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ABSTRACT

This report presents the findings of a preliminary assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) programs, the welfare-to-work centerpiece of the Family Support Act, for moving Puerto Rican welfare recipients closer to self-sufficiency. Programs in Newark (New Jersey), New York City, and Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) are reviewed. Six focus groups involving 42 Puerto Rican welfare recipients indicated that the majority of participants are female single heads of households, over age 30, born in Puerto Rico, and predominantly Spanish-speaking. Participants were united in a dislike for welfare and a desire to work or study, but most were skeptical about the impact the Family Support Act will have, and most continued to feel discrimination on the basis of language and ethnic background and to have a sense that program operations would be impersonal and focused on program requirements rather than participant goals. Implications for implementation of JOBS programs are discussed, with attention to child-care needs, educational goals, and language barriers. Two tables present study findings. Appendixes contain a summary of a previous report on the Family Support Act, an overview of the Act, and profiles of participating organizations. (Contains 51 references.) (SLD)

Puerto Rican Participation in Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) Programs

A Preliminary Assessment

José E. Cruz
National Puerto Rican Coalition, Inc.

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The National Puerto Rican Coalition, Inc., (NPRC) was founded in 1977 to further the social, economic, and political well-being of Puerto Ricans throughout the United States and Puerto Rico. Based in Washington, D.C., NPRC is a nonprofit, tax-exempt association providing a presence and voice for all Puerto Ricans at the national level.

As a membership association, NPRC has access to grass-roots views of Puerto Rican needs, problems, and aspirations. NPRC conveys these views to decision makers through its contacts with the media, leading institutions, Congress and the Executive Branch, and individuals in the public and private sectors.

To further its mission, NPRC has developed programs in three broad areas. Programs in advocacy, research, and policy analysis are carried out primarily in Washington, D.C. Programs to enhance the image of Puerto Ricans in the United States, such as the NPRC Life Achievement Awards, are conducted nationally. Partnership projects in community economic development are carried out locally.

The goal of all programs is to influence national policies as they affect the Puerto Rican community.

Puerto Rican Participation in Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) Programs

A Preliminary Assessment

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FOREWORD

In May of 1991, the National Puerto Rican Coalition published *Implementing the Family Support Act: Perspectives of Puerto Rican Clients*, a report based on interviews with Puerto Rican welfare mothers in Newark, New Jersey; New York City; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. NPRC reviewed the welfare experiences of a select group of Puerto Ricans to assess their implications for the implementation of the Family Support Act (FSA) of 1988. Focusing on this population, the report suggests several important connections between pre-FSA experiences and the implementation process. The findings also indicate that more information about the particular characteristics of Puerto Ricans receiving public assistance is needed. Some of the conclusions, while self-evident to practitioners and experts, are nonetheless significant in light of long-standing and glaring needs.

This report presents the findings of a preliminary assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) programs, the welfare-to-work centerpiece of the Family Support Act, in moving Puerto Rican welfare recipients closer to the goal of self-sufficiency. The findings, conclusions, and recommendations speak for themselves, but if one thing needs to be highlighted it is the fact that the engagement of families in the implementation process cannot be reduced to an aggregate participation rate. Puerto Rican JOBS program participants, in particular, need to know that they are considered not as mere statistics but as citizens with interests and aspirations; they need to know that somebody cares. Universalistic approaches are ill-fit to provide such a sense of engagement. On the other hand, short-term and punitive approaches tend to be counterproductive; within such a framework the most disadvantaged typically are left behind.

Puerto Rican welfare recipients, and probably many others as well, are not fully aware of the kinds of political and budgetary constraints facing JOBS implementation. The replacement of the Realizing Economic Achievement (REACH) program in New Jersey is a good case study of how rules are changed in the middle of the game with no input from the constituencies that are *directly* affected. The disconcerting message this sends to families genuinely interested in moving toward self-sufficiency should not be underestimated.

The concept of welfare reform as a social contract that establishes reciprocal obligations between recipients of public assistance and the government makes little sense if it means that recipients are getting something for nothing. Puerto Rican welfare mothers, in particular, are not free riders. They reciprocate by being law-abiding citizens who provide for their families. In spite of not being employed, these mothers work very hard and their children often serve in the defense of our country. Their dislike of welfare is based on an appreciation of the value of wage-work. Their objections to welfare-to-work programs are rooted in a strong commitment to family values and, more often than not, in experiences with programs that fail to deliver good jobs.

It is clear that the current wave of welfare reform does imply a new social contract; however, it is one in which the burden of proof is not on disadvantaged and troubled families but on the federal government and the states. It is up to our political institutions to keep their end of the bargain by making the long-term, quality investments that self-sufficiency requires. The National Puerto Rican Coalition and the Puerto Rican community expect no more and no less.

Louis Núñez
President

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction and Methodology

Puerto Rican Participation in Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) Programs: A Preliminary Assessment presents the findings of an examination of Puerto Rican participation in JOBS programs in Newark, New Jersey; New York City; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. It is the second of a two-stage project. The first part was a review of the welfare experiences and perspectives of Puerto Rican recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and their implications for the implementation of the Family Support Act of 1988 (FSA). The results of this review are contained in the May 1991 report, *Implementing the Family Support Act: Perspectives of Puerto Rican Clients*, which is summarized in Appendix 1.

This analysis of Puerto Rican participation in JOBS programs is presented as an addendum to ongoing assessments of the status of implementation of the Family Support Act. NPRC's goal is to draw the attention of human services administrators, community-based organizations (CBOs) and policy makers to the impact of JOBS on Puerto Rican participants. NPRC's premise is that the barriers to self-sufficiency faced by Puerto Rican AFDC recipients must be seriously addressed. This is a concern based on the belief that targeted approaches are necessary if welfare reform is to succeed.

To carry out its assessment of Puerto Rican participation in JOBS programs, NPRC enlisted the collaboration of three CBOs from among its network of over 100 member organizations nationwide. In Newark, NPRC worked with FOCUS-Newark; in New York City, with the Puerto Rican Family Institute; and in Philadelphia, with Centro Pedro Claver.

Self-contained focus groups were conducted to produce the necessary data. Six focus groups involving 42 Puerto Rican AFDC recipients currently or previously enrolled in JOBS programs were conducted: two each in Newark, New York City, and Philadelphia.

Although the research results can stand alone, they should not be interpreted as representing the full spectrum of experiences and opinions on the topics reviewed. Furthermore, some of the conditions reported here might have changed since the focus groups were conducted. This notwithstanding, the report constitutes the only available source of systematic data on the participation of *Puerto Ricans* in JOBS programs and the issues that foster or hinder their quest for self-sufficiency.

Findings

- A majority of participants, that is, women currently or previously enrolled in a JOBS program who attended the focus group sessions, are single heads of households with children (88 percent); of these, almost half have never married (43 percent). The majority are also 30 years of age or older (76 percent), were born in Puerto Rico (88 percent) and are Spanish-dominant (90 percent). Although a majority (69 percent) have not completed high school, a significant proportion (25 percent) have a high school diploma and a smaller proportion (14 percent) have some college. Over four-fifths (88 percent) have an average monthly income of $624.

- Some pre-FSA experiences and attitudes of a select group of Puerto Rican AFDC recipients (See Appendix 1) and the JOBS experiences and attitudes reported here appear to be similar in several important regards. Most participants dislike welfare; welfare is a response to difficult circumstances and most participants wish to work or study.

- Some of the experiences of pre-FSA programs and services, such as perceptions of language discrimination and "examiner" modes of operation, that is, impersonal line operations focused on paperwork and compliance with program requirements rather than on program goals, continue to affect Puerto Rican JOBS program participants but do not appear to have been fully carried over into JOBS.Yet in some cases the experience of JOBS has failed to change significantly the negative perceptions of the promise of the Family Support Act.

- For some participants voluntary enrollment was very important, but a key factor in eliciting committed and enthusiastic responses appears to be the timing of the intervention/participation rather than its character.

- The contrasts among program descriptions provided at orientation sessions, assessment models, and actual practice is significant.

- The child-care preferences of participant mothers appear to be determined by how they assess the needs of their children and families.

- The preference of these mothers for caring for their children is very strong yet flexible. It can be acceptable to leave preschoolers and school-age children in the care of providers other than family members.

- Security is an important child-care concern. This is one reason why care provided by relatives is preferred.

- In some cases care provided by relatives is preferred because it increases the income of the extended family.

- Late child-care reimbursements and/or payments can create serious difficulties and even hamper the ability of participants to secure the services of providers.

- Teenage children present a range of difficulties and concerns that discourage and/or complicate program participation.

- The quality of educational services offered to participants was reportedly affected by operational/ managerial problems and difficulties related to student/ teacher interaction.

- For some Spanish-speaking participants education services do not appear to be realistic or useful.

- Participant-worker relations resembling a "generalist" model of case management, that is, a model in which a single case manager works with the participant to attend to a wide range of needs and services, appear to yield the best program participation experiences and help sustain the participant's momentum toward self-sufficiency.

Implications for Implementation

- Human services administrators must systematically identify the managerial, attitudinal, and client-worker aspects of program implementation that appear to be affected by previous negative experiences.

- The failure of JOBS in most of the sites to change significantly the negative perceptions of the promise of the Family Support Act might be a function of the difficulties associated with early implementation.

- The marketing of programs appears to be important in how participants evaluate their seriousness and potential impact. Human services administrators must be extremely careful not to oversell welfare-to-work programs. The challenge here is how to make participants understand the relationship between program provisions and program practice in ways that are straightforward and do not undermine their enthusiasm.

- It is more difficult to turn around a participant with severe human capital deficits and acute personal problems if she does not feel ready for the intervention. In these situations programs run the risk of double jeopardy: they might need to overcome the reluctance and even hostility of participants whose attitudes are reinforced by bureaucratic modes of operation.

- The specific reasons why assessment models (tiered, two-generational, etc.) are or are not being realized in the studied sites must be ascertained to make necessary adjustments.

- The allocation of child-care services must be grounded in the judgments that Puerto Rican mothers make of what's best for their children and families.

- Differences in the type of care offered has a demonstrated impact on the continuity and adequacy of services, but the role of administrative issues on the stability of child-care arrangements must also be seriously considered and addressed.

