



## WELFARE PEER TA NETWORK

*TANF-Child Welfare Collaboration*  
Spokane & Bellingham, WA



### Short Summary

Children living in families earning less than \$15,000 annually are more than 22 times more likely to experience maltreatment than those children whose families earn at least \$30,000 (Sedlak & Broadhurst, 1996). Further, more than half of all foster care children come from welfare-eligible homes, and 70 to 90 percent of families receiving in-home support services through the child welfare system also receive welfare (Geen et al. 2001).

These findings point towards the critical overlap between the systems of child welfare and economic assistance. This intersection of child poverty and child maltreatment validates providing financial support and employment services to low-income and/or TANF-receiving families as a means of preventing possible involvement with the child welfare system. However, while the families served by the two systems are often in common, the systems themselves do not always work well together.

In response to this disconnect, some States and localities (e.g. North Carolina, San Mateo County, CA and El Paso County, CO) have made great strides in pioneering the integration and collaboration of TANF and child welfare services. As these innovative approaches have been shared across the country, some other States and localities are responding by creating initiatives of their own. Specifically, in early 2003, the State of Washington created the Families and Communities Together (FACT) initiative, the vision of which is to join with families and the communities in which they live to provide a continuum of coordinated and effective care. Spokane and Bellingham were chosen as pilot sites to implement the vision of this initiative due to their strong community social service networks and plans for service delivery improvements. As both sites are currently in the early planning phases of how they will respond to the FACT initiative, staff at both locations identified El Paso County, CO as a promising practice about which they would like to learn more. The sites hoped that they could gain ideas and learn lessons from the history of El Paso County's system reform at this early juncture in their respective projects.

To facilitate this peer-to-peer interaction, the Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network provided funds for Barbara Drake, the acting Director of the Department of Human Services in El Paso County, CO, to visit both locations in Washington State and provide technical assistance on El Paso County's model program. The Spokane Peer TA event took place on October 29, 2003, and the Bellingham event occurred the following day. In addition to State staff, these technical assistance events were attended by local administrators, program managers, agency supervisors, front-line workers, and directors of local community-based organizations.

During the various sessions of the technical assistance events, Ms. Drake touched on numerous aspects of how El Paso County's Department of Human Services embarked on the process of merging their child welfare and economic assistance programs. She discussed a basic overview of their service model, budget strategies, case management approaches, privatized contracts, program structures, and training methods. She also described the history of welfare reform in the county dating back to 1997. Ms. Drake

consistently emphasized the importance of systems integration, stating that it helps provide families with all the resources available in both systems instead of denying families certain resources based on the point of access through which they encountered either system. Ms. Drake ensured that the technical assistance events were interactive by asking questions of, and fielding questions from, the audience. As a consistent theme, she framed the discussion with two cornerstone concepts that grounded the integration and collaboration of the child welfare and economic assistance systems in El Paso County: TANF as a primary prevention program and child welfare as an anti-poverty program. She ended each day's event with pieces on outcomes and lessons learned from her work over the past six years. Overall, Ms. Drake provided valuable insight for these two Washington State pilot sites into the challenges, opportunities, and successes associated with TANF-child welfare service integration.

The full report on these two related events will be available in late-November 2003.

### **Works Cited**

Geen, Rob, Lynn Fender, Jacob Leos-Urbel, and Teresa Markowitz. (2001). *Welfare Reform's Effect on Child Welfare Caseloads*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute. *Assessing the New Federalism* Discussion Paper 01-04.

Sedlak, A.J., & Broadhurst, D.D. (1996). *Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect*. Washington, DC: United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration for Children, Youth, and Families, National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect.