

**IMPLEMENTING WELFARE REFORM IN GREAT BRITAIN:
IMPLICATIONS FOR US PUBLIC SOCIAL SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS***

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Abstract

This analysis of welfare reform in Great Britain and the United States is based upon extensive interviews with local administrators responsible for implementing welfare reform in both countries. It focuses on a description of the implementation of the New Deal Lone Parent program in Great Britain that parallels the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families welfare reform program in the United States. It features a description of the demographics of the lone parent population, the launching of the lone parent program, and the role of the lone parent program within the New Deal strategies for welfare reform in Great Britain. It concludes with implications, derived from the changes in Great Britain, for policies and practices in the United States.

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Overview

The origins of this paper can be traced to the multiple challenges faced by county social service agencies in the United States as they seek to implement the massive changes brought about by the 1996 federal welfare reform legislation. The impetus for understanding the British experience with welfare reform emerged from the experiences of county social service directors who were implementing welfare reform legislation in California (Austin et al, 1999). Since income maintenance programs are either state-administered or county-administered, welfare reform policy in California is established at the state level for county-administered welfare to work programs.

In order for local county agencies to reform welfare and make the transition from eligibility determination to employability enhancement, several major changes were needed and they included: a) changing the organizational culture in order to implement a community-oriented family self-sufficiency model, b) restructuring social service organizations in order to deliver new services, c) expanding the array of partnerships with other organizations, including other county departments, community-based organizations, and for-profit businesses, d) promoting integrated services and the use of inter-disciplinary teams, and e) expanding the use of data-based planning and evaluation involved massive efforts to inform the restructuring of services and staff training (Carnochan and Austin, 2002).

At the same time, agency staff began to explore new ways to promoting innovations in service delivery, community partnerships, and organizational structures (Prince & Austin, 2001). If organizational change and service innovations were part of the American experience in implementing welfare reform, what might be learned from the British experience with welfare reform? This question is the focus of this analysis.

Overview of Welfare Reform in the U.S.

The history of welfare reform in the United States can be traced to at least two sources in the 1990s; namely the growth of political interest in reforming a cumbersome and costly entitlement program that provided aid to families with dependent children and the expansion the economy. The significant change took place in 1996 with the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act that replaced the program of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) with the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). It replaced the federal open-ended AFDC entitlement program with fixed allocation block grants to the states based on the 1994 level of federal support linked to a defined level of financial participation from each state (Weaver, 2000; Hanson & Morris, 2000). The receipt of welfare was changed from a social right to benefits based on stringent eligibility rules to a social responsibility to seek and secure employment within certain time limits as a condition for receiving benefits. In many states, employment meant that TANF participants were expected to work at least 20 hours per week. States were required to substantially reduce caseloads over the first five years of the program and to apply sanctions (primarily reductions in benefits) to participants who did not comply with the TANF provisions. On the positive side of supporting self-sufficiency among TANF participants, the welfare reform legislation called for additional

child care support for TANF participants along with federal incentive funds to the states (for reduced caseload) for transportation, education, and services to address substance abuse and domestic violence. Both asset and income restrictions were liberalized so that TANF participants could own a car and accrue savings. Other legislation followed the 1996 welfare reform act that provided additional supports related to workforce development, the earned income tax credits, and increases in the minimum wage (Blank & Hoskins, 2001; Weil, A & Finegold, K, 2002).

All these changes had profound effects on state and local social service agencies (Hagen, 1999). These included the retraining of income maintenance staff to shift from eligibility determination to employability assessment and client advocacy (engaging and influencing local employers) as part of case management and supportive counseling. These changes in job functions required social service staff to engage in extensive in-service training to address such issues as accessing community resources, dealing with substance abuse and domestic violence, acquiring brokering and advocacy skills, and becoming a culturally competent counselor knowledgeable about family functioning as well as human growth and development. For many who had operated in a rule-bound eligibility environment where the job qualifications are often only a high school diploma, these were truly challenging times. All of these changes took place in a policy environment where many staff wondered if welfare reform was designed to help clients achieve self-sufficiency or to simply move them off of the welfare rolls in response to the first piece of federal legislation in the United States to require poor women to work and raise a family (Lens & Pollack, 1999). Agency staff members wondered if an enabling social service philosophy could exist in a mandatory policy environment designed to promote self-sufficiency (Hasenfeld, 2000).

At the same time, agency administrators had to reassess their organizational environment where employment services needed to be restructured (combining workforce development activities with welfare-to-work services) and decentralized (contracting with neighborhood community organizations) in order to facilitate a more collaborative relationship with the business community (Austin, 2003).