- The concerns about teenage children bring into question existing prohibitions that prevent states from providing JOBS services to youth. Short of lifting these restrictions, the issue provides opportunities for intervention through flexible operation of programs and collaborative approaches. Specifically, personnel must be aware of service opportunities beyond their particular program through Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), school-based programs, counseling services, and/or other special youth programs.

- Improving the interaction between students and teachers appears to be very important in terms of the quality of educational services. In this regard, it is important to specify the relative weight of teacher qualifications (including bilingualism and cultural competence), interpersonal skills, and the level and adequacy of resources available *vis-à-vis* program goals.

- Human development services cannot be tilted toward instant results. In the current service economy, it is unreasonable to expect that Spanish-speaking clients will be able to function in a work setting after a short course of English instruction.

- A comprehensive educational strategy requires different approaches for different levels of educational attainment. There is a need for more education personnel able to handle a diverse group of both Spanish- and English-dominant participants. Also, educational services must be offered within the framework of a workforce development strategy that includes both demand- and supply-side factors.

II. INTRODUCTION

The Family Support Act

The Family Support Act (FSA) was signed into law as P.L. 100-485 on October 13, 1988. Its stated purpose is to revise the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program to emphasize work, child support, and family benefits by encouraging and assisting families to obtain the education, training, and employment needed to avoid long-term welfare dependence.

NPRC's Implementation Project

In July of 1989 the Ford Foundation awarded NPRC a two-year project grant to conduct focus groups with Puerto Rican AFDC recipients in cities with large Puerto Rican populations.[1] The purpose of the project is two-fold: first, to review the welfare-related experiences and perspectives of Puerto Rican AFDC recipients and to assess how these relate to FSA implementation; and second, to produce a review of Puerto Rican participation in Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) programs.

Pre-FSA Experiences and Perspectives

A summary of NPRC's May 1991 report, *Implementing the Family Support Act: Perspectives of Puerto Rican Clients*, which encompasses the findings, conclusions, and recommendations from the first part of the project, is included as Appendix 1.

Puerto Ricans and JOBS

This report presents the research findings of the second stage of the project, a preliminary assessment of Puerto Rican participation in JOBS programs in Newark, New Jersey; New York City; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This analysis is presented as a supplement to the ongoing review of the status of implementation of the Family Support Act. NPRC's goal is to draw the attention of human services administrators, community-based organizations, and policy makers to the impact of JOBS on Puerto Rican participants.[2]

In states with large Puerto Rican populations this goal has acquired added significance. For example, in New Jersey the legislature recently enacted legislation to revise substantially the state's JOBS program. In New York, top level administrative changes could have an impact on efforts to improve the JOBS program for New York City.

NPRC's premise is that the barriers to self-sufficiency faced by Puerto Rican AFDC recipients must be seriously addressed. This is a concern based on the belief that targeted approaches are necessary if welfare reform is to succeed.

Findings

Each finding is supported by direct quotes from the focus group sessions. NPRC was especially careful to exclude statements that did not represent the consensus in each group. Only statements that captured the sense of most participants, and/or raised significant implementation issues are quoted in this report.

It is important to emphasize that the discussions analyzed here represent the perspectives of a small group of Puerto Rican JOBS program participants. In this light, findings must be seen as indicative of problems as well as possibilities. *No hard and fast generalizations are attempted*, especially given that some of the reported conditions might have changed since the focus group sessions took place.

Relevance of Study

NPRC's findings are important because they represent the perspectives of a group of women directly affected by welfare reform. By listening to JOBS participants themselves, the reader can get a sense of how implementation actually works. Furthermore, this report constitutes the only available source

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[1]Two parallel projects were also funded by the Ford Foundation. The resulting reports are the National Council of La Raza's *On My Own: Mexican American Women, Self-Sufficiency, and the Family Support Act* (December 1990) and *For My Children: Mexican American Women, Work, and Welfare* (March 1992) written by Julia Teresa Quiroz and Regina Tosca; and the National Urban League's *Report of the National Urban League Family Support Act Focus Group Session* written by Ann Hill (March 1991).

[2]The word "participant" is used throughout this report to refer to the women currently or previously enrolled in a JOBS program who attended the focus group sessions.

of systematic data on *Puerto Rican* participation in JOBS programs and the issues that foster or hinder their quest for self-sufficiency.

Structure of Report

This report is divided into six sections and three appendices. The Introduction is followed by a description of the methodology of the study. Section IV presents a profile of focus group participants based on selected characteristics. Section V presents the findings by city. Section VI discusses the findings, highlights the similarities between AFDC and JOBS participation, and in some cases elaborates on the findings in light of related research. Section VII outlines the implications for implementation suggested by the research. As noted above, Appendix 1 is a summary of the project's first report. Appendices 2 and 3 include an overview of the Family Support Act and profiles of the collaborating community-based organizations, respectively.

III. METHODOLOGY

Focus Groups

To carry out its assessment, NPRC conducted self-contained focus groups, ranging from one to two hours each, with Puerto Rican JOBS program participants. Six focus groups involving 42 Puerto Rican AFDC recipients currently or previously enrolled in JOBS programs were conducted: two each in Newark, New Jersey; New York City; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Focus groups constitute one specific technique for collecting qualitative data.[3] The hallmark of focus groups is the explicit use of group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible otherwise. The key distinguishing feature of self-contained focus groups is that the research results can stand alone. This does not prevent the data from being used as part of a larger project; rather, it asserts that no such further data collection is necessary before reporting the results from the focus group research itself.

The main limitation of this method is sample bias, but such bias is only a problem if it is ignored, if the focus group discussions are interpreted as representing the full spectrum of experiences and opinions.

Community-Based Organizations

NPRC worked with three community-based organizations (CBOs) operating in Newark, New Jersey; New York City; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The CBOs were selected from among NPRC's network of over 100 member organizations nationwide. The criteria for agency selection were (1) location in areas of high Puerto Rican concentration, (2) current involvement in welfare-related services, (3) access to Puerto Rican JOBS program participants, and (4) presence of bilingual staff to assist in their recruitment.

Participants

Each agency was responsible for the identification of suitable participants, that is, female AFDC recipients of Puerto Rican origin currently or previously enrolled in a local JOBS program. This was done either by reviewing CBO caseloads through contacts with JOBS program administrators, or through direct contact with JOBS program participants that had no history of involvement with the CBOs.

Participants were invited to attend through a combination of methods, including flyers written in Spanish, telephone calls, and site visits either at home or at JOBS program facilities. Although specific appeals varied from agency to agency, all were asked to come to the meetings to relate their JOBS experiences and to express their opinions about the program. At the beginning of each session this was reiterated in a standard introduction developed by NPRC. Although all answered the same set of questions, some answered more questions than others depending on the amount of probing that was necessary.

Questionnaires were completed for each participant to gather quantitative data and to develop a profile of the group according to selected characteristics. As compensation, they were offered combination packages that included stipends (ranging from $10 to $25), lunch, transportation allowances, and/or food vouchers. On-site child supervision was offered to those unable to make their own arrangements.

Focus Group Sessions

All Newark and New York sessions were conducted in Spanish. One of the Philadelphia sessions was conducted in English. All Spanish statements quoted in the report were translated by José E. Cruz.

NPRC sought information on three of the four service areas specified for JOBS by the Family Support Act: caseworker, support, and education/training services. Most of the information on the fourth area, employment services, was volunteered by participants. Questions were asked to determine the nature and character of various components of JOBS program participation, such as orientation, assessment, referrals, and choice of services. Focus group participants talked about how they were assessed and the relationship between assessments and choice of services. Child-care arrangements and issues were also discussed, and education and training activities as well. All sessions concluded with discussions of service delivery issues and the concept of self-sufficiency and its relation to the JOBS program.

[3]David L. Morgan, *Focus Groups As Qualitative Research* (Newbury Park, California: SAGE Publications, 1988).

IV. SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Summary of Selected Characteristics

Nativity

- 88 percent were born in Puerto Rico.
- Only three participants were born in Philadelphia and two were born in New York City.

Age

One participant declined to provide her age. Of the remaining 41:

- 22 percent were between 20 and 30 years of age.
- 44 percent were between 30 and 35 years of age.
- 34 percent were over 35 years of age.

Primary Language

One participant did not provide this information. Of the remaining 41:

- 90 percent reported Spanish as their primary language.
- Only one participant reported English as her primary language and three reported being bilingual.

Schooling

Only 36 participants provided information on schooling. Of these:

- 69 percent were dropouts.
- 25 percent had a high school diploma.
- 14 percent had some college.

Marital Status

- The overwhelming majority, 88 percent, are single mothers.
- Of these, 43 percent have never married.
- Almost one-third, 29 percent, are separated.
- Only 14 percent are divorced.

Number of Children in Household

- 55 percent of the participants had two or fewer children.
- 21 percent had three children.
- 24 percent of participants had four or more children.

Duration of AFDC Enrollment

Two participants did not provide this information. Of the remaining 40:

- 36 percent had been on welfare for five years or more.
- 28 percent had been on welfare between two and five years.
- 35 percent had been on welfare for two years or less.

Income

Five participants declined to report their sources of income. For the remaining 37:

- The average monthly income was $624.
- The average annual income was $7,484.

Comparative Analysis

In 1990, one-third of all mainland Puerto Ricans lived in New York City. New York also has the largest concentration of Puerto Ricans on welfare. According to a recent New York State Department of Social Services (DSS) survey,[4] a majority (73 percent) of Puerto Rican welfare recipients in the city were born in Puerto Rico. Over half of the respondents (61 percent) were 30 years of age or older and nearly two-thirds (65 percent) were Spanish dominant. A significant number (67 percent) had completed less than high school, had never married (51 percent), and were single heads of households (93 percent). Over two-thirds (68 percent) had two or fewer children, close to a quarter (21 percent) had three, but only a small proportion (11 percent) had four or more. One-third (33 percent) had been on welfare for over five years, nearly a quarter (22 percent) had been enrolled between two and five years, and one-fifth (20 percent) for two years or less.

