepin County), Minnesota, where the authors have been exploring perceptions of parents who use services at Southside Family Nurturing Center, are discussed. The chapter concludes with discussion and recommendations.

Welfare reform = Welfare-to-work

Until 1996, the US welfare program for poor families was called Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). It was funded with federal taxes and administered jointly with the states. Although states could set their own threshold for the income below which families would become eligible for cash assistance, and many set this level far below poverty, all eligible families were

guaranteed some income. In the UK, the Department of Work and Pensions defines poverty as household income below 60% of median income after housing costs. By contrast the formula used in the US is not tied to median income, but is a measure of need; in 2003, for a family of three, the poverty line using this measure was \$15,260 or 36% of the median annual household income, which in 2002 was \$42,409.

Over time, AFDC had presented difficulties since federal rules often failed to support parents' employment goals or move families out of poverty. In the early 1990s, Minnesota experimented with reforming AFDC by initiating the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP). MFIP provided supports, encouragement and requirements for parents to move off public assistance and into gainful employment (Hage 2004b). The original MFIP pilot maintained publicly funded financial aid, health care, childcare, and other services until families' earnings reached 140% over the poverty line. MFIP was also evaluated to determine its impact on children's well being, i.e. their academic, cognitive, mental and physical health, overall development, and social, emotional and behavioral outcomes (Crichton 2003; Crichton and Meyer 2003; Hage 2004b; Hollister *et al.* 2003; MDRC 2003; Minnesota Department of Human Services 2001, 2003, 2004). The results from the pilot were positive. For example, parents in the original experimental program enjoyed significant increase in income and employment compared to the control group with

AFDC, and their children performed better in school and had fewer behavior problems. Incidents of domestic violence also declined.

In 1996, President Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (Public Law 104.193). This repealed AFDC. The primary responsibility for administering the new legislation devolved to states. New time limited financial aid programs were introduced through Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), but financial assistance to poor families was no longer guaranteed. Now parents on welfare are referred to as 'job seekers' (Link and Bibus 2000, p.36). This historical policy change transformed the US welfare system 'from one focused on eligibility and cash assistance to an employment based program' (McPhee and Bronstein 2003, p.34).

Under TANF, states receive grants from the federal government designated up to a certain amount for cash assistance to eligible parents. The grants can also fund training (which could include education to a limited extent), preparing parents for employment, and childcare while parents are working. States are also encouraged to use the grants to support marriage and prevent teenage pregnancy. Other welfare programs, such as food stamps, can be added on top of the monthly assistance that a family receives. TANF rules, however, require clients to seek work first before receiving cash assistance. In addition, cash assistance is limited to no more than sixty months during a parent's lifetime.

Able-bodied adults without children are not eligible for federal cash assistance through this program and state general assistance programs for adults have been cut back or eliminated entirely.

Tighter eligibility requirements have meant that assistance may only be available to parents with young children, for example, and tougher penalties for not complying with the rules include reductions in or complete elimination of cash assistance. While food stamps and medical assistance for the children might remain available, parents who lose their cash assistance face subsequent loss of housing and other basic family needs which could in turn become factors leading to neglect of their children and potentially to voluntary or court ordered placement of their children in foster care.

Minnesota modified its MFIP program in 1998 to conform to the new federal requirements. However in contrast to other states, it tried to reduce child poverty as well as increase parents' employment. The MFIP program supports parents seeking jobs by providing transportation, childcare, health insurance coverage, or educational assistance, casework services, budgeting advice and job training (see below) as well as cash, but also imposes sanctions such as a 30% reduction in monthly cash grants for failing to comply with rules. While many MFIP families successfully moved from welfare to work under this combination of incentives and inducements, a substantial proportion are still in poverty.

Since the 2000 economic recession, state budget cuts have resulted in less financial aid for MFIP participants and increased sanctions. Moreover, parents receiving housing subsidies have had their MFIP grants cut by \$50 per month; those receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) for family members with a disability now have their grants cut by \$125 per month. To set this in context, a family with one child and two parents, one of whom is disabled, would have received \$564 per month in SSI benefits plus \$532 in MFIP cash assistance. This total of \$1098 per month plus food stamps has been reduced to \$973 per month due to the new cuts; an amount far below the poverty line. And there is no longer increased aid for an additional child.