With these changes brought about by welfare reform in the United States, it is timely to explore the change management processes used in other industrialized countries that are also engaged in implementing welfare reform. To develop this comparative perspective, especially for social service administrators engaged in local, county-administered welfare services in California (population estimate of 35 million in 2001) and the United States, the experiences of administrators of social benefits and employment programs in Great Britain (population estimate of 60 million in 2001) were seen as relevant and potentially useful.

The British Approach to Welfare Reform

“‘Welfare reform’ is the term used for all changes to the British income maintenance system, which consists of a centralized, state-run social insurance and social assistance system with accompanying programs for family allowances and non-contributory benefits. The basic principles for reform include the aim of providing ‘work for those who can and security for those who cannot’ (DSS, 1998a) and this aim puts welfare-to-work policy in the centre of policy initiatives for the working-age population.” (Evans, 2001, p. 260)

In 1997, Prime Minister Tony Blair proposed what he called The New Deal welfare reform program using mandatory and voluntary service strategies. These included the mandatory New

Deal for Young People (NDYP B under 25) and the mandatory New Deal for Long-term Unemployed (NDLTU B over 25) both of which include a job seekers allowance and a two week requirement to report on job search activities. These mandatory programs have a similar target population to the local adults-only General Assistance programs in the U.S. Other voluntary New Deal programs are targeted at Partners of the Unemployed (NDPU), Over 50s (ND50plus), the Disabled (NDDP), and Musicians (NDM).

The seventh program, New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP), is the focus of this paper. The Lone Parents program most closely parallels the Temporary Assistance For Needy Families (TANF) program in the United States. The fundamental difference, however, between the two programs is the fact that the Lone Parents program is *voluntary* and requires extensive marketing through the media while the TANF program is *mandatory* with time limits and sanctions. The other major difference relates to organizational structure. In Great Britain, the implementation of welfare reform is carried out by the national Benefits Agency through its local offices in collaboration with the national Employment Service and its local office (there are continuing discussions about merging these two national agencies into one). The British local authority social service agencies have no direct involvement in income support programs associated with welfare reform. Since welfare-to-work programs in the United States are administered by state or local social service agencies, the comparative dimensions of this analysis focus more on service delivery programs, despite the differences in organizational auspices.

The information in this paper is drawn from current government documents and reports as well

as site visits and interviews in June 2000 with five national policy experts in the central government (London) and London School of Economics as well as interview with fifteen local service delivery staff in Exeter, Plymouth, and Taunton. The interview questions focused on local program implementation issues related to the New Deal Lone Parents Program (NDLP). The interview questions included: 1) What changes in service delivery were created by the NDLP?, 2) How were staff assisted in making these changes?, 3) What changes in organizational structures resulted from the implementation of the NDLP?, 4) What is the preliminary assessment of the impact of the NDLP on clients and line staff?, and 5) What are some of the managerial challenges in implementing the NDLP?

In order to foster understanding of a system quite different from the American system, it is necessary to focus this analysis on the following components: 1) an overview of the demographics of the lone parent population in Great Britain, 2) a brief history of the launching of the Lone Parent Program, 3) the context of the Lone Parent Program within the New Deal, and 4) the implications of the British experience for the U.S..

Demographics of Lone Parent Poverty

The majority of lone parents in England, according to the NDLP Learning Workbook (Employment Service, 1998), are either separated (21%) or divorced (31%). This discussion of demographics is based on the materials used to train NDLP staff (Employment Service, 1998). The fast growing category of lone parents are the never-marrieds (35%). In 1996, 35% of births

in England and Wales were outside of marriage. The number of teenage pregnancies has been relatively static over the past ten years and 4% of lone parents are between the ages of 16 and 20. The demographics of the rest of the lone parent population looks like this: 20-29 (35%); 30-39 (34%); 40-49 (21%); and 50+ (5%).

The research used to launch the Lone Parent Program indicates that 90% would like to work if they could (Employment Service, 1998). In particular, 30% already work at least 16 hours/week, 30% are ready to work, 30% will seek work some time in the future, and 10% do not expect to ever work (mostly due to poor health). Over the past twenty years, lone parent participation in the labor market has decreased from 49% to 40% (currently 44%), related, in large part, to the high cost of working part-time despite the 60% growth in part-time employment from 1993-1996 and the nature of low skill, low-wage jobs. The financial risks of employment associated with high childcare and housing costs represent a key element in promoting involvement in the new Lone Parent Program.