Table I summarizes and compares some of the characteristics outlined above with those of focus group participants. A majority of participants were born in Puerto Rico (88 percent) and are 30 years of age or older (76 percent). Almost all are Spanish-dominant (90 percent), over two-thirds have not completed high school (69 percent), and almost half have never married (43 percent). Over four-fifths are single heads of households with children (88 percent). More than half (55 percent) have two or fewer children, nearly a quarter (21 percent) have three, and a high proportion (24 percent), have four or more children.

The average monthly income of $624 is a composite of various sources. It includes AFDC grants, food stamps and transportation allowances, and child support payments. All participants receive food stamps but only a few receive transportation allowances, child support payments, and other income. **Conservative critics argue that, on average, the**

[4]New York State Department of Social Services, *Hispanic AFDC Recipients in New York City: Barriers to Employment and Self-Sufficiency* (March 1991).

combination of benefits available to AFDC recipients is comparable to the income of low-wage workers. This is clearly not the case for the group of women that participated in this study. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, in 1990 low-wage workers had a monthly average income of $1,016.

TABLE I
Selected Characteristics of Focus Group Participants and Puerto Rican AFDC Case Heads in New York City

Characteristic	Focus Groups	New York City	% Point Difference
Born in Puerto Rico	88	73	-15
30 years of age and older	76	61	-15
Spanish-dominant	90	65	-25
Less than high school diploma	69	67	- 2
Never married	43	51	+ 8
Single head of household	88	93	+ 5

Table I shows the bias embedded in NPRC's nonrandom sample, thus it is not possible to generalize on the basis of a quantitative comparison of focus group participants and DSS survey respondents. Yet it is clear that these two groups share some basic characteristics: both are born predominantly in Puerto Rico, speak mostly Spanish, have low levels of educational attainment, and are single heads of households with children. The proportion of participants that have four or more children, however, is twice as high as the proportion in the DSS sample.

TABLE II
Characteristics of Focus Group Participants
N = 42

Characteristic	No. of Participants	Percent of Total
Nativity		
Puerto Rico	37	88
Philadelphia	3	7
New York	2	5
Age		
20 - 30 years	9	22
30 - 35 years	18	44
Over 35 years	14	34
Primary Language		
Spanish	37	90
English	1	2
Bilingual	3	7
Schooling		
Dropout	25	69
High School	9	25
Some College	5	14
Family Profile		
Single Mother	37	88
Never Married	18	43
Separated	12	29
Divorced	6	14
Two Children or Fewer	23	55
Three Children	9	21
Four or More Children	10	24
AFDC Enrollment		
Two Years or Less	14	35
Between Two and Five Years	4	28
Over Five Years	22	36
Annual Income[5]		
$3,000 - $5,000	6	16
$5,000 - $7,000	10	27
$7,000 - $10,000	14	38
Over $10,000	7	19

[5]Includes AFDC grant, food stamps, transportation allowances, child support, and other unspecified payments. According to Congressional Budget Office projections, the weighted average poverty thresholds for urban families in 1992 was $9,521 for a family of two whose head was under age 65, $11,280 for a family of three, and $14,463 for a family of four. Committee on Ways and Means, U.S. House of Representatives, *1992 Green Book*, May 1992, p. 1272. Forty-one participants headed families of two persons or more. Twenty-seven were below the poverty threshold for a family of two.

V. FINDINGS

A. Newark, New Jersey

Focus group participants met on September 6 and 27, 1991, to assess their experiences in the Realizing Economic Achievement (REACH) program for Essex County, of which Newark is a part. A total of 11 female, Puerto Rican participants attended.

Enrollment

REACH is a mandatory program but some of the participants were volunteers. **Of those responding to the mandate, some did so with enthusiasm based on a combination of perceived benefits and their own aspirations for betterment.** In one case, a volunteer participant learned about REACH from a friend. She decided to find out more about the program, lured by the prospect of rewards for personal responsibility and the promise of child-care services.

> *I enrolled because they said that you could get paid child care and that if you were responsible you could improve yourself.*

> *I found out from a friend....I didn't wait for a letter because I was interested in studying and learning a trade.*

> *I volunteered because my daughters are old enough now and I want a better life for myself. I don't want to be on welfare all my life.*

Some of the nonvolunteers perceived the program as an opportunity for progress and responded with enthusiasm. Some acknowledged that mandatory participation had made them reevaluate their belief in their capacity to improve themselves. **The implicit suggestion was that if mandatory programs fail to boost the self-confidence of participants, say by relying heavily on sanctions, they are unlikely to succeed.** Others simply responded to the threat of losing their benefits and **because of their previous welfare experiences** were skeptical of the program.

> *I was sent a letter and I liked the idea because I want to improve myself.*

> *If it's up to you, you don't take the step. This program opens doors for you, it makes you aware of your own capabilities.*

> *I had to enroll because the first thing they told me was that if I didn't I would lose my grant.*

> *I did not volunteer because they promise you so much at first and they give you so little....*

Orientation and Assessment

All participants were told about the program's terms and conditions but reportedly no assessments were made. Those who were sent letters as well as the few who volunteered remembered the orientation process well. The transition from orientation to program activities was fast. In some cases, participants had to begin meeting program requirements without having child-care arrangements in place. This they found unsettling and difficult. In one case, the orientation was offered in English to a Spanish-dominant participant.

> *I said, my God, this is fast. I came in for information and was quickly enrolled in the program. I didn't have a baby sitter, you know, it all happened on a moment's notice.*

> *My letter had a date for an appointment. That day they talked about the program, that it was to help us develop certain skills and that they would help you find a baby sitter and pay for transportation. I liked the idea but I had a lot of difficulty [finding] a baby sitter.*

> *I volunteered and my social worker filled out some forms for me. I got a letter and they gave me a date for an orientation and after the orientation they gave me a date to start classes.*

> *They gave us the whole conference in English so I didn't understand.*

None recalled being evaluated to determine needs and specific services. Their responses to the question of how participants were evaluated to determine specific needs and services suggest that needs were *assumed* rather than *established* through assessments. In one case, a participant was required to enroll even though she felt the services offered did not match her needs. The following are representative responses.

> *They made me fill some papers* ***to start my classes*** [emphasis added] *and afterwards I found out about benefits from other*

participants....They have not told me anything directly, I have found out myself by asking.

They said that the program was about English as a second language.

All they care is that you study for six months. They only want you off welfare and on your own.

I wanted to study but when I saw that the level of instruction was high I realized I would not benefit since I don't know English. I've been in the program since January....I have to participate, otherwise they cut my benefits or close my case....

Child Care

The concerns of REACH program participants were threefold. **The first was related to the type of child care available, with neighborhood-based care provided by relatives or close friends being preferred over more formal alternatives.**

I don't like day care. I told the caseworker that I was willing to study hard but I'd rather get kicked off welfare than to leave my son at a day-care [center]. Too many things happen there and I wouldn't be at peace and able to study if I was worried that someone might hurt my son.

My son was really thin and I had problems getting him to eat at home, imagine what it was like at a day-care [center], and he doesn't speak English. My caseworker let me stay at home in August because of this problem.

The second concern was related to the inability of the program to pay for child-care services promptly.

I started the program in April...it is September now and my baby sitter has not been paid....We are going to end up not being able to find anyone to take care of the children because when you say ,"REACH is going to pay," they tell you ,"Oh no, don't even mention it, those people are liars."

It takes them too long to pay and the biggest problem is when you find someone to baby-sit and they are supposed to pay that person. Sometimes it will be two, three, four months before a baby sitter will get paid.

Only two participants disagreed. One simply offered an amendment to the criticisms of the majority by explaining that in her experience the delays were never more than three weeks. The other had a relative who reportedly was promptly receiving her payments every two weeks.

Third, participants were concerned with issues that go beyond those associated with the care of small children. For some mothers there were supervision and safety issues that appeared to them more difficult to tackle with teenage children.

My situation is difficult because my children don't want to come home after school because I live downtown, close to City Hall, and after the stores close there's nothing around here. So they go to Mount Prospect looking for action and then they come home very late. I used to get upset about it but now I only thank God because at least they are not into drugs.

The summer is very difficult because you need someone all day long. One of my daughters is 12 years old and the other one is seven years old, so you figure the older can take care of the younger, but you must have an adult to supervise them.

The participants were asked whether they felt that they could talk about these issues within the program. **The sense of most was that there was little that caseworkers or other program people could do about their problems with teenage children.** Some, however, were very critical of the perceived indifference with which their concerns were dismissed, although eventually they were able to identify individuals that helped.

They [the workers] are not interested. I was told "Well, that's the way kids are, they don't pay attention and do as they please." They should have said, "Look, we have someone who can help you with that." All I wanted was counseling, I wanted them to help me deal with the problem. I explained the problem to a teacher and she referred me to an agency that could help.

Education and Training

Several themes concerning educational services emerged from the discussion. **Participants felt that services were not tailored to the needs of clients.**

New and return participants are placed in separate groups, supposedly to offer the return cases more advanced material, but sometimes they give both groups the same stuff.

They put a 50-year-old woman in an English class and she knew no English whatsoever. She was completely lost. She said, "Oh my God, what is this," and they had to get her out.

Operational issues were another concern. **They discussed the absence of progress evaluations, lack of bilingual staff, irregularities in the promotion of students, poor scheduling of courses, and inadequate facilities.**

There's no one there to make adjustments. For example, if you are taking classes that are obviously not useful to you, if you don't take the initiative and do something about it nobody does it for you.

All the counselors are Americanos.[6] *They should have Hispanic counselors because sometimes no matter how hard you try [to speak English] you just can't.*

I was scheduled to go into a training program without passing the test and I had to appeal to the caseworker's supervisor. She said, "How can that be? You don't have the high school diploma and you don't have the needed score."

Just when there was only a week left in the program they started teaching us computers, one hour a week. What can you learn in one hour? Nothing.

We were assigned a room on the fourth floor and it was so cold we had to wear our coats, and the computer class was so far away that sometimes it took us 15 minutes to get there. Sometimes the teacher would get there half an hour late. We wrote a letter complaining about this but nothing was done.

Lastly, the participants were critical of the quality of teacher-student interaction.

Some of the teachers are good but we have a reading teacher that gives us assignments without explaining. The next day she doesn't collect the assignment but tells us to do something else. By the time of the test we don't know what to do.

