

## The Cultural Policy Studies Project

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# LIBERAL WELFARE PROGRAMS: WHAT THE DATA SHOW ON PROGRAMS FOR TEENAGE MOTHERS

## INTRODUCTION

Congress is engaged in a fierce debate over welfare reform. While some congressional leaders have proposed radical reforms, others seem determined to protect the central features of the current system. Today's approach is to provide federally designed benefits complemented by job training, education, family planning, and other programs intended to encourage enrollees voluntarily to leave the welfare system.

Five major federal studies<sup>1</sup> show clearly that this conventional liberal view of welfare simply does not work. Job training, educational supplemental training, and family planning programs focused on teenage unwed mothers have failed to reduce dependency. The five federal demonstration projects evaluated in the government-sponsored reports are New Chance (an interim report), Teenage Parent Demonstration, Even Start, the Comprehensive Child Development Program (CCDP), and the National Job Training and Partnership Act Study.

1 Robert Granger, Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, "New Chance: Interim Findings on a Comprehensive Program For Disadvantaged Young Mothers and their Children," paper presented at American Enterprise Institute Seminar on Persistent Poverty, Washington, D.C., June 9, 1994; Rebecca Maynard, Mathematica Policy Research Inc., "Welfare Reform and Young Unwed Mothers: Lessons from the Federal Welfare Reform Demonstration," paper on the Federal Teenage Parent Demonstration presented at AEI Seminar on Persistent Poverty, Washington, D.C., June 9, 1994; Jean Layzer, Abt Associates, "Even Start and the Comprehensive Child Development Program," paper presented at AEI Seminar on Persistent Poverty, Washington, D.C., June 9, 1994; "The National JPTA Study Overview: Title II-A Impacts on Earnings and Employment at 18 Months" (Bethesda, MD: Abt Associates Inc., January 1993).

Despite the availability of these results, welfare reform packages such as those proposed by President Clinton and other leading Democrats<sup>2</sup> continue to rely on such programs as the best way to help poor teenage mothers.

These studies show that:

- ✓ **Government job training programs** do not work for young unmarried mothers. Nor do they work for teenage men—indeed, some young men may do even worse after job training.
- ✓ **Government literacy training programs** do not work for young unmarried mothers.
- ✓ **Government family planning programs** do not work for young unmarried mothers.
- ✓ **Young unmarried teenage mothers** who do not get the “benefits” of these programs do as well as, and sometimes a little better than, those who do get them.

President Clinton’s welfare reform proposal would focus resources on young single mothers.<sup>3</sup> These mothers would be given access to more extensive job training and education, as well as child care programs, for up to a year after leaving welfare. But the evidence indicates that the strategy of concentrating services and benefits on welfare recipients to move them off welfare is largely ineffective. As *The Washington Post* observed with frustration, commenting on a General Accounting Office (GAO) study of job training for welfare recipients, “Almost every new report issued on the problems facing welfare recipients tells a story that few want to hear right now: that moving long-term welfare recipients into jobs is hard, complicated and costly.”<sup>4</sup>

The recent studies of traditional liberal welfare programs underscore the dismal results of these expensive programs. It is clearly time for Members of Congress to try a fundamentally different approach.

### **THE PROGRAM: NEW CHANCE**

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New Chance recruited over 2,000 diverse, highly disadvantaged young mothers and assigned them randomly to experimental and control groups for the duration of the experiments. On average, they were 19 years old and had their first baby at age 17. Fewer than one in ten were married. Most had some work experience, but most also had not been working for the 12 months prior to taking part in the program. One-third had two or more children.

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2 For a description of the Clinton welfare reform bill, see Robert Rector, “How Clinton’s Bill Extends Welfare As We Know It,” Heritage Foundation *Issue Bulletin* No. 200, August 1, 1994.

3 Reuter, “Clinton proposal caps cash, offers education, job training and child care,” *Rocky Mountain News*, June 15, 1994.

4 Editorial, “The Good and the Bad of Jobs,” *The Washington Post*, December 21, 1994.

The program consisted of regular GED classes, career exploration, and instruction in job skills, health issues, and family planning. It lasted up to 18 months, with 25 hours to 30 hours of instruction per week.<sup>5</sup>

An interim analysis of the program was conducted for the federal government by Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation. The final report is expected later this year.