From 1979 to 1996 the number of lone parents receiving benefits grew from 320,000 to 1.1 million and an estimated cost (including Working Families Tax Credit) of \$11.4 billion per year (99/00). The development of the new program is predicated on at least two assumptions: 1) work is the best route out of poverty and social exclusion with the NDLP focusing on child poverty by addressing the historical lack of help and support for lone parents on welfare, and 2) that the British welfare state could not continue to support an increasing number of lone parents living on benefits. The 1+ million lone parents raise 2 million children. The goal of the Lone Parent

Program is to help participants move out of benefit dependency and into employment by providing information and support to overcome the barriers to employment.

Some of the factors affecting the capacities of lone parents to move toward financial independence include (Employment Service, 1998):

- 1) providing stability for their children after the emotional trauma of domestic violence or the breakdown of marital or cohabiting relationships,
- 2) experiencing low self-esteem and/or confidence regarding the applicability of current skills to work situations,
- 3) dealing with the threat to their financial security derived from benefits which support a minimum standard of living,
- 4) handling the emotional stress and time-consuming nature of legal problems related to divorce and parental responsibilities,
- 5) experiencing homelessness as a result of relationship breakdowns,
- 6) dealing with the fear of reprisals from absent partner as a result of seeking child support,
- 7) finding a lack of accessible, affordable, and quality childcare and fear of being perceived as a bad parent who leaves her children with others,
- 8) experiencing a lack of family-friendly employment practices (flextime, job sharing, part-time, telecommuting, family leave options, options for caring for sick children), and
- 9) handling the fear of feeling isolated and alone in making the transition from welfare to

work.

Another significant difference between the two countries relates to the structure of the service delivery systems used to deal with lone parent poverty. In Great Britain, all welfare benefits in 2000 were managed through departments of the central or national government. The two major departments are the Benefits Agency that processes all benefits requests and payments through the local offices of the country-wide Benefits Agency which is a major unit of the Department of Social Security. Comprehensive benefits applications can be completed and processed through the mail with a very high degree of accepted applications, followed by the issuance of benefit books so that payment can be picked-up at any local post office. Similarly, all job application, preparation, and placement activity is handled by the national Employment Service, a major unit of the Department for Education and Employment, through its local Job Centres.

Launching the Lone Parent Program

The New Deal Lone Parent Program (NDLP) was introduced by the Department of Social Security and the Department for Education and Employment in July 1997 in prototype form (Benefits Agency managed four sites and the Employment Service managed four sites). While the NDLP has been available to all lone parents on Income Support, the initial target group was lone parents with children over the age of 5 years and 3 months who had received benefits for at least 8 weeks (Operational Vision, 1998). Through an outreach program of invitational letters, they were encouraged to contact their local office if they were interested in participating in this

voluntary program. Lone parents with children under the age of 5 are encouraged use governmentally-provided benefits to focus on the work of parenting and child-rearing unless there is a strong desire and resource network that would support work outside the home (currently, invitational letters are being sent to lone parents of three and four year olds). The primary goals of the NDLP included: a) help lone parents engage in some work, at least 16 hours per week, b) increase the number of hours of current part-time work, and/or c) enter a job-related training program.

The key element in implementing the NDLP was the use of a Personal Advisor. These advisors were recruited from the ranks of eligibility-oriented Benefits Agency staff and job information/referral staff of the Employment Service. Initially, intensive six-week residential training programs were used to prepare all Personal Advisors regardless of previous experience. The Induction Training (NDLP Training Workbook, 1998) focused on: a) learning a new role in relationship to the unique needs of lone parents, b) understanding the policies and procedures of both the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service, with input from the Child Support Agency, c) information technology needed to conduct benefit calculations, and d) advanced interviewing skills.

Learning a new role involved making the transition from a primarily reactive eligibility-focused advisor to a proactive client/community-focused advisor using skillful interviewing to (Employment Service, 1998):

- 1) allay fears that the government was coercing people into work regardless of circumstances
- 2) explore lone parent=s situation, including barriers to work and how they might be mitigated
- 3) address the lone parent=s motivation to work, including self-confidence, current skills, and awareness of suitable vacancies
- 4) clarify financial information in developing the Abetter off calculation@
- 5) help with the completion of a job application and/or resume
- 6) explain the use of an Action Pack binder of advice and contact addresses
- 7) explain the community focus of the Personal Advisor role in relating to employers and other support systems.