They treat us like little girls. If I'm late I get reprimanded like a little girl. They treat us like mentally retarded people.

The only thing I didn't like about the program was that the teachers were afraid of the blacks so they helped them more than they did Hispanics.

Service Delivery

In Newark, the experiences of focus group participants suggest that an important predictor of quality service delivery is the commitment on the part of caseworkers to provide such service. The negative assessments offered below were tempered by references to variations in the character of caseworkers. The basic distinction participants made was between those who cared and those who didn't. Some workers were considered inefficient. There was some understanding that workers often are strapped by program requirements over which they have little discretion. In these cases, however, participants were still critical of caseworkers.

I think it depends on who your worker is. I asked for help with my electricity bill and she [the caseworker] said that was not her problem.

It is simply my responsibility. They say, "It's up to you. Either you participate or we take your benefits away." They don't care about my problems at home.

Some caseworkers are so slow it takes them days to put you in the computer and if you don't pressure them they forget about you.

They promise you $30 for transportation and lunch and it takes them so long to pay that you end up walking or eating junk.

If you miss a morning session because of an appointment elsewhere you lose the whole day. Even when the appointment is to see a social worker at the welfare agency you lose that day.

[6] *Americanos* is the word Island-born Puerto Ricans use to refer to non-Hispanic whites.

If we are fifteen minutes late [to class] they tell us that we can stay for our own benefit but that as far as they are concerned we are absent.

Self-Sufficiency

The women in the Newark focus group sessions offered a straightforward definition of self-sufficiency: to avoid dependency by earning one's way. But given their experiences they were not convinced that REACH could help them achieve that goal.

For those who know English the program is great and offers a lot of opportunities.

The objective is to prepare you for work but in reality the English they teach you does not qualify you for work.

They understand that external support is not enough; participants must also believe that they are capable of attaining self-sufficiency. Armed with this conviction they can better avail themselves of external support.

I think that ultimately it is up to you. If they see that you are weak they look the other way. You have to pressure them. When they see that the person wants to move ahead they are more helpful.

The dynamic here is one in which self-confident participants get better responses from workers and the support obtained in turn nourishes feelings of competence and capability. **Some statements, however, revealed that if the level of program support is inadequate self-confidence becomes difficult to sustain.**

They promise a lot of things but don't deliver. They talk and talk and talk but do nothing.

You have to give a lot of yourself. [The program] offers a little help and you have to make it go a long way because the obstacles are great. It is very difficult.

B. New York City

A total of 20 Puerto Rican participants in the Begin Employment Gain Independence Now (BEGIN) program met in two groups in New York City on May 23 and 24, 1991.

Enrollment

Like REACH in New Jersey, BEGIN in New York City is also a mandatory program. The majority of focus group participants were nonvolunteers. They were sent bilingual letters summoning them to participate, but some of those who received the letters were illiterate. There was some degree of enthusiasm among participants but there was also a great deal of skepticism. **Some participants were not convinced that those with a history of family and personal problems could develop the interest and enthusiasm necessary to benefit fully from the services offered.**

I'm interested in the program, I want to learn, but the way they want things done it is not possible.

The program has advantages but many people are forced to enroll and they have no interest because they have so many problems at home that when they get to the classroom their minds are elsewhere.

Four participants entered BEGIN voluntarily. One learned about the program from a friend and decided to enroll. **Volunteers were individuals who were already working toward self-sufficiency but needed additional help.** For example:

I've been studying English for over five years, since I came to the United States. I have learned a lot but I still get confused, I have to think hard what I'm going to say. I learned about BEGIN from some friends and I decided to enroll.

Orientation and Assessment

The prevailing sentiment in the New York sessions was that the orientation and assessment process was superficial, unrealistic, and unrelated to the provision of services. In New York, mandatory participation correlated with high levels of skepticism about the promise of BEGIN. The disbelief of participants was thus exacerbated by perceived mismatches between promise and performance.

I went to an interview, a conference, and they paint you a rosy picture but in reality it is not like that.

We should be told the truth about the program. They should not tell us we are going to learn English because that's a lie.

Program placement decisions made the mismatch between promise and performance apparent to participants.

People should be placed where they benefit the most. But they lump together people who are advanced and people who know nothing and that holds the group back.

In my group people who speak English are mixed with people who don't; some understand English but cannot speak it.

Most saw the assessment process as a confidence-building session rather than as a method to determine employability and appropriate services.

All they tell you is "You can do it, you can do it" [get off welfare]. What they tell us is that we can do it, that we have *to do it.*

When asked if anyone had interviewed her to identify skills and needs and then decide on services, one participant stated:

They didn't do anything like that. The only thing was that my husband asked for a Hispanic caseworker but they assigned a black worker and since my husband knew a few words of English she determined that he was fluent. They never evaluated my case. I was just told that I was due to enter the program, that I had to study or else.

Child Care

As in Newark, participants complained that delayed payments made securing child-care services difficult. Allowances also were considered inadequate.

I have three kids. They pay $2 an hour per child. I was in school for almost two months without getting any child care money and then I got a lump sum. The money is supposed to keep coming but they stopped again.

They are asking us to stay in school during the summer but are they going to help us with child care? They are going to pay $40 per child and there is no one in my neighborhood that's going to do it for $40.

The concern among New York City participants with teenage issues was also significant. In their view, definitions of child care should not be construed to apply only to young children, with some arguing that the difficulties of child care should be seen as increasing, rather than decreasing, with age.

A lot of us have children that are six years and older and there are some whose kids are 13 and older. Those need the most attention.

They say that teenagers don't need care, but sometimes teenagers are more in danger than small children because when my son was little he gave me no problems and now he does.

One participant was particularly troubled by the fact that, because her husband was unemployed, child-care services were not allowed her.

They figure that [my husband] is at home and he can take care of [the children], but my husband doesn't know how to cook and the children make too many demands. Men, you know, can't handle it. I tell them that if he is taking care of the children he won't be able to look for a job, but they just don't understand.

Education

The New York City participants were receiving only educational services, namely English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) instruction. The focus of instruction was job search. In other words, the curriculum emphasized the use of English in the process of looking for a job. **Participants disagreed over the impact of class composition on individual learning and the quality of instruction. They were emphatic about the inadequacy of the length of services.**

You cannot be fully prepared after eight weeks [of instruction]. I don't know how to read or write in Spanish, how can I do it in English? Eight weeks is not enough time.[7]

[7]After eight weeks of immersion, BEGIN students are offered two days a week of further instruction for five months. Participants still thought this was not adequate.

Some felt cheated by the contradiction between the program's ostensible purpose—English instruction—and its actual performance—acquisition of job search skills.

> *This is not a program to learn English. It is a program to instill responsibility, to make people learn about responsibility so they can find a job.*

Some participants complained about BEGIN's failure to provide individualized instruction in classes ranging from 18 to 25 students.

Service Delivery

In New York City participants related service delivery issues to language issues. **Spanish-speaking clients perceived that they were treated unequally and often harshly for their inability to communicate in English.** In this regard, the reported experiences of participants in the BEGIN program appear to be similar to the experiences of other Puerto Ricans in the city with pre-FSA services and programs (See Appendix 1).

> *They know that you don't know English but they refuse to help you. I had a Face to Face[8] recently and I spent the whole day there and no one helped me. Then they told me that my case was going to be closed so I had to go back and hire an interpreter.*

Classroom experiences, however, departed from this pattern. Unlike in New Jersey, none complained about insensitive or uncaring instructors. **Teachers were perceived as trying to make the best use of limited time and resources.** Thus, some felt that in spite of their own limitations they were making progress.

> *I like the teachers because they care. You tell them about your problems and they try to help you, well, at least my teachers do. I don't have the mind to learn much anymore but I think I have learned a bit and my progress is good.*

Self-Sufficiency

The New York City participants were not convinced that BEGIN would make a difference in their quest for self-sufficiency. Although critical of many of the program's features, their single most important concern was with the impact of the services received. At the time some had already been placed in temporary jobs. They considered the experience important but decried the fact that these jobs would not lead to permanent employment. Others did not appreciate going through a program that would only land them jobs for which the rigors of program participation were not necessary. Lastly, there were deep concerns about the possibility of not obtaining a job after completing the program.

> *I wish they would place people in permanent positions. You make a big effort, you do well, and for what?*
>
> *Once your eight weeks are up you must be off to work. I still don't know how to read and write very well so I'm going to be sent to clean abandoned buildings again and I'd rather get kicked off welfare than do that.*
>
> *It's eight weeks of study and then five months of study and work, but if you don't get a job after that, what do you do?*

In contrast to the participants in Newark and Philadelphia, these women were highly skeptical of welfare reform. All wanted to be self-sufficient but did not buy into the self-sufficiency rationale of the BEGIN program. The important question to them was whether, if necessary, safety net mechanisms would be available for them beyond BEGIN.

C. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Eleven Puerto Rican participants in the Single Point of Contact (SPOC) program met in Philadelphia to discuss their experiences on July 24, 1991, and January 17, 1992.

Enrollment

The two groups of women interviewed in Philadelphia had opposite experiences. The women in the July group were nonvolunteers. They were mostly negative about the program. **Negative attitudes were related to the fact that work training program payments were deductible from AFDC grants.** This was not clear to participants from the onset. Reductions came as a surprise to them and were considered a disincentive to participation.

> *All participants were interviewed together to complete an application and then they gave us a talk. They told us that it was a work-*

[8] In New York City, a Face to Face is a procedure which, upon due notification, requires clients to come to the welfare office for *ad hoc* assessments.

study program. They didn't tell us that as soon as we started reporting our income we would be hurt.

The program was presented one way but the reality was another; it only hurt us.

The January group consisted of volunteers. **Volunteers experienced difficulties but were generally more hopeful and optimistic about the program.** All the women in this group decided independently to get their GED and were referred to the SPOC program to do so. Some were referred by caseworkers and others by local program administrators. Some in turn prompted friends or relatives to enroll.

Sometimes the caseworker would say, "I think it's time for you to take a training or go to school," but they never gave me a paper or anything so I decided to go on my own.

When I went to see [sic] my GED I went to the Concilio [a local CBO] and they were so packed that anytime I would call they would tell me, "We don't have any openings." I'm trying to show my kids an example, that's why I want to get my GED.

