

The Need for Universal Preschool in the Wake of Welfare Reform:
An Examination of How to Alleviate the Child Care Crisis in Los Angeles County

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“The moral test of government is how it treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the aged; and those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy, and the handicapped.”

- Hubert Humphrey, last Presidential speech, November 1, 1977

Introduction

In 2002, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), better known as the welfare reform legislation which changed Assistance to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) to Temporary Assistance to Needy Families

One component of the new welfare system that can be labeled a failure is the system's incompatible work requirements and work supports. Recipients cite multiple barriers that keep them from being able to transition from welfare to work, ranging from a lack of transportation to a lack of basic skills. The lack of child care, however, has been

of six and seventeen, worked outside the home.³ And, since 1996, welfare reform has further increased the number of working mothers in America. In 2001, over 70 percent of women with children between the ages of three and five were in the workforce.⁴

A government commitment to subsidized, universal childcare would be the first major attempt to bridge this historical disconnect. First, it would make it easier for women to find and keep jobs, which is the explicit goal of welfare reform. Second, universal childcare would provide greatly needed improvements in child development and early education. Specifically it has the ability to standardize and expand care, which would help put children in low- and middle-income families (who currently receive no or limited care) on a more equal footing with the children of more affluent households who do receive early care. Correspondingly, it would have the ability to alleviate the cycle of poverty and systemic unequal education that currently exists in America.

Additionally, it would ensure that the effort to increase care also takes into account the quality of the care that is delivered. Currently under PRWORA, states have to spend 4 percent of their Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) funds on improving both the quality and supply of care.⁵

the added benefit of simultaneously providing a much needed work support program for parents.

Finally, universal childcare would be beneficial for the overall health of the economy, since it would create jobs, enable more women to focus their attention on becoming productive members of the (paid) workforce, and prepare children of welfare recipients and children from low- and middle-income households to be more productive members of the workforce and society in general. Recent longitudinal studies conducted by the Perry Preschool, the Carolina Abecedarian Project, and the RAND Institute show that each dollar invested in child care programs saves an average of \$7 in the long run, because children in child care are more likely to attend college and be employed and less likely to be school dropouts, dependent on welfare,

billion and \$8 billion, respectively.⁸ Unfortunately, the only bill to get through the House of Representatives in 2002 provided a mere \$1 billion increase in child care funds. Since this occurred in peace time, with a more Democratic Congress than is now in power, an adequate allocation of child care funding is even less likely to occur in today's political climate.

Thus, if the goal of welfare reform, and specifically the welfare-to-work component, is to improve the lives of American women and children, it cannot succeed without an established, separate system of universa

Setting the Context

The research for this report has three objectives: to analyze how welfare reform can be made more effective; to evaluate the universal preschool initiative as a way to improve the child care crisis; and to develop recommendations on how to support the universal preschool initiative's success. In order to understand why and how universal preschool can serve as a tool to help reform the welfare system, it is important to understand the intricacies of that system on the federal, state, and local levels.

Additionally, it is crucial to understand the extent of what has been labeled the "childcare crisis." Thus, the need for universal preschool can best be placed in context by first analyzing the nature and outcomes of welfare reform, as well as its potential outcomes, and then by focusing on the current state of child care at the national, state and local levels.

In 2000, a single mother with two children (the average welfare recipient) needed

most involve actual work rather than preparation for work in school or other educational

that the state spent in the mid-1990s. California has typically met its spending requirement of \$2.7 billion a year.³⁴ Generally, about half of the combined CalWORKs funds and TANF funds go toward cash assistance and about a third of CalWORKs and

Eligibility

Who May Be Eligible for CalWORKs Assistance?	
	Potentially Eligible? ¹
Caretaker adults living with related children under 19	Yes
Undocumented immigrants, adults or children	No
US-born children of undocumented parents	Yes
Legal permanent residents ²	Yes
Fleeing felons, drug felons	No
Children living with an adult felon	Yes
Adults who have had five years of welfare assistance starting 1/1/98	No
Children living with an adult who had been assisted for more than five years starting 1/1/98	Yes
Adults who refuse to comply with CalWORKs work requirements ³	No
Children of non-compliant adults	Yes

Source: AB1542, 1997; County of Los Angeles, Department of Public Social Services

¹ Families can only be eligible if their income is sufficiently low and the value of family assets such as savings accounts, real estate, and automobiles fall under specific thresholds. Many families ineligible for CalWORKs assistance could be eligible for general assistance, food stamps, and/or Medi-Cal. Note that parents under age 18 who are living independently and who have not finished high school will be enrolled in the CalLEARN program.

² Not eligible for some other forms of federal aid.

³ Excluding those who are not required to participate in welfare-to-work activities because of old age, presence of a child under one year old, etc.

