

RAPID RESPONSE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE TO NEEDY FAMILIES AND WELFARE TO WORK

Leadership Forum: Strengthening Families Through Partnerships With Faith- and Community-based Organizations

**Montgomery, Alabama
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Long Report

Background

The enactment of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) in 1996 provided States the wherewithal and flexibility to develop Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs focused on assisting families achieve self-sufficiency. States have spent most Federal TANF dollars on direct assistance and work preparation activities. Few dollars, however, have been dedicated to the purposes of TANF relating to marriage education, programs to prevent and reduce out-of-wedlock pregnancies, and the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

The current economy has created a critical budget situation for all 50 States. Alabama's crisis has precluded State staff from attending Administration for Children and Families (ACF) regional and national training events for the past couple of years, and the current budget situation is bleaker yet.

To educate and inform grantees and State partners, the Regional Office held a one and half-day leadership conference in Montgomery, Alabama. Attendees included State and county staff from ACF partners in the Alabama Department of Human Resources, as well as the Executive Directors for Head Start grantees, Community Action Agencies, and faith-based organizations. The focus of the forum was on strengthening families through fatherhood initiatives, marriage education, youth education programs that foster positive youth development, and involvement of faith-based and community organizations.

Purpose

The purpose of this conference was to educate and inform a wide spectrum of stakeholders from across the State of Alabama about ACF's priority initiatives. It was also to assist stakeholders to aggressively and creatively incorporate the initiatives throughout ACF programs and communities to strengthen families in the State of Alabama. The conference theme was Strengthening Families, with plenary sessions focusing on family formation, fatherhood, and youth development.

Workshop Goals

This goal of the conference was to focus on the importance of partnering with ACF at the State and local levels to bring fatherhood, healthy marriages, and youth development programs to the forefront of the human services agenda in the State of Alabama so that families are strengthened, and the quality of life improves for children, mothers, fathers, and communities. This was the third ACF forum. Forums were held in Tennessee and South Carolina last year, and the hope is to bring the expertise of ACF staff to the State and local levels.

Workshop Organization

This forum was designed so that participants could take back valuable information to their respective organizations. The focus was to share information about how ACF, in collaboration with its State and local partners, could take welfare reform to new level, promote family formation, and to discuss ways to strengthen families. ACF values active State and local

partnerships, and is committed to serve as a catalyst in the effort to strengthen families. Program specific workshops engaged participants in discussions about how programs can be integrated into existing structures and how to involve non-traditional partners in the work of strengthening families. ACF leaders at the Regional and Central Office levels spoke about key initiatives. Organizations and communities that have successfully implemented marriage, fatherhood, and youth programs were highlighted.

Highlights of Day One Workshop: Plenary Session, September 9, 2004

Introduction and welcome remarks were provided by Carol L. Osborne, State Programs Director, ACF – Atlanta; Carlis Williams, ACF Regional Administrator – Southeast; and Page B. Walley, Ph.D., Commissioner, Alabama Department of Human Resources. Ms. Carlis Williams quoted Jack Welch, the former Chief Operating Officer of General Electric, “....The world of the future will belong to passionate driven leaders, people who not only have an enormous amount of energy, but that energize those who they lead.” Ms. Williams commented that as leaders, the participants at this meeting should note the great importance of their impact on the lives of others, and on creating a vision around what it is that they plan to accomplish. She emphasized the need to increase the passion and commitment as key factors in making the difference for children. She closed by encouraging participants to enjoy the day and continue to work together “in the partnerships that we forged in the past and make them even stronger in the future. “

Page Walley, Ph.D., Commissioner of Alabama’s Department of Human Resources, opened his remarks by thanking Ms. Williams and her ACF staff. He also stated that he wants what’s being done on his department’s behalf to be understood so that everyone can speak the same language and “get through” all of the acronyms and terminology.

After the opening and welcome remarks, the presentations on ACF Key Priorities included: TANF Reauthorization; Fatherhood; Mentoring Children of Prisoners; and Healthy Marriage.

TANF Reauthorization

Mack Storrs, Senior Policy Analyst, Office of Family Assistance, ACF-Washington, began by stating that the TANF program expired on September 30, 2002 and has continued by a series of continuing resolutions. It is set to expire again on September 30 in 2004, and Congress has to take action or there will no longer be a program. Mr. Storrs stated that almost everyone in Congress is in agreement on every one of the TANF provisions and there is a general uniform agreement on the concept of welfare reform. Compare that sentiment, he said, with the initial welfare reform proposal submitted in 1995. Welfare reform at that time was very controversial. Today, everyone has agreed that welfare reform has been the most successful social science experiment in the last 100 years. The issue has now become how to pass new welfare reform legislation and what exactly that legislation will contain.