Globally, faith in the market rises while families' income drops

The 'welfare-to-work' strategy is the hallmark of welfare reform worldwide. Welfare policies increasingly require parents to find employment rather than rely on public assistance. The underlying shift in philosophy introduced in the United States has also influenced the provision of state benefits in the UK (see Chapters Two and Three). Goldberg and Rosenthal's (eds) 2002 study of nine countries, including the US, found that 'benefits are more closely tied to past and present employment or denied altogether. This...is concurrent with deteriorating employment opportunities' (p.339). 'Nonetheless,' they concluded, 'faith in the market has risen at the very time when market income leaves more people impoverished' (p.347). This market-based strategy leads to

adjustment programs, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank requiring countries to reduce social service spending in favor of dependence upon the marketplace.

In the US, trust in the market has resulted in many parents remaining poor even when working full time (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities 1999).

Requiring parents to 'work first' and rely on public assistance only as a time-limited last resort has become the dominant feature of welfare policies.

Consequently, poor parents must attempt to meet their families' needs within unpredictable job markets while state budget cuts strain neighborhood resources. Between 1996 and 1998, the financial resources for lone parents declined, and the number in extreme poverty increased (Weil and Finegold (eds) 2002).

In the first six years following the introduction of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, the percentage of children whose family income was below the official poverty level (less than \$15,020 for a family of three) increased from 16.4% to 17.2% (United States Census Bureau 2003). There is now a wide gap between the well being of children in low-income families and that of children from higher income families (Weil and Finegold 2002). For example, in 2002 children in low-income families were three times more likely to be in poor health (Vandivere, Gallagher and Moore 2004).

While the number of parents receiving welfare has fallen by half nationwide, one in four of those leaving the welfare rolls are not finding work (Mathematica Policy Research 2003) and 'the number living in poverty has fallen by only 11 percent' (Hage 2004a, p.AA9). In Minnesota, three quarters of those parents who expend their eligibility for public cash assistance have incomes below \$15,202; less than half of that needed to meet children's needs (Crichton 2003, p.21, footnote 18). As elsewhere in the US (Finegold and Staveteig 2002), children of color are over-represented among those living in poverty. For example, 32% of African American children live in poverty compared with 6% of white children (Children's Defense Fund Minnesota 2003).

In Hennepin County, Minnesota, the percentage of children in poor families increased from 12.9% in 2001 to 15.5% in 2002. In the Phillips neighborhood, child poverty is even more pervasive. Of the 5,958 children, 2,348 (39.4%) are living below the poverty line. The study discussed later in this chapter explored the perceptions of parents in this neighborhood regarding the effects of welfare reform policies – an issue that is clearly critical.

However before their views are considered in detail, this chapter reviews more broadly the impact that welfare reform has had on children's well being. The

authors focus particularly on the experience of parents leaving welfare and trying to rely on the labor market to meet their children's needs.

What we know

If the main purpose of welfare reform was to reduce the number of parents receiving cash assistance, welfare-to-work policies appear successful. Hays (2003) documented a decline by over half in welfare rolls 'from 12.2 million recipients at the start of reform to 5.3 million in 2001' (p.221). However, she also pointed out that poverty levels have not declined at a corresponding rate; half of working parents were not making wages sufficient to raise them out of poverty' (p.18). Acknowledging the positive results of welfare reform such as TANF funded 'wage supplements and funds for education, training, childcare and work-related expenses' (p.237), Hays concluded: 'Yet in the long run and in the aggregate, poor mothers and children are worse off now than they were prior to reform' (p.226).