## THE RESULTS

The New Chance interim evaluation suggests that intensive, two-year job training makes no significant difference in the employment chances of young, unmarried teenage welfare mothers. Significantly, during the 18-month follow-up period after the interventions had taken place, those who did not receive the training had reading scores similar to the scores of those who did. They also worked more and earned more. At any point in time during the evaluations, over 80 percent of the women in each of the research groups were on welfare during the 18 months of follow-up.

Furthermore, the program had no effect on marriage rates, on reducing repeat out-of-wedlock births, or on drug and alcohol consumption during the 18-month follow-up period.

As Robert Granger, Senior Vice President of Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, says: "These data send a strong cautionary note about the efficacy of starting welfare reform with young mothers."

## THE PROGRAM: TEENAGE PARENT DEMONSTRATION

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This demonstration was a large field test of the JOBS program provision of the Family Support Act of 1988, the last major congressional effort to "end welfare as we know it" through mandatory intensive job training and services. The demonstration was conducted in Camden and Newark, New Jersey, and Chicago, Illinois, during the late 1980s by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Six thousand teenage first-time mothers (average age 18.4 years) participated.

As the program evaluators explain:

Half of these teenagers were randomly selected to participate in the new welfare regime requiring them to engage in approved self-sufficiency oriented activities or risk a reduction in their welfare grants of about \$160 a month. The other half acted as the control group. These young mothers were provided with a fairly rich bundle of support and services to facilitate and promote their compliance with these requirements. The program consisted of providing supplemental general education, job training, employment services, child care and transportation assistance, personal skills training, job skill training and mandatory family planning classes. About 90% of the eligible young mothers participated in the JOBS-type

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<sup>5</sup> This voluntary program came in two phases. Phase I had an 88 percent participation rate focused on education (GED or ABE based on skill level): career exploration; and instruction in preemployment skills, health education, life skills, and family planning classes. Phase II, with a 42 percent participation rate, included skills training, paid or unpaid work experience, and job placement assistance. Case management, including individual counseling, was offered throughout.

programs; the vast majority of those who did not left welfare relatively soon after being notified of their obligations to participate.

An analysis of the program was conducted for the federal government by Mathematica Policy Research Inc.

## THE RESULTS

The evaluation of the Teenage Parent Demonstration program yielded conclusions similar to those reached in the analysis of New Chance:

The net result is that there was no overall improvement in the economic well-being of these young mothers.... It is unrealistic to expect that the majority of teenage parents will be able to achieve self-sufficiency within two years, even if offered strong JOBS-type services. Most simply do not have the basic skills, support systems and experience necessary to hold jobs paying wages that will move them out of poverty and off welfare.... The demonstration and its family planning services were not successful in decreasing the likelihood of repeat pregnancies.<sup>6</sup>

## THE PROGRAM: EVEN START

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This program was funded by the Department of Education to improve adult and child literacy and was targeted at families in poor areas. The government funded over 500 projects under this program in 1994 at a cost of \$90 million. To be eligible, a family had to have a child under the age of eight and live in a Chapter One school attendance area (a neighborhood with a high proportion of low-income families). There was no formal time limit on the service period. The program consisted of adult education, parenting, and early childhood education classes. In five cities there was a randomized experiment with measurements taken at three different points: at the time of entry, nine months later, and 18 months later.

An analysis of the program was conducted for the federal government by Abt Associates.

## THE RESULTS

Though there were large differences between the groups in the attainment of a GED, the evaluation concluded that there was "No significant difference between the 2 groups [those who participated in Even Start and those who did not] on a test of functional literacy at 9 and 18 months." Furthermore, "There were no differences between the two groups in employment or family income."<sup>7</sup>

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6 Maynard, "Welfare Reform and Young Unwed Mothers: Lessons from the Federal Welfare Reform Demonstration," pp. 45 and 48.

7 Layzer, "Even Start and the Comprehensive Child Development Program: Lessons for Welfare Reform," p. 75.



**THE PROGRAM:  
THE COMPREHENSIVE CHILD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM (CCDP)**

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CCDP is a comprehensive services program run by the Department of Health and Human Services for families below the poverty line with a mean family income of \$5,707. The taxpayer pays \$8,000 per family, per year for this program, which lasts five years per family and includes adult education, parenting and early childhood education, housing assistance, and counseling. A randomized experiment was conducted at 21 sites around the country. About two-thirds of the experimental households were single-parent families. Of these families 50 percent had their first child in their teens and 25 percent were teenage mothers.

An analysis of the program was conducted for the federal government by Abt Associates.