President Bush submitted his welfare reform proposal in February 2002, and the House and Senate reported out their own versions of the legislation in 2003 and 2004, although none have been successful. The Congress needs to pass a reauthorization or another continuance by September 30, 2004. It is not clear what is going to happen. One option is another short extension; the second option is a six month extension and to have the new administration in 2005 take up the issue. In any event, the future of welfare reform is uncertain, but it is worthwhile to discuss new aspects of the current legislation. Some specifics of the bill include:

- 16 ½ billion block grant;
- State flexibility;
- strong work requirements; and
- expiration of benefits after 5 years.

Mr. Storrs stated that employment has increased and there have been over 600,000 people newly placed in jobs every year, with 60 and 70 percent retention rates. Caseloads have also fallen dramatically. Welfare reform is now about what communities are doing, not necessarily what States and the Federal Government are doing. Poverty has declined generally since 1996, but has increased in the last three years, raising some concern related to the recession we had two years ago. Clients have a continuing economic struggle. There are still challenges; wages are

above minimum wage but often still not enough to bring people above the poverty level. One of the changes in the reauthorization bill is a provision to move children out of poverty – that is a goal of welfare reform and it is a goal we have look at seriously. Of more concern are the services provided to welfare recipients. We have been successful in getting clients off of welfare but not into careers that take them out of poverty. Our services are moving them into work faster but not moving them into the wage stream to get them out of poverty. What we need is more effective models of barrier reduction, postemployment supports for wage growth, and career development.

Mr. Storrs said that the main aspect of welfare reform is the notion of full engagement. He told the audience that he believes this area has a lot more impact than the impact of the work requirements. The reason is because it involves every family member in activities that move toward self-sufficiency. For example, Mr. Storrs cited that it is currently reported that 60 percent of the cases in Alabama are not engaged in any activity whatsoever. The model of full engagement would have a self-sufficiency plan for each family and would also involve children; it would address the needs of children, monitor their progress in school, and this is different than only addressing the needs of adults. The current legislation contains increases in work and participation requirements. There is new money for healthy marriage promotion and research, some welfare and workforce integration waivers, and some improvements in child support.

Mr. Storrs described differences of the House and Senate bills, including, for example, that the House bill provides an increase in work requirements from 30 hours to 40 hours. He said that some concern on Capitol Hill is that there hasn't been enough funds devoted to Healthy Marriage and that most of the money has instead gone to provide work supports. The reason for marriage promotion is that it provides significant protection against poverty. It also provides for economies of scale; stable marriages have two-parents and a greater potential for income and support. The household also has an equitable division of labor. On a policy note, Mr. Storrs stated that research says marriage promotion and the prevention of non-marital single parents go together. The most controversial issue of reauthorization is how much child care is needed to meet the additional work requirements. The answer, Mr. Storrs said, is that no one knows

Fatherhood

Robert Richie, Child Support Manager, ACF-Atlanta, discussed the effort of getting parents more involved in sustainable relationships as an important one, and a high priority for ACF. He said that fathers provide a shield against poverty for their families and many children do not have fathers in the home now. This high priority reflects President Bush's belief that fathers play an important and critical role for families. The budget for FY 2005 provides funds for faith-based and community organizations for many services for fatherhood initiatives. Mr. Ritchie cautioned that "We also know this can be a complicated and difficult task - many fathers are teenagers, are incarcerated, or are on drugs." Federal programs have improved over the years to help States mandate and enforce child support and to establish paternity.

Examples of Interagency Collaboration

Mr. Ritchie cited examples of interagency collaboration on fatherhood programs within States. He stated that the Georgia Office of Child Support Enforcement collected just under 5 million dollars of child support last year, and over the past three years the Georgia fatherhood services network has helped 3,500 noncustodial parents help find jobs to support their children. Georgia has recognized that many noncustodial parents lack the economic capacity to make regular child support payments. The Georgia fatherhood services network is sponsored by Georgia Child Support Enforcement and is a great help for fathers. The Florida Department of Revenue is also reaching out within the State for resources to help fathers in child support. Many of these projects are a good way to communicate with fathers. The Mississippi Division of Child Support Enforcement has negotiated a Memorandum of Understanding with the Mississippi Head Start Association. It promotes local collaboration on fatherhood initiatives and it furnished the Mississippi Head Start program with videos. Another good example of Child Support Enforcement partnering with fatherhood initiatives is in Alabama. The Alabama Fatherhood Initiative helps fathers with supporting their children by providing counseling, education and training, enhancing their ability to help their children. More employment related services, however, are needed.