Duncan and Chase-Lansdale agreed: 'Caseload declines have been dramatic, but caseload declines do not necessarily translate into enhanced family and child well-being' (2001, p.3). Indeed, data on the number of former recipients not employed or returning to the rolls, reviewed by Loprest in 2003, suggested 'that early employment successes in welfare reform have not been sustained' (p.1). 'Employment is more difficult to find and to keep, and for some families unemployment is a precursor to a return to cash assistance' (p.2). Haskins

(2001), who viewed welfare reform as generally positive, also urged policy makers to 'help floundering families' with extensions on time limits, continuing food stamp eligibility, and expanded use of tax credits (pp.284-285).

Increased income is key to children's well being

Dunifon, Kalil, and Danziger (2003) summarized welfare reform's impact:

'Overall, then, existing research supports that the movement from welfare to work may have benefits for children, and that such benefits are most likely to be found when the transition off of welfare is accompanied by an increase in total family income' (p.61). However, many parents moving from welfare to work experience a loss of income, not an increase.

In 2002, Zaslow and colleagues completed an integrative review of several studies of states' programs, including MFIP. While they reminded readers that findings provide evidence only of particular programs' impact on children's well being, their analysis calls attention to important potential effects of welfare-to-work policies on parents' ability to meet children's needs. They determined that 'children in families currently receiving welfare and children in families that have left welfare within the past two years were at consistently greater risk than children in high income families (>200% of the poverty level)' (p.92).

In her review of welfare reform effects in the US and Canada, Hardina (2003) found that many former recipients experienced substantial economic hardship. Findings that some parents moving from welfare to work are not better off financially are troubling in the light of the evidence now that increased family income, not just parental employment, is key to improving children's well being (Morris and Gennetian 2003). Gennetian and Miller (2002) used a rigorous experimental design to examine results of the original pilot MFIP program. Gathering lone mothers' reports on children's well being (such as academic achievement, engagement in school, and behavior), they found that children whose parents received income supplements only, without being required to participate in the other program elements (such as casework services, budgeting advice, and job training), had consistently more positive outcomes than children whose parents relied solely on welfare or on work that did not raise family income 140% above poverty: 'These experimental impacts suggest a strong link between increases in income and improved child well-being' (p.726). After a similar study in Michigan, Dunifon and colleagues (2003) concluded that 'results from these two studies suggest that children benefit, particularly in terms of behavioral adjustment, when welfare policies are such that women are able to combine welfare and employment' to maintain income above poverty (p.77).

As summarized by Weil and Finegold (2002), 'parental work appears to yield better outcomes for children only when it results in additional resources for the

family and then only in some subgroups' (p.xxii). For example, 'programs that resulted in increased maternal education were also sometimes associated with favorable impacts on young children's cognitive development' (p.81).

Just having a job is not enough if parents are to be successful in meeting their children's needs (Billings, Moor, and McDonald 2003). To meet their children's needs, parents who move from welfare to work must have access to transition services such as food stamps, health coverage, childcare, transportation, and housing subsidies. Health coverage is particularly critical in the US, since there is no universal national health service and many employers do not pay for employees' health care, especially in part-time positions. Even if parents are working, children face increased risks for maltreatment and foster care if families lose income or medical benefits.

The MFIP program conforms to federal requirements by introducing a sixty month (five year) time limit on eligibility over a parent's lifetime, no matter how many children they may have. In a study on the effects of these time limits, half of the parents surveyed were working, but 72% lived below the poverty line (Crichton 2003). Most of those employed did not have health insurance. Over 80% reported that their lives were the same or worse than when they were participating in MFIP; only 18% reported that their lives were better. Forty-four percent had experienced discrimination in seeking jobs. African American parents are over-represented among those who are reaching

time limits in Minnesota and represent 32% of MFIP recipients compared with 3.5% of the general population. The Office of the Legislative Auditor (2002) found that income gains for MFIP recipients first moving from welfare to work soon disappear as their increased earnings are offset by decreased welfare assistance. Despite the hardships, parents often retain a hopeful attitude, as summarized in the Minnesota time limit study: 'When asked to name what helps them to get along each day, the number one response to this open-ended question was that their children keep them going, as they take care of them and provide for them (38 percent)' (Crichton 2003, p.19; see also Crewe 2003; McPhee and Bronstein 2003; Rank 1994; Tweedie 2001).