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³⁶ Los Angeles Department of Social Services, Urban Research Division. "Monitoring the Implementation of CalWORKs: Welfare Reform and Welfare Service Provision in Los Angeles County, 1998: Evaluating CalWORKs in Los Angeles County." 1998. 26. Available

receiving “diversion” services (for example, up-front one-time cash payments).⁴⁴

However, with the current budget deficit, Governor Davis has proposed entirely cutting out stage three, and has suggested making some cuts in stage two.⁴⁵

Child care during job searches is available to households with children up to 12

Avenues to Independence) offices that administer employment related services.⁴⁸ Los Angeles has typically not used contracted vendors as many other counties do. However starting in 2000, Jobs-First GAIN services were contracted out to Maximus and ACS State and Local Solutions.

Program Environment

earnings cut off (the point where TANF is reduced to \$0) for a family of three is \$1,477.

The maximum monthly grant that a family of three can get is \$625.⁵⁰

Exemptions

Exemptions from CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work Requirements

Sanctions

Since 1996, approximately 30 percent of single parents and a quarter of adults in two-parent families have incurred a sanction (dropping the recipient from the grant) for noncompliance.⁵² Of those who left TANF in January of 2001, 54.5 percent did so because they were found to be noncompliant.⁵³

Jobs-First GAIN

Jobs-First GAIN is the largest welfare-to-work program in the nation.⁵⁴ The main services currently provided through Jobs-First GAIN are orientation/appraisal, job club, assessment, and supportive services – a clear shift away from the program’s original emphasis on education and training activities.⁵⁵ Whereas other program staffs use most of their time in orientation sessions to collect background information on the new recipient and assign them to their first employment related activity, Jobs-First GAIN staff devote most of the orientation to communicating a work-first message to new recipients and to increasing their self-esteem in regard to their ability to find work. Jobs-First GAIN offers short-term basic education and vocational training classes, but assigns very few recipients to these activities.⁵⁶ One reason for this may lie in the fact that the work-first program’s net cost falls well below that of Los Angeles’s earlier education-focused

⁵² Freedman, Stephen, Jean Tansey Knab, Lisa Gennetian, and David Navarro. “The Los Angeles Jobs-First GAIN Evaluation: Final Report on a Work First program in a Major Urban Center. *The Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation*

programs.⁵⁷ On the whole, Jobs-First GAIN will lead to substantial short-term savings for the government budget.⁵⁸

Work Requirements

Los Angeles follows a strict “work-first” model that requires recipients to begin participation in an approved work activity immediately. DPSS administrators are willing to clearly state that the goal of Jobs-First GAIN is to “move people into employment as rapidly as possible.”⁵⁹ Los Angeles requires the maximum participation requirement of 32 hours per week for a single parent family.⁶⁰ Those not already working or in an approved education program are referred to a three week job club where they undergo a vocational assessment, skill training, and start their work-trigger “clock.” If a participant does not find work by the time she reaches her work-trigger time limit (around three weeks), she is assigned a community service job.

The majority of case managers report that both initial and subsequent program assignments are based on state or county rules, leaving little room for staff judgment. Case managers generally approve education and training programs in which clients enrolled *before* being called in to the county’s welfare-to-work program as long as the

(in a MDRC study) expressed frustration over the fact that the first activity recipients are filtered into is strictly determined by agency rules. For instance, if a recipient says that she wants to attend school to be able to get a better job, the case manager is instructed to say that “GAIN is a work-first program [and] any job is better than no job.”⁶¹ In a study of four counties across the nation, Los Angeles had the most “rule-bound” program, recommending job club in a wider range of circumstances than did case managers in other counties.⁶² In the same study, the administrators who were interviewed voiced much more confidence in the rapid-employment, work-first approach than did the case managers (the ones that actually interact with the recipients), who were less certain about the approach’s effectiveness.⁶³

Another concern revolves around the fact that the low-wage sector of Los Angeles’s economy has become increasingly prominent over the past two decades, making movement from plentiful low-wage jobs to scarce living wage jobs challenging

supportive services, such as child care, which can quickly deplete ones earnings. Nearly all recipients in a 2000 Jobs-First GAIN evaluation study who used paid child care covered the expenses out of pocket rather than reporting expenses to DPSS for reimbursements or for government subsidies due to lack of knowledge of the services or complications with the bureaucracy.⁶⁵

Child Care

Counties are responsible for administering child care subsidy programs for current and former TANF recipients, but most major aspects of the programs, such as eligibility requirements, payment levels, and licensing standards are set at the state and federal level.⁶⁶ While Jobs-First GAIN increased the use of child care dramatically, very few recipients report using subsidized care or receiving transitional care benefits.⁶⁷ Currently, only 13 percent of children on welfare receive some form of subsidized child care.⁶⁸

Both staff and recipients complain that the procedures for securing child care are complex and time-consuming. Case workers have reported that the time they spend processing child care applications and troubleshooting child care difficulties impairs their ability to help participants with other welfare-to-work issues.⁶⁹ This illustrates that there

⁶⁵ Freedman, Stephen, Jean Tansey Knab, Lisa Gennetian, and David Navarro. "The Los Angeles Jobs-First GAIN Evaluation: Final Report on a Work First program in a Major Urban Center. *The Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation* June 2000.

is a need for child care to be dealt with outside of the welfare system, where it could have the full devotion of staff and other resources.