Those who provide these services not only help the men by helping them to become better fathers but they also help the community. These programs often transform fathers with problems into responsible citizens, and allow them to assume and understand their responsibilities.

Mentoring Children of Prisoners

Lynn Childs, Alabama Attorney General's Office, spoke about the Mentoring Children of Prisoners program; a new program that President Bush talked about in January 2003 in his State of the Union address. This program comes under section 429 of 504 b subpart 2 of the Social Security Act as amended. It is administered by the Family and Youth Services Bureau in ACF, and its purpose is to help bring mentors to children who are vulnerable - children of those who are incarcerated. Ms. Childs stated that kids don't have appropriate role models and that this program was designed to address this need. For example, between 1985 and 1995, the juvenile crime rate went up 140 percent in the State of Alabama. Some other facts about the program include that in FY 2003 there were 9 million dollars in grants awarded to 52 organizations located all over the country. In 2004, that figure was 45.6 million dollars in grants to 164 additional organizations around the country. There were two recipients in Alabama. One was the State's Attorney's General Office (her office), and it received 447,999 for the three year program. They have subgranted the funds out to some six organizations, among them, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Birmingham, We Mentor, and Aid to Inmate Mothers. They are near the end the first year of this grant.

Alicia Luckie, Children's Trust Fund, stated that her organization also applied to this program, and now partners with subgrantees to provide mentor matches through faith-based organizations. She announced that The Children's Trust Fund found out last month that they will be a recipient of the grant for the next three years for 900,000 to implement the Mentoring Children of Prisoners program, and that they will expand into three new counties in Alabama.

Highlights of Day One Program Specific Breakouts, September 9, 2004

The program specific breakouts included the topics: Child Welfare and Youth Development; Head Start/Child Care; Child Support; and TANF. The facilitators and presenters of the breakouts were from 1 regional ACF Offices, as well as specialists and experts from around the country.

Head Start/Child Care

The Head Start/Child Care breakout was facilitated by Desiree Reddick-Head, State Technical Assistance Specialist, National Child Care Information Center; Marsha Lawrence, Head Start Manager, ACF; and Darrel McGhee, Child Care Program Specialist, ACF. In the first session, entitled, *Scanning the Alabama Early Care/Education Landscape*, five speakers from State agencies and programs presented the State perspective on early care and education in Alabama. Ms. Debbie Thomas, Director of Child Care Services, Alabama Department of Human Resources, detailed the duties of her department. The duties are to license and monitor child care facilities (including homes and centers) and faith-based child care centers. In addition to child care services, the department contracts with various agencies to determine eligibility for the State supported child care assistance program.

Linda Hampton, Head Start Collaboration Director, and Acting Commissioner, Alabama Department of Children's Affairs, discussed the department's role in making child care recommendations to the governor via a consensus of representatives on the State Policy Council. Ms. Hampton stated that some of the recommendations made included: 1) To create a seamless system of child care services in Alabama (to include the Office of School Readiness, among other offices) to increase the ability of parents to gain employment; 2) To explore the effect of changing the mandatory school age from 7 to 16 years old, to 6 to 17 years old; and 3) The State should develop a comprehensive resource directory of services provided by its agencies. Ms. Hampton believes that the major accomplishments of the Department of Children's Affairs has been the strengthening of the county Children's Policy Councils, a system to identify and address children's issues at the local level; the provision of a first-time dental summit to address the oral health needs of children in the early care and education community; increased test scores of pre-

kindergarten children transitioning to kindergarten in relation to the general kinder population; and the provision of county-specific data to local policy councils for accurate assessment of local needs and positive outcomes and accountability for Children's Trust Fund dollars.

Highlights of Day Two Plenary Session, September 10, 2004

Opening and welcome remarks were given by Ramona Warren, ACF Atlanta, and Carlis Williams, ACF Regional Administrator, respectively.