Healthcare coverage loss

Programs such as MFIP may include health coverage for participants for the sixty months that they receive welfare assistance and for a year after they have found employment; however, few employers offer health insurance for casual workers and so coverage often ceases once participants move from welfare to work. The US Department of Health and Human Services (2002) reports that one in four children in families moving off welfare are without health insurance. Evidence related to the lack of health care coverage for parents moving from welfare to work and other systemic discrimination is also emerging from the longitudinal, random sample study that Hollister and colleagues (2003) conducted in Hennepin County. MFIP participants who were employed most extensively during the study period also were most likely to be

without healthcare coverage. In addition, 'nineteen percent of all participants studied stated that there was at least one time when their children did not get needed medical attention -- especially dental care' (p.4).

Impact on vulnerable children

Parents in the Hennepin County study 'found their work and training experience to be helpful, with immigrant groups reporting the greatest appreciation' (Hollister *et al.* 2003, p.4). However, participants of color earned much less per hour (and \$200 less per month) than white participants: 'Children of color on average live in households where the full-time wages their parents earned were more than \$2 (full-time) and \$3 (part-time) an hour less than the wages white parents earned on average' (p.15). Children of color were also more likely to be in poverty. Moreover, children whose parents worked most experienced more disruptions in their schooling. In addition, 'there were concerns about the lack of evening, early morning, and special needs childcare' (p.4). These families were better off financially when working, but they also reported that 'the children's well being had been affected by the MFIP experience and stated that family time together and household routines had been compromised' (p.4). Some of the parents who were working extensively indicated that not receiving income support to stay home and raise their children and instead being required to work outside their home resulted in 'lack of time for family routine', 'less time with the children' ...and 'parents stressed'' (p.15).

Summary of what we know

In summarizing the results of the earlier review of research on welfare reform in the US (Link and Bibus 2000, pp.114-124), the authors identified positive results such as heightened public awareness of child poverty, promotion of public/private partnerships, workforce development, and encouragement of family friendly employers. They were troubled by the inadequate minimum wage, policies that did not recognize parents' care of children as legitimate work, the lack of choice for low income parents to be homemakers, and punitive rhetoric reflecting a deepening conviction that welfare was a question of morality instead of social obligation or human rights. We now know that millions of US children whose parents move from welfare to work are at risk of 'social exclusion' (Elliott and Mayadas 1999). This risk increases when parents are not able to realize earnings gains through steady, well-paid work with benefits and when transition supports diminish or are absent altogether. For a closer glimpse through parents' eyes of the impact of welfare-to-work policies, this chapter now returns to the study of the perceptions of mothers attending the Southside Family Nurturing Center in the Phillips neighborhood of Hennepin County, Minnesota, mentioned above.

Parents' perceptions: focus group at southside

Phillips neighborhood

The Phillips neighborhood is one of the oldest sections of Minneapolis and is located just south of the central business district. As a result of the physical 'walling off' of the neighborhood by highways and the movement of many middle class families to the suburbs, the neighborhood's population declined about 30% from 1960 to 1990 (24,776 to 17,272). However, the 2000 Census showed the population had risen again, by 14.8% since 1990, due to an increase in Black/African American and Hispanic groups and those reporting 'some other race', while the White, American Indian and Asian/Pacific Island populations had declined. This recent population increase has contributed to a population density in Phillips that is over 68% higher than the rest of the city as well as sharply contrasting in racial and ethnic population. The number of children has also increased since 1960; in the 2000 Census dependent children accounted for over one third of the population in Phillips (35.8 %) in contrast to only 25.69% for the city. While the region has experienced economic prosperity, Phillips has experienced increasing poverty as shown in Table 4.1.

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Even though the 2000 Census indicates that poverty rates in Phillips had abated to a degree, many individuals and families are still experiencing deep and persistent poverty. Four of the eight census districts (or tracks) in Phillips have poverty rates exceeding the city's threshold goal of 33.5% of residents (O'Neal and Marano 2003.)