My sister, she was coming here for classes and then she told me, why don't you come along and try to get your GED?

The focus group session made it clear that these were not simple enrollment decisions; rather, they were decisions about the course of the participants' lives. **The fact that the process was self-initiated rather than mandated appeared to be very important to them.**

Assessment

The options of the Philadelphia participants were narrowed down by their caseworkers to two: GED classes or job training.

The way they are doing it is like either you take the GED or go for training.

Once the participants expressed a preference, no attempts were made to explore the issue further. Those choosing GED classes were given tests to determine the level of instruction they needed. **There were no indications from the statements made that those choosing job training were assessed in any significant way.** Assistance was provided to determine which specific program site they would attend, but some were not given site options and others decided on the basis of proximity or the availability of slots.

Me and my girlfriend, wanting to get our GED, we just went to an office and they referred us over here.

One of the social workers gave me ideas about which [site] was best for me, so he told me according to my address which one was best for me and this one was it.

I went to Lutheran Settlement and they told me they were packed. They called me three weeks later and told me about this SPOC and I went for it.

Child Care

Only two participants had preschool-age children. They were satisfied with existing child-care arrangements but described bureaucratic difficulties similar to those faced by participants in Newark and New York City.

I am going through problems now every month. I have to open my case again so that they will pay for my child care. They are paying for it, but not this month, they haven't. I have to take a letter that I am going to school...now I have to do that every single month.

My mom takes care of my son...they gave me a hard problem because of that. They were like, "I don't know if that is in the book." I was like, "She is not working...." They gave me the money for her after I went through a lot.

Although participants preferred care provided by relatives they were also open to various alternatives. One insisted on home day care provided by a relative simply to increase the family's income. Another preferred family-based child care but was open to, and accepted, services provided by a day-care center of her own choosing. Those with school-age children received SPOC program services during the morning hours. This schedule allowed them to be back home before their children were discharged from school.

In one of the groups, comparisons between early and current experiences with SPOC were offered. A general observation about child-care services was that improvements were beginning to be seen in the operation of the program. **Participants in the January group noted more expeditious procedures which**

they felt afforded them more opportunities and better treatment.

I think that they are working better this year than last year. They are like really helping me.

This year there are more opportunities than last year. I was here last year and it wasn't as good and as nice as it is this year.

Education/Employment

Language instruction was mentioned as a positive feature of SPOC. Some statements, however, suggested instability as a result of high staff turnover. Aside from formal instruction, some participants were given moral support and reassurance. This helped them overcome the fear of being in a classroom situation and of testing. **Furthermore, it appeared that some teachers systematically monitored the progress of students to match them with appropriate training after completion of the program's term.** Some participants complained that educational services should run a full week instead of four days.

You learn the language [English], although we had problems since they changed our teacher three times.

I was thinking maybe I'll do terrible in the class but Susan[9] told me, "María don't worry, I'm pretty sure that you are going to do OK. But if not there are other programs and other classes. There will be something there for you." It was scary, I didn't think I was going to pass the test. But I did good.

Both Susan and Julie have been talking a lot about certain training that you could go into. They told us which ones and how and there is still a process for which one goes into some training and which ones do not. It is ongoing.

I would like it to be five days instead of four. Last year it was only two, so we do have two more than last year. I guess we enjoy the class so much and the things that we do here.

Others experienced none of the above. **In the July group, only the job skills learned, namely tips on how to do a job interview along with practice sessions, were considered of value.**

The training prepares you to get a job because you learn how to do an interview, how to dress [for the interview], and we interviewed ourselves.

Service Delivery

The experience of the July group illustrated typical service delivery difficulties often described by Puerto Rican AFDC mothers: **Spanish-dominant participants had greater difficulties negotiating services, were frustrated more often, and alleged to suffer from prejudice and mistreatment.**

Negative assessments also were offered regarding the number of job counselors available, which in one instance was said to be one for 30 program participants. **While the value of job search skills was appreciated, questions were raised about the qualifications of job developers who would simply refer participants to jobs listed in the classified advertisement section of the newspaper.** Many referrals, the participants argued, were done without performing background checks.

They don't visit the workplace before they send you there. If it's a nonprofit, there you go.

They ought to make sure what kind of place it is they are sending you to avoid problems.

In one case a participant was sent to a nonprofit agency to work as a clerk-typist and she was asked to do janitorial work instead.

The experience of the January group was the opposite. On several instances they were asked probing questions in an attempt to draw on the full range of their experience. The consensus concerning service delivery was captured by the following statement:

I mean, we have our bad days sometimes, we may be in a bad mood, but we get through it together. We get by fine.

The group appreciated the variety of services received, some of which were not part of the official package, and were distinctly grateful toward the teachers in the program. **Participants in the January group also appreciated the fact that the teachers cared about them.**

We get all kinds of services. We had the health nutritionist, the AIDS conference, then we got our AIDS test free. We had a lot of things like that.

[9]To ensure confidentiality, all names have been changed.

Here Susan and Julie care a lot. I am grateful. I think that Julie especially really cares that we get it together before we get out of here. And then if there is a problem she takes care of it right away.

Julie will be asking us every other week, "Have you had any problems with the welfare? Do you need something? Are they taking care of you well?" And if any of the girls has any problems she will say, "Just come on into the office. I will talk to you."

Participants in the January group reported a sense that Department of Public Welfare (DPW) and SPOC staff were not at odds with each other; this appeared to satisfy them greatly. They also were pleased by the knowledge that they were in the program by choice.

[Dealing with DPW and SPOC] is easy because at the welfare department, when I went to register I had to go to the case-worker and they are working together. So it's way easier. See, the worker knows what the SPOC is doing and the SPOC knows what the workers are doing. They are both together.

I knew before going to the services that I had a choice. And you do have a choice. But they treated me wonderful. I ain't got no complaints. None at all.

Self-Sufficiency

All participants were of one mind regarding self-sufficiency. **They were emphatic that one should be able to provide for one's family without the government's help.** A distinction was made between assistance provided to those who could not help themselves and to those who needed to get over temporary setbacks or to lessen human capital deficits.

I think that everybody in their right mind should provide for themselves, without getting help. We are young. I mean some people do need assistance because they got sick kids or they are old. But I think those of our age can go for goals. You don't have to be waiting for the check every two weeks.

If you don't help yourself nobody can, but if everybody here put their mind to it and take all the advice from the teachers we all graduate in June.

Their decision to enter SPOC was in part motivated by the desire to develop the capacity to stand on their own, to take control of their lives, and to give their children something they could look up to.

I want to teach my kids by working. I want something to stand by and say, "I got this and I can on my own." I want to be a travel agent. That's my dream and I'm going to go for it.

The impulse toward self-sufficiency was nurtured by the encouragement and support provided by the teachers. This heightened the level of self-confidence of participants and helped them keep their momentum.

Because of what I wanted to study I thought it was just a fantasy. [The teacher] said, "No María, that's what you want to do, do it. It's not a fantasy." And she sat down with me and wrote a list of theaters that I could start, you know, calling. And she made me feel that it's a dream if I want it to be a dream. I get encouraged a lot.

They make me feel confident. I never had any confidence about myself. If I had problems doing the work I would just give up and forget it, but she tells me to keep trying. I have been doing it and every time I take a test I get a higher [score] than the last one. So I just keep going, keep going. That's what they taught me, that's what I like about it.

Julie is trying to get training for us, you know like its one thing after the other so we won't waste our time, we won't be sitting at home after we finish [the GED classes].

VI. DISCUSSION

Pre-FSA and JOBS Experiences

A comparison of pre-FSA experiences of a select group of Puerto Rican AFDC recipients (See Appendix 1) and JOBS experiences of participants reveals the following important similarities:

- a generalized dislike of welfare;
- a desire to work or study on the part of most recipients/participants;
- almost complete acceptance of the goal of self-sufficiency as defined by the Family Support Act (in other words, as employment that keeps families off welfare);
- uncertainty about the impact the FSA will have and skepticism about the promise of JOBS;
- perceptions of language discrimination; and
- prevalence of "examiner" modes of operation.[10]

Enrollment

The issue of mandatory versus voluntary participation in welfare-to-work programs has been discussed from a variety of perspectives. As Mary Jo Bane has pointed out, the controversy involves questions concerning worker-client interactions and managerial approaches to these interactions.[11] Leslie Garner argues that whether programs are mandatory or voluntary will depend on how public agencies manage innovation. In this case, the question is not so much which type of program will best accomplish the goal of self-sufficiency, but rather which one will be feasible given existing political realities.[12] Robert Leone and Michael O'Hare acknowledge that mandatory programs do not foreclose choice, yet they favor voluntary programs because they make work feel like an asset rather than a punishment.[13] Stephen Rosenthal makes a strong case for voluntary programs from a management perspective but says nothing about the impact on client-worker relations, client perceptions of the demands such programs impose on them, or program impact.[14]

The controversy remains inconclusive, at best. Although there is some evidence that both types of programs can have positive results, no study has made a direct comparison between the cost-effectiveness and impact of voluntary versus mandatory programs.[15]

It is clear from the focus groups that mandatory programs can elicit interested and enthusiastic responses from clients. The key factor in this case, however, appears to be the timing of the intervention rather than its character. For some, the "mandate" came when they felt ready to take steps or had already begun moving toward self-sufficiency. Those who had been frustrated in the past did not appreciate mandatory participation. Similarly, participants with serious human capital deficits and/or a history of social and health problems were less likely to feel engaged in the process.

While the greater enthusiasm of volunteers in all three cities was readily apparent, **much of the disaffection expressed by nonvolunteers was related to management and/or policy issues.** The reluctance of the Human Resources Administration to respond in favor of a literacy component for BEGIN in New York City[16] and the observed contrasts between promise and performance in Philadelphia were more significant sources of skepticism and discontent than whether the program was voluntary or not.

An important caveat to the argument that mandatory programs are likely to result in examiner modes of operation needs to be made. **NPRC's findings suggest that although the nature of the program has a significant impact on the relationship between client and worker, the personal attributes of workers are similarly important and often paramount.**

Orientation and Assessment

Orientations are the entry point to JOBS programs for welfare recipients. What they are told and how the message is conveyed sets the framework for program participation. Assessments not only facilitate the match between needs and services, but also provide an opportunity for clients to determine what level of resources will be made available to them and for workers to send a message about the seriousness of the program's intervention.