Chapter 2: The Child Care Context

Federal Funding

As discussed in the previous chapter, the main forms of federal child care subsidies are administrated through the TANF block grant and the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), both which were created by the PRWORA. \$2.3 billion of TANF funding (16.5 billion annually) is spent on child care. The Child Care Development Block Grant is part of the CCDF and currently provides child care subsidies to low-income families with children under age 13. It is the primary source of federal child care assistance for low-income families (income less than 85% of the state median). In FY2002 a total of \$4.817 billion was appropriated to the CCDBG.

There are also federal grant programs that fund child care related programs and activities, in addition to tax provisions that assist parents of varying incomes with child care expenses. For example, the Dependent Care Tax Credit (DCTC) gives families a tax credit of 35% of child care expenses up to \$3,000 for one child and up to \$6,000 for two children. However, the 35% rate only applies to taxpayers with adjusted incomes of \$15,000 or less. The rate decreases by one percent for every additional \$2,000 income increment and stops at 20% for families making over \$43,000.⁷⁰

Separate from these programs is Head Start, which provides early childhood education and development services to low-income preschool children on a part-time basis. Currently it is estimated to serve 916,000 children every year at a cost of \$6.5 billion.⁷¹ Though this amount of funding may seem high, it is important to keep in mind

⁷⁰ Gish, Melinda. "RL30944 – Child Care Issues in the 107th Congress." *Congressional Research Service*. 9 Sept. 2002.

⁷¹ Ibid.

In California, the licensed child care industry directly employs over 123,000 people, and approximately 35,000 people in Los Angeles County. Family child care providers make up 35 percent of all licensed child care spots, while the remaining spots are predominantly in center-based child care.⁷⁵ Babysitters and relative caretakers are usually unlicensed providers.

The Child Care Climate in California and Los Angeles

Of California's total population of 33,871,648, 7,783,683 are children under the age of 14. Children under five make up almost 10% of the state's population.⁷⁶ Additionally, recent population estimates project that the United States' child population will increase by 10 million (from 70 million to 80 million) in the next twenty years, and that 5 million – or 50% - of that growth will be in California.⁷⁷

Los Angeles County, which is the largest county in the nation, has more children under five than in 45 states. Additionally, it ranks seventh among California's 58 counties in child poverty (defined as children living in households with incomes less than 80% of the county's medium household income) and has over 40,000 families on waiting lists for subsidized care. Currently, the demand for child care in Los Angeles County is steadily increasing as the child population increases and there are growing numbers of CalWORKs participants trying to move into the workforce.⁷⁸ This is highly problematic for the child care industry since the supply of licensed care in Los Angeles County is

⁷⁵ ACORN. "Licensing, Expansion, and Access for Providers (LEAP) Project Executive Summary." 31 Jan. 2003.

⁷⁶ US Department of Health and Human Services: Administration for Children and Families. "California Profile: Demographic Information." <http://ericps.crc.uiuc.edu/nccic/statepro/californ.html>

⁷⁷ Hill-Scott, Karen. Presentation at First Five LA meeting, 28 March 2003.

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staff, which takes time away from the children. Recent studies have revealed that high turnover among staff is directly correlated with the diminished social and cognitive development of children.⁸²

Some reasons that explain such high turnover rates include the insufficient compensation, benefits, and work supports that child care providers receive. The average child care provider is a member of a three-person h

These findings indicate that a high-quality preschool program can significantly

had an individualized prescription of educational a

quality preschool between the ages of 0-5 has a significant effect on the rest of a child's life.

This adds another notch to the realm of unequal education in America, for even if all current elementary, junior high, and high school

**Chapter 3: The Proposition 10 Initiative in California - A Universal
Preschool Case Study**

This research will focus on First Five LA’s “Universal Access to Preschool Including Early Care and Education” initiative, which broadly aims to create quality universal preschool and early care to children age 0-5 over the next ten years. It has been allocated \$100 million for the first five years of operation. In September of last year, the Commission rolled out what it characterizes as a “holistic, systems approach of designing

framework, however, highlights the needs of children first, while simultaneously providing a work support for parents.