INSERT TABLE 4.2 ABOUT HERE

Today's 'jobless recovery' does not bode well for those Phillips residents who have reached the MFIP/TANF time limits. Even more foreboding are 1998 health statistics indicating that:

- 42.1% of mothers in Phillips had less than a high school education;
- only 30.5% of mothers received first trimester prenatal care;
- 67.3% of mothers were unmarried women; and
- the infant mortality rate in Phillips was 23.9 per 1,000 live births.

These statistics reveal the dramatic impact on low-income women and their children who live in an inner-city community such as Phillips. With its patterns of persistent and concentrated poverty, the neighborhood is a vivid representation of the transformation affecting many US inner cities. It is within this community context that the focus group participants live and must attempt to provide for their children's well being.

Southside Family Nurturing Center

Entering its thirtieth year, Southside Family Nurturing Center is based in the Phillips neighborhood. Southside believes in the strength of families and in co-operative strategies to prevent child abuse and neglect. The agency was established to work with whole families rather than identified 'problem'

members and has been recognized as innovative in its holistic systems approach. Most of the 150 adults and children receiving services have experienced neglect, poverty, drug abuse, child protection inquiries, housing and transport concerns.

Southside offers three main areas of service: The Center-based Early Childhood Education Program, Home Based Services, and the Fathers' Program. Set in a Victorian four-storey house, the agency is a welcoming place: a site visitor recently commented: 'If I were a child, I would want to be here.'

In January 2004, two focus groups were convened of parents who used MFIP services and the supports offered at Southside.

Parents were invited to share perceptions on how moving from welfare to work had helped them support and raise their children and were asked if they had encountered difficulties. Particular attention was given to neighborhood supports and barriers such as access to jobs, childcare, housing, education, financial institutions and banks, social services, health care, and transportation (Zedlewski 2003).

Focus Group Findings

Two focus group sessions were conducted. Sixteen mothers participated, five in the first group and eleven in the second; all volunteered from two of the support groups at Southside Family Nurturing Center. Most of the mothers lived in the Phillips neighborhood and all used the services of Southside as well as MFIP. In a survey participants completed afterwards, respondents indicated an age range from 22 to 40 years old (mean = 27.9; median = 26). They identified themselves as American Indian (11); as Black, African American or African (2); as White, Caucasian or European American (1); as Asian (1); and as Hispanic (1). All but one of the women from the second group identified themselves as American Indian. Fifteen of the respondents rented and one was a homeowner. Thirteen estimated their yearly household income at below \$10,000. Fourteen were lone parents, raising between one and eight children (average total number of children = 3.1; average under six years old = 2.0). Eleven parents did not have a high school education, but four had been to community or technical college and one had a college degree.

In the parents' responses to questions about their experience with welfare reform, the following themes emerged:

Intrusion

MFIP rules require participants to document job-seeking efforts. The mothers shared a sense of intrusion into their private lives related to using MFIP. They objected to having to write down what they did all day, as if they were on

parole and their job counselor or eligibility worker were their probation officer. Some MFIP staff brushed mothers off, treated them rudely, or seemed to enjoy reporting to the mother that she was cut off assistance.

Negative, punitive changes

Even though we asked the mothers about positive changes in their lives, they focused mostly on negative changes such as the recent housing subsidy penalty whereby if a parent on MFIP also receives rental assistance, \$50 per month is deducted from their cash assistance. They called this and the similar reduction in grants if they received supplemental income for family members with a disability (SSI) 'not fair,' and they experienced these cuts as punishing. They resented:

- The pressure to work first and insinuations that if they did not move off welfare and into full-time jobs, their children might be removed;
- Having to ask permission to attend school as part of their plan to seek gainful employment;
- The new co-payments wherein parents must now contribute money from their own pockets to cover a portion of the costs required for medical assistance and childcare;
- Having less money; and
- Sanctions (punitive reductions in income, for example for not documenting 40 hours per week of work or job-seeking activities).