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[10]"Examiner" modes of operation are impersonal line operations focused on paperwork and compliance with program requirements rather than on program goals.

[11]Mary Jo Bane, "Welfare Reform and Mandatory Versus Voluntary Work: Policy Issue or Management Problem?", *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 8:285-3, 1989.

[12]Leslie H. Garner, Jr., "Mandatory or Voluntary Work Programs?: It Depends on Power," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 8:289-93, 1989.

[13]Robert A. Leone and Michael O'Hare, "Welfare Reform and Work," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 8:293-98, 1989.

[14]Stephen R. Rosenthal, "Mandatory or Voluntary Work for Welfare Recipients?: Operations Management Perspectives," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 8:298-303, 1989.

[15]Judith M. Gueron and Edward Pauly, *From Welfare to Work* (New York: Russell Sage, 1991), p. 45.

[16]Lisa Earl Castillo, BEGIN teacher, personal communication, 28 May 1991.

The information provided by the focus groups suggests that, with respect to orientations and assessments, the contrast among promises, models, and performance is significant. The information shows how participants' perceptions were affected by orientation sessions that made the program appear either inadequate or too good to be true. In some cases, assessments were reportedly not made at all. In most cases needs appeared to be *assumed* rather than *established* and participants had no clear awareness of the process or its purpose.

The experiences of focus group participants suggest a pattern of passive participation at orientation sessions, with decisions about program services made quickly and with little information. This pattern closely resembles a scenario described in a recent work by Anne Mitchell and Emily Cooperstein,[17] based on problems noted by JOBS caseworkers. Their observations focused on the role of orientation sessions in the selection of child-care arrangements. They conclude that decisions made hastily and with little information can result in unstable arrangements that may delay the progress of JOBS participants. Whether the similar experiences of participants in NPRC's focus groups regarding orientations have delayed their progress or not, this report cannot tell.

Assessments may or may not be taking place, but participants do not understand what they are and are not aware that they are being evaluated. In Newark, for example, assessments simply measure literacy levels. This narrow focus might explain why participants reported that no evaluation of needs took place.

There is no one best method of conducting assessments. In fact, the ways in which needs can be identified and services targeted range from informal conversations to formal testing. Furthermore, the purposes of assessments can vary from state to state. In Pennsylvania, for example, the purpose of assessments is to determine the level of job readiness. The state is committed to a tiered approach in which initial assessments are supposed to be followed by more comprehensive reviews depending on the clients' needs. In New York, the special needs of children are supposed to be emphasized, making its assessment model two-generational.[18] The experiences reported here, however, suggest that these models are not being fully realized locally.

[17]Anne Mitchell and Emily Cooperstein, "Low-Income Parents Choose Among Limited Child Care Options," *National Center for Children in Poverty, News and Issues*, Spring/Summer 1992.
[18]Jan L. Hagen and Irene Lurie, *Implementing JOBS: Initial State Choices* (Albany, New York: Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government, State University of New York, March 1992), pp. 109-110; 112.

Child Care

Some of the concerns of child-care advocates and experts regarding FSA provisions center on access, choice, and quality care. According to Paul Offner, the policy of limiting payments to regulated child care providers results in many low-income families not being able to obtain the child care they need. Gina Adams and Clifford Johnson have argued for larger state investments in child care to ensure access. They have also suggested revisions to federal matching rates to cover full market child-care rates at the state level.

Another important issue is the quality and stability of child-care arrangements, with formal arrangements getting high marks from a number of researchers. In arguing in favor of formal arrangements Adams and Johnson cite research findings suggesting that low-income parents rely more on informal care arrangements because they are not able to afford the higher costs of formal child-care programs.[19]

In the case of Puerto Rican mothers, limited research has found that they are less willing than non-Hispanic mothers to leave their children in the care of others;[20] they prefer taking care of them at home or to leave them in the care of relatives.[21] Because of the differences in child-care needs across cities, this set of preferences came out strongly only in the Newark focus groups. Two Philadelphia mothers shared this preference but were nonetheless flexible and willing to accept alternative arrangements. The combined concerns of participants centered on security, stability, and economic benefit.

While the issue of stability has been related to the type of child care offered, the focus group process revealed a different connection. **Late reimbursements and/or payments were the leading cause of instability among Newark and New York City participants and the cause of some difficulties in Philadelphia.**

An interesting finding was related to the issue of young teenage children. This is a *youth services* rather than a child-care issue, but it was raised by focus group participants when asked about child-care problems and concerns. Their understanding of child care did not conform to FSA provisions or Department of Health and

[19]Paul Offner, Gina C. Adams, and Clifford Johnson, "Child Care and the Family Support Act: Should States Reimburse Unlicensed Providers?", *Public Welfare*, 49:6-12, Spring 1991.
[20]New York State Department of Social Services, *op. cit.*, p. 63.
[21]José E. Cruz, *Implementing the Family Support Act: Perspectives of Puerto Rican Clients* (Washington, D.C.: National Puerto Rican Coalition, May 1991), p.7.

Human Services (HHS) regulations.[22] **Yet the difficulties of attending to the demands of teenagers, providing for adequate supervision, and ensuring their safety were considered of sufficient import to warrant intervention and support.** HHS, however, prohibits states from providing JOBS services to youth until the teen has dropped out of school or has a baby.

Education and Training

Many human service professionals and researchers believe that a focus on human capital, specifically through education and training services, is the most effective remedy against welfare dependency and poverty. The Family Support Act itself emphasizes these services, but evaluations of programs that provide substantial amounts of education and training (San Diego's Saturation Work Initiative Model [SWIM] and Baltimore's Options program) have not tested the effectiveness of the separate components of the programs. The only information available is on their impact over earnings compared to programs that did not offer these services.[23]

The findings of a recent study of new education programs in five states suggest that large class size and limited availability of assistance from teachers could be factors that hinder the progress of JOBS program participants. The study indicates that low self-esteem and the acuteness of other personal, health, child-care, and transportation problems of welfare recipients enrolled in education programs can interfere with the students' attendance and ability to concentrate in class. Further, counseling is considered an indispensable program feature if some welfare recipients are to deal effectively with motivational and situational problems.[24] These findings are consonant with the reported experiences of Puerto Rican JOBS program participants which included criticisms about class size, lack of individualized instruction, uneven degrees of support, and self-confidence problems.

Findings in the above-mentioned study related to the quality of education were similarly confirmed. **The focus group sessions revealed no systematic efforts to assess the quality of educational services offered to Puerto Ricans, including management issues and teacher-student interactions. In New York City, in particular, the length of services was especially criticized.** As a BEGIN program observer put it, no one would expect an American in Germany to be prepared to be self-sufficient after eight weeks of instruction in German. Yet monolingual-Spanish AFDC recipients are expected to be prepared to tackle the labor market after eight weeks of ESL instruction.[25]

Service Delivery

A nationwide survey conducted by the Institute for Family Self-Sufficiency of the American Public Welfare Association to assess JOBS case management practices found that administrative paperwork consumes an average of 39 percent of a case manager's time. Case managers interviewed by the Institute reported that excessive paperwork often frustrates their efforts to serve their clients effectively. With caseloads of up to 500 clients, the respondent case managers agreed that it is difficult to provide individualized services, especially in cases where JOBS participants exhibit severe social problems and marked human capital deficiencies.[26]

A recent study of how welfare agencies manage services aimed at children reached a similarly discouraging conclusion concerning effectiveness. "Even when a welfare worker genuinely wants to help," writes Olivia Golden, "the evidence suggests that our large public welfare agencies, although employing some hundred thousand workers to assist several million poor families with children, too often play little positive role in the lives of those children."[27]

In her assessment of Connecticut's JOBS program, Rosemary Talmadge suggests that one reason for this failure is the prevailing culture of the welfare agency which advises new workers not to get too involved with their clients and might give a worker who spends "too much time with her clients," a negative evaluation.[28]

Operational and institutional factors, however, were irrelevant to the perceptions of participants of how they were being served. Because of treatment

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[22]Title III of the Family Support Act refers to "dependent children" and "early childhood." HHS regulations permit child care only for dependent children under 13. Children age 13 and over are eligible only if they are physically or mentally unable to care for themselves or if they are under court supervision.

[23]Gueron and Pauly, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

[24]Edward Pauly, David A. Long, and Karin Martinson, *Linking Welfare and Education* (New York and San Francisco: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, 1992) pp. 9, 11, 12.

[25]Patricia Allen, educational consultant, Welfare Reform Network, New York City, personal communication, 5 June 1992.

[26]Institute for Family Self-Sufficiency, American Public Welfare Association, *Status Report on JOBS Case Management Practices* (Washington, D.C., April 1992), pp. iv-v.

[27]Olivia Golden, *Poor Children and Welfare Reform, Executive Summary of the Final Report* (New York: Foundation for Child Development, 1991), p.2.

[28]Rosemary A. Talmadge, *An Invitation to Change, Realizing the Mission of the Family Support Act* (Hartford, Connecticut: Department of Income Maintenance, March 1992), p.8.

differentials, they placed the burden of proof on individual workers. Only very rarely did they equate individual with institutional excellence. In this study, only the Philadelphia January group referred to the service differential as institutional; elsewhere the differences were attributed to exceptional individuals rather than to observed institutional changes or progress. In New York City, especially, change was seen as an adversarial process given that the Human Resources Administration acted responsively only after participants petitioned the Mayor for an extension of the literacy component of their program.

It seems that a cooperative and trusting relationship between worker and client depends more on cultural, interpersonal, and human factors than on purely technical ones. In Philadelphia and New York City, some teachers acted along the lines of a case-management model that emphasizes support and encouragement of clients, helping them make their own decisions and acting as their advocates on child-care, health, housing, training, and other issues.[29] The prescription that follows is that good client-worker relationships should be operationalized by abstracting their characteristics as case-management models, agency missions, and/or standard definitions of roles.[30] Furthermore, upward flows of information about problems appear to be necessary if operational adjustments are to be made.