Although the program aims to eventually be truly universal and provide at least

Start Program, which serves approximately 40 percent of eligible three- and four-year olds in LA County. Within this strategy, they have suggested three sub-methods: 1) the “connected care” method which would develop a collaboration between Head Start and child care programs in which partnering agencies provide care to connect the part day educational Head Start services with early care and educational services for the rest of the day; 2) the “wrap-in services” method which would make the primary early care taker and education provider responsible for the Head Start component, and thus would be paid through Head Start funds; and 3) the “blending funds” method, which would blend several funds such as Head Start, State Preschool, Alternative Payment, other Department

development, parent involvement, staff to child ratios, health and safety, nutrition and food service, physical environment, and relationships among teachers and families. The first is to adopt and promote quality standards in all initiative programs. These standards will be adopted from existing resources such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), Head Start’s performance standards, and the Department of Education’s “desired results.” This strategy may also include a certification process, which would require support for agencies or providers who do not currently meet these standards. This support should include information about the standardization process, funding to defray the cost of training and other activities, and training opportunities for providers to become familiar with the standards.

The second strategy is to establish an independent system for on going assessment to ensure that standards are upheld. Currently, outside of Head Start and centers funded

have successfully created a universal system for preschool aged children. Thus, not only is the undertaking bold and costly – it also has very little precedent to follow.

Chapter 4: Two Universal Preschool Case Studies

At present, the state of Georgia and the military are the only two entities that have genuine comprehensive universal preschool systems. New York has a program designated as universal pre-kindergarten, but it does not yet serve all eligible children. Local communities there decide what criteria to use in selecting age-eligible children for enrollment. From school year 1999 until June 30, 2002, preference was given to economically disadvantaged children.¹⁰² Similarly, the District of Columbia has established a universal preschool program attached to its public school district. However, while all 4-year-old children residing in the District are eligible to participate, children are served on a first-come, first-served basis – and thus not every child is guaranteed services. Oklahoma is also currently making progress toward universal pre-kindergarten through its Early Childhood 4-Year-Old Program; however it can not yet provide service to all four year olds.

Other states have programs that are referred to as “universal preschool;” however they are only for children labeled “at-risk” or below the state’s poverty level. For example, New Jersey law mandates free, high-quality preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds living in the state's highest-poverty districts. Kentucky also provides a free preschool education to 4-year-olds from the state's lowest-income families. Last November, voters in Florida approved a universal pre-kindergarten measure. This legislation stipulates that free universal pre-kindergarten will be offered to all Florida 4-year-olds by 2005. Additionally, West Virginia has legislation stipulating that all 4-year-olds in that state

¹⁰² Available at <http://www.nccic.org/faqs/univprek.html>

Education, but the department proved to be too bure

Chapter 5: Creating A Model Child Care Provider Resource Center

In order to make universal preschool work, no matter which strategies are ultimately adopted by First Five LA, it is clear that there is a need for serious efforts to recruit more providers, improve and standardize the quality of their services, improve their working conditions/incentives, improve the way they run their businesses, and increase the amount of government funding allocated to early childhood development. A Child Care Resource Center, described in detail in this chapter, can concretely address all

- how to develop marketing and community outreach skills;
- how to manage business finances;
- updates on current trends in the child care industry;
- dealing with government bureaucracy (filling out forms correctly, getting paid fully and on time, navigating the child care subsidy system).

In order to assure that the center would be well utilized, it must be as accessible and connected to providers as possible. Since the current RRs serve as quasi- employers in addition to resource centers, many providers feel disempowered by them because of disputes over things such as paperwork, late payments, or substandard reimbursement fees (which are e eubr the 2e,7.;OMMM2,...6.5M;”MM2h,...-4“”42a,7.;OM652 n,...“:“MO;52e,7.;OM652

5”7M2c,7.;OM652a,7.;OM652r,7.75M7”2e,-4“”42 ,...-6.5”-4uhRs2es as (wbl, uhather st

However, knowing that both retaining and recruiting

Conclusion

The attempt to alleviate the child care crisis in Los Angeles, which has been highlighted and exacerbated by welfare reform, is not an easy task. It is a complicated, multifaceted problem, especially in this time of conservative political domination, economic downturn, and a focus on international events.

As this research indicates, though pressure needs to be applied to all levels of government, it is clear that no significant help is going to come from the federal government any time in the near future. The child care crisis in Los Angeles, and throughout the nation, is operating in the broader context of a federal abandonment of social services. According to the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, Bush's FY2002 budget proposed 40 times more money for tax cuts than for education.¹¹⁶ The

Thus, in this context it is necessary to look in the near term to more localized, “bottom-up” models for progressive change. Since it is unlikely that welfare reform, and specifically the welfare to work component, will be significantly altered by any

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