Cindy Ferrell, Program Director, Christian Women's Job Corps of Madison County, spoke about her job corps program, which offers classes and other assistance for drug-free women over the age of 18 years old in need of services. Some of the classes offered include job training classes, computer training, communication classes for effective communication skills, classes in literature (which also helps participants with speaking, reading and writing), career classes, how to choose a career, mock interviews, resume writing, health and nutrition, money matters, and family matters. Ms. Ferrell noted that guest speakers are often invited to talk to the participants about family issues and that this offers the women an opportunity to be exposed to positive family problem solving techniques. Special field trips to museums and to other local events expose women to explore the meaning of culture, and to grow and be exposed to different learning experiences. The GED classes offered by the job corps work with community colleges to create a curriculum (85 hours) of one on one tutoring to help women prepare. Other classes include bible study – although Ms. Ferrell noted that participants do not have to be Christian and that the program was designed to be nondenominational. She noted that the jobs corps has a comprehensive application process for women to be admitted into the program. Women must be over the age of 18 years old and drug free for 8 months. Working with the Department of Human Resources, they look for women who are willing to make changes in their lives and also who are ready to make changes in their lives. Currently, they offer a day program that is 10 weeks and is offered twice a year. They also have evening classes, which meet twice a week for 12 weeks. The Department of Human Resources notifies caseworkers of women that they identify who are open to bible study and have a willingness to change. The applications and referral forms are then assessed by the Department of Human Resources for this program. Ms. Ferrell also noted

that there is also a mentoring program after a participant graduates from their program. After they graduate, a woman is assigned a mentor; a Christian woman who agrees to work with the woman for one year. Working with the mentor, the participant continues bible study and works on setting realistic goals and breaking them down into manageable pieces. The mentors also try to ensure that the participants stay accountable to their goals as they meet on a regular basis. Ms. Ferrell stated that the jobs corps graduates are eligible to apply for a car and a computer. She stated that applicants for these items are prioritized on a list based on attendance and other factors. Regarding funding, she said that the jobs corps program was a 501c 3, and that it receives TANF funds. The program relies heavily on church donations (about twelve churches donate regularly) individual and business donations, and that it also received a small grant from the Boeing Corporation. At the end of her presentation, Ms. Ferrell reiterated that the program was educationally focused and that many of services are provided by their valuable volunteers, many of whom are retired.

Don Horne, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food & Nutrition Service (FNS), opened his remarks by stating that the mission of the FNS is to lead America in feeding children, families, and in providing food and nutrition assistance. The FNS does this in cooperation with farmers, the retail community, school community, and many other partners. Mr. Horne noted that brochures of the many programs offered by FNS were being left on a table outside of the meeting room so that participants could read more information about them. He also suggested that participants visit the FNS Web site, which would also provide additional information. Some of the programs Mr. Horne discussed included the School Breakfast program, the School Lunch program, the Snack program, the Food Stamp program, the Summer Food Service program and the Child and Adult Care Feeding program. The Food Stamp program has a screening tool on their Web site to help people find out if they qualify, although the site will not make an official determination. Mr. Horne stated that there is a funding opportunity for outreach grants in the Food Stamp Program. The funds will be provided to public and nonprofit organizations, with the exception of State and local governments. The grants range in amounts up to 125,0000 to provide outreach opportunities in a wide variety of activities and partnerships with various

organizations. He reiterated that there is a funding opportunity here and it is something to look for if you're looking to provide these services.

Some of the FNS programs don't have funding opportunities, but do provide assistance for people who need it. All of the programs are administered through the FNS Office and are maintained and monitored by FNS. Mr. Horne commented that feeding children is important to lift people out of poverty, and children will learn better and will be able to succeed. Schools across the country can offer FNS programs and most school districts do offer them. One of the ways to find out if a school district offers FNS programs is to ask local school board members what programs are offered, and this includes the School Snack program. The Child and Adult Care Feeding program is a program designed to reimburse providers for nutritious meals. This is the same with the After School program. All program information is available on the FNS Web site, and he encouraged participants to visit the site.

Mr. Horne stated that the Summer Feeding program is a high priority program. It was designed to reimburse providers for meals for children 18 years old or younger when schools are out. He encouraged the attendees to participate in this program and said there are many different ways to participate. He commented that it is all about partnerships at the local level, "We need to leverage all of the partnerships and resources we have." He said that any place where children congregate is a viable place for this program. Feeding children during the school year and during the summer, he said, will enable them to learn, succeed, lift them out of poverty, and into better circumstances.