Impact on Self-Sufficiency

It is widely acknowledged that the labor-force attachment models favored by the Work Incentive (WIN) programs of the 1980s did not lead to employment or earnings gains for all participants. Disadvantaged welfare recipients, in particular, did not fare well compared to recipients with fewer human capital deficits.[31] The Family Support Act incorporated two approaches that distinguish the JOBS program from its WIN predecessor: state variation and gradual implementation. Underlying these approaches is the central assumption of the legislation that self-sufficiency can only be the result of long-term investments that allow individuals to acquire the skills and receive the supports necessary to find and secure adequate employment.

Based on the experiences reported in this study, it can be said that this assumption and the implementation approaches mentioned are favorably regarded by program participants; it does not appear, however, that they are being fully realized locally. There are differences in how each city has chosen to carry out its JOBS program. The incremental pace of implementation is also evident. **But not all programs appear to be willing or prepared to make the long-term investments that would clearly differentiate the current round of welfare reform from its predecessors.** And many Puerto Rican participants, despite their enthusiasm, perceive this and react with uncertainty and/or skepticism about the promise of JOBS.This notwithstanding, two things must be kept in mind:

- All participants, from the most enthusiastic to the most skeptical, clearly rejected welfare dependency and expressed a strong desire to be self-sufficient.

- Most participants believe that the process leading toward self-sufficiency should be self-initiated.

Participants clearly consider self-confidence the most important factor in the process and believe that a crucial function of programs is to sustain the individual's belief that self-sufficiency is possible. The achievement of self-sufficiency is subject to other pressures of a political, administrative, and budgetary nature, yet how to heighten the level of participant self-confidence and how to enable them to keep their momentum is arguably the kind of challenge that is most difficult to tackle.

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[29]Jolie Bain Pillsbury, "Reform at the State Level: In Massachusetts Eligibility Workers Have Become Case Managers," *Public Welfare*, 47:8-14, Spring 1989.
[30]*Ibid.*, Talmadge, *op. cit.*
[31]Kay E. Sherwood and David A. Long, "JOBS Implementation in an Uncertain Environment," *Public Welfare*, 49:17-27, Winter 1991.

VII. IMPLICATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

In accordance with the qualifications made earlier in the report (See Section II, Methodology) the following statements are offered not as definitive conclusions about JOBS implementation but rather as hypotheses suggested by the research. As such, they have a dual character: as questions for a broader comparative study or evaluation, and as a set of warnings about what might and what might not work for Puerto Ricans in JOBS programs.

◆ **Human service administrators must systematically identify the managerial, attitudinal, and client-worker aspects of program implementation that appear to be affected by previous negative experiences.**

For Puerto Ricans, the following premises for program implementation are suggested:

- Many participants dislike welfare. Welfare is often a response to difficult circumstances and most recipients wish to work or study.

- JOBS program participants want to be self-sufficient. Some are uncertain about the impact the Family Support Act will have on their lives and a significant number are skeptical about its promise. The experience of JOBS has failed to change this assessment significantly, but this might be a function of the difficulties associated with early implementation.

- Some of the experiences of pre-FSA programs and services, such as perceived language discrimination and examiner modes of operation, continue to affect Puerto Rican JOBS program participants but do not appear to have been fully carried over into JOBS.

◆ **While the impact of mandatory *versus* voluntary programs must be specified, it is also important to evaluate the importance of the circumstances in which enrollment takes place and its timing.**

- The marketing of programs appears to be important in how participants evaluate their seriousness and potential impact. Human services administrators must be extremely careful not to oversell welfare-to-work programs. The challenge here is how to make participants understand the relationship between program provisions and program practice in ways that are straightforward and do not undermine their enthusiasm.

- It is more difficult to turn around a participant with severe human capital deficits and acute personal problems if she does not feel ready for the intervention. In these situations, programs run the risk of double jeopardy: they might need to overcome the reluctance and even hostility of participants whose attitudes are reinforced by bureaucratic modes of operation.

◆ **Monitoring mechanisms should be in place to detect contrasts between program descriptions offered at orientation sessions, assessment models, and actual practice and to make adjustments where needed.**

- This is important because orientations that paint a rosy picture of program participation create unreasonable expectations, at best; at worst, skepticism, whether reasonable or not, is exacerbated.

- The specific reasons why assessment models (tiered, two-generational, etc.) are or are not being realized locally must be ascertained to make necessary adjustments. There is some evidence that assessments have limited predictive value for employability, but assessments play other important roles. Through assessments, deficits and needs can be documented and goals can be set. Furthermore, quality assessments, regardless of their form, can cement client-worker interactions and strengthen the impetus for self-sufficiency. If done properly, the assessment process can also be used to help clients acquire problem-solving skills, such as gathering information, setting goals, and developing strategies to accomplish them.

◆ **The allocation of child-care services must be grounded in the judgments that Puerto Rican mothers make of what's best for their children and families.**

- The needs of infants and toddlers are considered best served by the mother herself. The preference of Puerto Rican mothers for caring for their children themselves is very strong yet flexible. It can be acceptable to leave preschoolers and school-age children in the care of providers other than family members.

- Security is a very important child-care concern. Care provided by relatives is preferred because it is felt to be secure. In some cases, this type of arrangement is

preferred because it increases the income of the extended family.

◆ **Administrative issues can have a significant impact on the stability of child-care arrangements.**

• Differences in the type of care offered have a demonstrated impact on the continuity and adequacy of services, but reimbursement and payment practices can also be a source of instability. Late reimbursements and/or payments were the leading cause of instability among Newark and New York City participants and the cause of some difficulties in Philadelphia.

◆ **The concerns about teenage children bring into question existing prohibitions that prevent states from providing JOBS services to youth.**

• The difficulties of attending to the demands of teenagers, providing for adequate supervision, and ensuring their safety appear to be issues of particular relevance to Puerto Rican mothers. The context of single motherhood seems to exacerbate the difficulties associated with this period of development.

• It is important to specify further the implications of this issue, especially to the extent that it is of importance to other populations.

• Short of lifting HHS regulations that prohibit the provision of services to youth, the issue provides opportunities for intervention through flexible operation of programs and collaborative approaches. Specifically, personnel must be aware of service opportunities beyond their particular program through the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), school-based programs, counseling services, and/or other special youth programs.

◆ **Efforts to improve the quality of educational services should consider the interaction between students and teachers as a priority.**[32]

• In this regard, it is important to specify the relative weight of teacher qualifications, including bilingualism and cultural competence, interpersonal skills, and the level and adequacy of resources available *vis-à-vis* program goals.

• Personnel of education programs who act along the lines of a "generalist"[33] model of case management elicit trusting and responsive teacher-client interactions which help sustain the momentum toward self-sufficiency of participants.

• This has implications both for educational services and service-delivery in general since sustaining this momentum is one of the many important challenges facing JOBS implementation locally.

◆ **Educational services need to be more realistic and useful.**

• Human development services cannot be tilted toward instant results. In the current service economy, it is unreasonable to expect that Spanish-speaking clients will be able to function in a work setting after a short course of English instruction.

• A comprehensive educational strategy requires different approaches for high school graduates and dropouts. There is a need for more education personnel able to handle clients at different levels of educational attainment. Also, educational services must be offered within the framework of a workforce development strategy that includes both demand- and supply-side factors.[34]

[32]For a similar recommendation, see Pauly, *et. al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 10, and Richard Murnane, "Interpreting the Evidence on School Effectiveness," *Teachers College Record*, 83:1, 1981.

[33]In this model, a single case manager works with the participant, attending to a wide range of needs and services as these relate to the various components of a program. See Institute for Family Self-Sufficiency, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

[34]National Puerto Rican Coalition, *Workforce Readiness and Wage Inequality: Public/Private Perspectives* (Washington, D.C., July 1992).

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APPENDIX 1

Summary of *Implementing the Family Support Act: Perspectives of Puerto Rican Clients*

Introduction and Methodology

Implementing the Family Support Act: Perspectives of Puerto Rican Clients presents the findings of an assessment of welfare-related experiences and perspectives of Puerto Rican AFDC recipients in New York City; Newark, New Jersey; and Philadelphia Pennsylvania. On the basis of these findings it offers recommendations aimed at influencing the implementation of the Family Support Act of 1988 (FSA) in ways that are meaningful to this special population.

To carry out the project, NPRC selected four community-based organizations (CBOs) from among its network of over 100 Puerto Rican organizations nationwide. In New York City, NPRC worked with Loisaida, Inc., and the Puerto Rican Family Institute; in Newark, with the St. Columba Neighborhood Club; and in Philadelphia, with the Centro Pedro Claver.

Self-contained focus groups were conducted to produce the necessary data. Although the research results can stand alone, they should not be interpreted as representing the full spectrum of experiences and opinions on the topics reviewed. Yet the representativeness of NPRC's sample becomes clear when its characteristics are compared to those of a scientific sample. Similarly, the validity of the findings stands out when compared to the results of other research.

Eight focus groups involving 63 Puerto Rican AFDC recipients were conducted: two each in Newark and Philadelphia, and four in New York City. A small group of non-Puerto Rican Latino AFDC recipients and two Puerto Rican males on General Assistance also participated in the focus groups. This allowed NPRC to explore why Puerto Ricans and non-Puerto Rican Latinos go on welfare and to examine their relative attitudes toward welfare and work.

An additional focus group was conducted with human service professionals from the participating CBOs. The purpose of this discussion was to review the welfare-related experiences of professionals who serve Puerto Rican clients on AFDC.

Findings

- A majority of focus group participants are single heads of households with children (90 percent), are 25 years of age or older (79 percent) and Spanish-dominant (68 percent), have not completed high school (75 percent), and are below the poverty level (90 percent).

- A majority have been on welfare for over three years (73 percent), a handful have unreported earnings or support from absent fathers, and over one-third are currently receiving non-FSA job training or educational services.

- For focus group participants, welfare was a response to difficult circumstances. Their decision to enroll was influenced more by family-related than by work-related values.

- AFDC enrollment triggers conflicts involving other human services agencies and the criminal justice system. The experience of welfare is more difficult for Spanish-dominant clients. Recipients are often discouraged from seeking employment and frustrated by punitive rules and practices.