Positive supports

Participants agreed that life is 'much tougher now' both for themselves and others they know on MFIP. Nevertheless, they shared some positive aspects:

- Rental assistance and once a year emergency cash assistance (\$300);
- Referral to transitional housing; and
- Medical assistance and childcare coverage sustained during the first year after MFIP.

Effect on children's well being

Some participants had more difficulty identifying changes in the children's lives resulting from welfare reform. At first they could not see how being on MFIP was relevant to their children's lives. They explained that welfare reform concerned adults, not children. One said that she tried to shield her child from having to worry about how she supported the family. When asked if their children were better off, worse off, or the same since welfare reform, some replied 'the same,' 'not bad,' 'in between'; others replied 'worse'; and some found the question irrelevant. Then, after exchanges among participants, some suggested that the cuts in childcare funding, losses in children's interaction time with other children in childcare, and reduction in family income did harm their children despite their desire to buffer them from these effects. They called the time limits 'crazy,' though some thought that other new rules encouraging work were helpful and should have been in place earlier. Others commented on how stress on parents due to budget cuts led to stress on

children; and not being able to purchase clothes or shoes or toys contributed to parents being 'stressed out.'

Effect on parents' well being

Participants wanted to respond to a similar question about whether they as parents were better off, worse off or the same. They stated 'worse off!' and gave examples of rising prescription costs resulting in less money for other needs, reductions in family income resulting from the new deduction of \$125 SSI benefits, and the rule prohibiting additional cash assistance to care for new children. The sentiment expressed by one mother: 'I'd rather be working' was met with affirming nods. One mother reported that she had just been laid off her job, due in part to discrimination. Some wished that they had more opportunity and support for further education. Some noted that food shelves¹ were closing. However, they added that more supports were available through Southside and other resources in the Phillips neighborhood than elsewhere.

What improvements would parents recommend to lawmakers?

The mothers recommended the following improvements in welfare reform policies:

- Explain the time limits and reductions of housing assistance and SSI;
- Enforce the work rules, but lift the time limits; provide more extensions on the time limits; 'Since there is a five year limit, at

least make [sure] that families or single parents are able to maintain themselves on their own. While they are receiving assistance, definitely help them to be prepared';

- Although the rules and expectations of welfare reform might not have a direct impact on children's well being or success, an increase in cash assistance and food stamps would help;
- Parents should be able to make a living while off welfare and at least \$9.45 per hour at work; money that parents receive from their tribe or reservation should not be deducted from welfare grants;
- Make sure there are jobs out there with living wages;
- Childcare should be available at more times, more flexibly and for extended hours; and
- Encourage ('push us toward') more and better education and job training.

Finally, one group asserted that researchers should:

Bring a group of mothers to testify at the legislature!

Implications of the focus group findings

This case study helps assess the impact of welfare reform in the US. The mothers in the focus groups are pragmatic, resourceful, and responsible, just as those in other ethnographic studies (Almgren, Ymashiro and Ferguson 2002;

Lengyel (ed) 2001; McPhee and Bronstein 2003; Seccombe 1999). Parents see the benefits of moving from welfare to work, if jobs can be stable and bring in adequate income. However, they also value transitional support services such as childcare, extended health care coverage, access to higher education, and help with transportation. Evidence from welfare reform experiments, such as MFIP, supports these parents' conclusions regarding the importance of transitional services. But funding these services, which typically cost more than cash assistance, will require more government investments and continuing partnerships between government, private foundations, and businesses. In its most successful form as a pilot project without time limits, without drastic sanctioning, and with a high threshold of 140% of the poverty level before parents needed to rely entirely on their wages, MFIP cost between \$1900 and \$3800 more per family per year than AFDC (Minnesota Department of Human Services 2000). Research on MFIP's impact on children's well being bolsters earlier findings related to the detrimental effects of poverty and the conversely beneficial effects of increases in income for children of working poor parents (Gennetian and Miller 2002). These increases, beyond what many families will be able to find in the employment market, require substantial investment of public money.