Since the initial interview and all subsequent interviews are voluntary, it is a major challenge to build job search momentum in one interview. One major element of the interview is the better off calculation@. This process involves the collection and tabulation of information, using a computer, to demonstrate to the lone parent the total of their current benefits in contrast to what that total would look like if they worked 16 or more hours per week.. In some cases, walking out of the office with an estimate of making \$35 more per week would be incentive enough while it may not be enough for others. The key in the better off calculation is the Working Families Tax Credit. These substantial revenue transfer funds, which include childcare funds, can make the difference in becoming better off. This tax credit is administered through the *employer* whereby the employee receives a pay check that includes a salary and a tax credit which, in combination, begins to approach a livable wage. The employer deducts the employee tax credit at the end of

the year from his/her business taxes.

Once the lone parent recognizes the economic benefits to working and begins the process of job exploration, the Personal Advisor is authorized to build an open-ended supportive relationship designed to provide whatever it takes to help find and sustain viable employment. Some of the key activities include: a) finding appropriate childcare, b) assessing training needs and finding suitable course (with fees, childcare, and travel expenses paid by NDLP), and c) ongoing support during difficult times in the workplace.

The Lone Parent Program within the Context of the New Deal

It became increasingly apparent that the Lone Parent Program needed to be understood within the context of implementing the other New Deal programs (Green, 2000; Hales et al, 2000a & b; Hamblin, 2000; Hasluck, 2000a & b; Hasluck et al, 2000). While the lone parent program is voluntary and the large programs for able-bodied persons under and over 25 are mandatory, it is useful to describe efforts to improve access to all New Deal programs. In many of the New Deal programs, the central government is experimenting with new collaborative structures between public and voluntary agencies as well as privatized structures for delivering services.

One of the experimental pilot programs relates to increased participant accessibility through what is called AONE@ Centers. These are single work-focused gateways (Employment Service, 1999) being piloted as the basic model in 12 district offices of either the Benefit Agency, the

Employment Service, or Local Authorities and the eight variations of the basic model which includes four Call Centers. The gateways are designed to help change the culture of the benefits system towards promoting independence and work, putting more benefits recipients in touch with the labor market, and providing individualized, tailored services to meet client needs.

The Call Centers build upon the Personal Advisor system described in the NDLP by creating an automated, computerized intake system. This allows any person seeking benefits or employment information to use a telephone to contact a Registration and Orientation (R & O) Advisor who helps the individual complete complex application forms over the phone. Completed forms are sent to the applicant for review and signature along with the name and number of their local Personal Advisor, including a scheduled appointment, if desired, to engage in a Work Focused Interview. Trained intake staff, who function as client advocates rather than rule-bound bureaucrats, provide the registration and orientation services from regionally located centers using banks of computers and telephones under the guidance of a Call Center manager.

The Call Center is an integrated information and referral system, utilizing user-friendly claims forms, provides each caller with access to an array of government benefits and allowances precluding the need for individuals to call or visit multiple governmental offices. It relies on notices in local newspapers, local voluntary agencies, and local authority offices. Experienced as private, confidential calls, applicants have access to the following R & O Advisor services (Employment Service, 1999):

- gathers client details, confirms identity, and discusses circumstances to establish need for welfare support
- identifies potential benefits subject to eligibility
- issues appropriate benefit claim forms and the additional information needed from the client
- provides information needed to process the claim
- explores suitable job vacancies which the client could be pursued immediately
- determines if client needs immediate financial help and assists with benefit claims
- allocates local Personal Advisor and arranges for immediate appointment where appropriate
- identifies potential child maintenance (financial support) issues
- § arranges for special needs related to an interview with a Personal Advisor (interpreter, etc.)
- § identifies and arranges home visits and any specific benefit activity for those clients where the immediate Personal Advisor interview is not appropriate
- § advises clients of their rights and responsibilities in relation to their benefit claims

It should be noted that lone parents can access a Call Center just like anyone else seeking information and support from a New Deal program.

Identifying Potential Implications for the U.S.

From the perspective of implementing the New Deal Lone Parent program, several interesting

policy and procedural issues emerge:

- § the struggle to *balance consumer rights to receive benefits when in need with consumer responsibilities for workforce participation* in order to become self-sufficient is a struggle that spans the Atlantic. In Great Britain, it became increasingly clear that a totally voluntary program for lone parents would need more incentives for participation, including better public information about the new program. This approach represents such a contrast with the past, especially the increased requirements of an annual work-focused interviews for all lone parent recipients of income-replacement benefits whose youngest child is over 5 years of age and under 16.