**THE RESULTS**

The interim report on the Comprehensive Child Development Program concluded that after two years in the program there were no significant differences between the experimental and control groups in GED attainment, income, or employment.<sup>8</sup>

**THE PROGRAM:  
THE NATIONAL JOB TRAINING PARTNERSHIP ACT STUDY (NJTPA)**

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This study examined the effectiveness of the Job Training Partnership Act of 1982 by measuring the impact of job training on two groups: adults (22 years of age and over) and youths (16-21 years of age). Over 20,000 applicants for job training in 16 different areas of the country participated in the study. The experimental group received classroom training in occupational skills, basic education, and job search assistance.

The study was conducted for the federal government by Abt Associates.

**THE RESULTS**

“The [JPTA] programs failed to raise the average earnings of out-of-school youths in general.”<sup>9</sup> Remarkably, young women worked even fewer hours after training than before, leading to a *decrease* in income. “The program had a large (7.9%) **NEGATIVE** effect on the earnings of young males and **NO** effect on their employment.”

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8 *Ibid.*

9 The JPTA programs *reduced* the average earnings of male out-of-school youths who reported having been arrested between their sixteenth birthday and random assignment.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR WELFARE REFORM

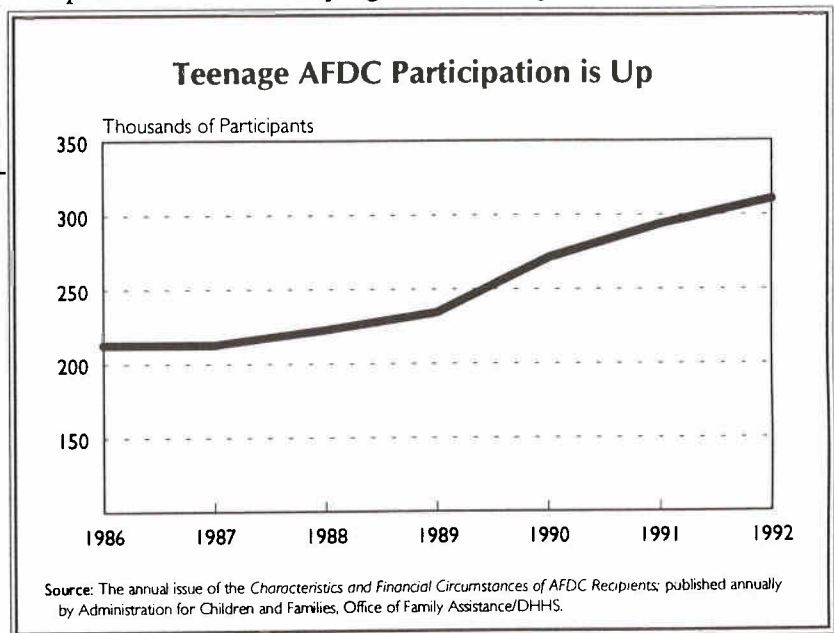
All the program evaluations summarized above were conducted by organizations with a national reputation for their analytical work.<sup>10</sup> All reached similar conclusions which conflict directly with the liberal welfare reform agenda. On all the major issues within the welfare debate—work, marriage, out-of-wedlock births, and drug and alcohol consumption—well-designed, liberal reform experiments had *no* positive impact on young teenage mothers. None of the traditional liberal policies on job training, educational supplements, or family planning made any significant difference in the educational or employment futures of teenage welfare mothers.<sup>11</sup>

The experts concluded that the programs were well-run, although some were run better than others. The problem is not that they are badly managed, but that they do not work. And yet, the Clinton Administration's welfare proposals would expand these types of programs.

## WHY THE PROGRAMS DO NOT WORK

The repeated failure of these programs for the young-parent welfare population is the result of a misdiagnosis of the problem. The underlying issue is not jobs or education for teenage mothers, but a much more profound disturbance in the natural process of growing up: deciding about having babies, starting families, and the relationships between the fathers and mothers of the children. The crucial factors are not economics and job training, but love and family, the fact of belonging, and the capacity for work.<sup>12</sup>