- Family responsibilities, lack of English proficiency and basic skills, the cost and logistics of transportation, and housing costs are the most significant barriers to the self-sufficiency of focus group participants.

- Most participants wish to work or study; they dislike welfare and recognize that it fosters a structure of incentives that is not right. They also exhibit behavioral deficits that could impair the transition to self-sufficiency.

- The prejudice and mistreatment often associated with the experience of welfare is not limited to AFDC recipients. Even Puerto Rican human services professionals have been subjected to the disdain and stereotyping experienced by some of their clients.

Discussion

Nativity, age, schooling, and language deficits make Puerto Ricans the least employable of all AFDC groups. The number of focus group participants who are currently in training suggests that a good many of them are willing to do what is necessary to change their lives. Research has shown that English proficiency and specialized training significantly increase the odds of being in the labor force. And high school and college education dramatically decrease the odds of being unemployed. There is enough evidence which confirms that families at

the highest levels of risk can be helped if the services are intensive, comprehensive, and provided by competent and caring staff.

Among the educational services Puerto Rican AFDC mothers will need, English language training and basic/remedial education stand foremost. While the proportion of those that could benefit from higher education in the short term is low, FSA reimbursement restrictions regarding college costs are nonetheless unfortunate. In the long run, this restriction will have to be removed given the proven role of a college education in increasing the likelihood of employment and the progressively higher educational requirements of the labor market.

The emphasis on family-related as opposed to work-related values in the decision to go on welfare suggests a clear difference between Puerto Rican AFDC recipients and other special populations. This emphasis is positive. The preference of Puerto Rican mothers for caring for their children themselves should be supported rather than undermined. In no other aspect are the mothers interviewed more at odds with the implementation focus of the Family Support Act than in their emphasis on family rather than on work. In that sense, JOBS participation requirements promise to put their families under twice as much stress as the families of other groups.

There are numerous negative aspects in the experience of these mothers to make them not want to work. Yet there is a substratum of optimism and willingness to change that runs through even the most reluctant. All they need is help, and in some cases those who are optimistic and motivated will require more of it rather than less simply because the odds against them are higher. Most will also require services to help them acquire the discipline and sense of structure that a successful foray into the world of work requires.

Human services administrators should not be surprised, however, to find few Puerto Rican AFDC mothers who expect fair treatment from a system that treats even Puerto Rican professionals rather badly. In the same way that prejudiced perceptions of minority groups die hard, it is usually very difficult to overcome the distrust and defensiveness that these perceptions provoke in the stereotyped group.

Recommendations

There is not one single factor that accounts for the large number of Puerto Rican women on welfare and no single strategy will enable them to break out of the cycle of poverty and dependency; therefore, if the following general guidelines are applied to the implementation process, the transition to self-sufficiency will be more likely for these mothers.

- The emphasis of collaborative arrangements between JOBS programs and human services agencies must be on the strengths and potential of currently existing service delivery systems. The challenge for human services administrators is to prevent the best features of JOBS programs from being ineffective if implemented through a system that is insensitive and dehumanizing.

- The promise of economic progress, if adequately presented, can make even the most reluctant AFDC mother agree to invest time and energy toward self-sufficiency. JOBS programs must have a strong marketing emphasis which, to be appealing to Puerto Ricans, must be bilingual and culturally sensitive.

- Puerto Rican AFDC mothers must be subject to intensive, risk-free assessments. Their needs must be fully identified and properly addressed. Their trust must be rewarded with help rather than punitive measures.

- These assessments must take into account the values underlying specific preferences. Puerto Rican single heads of families who fall within federally targeted groups but who prefer to stay at home to care for their children should not be mandated to participate in JOBS programs. This decision should be voluntary. Non-volunteers should be offered instead family support that focuses on the needs of their children.

- Puerto Rican single heads of families who are willing to accept child care must be offered family- or neighborhood-based services. While the welfare of children must remain the paramount concern of child-care arrangements, the psychological well-being of mothers must also be taken into account.

- Counseling and psychological support will be essential for most participants in JOBS programs. This kind of service is important for AFDC mothers born in Puerto Rico and will also be extremely helpful to those whose efforts toward self-sufficiency are threatened by rather unfavorable odds.

- Educational services and employment training must focus on English instruction and basic skills. These efforts must be tied in with job growth strategies, particularly through community economic development.

- The participation of Puerto Rican or Latino community-based organizations in the implementation process will increase the likelihood of self-sufficiency. CBOs have a useful role to play in marketing, assessment, service provision, and community economic development.

APPENDIX 2

Overview of the Family Support Act

The Family Support Act (FSA) was signed into law as P.L. 100-485 on October 13, 1988. The stated purpose of the law is to revise the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program to emphasize work, child support, and family benefits by encouraging and assisting families to obtain the education, training, and employment needed to avoid long-term welfare dependence.

Program Components

Child Support

To ensure that child support is paid by absent parents, the law requires that courts use numerical formulas to set support amounts and mandates income withholding to collect support payments. Paternity establishment programs also are mandated by the law. States are encouraged to adopt civil procedures for voluntary acknowledgment of paternity and procedures for establishing paternity in contested cases. In contested cases the law allows for genetic tests to establish the identity of the parent.

Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) Program

Under FSA most AFDC recipients are required to participate in a JOBS program. Services and activities that states must make available include high school or equivalent education (combined with training, if necessary), basic and remedial education, education for individuals with limited English proficiency, job skills training, job readiness activities to help prepare participants for work, and job development and job placement. In the legislation, states were required to have an approved JOBS plan by October 1, 1990, but the deadline for statewide program availability was October 1, 1992.

Supportive Services

Child Care—Each state must guarantee child care for each family with a dependent child if such care is necessary for an individual in the family to accept employment or remain employed. Individuals participating in an education and training activity also are eligible for child care. The law authorizes states to offer this service either directly, through providers, by facilitating cash or vouchers, or by reimbursing the caretaker relative in the family. States are free to adopt other arrangements, but in all cases guidelines to ensure basic health and safety must be in place.

Transitional Services—FSA provides for extended eligibility for child care and medical assistance for cases in which a family no longer receives AFDC benefits as a result of employment. Former recipients will be entitled to up to one year of child care after meeting certain requirements. Generally, continued medical assistance will be offered for six months free of charge. After that, states may impose a premium for an additional six months of coverage.

Benefits for Two-Parent Families—Mandatory coverage is also provided for unemployed two-parent families for at least six months in each year.

Benefits for Minor Parents—In the case of an unmarried individual who is under age 18, and who has a dependent child, the law provides for support if the individual and child reside with his/her parents, legal guardian, foster home, maternity home, or other adult-supervised living arrangement.

Participation

Although states can determine whom to serve first, federal funding is tied to specific participation requirements. To be fully funded, states must spend at least 55 percent of JOBS funds on four target groups:

- parents under age 24 who have not completed and are not enrolled in high school or its equivalent,
- parents under age 24 who have little or no work experience,
- individuals who have received public assistance for at least 36 of the last 60 months, and
- members of a family who will lose AFDC eligibility within two years because the youngest child will no longer qualify as a "dependent child."

Within these groups, those who volunteer must be served first.

Implementation

Although different opinions exist, it is generally agreed that the JOBS program is the centerpiece of the FSA. In this light, the difficulties noted by observers of the JOBS implementation process across the country acquire added significance. At the macro level, a number of impediments stand out.

There is a consensus among welfare advocates that lifting the cap on federal funding for JOBS, which is set at $1 billion in FY 93, is appropriate. The current economic climate is having a significant impact on the ability of states to sustain their fiscal commitment to the program. Furthermore, the increase in the AFDC caseload nationally compounds an already troubled fiscal scenario.

Although some have argued that the FSA has failed to generate a new sense of mission among welfare programs, a recent General Accounting Office (GAO) study found that almost half of the states have reported shifting their program emphasis from immediate job placement toward basic skills and long-term education and training.

Other factors continue to take a toll on implementation. The severe education deficits of those being served require intensive and more expensive education and skills training. Once in place, the administrative mechanisms that complex data reporting and participation requirements demand will require more resources and technical assistance. Unfortunately, as of September 1991 nearly 90 percent of states reported experiencing great difficulties developing necessary information systems.

Budget shortfalls and the pressures of electoral politics have created a climate of opinion conducive to an emphasis on punitive approaches to implementation in some states. This is true in New Jersey, where significant numbers of Puerto Rican AFDC recipients live. In New York, ironically, one of the features that distinguish JOBS from Work Incentive (WIN) programs—state variation—has allowed the state to dance around the central premise of the Family Support Act: that long-term investments are preferable to quick, low-cost interventions.

APPENDIX 3

Profiles of Participating Community-Based Organizations

Centro Pedro Claver, Inc., 3565 North 7th Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19140; (215) 227-7111. Roger Zepernick, Executive Director. Focus group project coordinator: Roberto R. Santiago. Centro Pedro Claver was founded in 1978 to improve the quality of life for Puerto Ricans, Latinos, blacks, and other low-income communities in Philadelphia. The agency provides assistance to neighborhood residents in such areas as housing, youth employment, social services, and education.

FOCUS-Newark, Inc., 441- 443 Broad Street, Newark, New Jersey 07102; (201) 624-2528. Edward Domínguez, Executive Director. Focus group project coordinator: Nitza Molina. FOCUS-Newark has served the Hispanic poor of Newark since 1967. The agency's mission is to empower Hispanics with limited language, occupational, and educational skills to improve the quality of their lives and that of the community at large. It provides services in four areas: community development and support, education, family crisis intervention, and youth services.

Puerto Rican Family Institute, Inc., 145 West 15th Street, New York, New York, 10011; (212) 924-6320. María Elena Gironé, Executive Director. Focus group project coordinator: Sonia Acobe-Morales. Organized in 1960, the Puerto Rican Family Institute offers comprehensive services in the areas of placement prevention, mental health, residential treatment programs, education, and research. The Institute combines casework and psychiatric counseling to prevent individual dysfunction and promote family stability. It serves clients throughout New York City and Puerto Rico.

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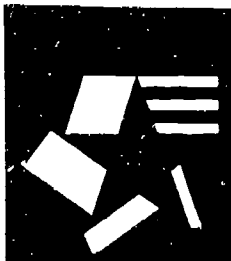

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