



## Survey Shows Welfare Reform Concerns

From the CDF Minnesota March 2001 Newsletter

The majority of people who work directly with children and families expressed concern about the effects of welfare reform efforts on children in a recent survey conducted by CDF-MN. People interviewed included staff in early childhood programs, battered women's shelters, legal aid clinics, crisis nurseries, and county social service agencies, in three different regions of the state.

Two-thirds of the 27 social service providers interviewed reported more family stress. Increased stress stemmed from lack of dependable or affordable child care and stable housing, as well as employers' lack of responsiveness to family needs and parents' fear of sanctions.

Social service providers have seen adults expressing their concerns and frustration more often in the presence of children, and increased acting out by children in response. Some providers also observed an increased awareness by, and subsequent stress, in children preoccupied with their family's financial situation. One respondent, for instance, described a 14-year old daughter torn between participating in her school's speech team, and taking an after-school job to help support the family.

Because it has been difficult to obtain information directly on the well-being of children affected by the welfare changes, CDF-MN interviewed those people who work closely with families and children. This information, when combined with data from other studies, helps give advocates and policy makers some ideas as to where potential problems may lie as the state continues its welfare reform effort.

The vast majority of respondents felt that the 60 month lifetime cap on welfare benefits would increase rates of child abuse and neglect, homelessness, and negatively effect school readiness and performance if families lost assistance before they were financially independent. Respondents were especially unanimous in believing neglect, hunger, homelessness and school readiness would be negatively impacted. Concern was even greater that child neglect, hunger and homelessness would increase if families were cut off because they were not in compliance with welfare requirements. Most social service providers believed that the imposition of sanctions of any kind were detrimental to child well being. Many expressed hope that alternatives to sanctions were being explored.

When asked if children were better off, the same or worse off than before welfare reform, the largest proportion of respondents (44%) thought children were worse off. Even though their parents were now working, children often remain poor. Almost a third of those interviewed were unsure or thought children's well-being was about the same as before the changes went into effect. Two respondents felt that children were better off because they benefited from seeing their parents go to work and two thought welfare reform had both good and bad impacts on children.

The survey was conducted by Lisa Lilja, a University of Minnesota Masters of Social Work student interning at CDF-MN.

CDF Minnesota  
University National Bank Bldg.  
200 University Avenue W.  
Suite 210  
St. Paul, MN 55103

Telephone (651) 227-6121  
Fax (651) 227-2553  
cdf-mn@cdf-mn.org  
www.cdf-mn.org

Children's Defense Fund  
25 E Street NW  
Washington, DC 20001

Telephone (202) 628-3510  
Fax (202) 662-3510