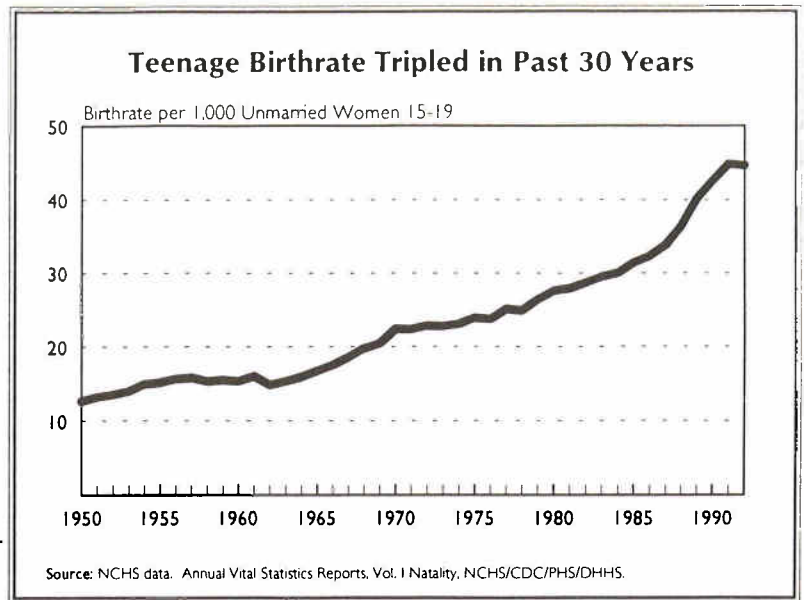
No matter how complex, sophisticated, or costly, all conventional government interventions fail to affect these fundamental human tasks of intimacy and love, of family and friendship.



- 10 Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, Mathematica Policy Research Inc., and Abt Associates.
- 11 While not all the studies were targeted solely at teenage mothers, all reported on this group, and the findings all point in the same direction for this group.
- 12 See Patrick F. Fagan, "Rising Illegitimacy: America's Social Catastrophe," Heritage Foundation *F.Y.I.* No. 19, June 29, 1994, and Patrick F. Fagan, "The Real Root Causes of Violent Crime: The Breakdown in Marriage, Family, and Community," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 1026, March 17, 1995.

Teenage mothers seem to follow a rather clear pattern. They use the welfare system when it helps them attain their goal of starting their families and ignore it when it does not help them. Welfare policy for the last thirty years, however, has sought to provide extra services in an attempt to persuade mothers to change these goals. These services range from the distribution of contraceptives, to school-based clinics, to family planning education, and

now to intensive job and literacy training combined with child care. All have failed to change the goals of this population.



Unfortunately, those who support the welfare system and those who believe that the core of reform should be more “transition” services seem determined to ignore the findings of government-sponsored evaluations of these service-intensive programs. Indeed, if previous experience is any guide, one of them—the Clinton welfare proposal—will cost billions of new dollars yet make little or no difference in the employment, earnings, or family structure of the current welfare population.

The failed federal policies of the War on Poverty focus on providing services to enable the welfare recipient, in a sense, “to have it all” by having a child out of wedlock and then joining the workforce with the expectation of reasonable earnings. But this approach is wholly unrealistic. Instead, it is time for society—all communities, families, parents, teachers, media opinion molders, and adults—to impart to teenagers the most basic of messages on sex, babies, and work and for government programs to reinforce these messages:

**First:** If a girl wants a family, she starts by marrying a man, not by having a baby. Her first and her family’s first and most important task is to select a husband who will commit himself, for life, to her and to their children.

**Second:** Young would-be parents must be psychologically and emotionally ready to agree together to embark on the great, difficult, and potentially most rewarding work of their lives: raising their children to be competent, compassionate, responsible adults. One of the marks of that maturity is that the married couple agree together to bring their first child into the world. The first step in such an agreement is getting married: a deeply private act that is also a very public and social act of commitment that demonstrates the acceptance of responsibility to spouse and children.

**Third:** Young would-be parents must be economically productive enough to support themselves and the children they bring into the world without relying on the financial support of others for the basics of life. As President Clinton has said, “Children

should not be born until parents are married and fully capable of taking care of them.”<sup>13</sup>

## CONCLUSION

If the adults, who are responsible for the education and formation of children, clearly send these messages, there is some chance teenagers may follow their advice. The current welfare system and its defenders, however, in accordance with the general tenor of a permissive culture, have sent precisely the opposite message on marriage, sex, and the child’s critical need for married parents. Only when all institutions in society, including government, send the proper messages will there be any dramatic change in the behavior of teenagers. To the extent that these positive messages are not sent, the problem will continue to lie not with poor teenagers, but with the cultural leadership of society at large, as well as with the nation’s political leadership.

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**13** White House Briefing: Welfare Reform Address by President Clinton, Federal Information Systems Corporation, June 14, 1994.