In an economy where most families need two adult earners in order to meet children's needs, lone parents deserve to have the government as their partner to supplement their earnings and benefits (Hage 2004b). Beyond income

increases, the provision of comprehensive and on-going transition services such as support groups has been found to be associated with parents being less likely to return to welfare (Anderson-Butcher, Khairallah and Race-Bigelow 2004). The mutual aid observed among the parents at Southside Family Nurturing Services and their process of providing information and encouragement to each other demonstrate that support groups should be part of any comprehensive welfare reform package.

Summary and recommendations

This chapter has discussed implications for practice in neighborhoods that are most vulnerable to seemingly intractable poverty. Narrated experience of parents who are poor puts a human face on the interaction between people and place and highlights the barriers to successful employment. These include lack of affordable housing, unreliable transportation, inadequate childcare, health difficulties, low wages, acute stressful events, discrimination, and insufficient experience and preparation (Carnevale and Desrochers 1999; Nightingale 2002; Strawn 1998; Weil and Finegold 2002; Wilder Research Center 2003). Immigrants and refugees encounter particularly challenging obstacles (Pinto 2002; Shelton and Roy 2001). When parents face lack of education services, sanctions for unsuccessful job search, employers 'unfriendly' to families, and poor quality childcare, children often suffer (Sherman 1999). 'Family friendly' employers are scarce but can be found, and their qualities include attention to family needs, including child sick leave, childcare, flexible maternity leave,

fast-track re-entry after negotiated family leave, and the willingness to stay abreast of the balancing act between family and work life.

Conditions such as unsuccessful job searches and poor quality childcare facilities can be anticipated and buffered by progressive social policies. This chapter offers several recommendations for improvements in welfare reform including more universal and substantial income maintenance for parents without arbitrary time limits; continuing health care coverage; childcare assistance; food, housing and transportation subsidies; and social services such as the support groups at Southside Family Nurturing Center. With this information, lawmakers, administrators, practitioners and neighborhood residents can join in a united effort to lift children out of poverty (Bannerjee 2002; Lens 2002).

However, we must not underestimate the uphill nature of this effort, given the characteristics of American society that Goldberg 2002, (p.34) cites as potentially impeding improvements in social welfare policies: 'persistent, entrenched individualism; deep racial and ethnic cleavages; marked regional differences; and a labor movement that is relatively weak and, for much of the post WWII period, ideologically conservative' (see also Katz 2001). In order to advocate for welfare reform that meets children's needs and their human rights, social workers, professional advocates, and policy makers will need to

tap resiliency, stamina, and fortitude like that manifested by the parents and staff at Southside Family Nurturing Center.

Authors' Acknowledgements

We owe a debt of gratitude to the parents and staff at Southside Family Nurturing Center, whose dedicated participation in our study enriched this chapter.

Special thanks also to Prof. Karen Robards and her students.

Footnotes

¹ Food shelves contain stocks of donated goods and are located in neighborhood agencies or centers where staffers distribute the food to people in need.

TABLE 4.1: Phillips Poverty Rates, 1970 through 2000

	1970	1980	1990	2000
Percent Families Below Poverty	12.7%	20.3%	53.8%	42.2% (est)
Percent Individuals Below Poverty	31.7%	33.8%	49.6%	34.2%

TABLE 4.2: Contrasting Phillips to the City of Minneapolis and the Region. Using 2000 US Census.

Phillips: Census Tracts	% White/People of Color*	% Total Population Below Poverty	% Families Incomes less than 30% MMI *	Median Family Income
5902	19 / 81	42	43	\$ 23,444
7301	12 / 88	42	58	\$ 17,045
7302	18 / 82	27	26	\$ 31,563
7802	29 / 71	31	34	\$ 31, 172
7900	26 / 74	28	25	\$ 28,512
106000	29 / 71	34	37	\$ 25,949
107100	46 / 64	40	47	\$ 22,266

107200	25 / 75	27	31	\$ 30, 843
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*rounded to nearest whole number

City of Minneapolis	65 / 35	16.9	17.3	\$ 48,602
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Twin Cities MSSA	90 / 10	7.3	9.9	\$ 63,600
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