- § the implementation of new programs also comes at a time when national and local *governments are in the midst of modernization programs* that seek greater efficiency, accessibility, and effectiveness. The massive changes related to information technology have had a significant impact on implementing New Deal programs that involve databases from different central government departments as well as the continuous need for new and upgraded software and hardware to provide services. These massive changes also impact the ability of any program to monitor and evaluate outcomes.

- § any massive new program initiative must deal with the need for *extensive staff*

training and updating in order to deal with confusion, resistance, and all the unexpected issues emerging from large-scale change. All of these issues parallel those found in the implementation of welfare reform in the U.S..

It is important to note this context of emerging issues for deriving implications from the British experience for the American scene. Clearly, innovations taking place within the context of the comprehensive British welfare state administered at the national level are not easily transferable to the enabling welfare system of the U.S. that is administered at the national, state, and local levels. The British welfare state includes a substantial system of taxation, a national health care system, a university system which includes substantial student support, a comprehensive transportation system, and a substantial system of child supports ranging from children's allowances to childcare programs.

Despite the differences in the political economies of the two countries, several implications can be identified in the form of policy and program implications. The first policy implication relates to the voluntary nature of the Lone Parent programs (NDLP) in Great Britain and the mandatory nature of the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program (TANF) in the United States. Both welfare reform strategies are pro-employment. However the British lone parent program is both pro-family and pro-employment. The pro-family component is based on the preference for continuing to provide benefits for lone parents as long as their children are under the school-entering age of 5 years and 3 months. In contrast, the US pro-family approach focuses more on work, childcare and limited efforts to foster support for the self-sufficiency of two-parent

families. Should the pending welfare reform reauthorization policy efforts in 2002 fail to address viable mechanisms for promoting two-parent families in the United States, it might be useful to revisit the British approach to supporting lone parents with children under 5 years of age. In a similar way, it is important to note the growing research evidence on the importance of the first five years of life and the parallel research on the brain chemistry of the young child. This work may suggest a significant rethinking of the temporary assistance policies in the United States with regard to the value of work done in the home to support and educate young children.

A second policy issue relates to the use of tax credits as a welfare reform strategy. Is it truly welfare reform when governmental funding is shifted from a benefits system to a revenue system? In Great Britain, financial support is transferred from homemaker benefits to employment tax credits in the form of substantial Working Family Tax Credits. While there is a clear shift in values from dependency to self-sufficiency, is there really an ultimate saving if lone parents get stuck in low-paying, dead-end jobs? These questions parallel the debate in the US over the issue of welfare reform as a tax saving strategy, beyond the primary focus on reducing dependency and fostering self-sufficiency. The growth in the US for support of the Earned Income Tax Credit suggests that public policy support is easier to generate when helping poor people through a tax system than through a benefit system. The long-term implications of this significant shift in policy implementation remain to be seen.

In addition to policy implications, there are important service delivery implications. For example, the professionalization of the Personal Advisor role as a case manager in Great Britain

represents a significant shift from a traditional bureaucratic role to a professional role of Personal Advisor. The nature of the work changed from benefits eligibility determination and information and referral to a service philosophy of employability assessment and support services. Does this new approach foster enlightened outreach and case management or inadvertently provide for increased opportunities to be coercive in pushing lone parents out of their homes and into work? How are clients' rights protected? In the US, the use of time limits for TANF eligibility as well as sanctions for non-compliance can clearly be viewed as coercive.

Beyond the issue of coercion, what will the service system of the future look like in both countries as agency roles are shared and blended in implementing welfare reform services across the spectrum of private and public organizations? What are the long-term effects of relying on public-private collaboratives to implement public programs? How do organizations with different cultures manage and monitor services in a collaborative manner? Will the private sector walk away from collaborations when they are no longer seen as profitable or consistent with the corporate mission? In a similar vein, the changing relationships between non-profit organizations and public sector social service agencies in the US (Austin, 2001) need to be compared to similar changes in Great Britain.

And finally, the increased use of automated intake systems poses interesting issues about the degree to which these changes really create more user-friendly services and/or save money. The early efforts in Great Britain to automate intake and create integrated one-stop service centers have their parallels in the US. However, there is little research to support the long-term viability

of these approaches in terms of cost as well as effectiveness. There is a shared belief that the use of automation to simplify governmental programs and policies is a positive step but it needs to be carefully evaluated.

Conclusions

Taking a comparative view of welfare reform can be useful to program administrators and policy analysts on both sides of the Atlantic. This paper focused on the emerging role of the New Deal for Lone Parents program in Great Britain and how it compared to the start-up of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program in the US. It features a description of the demographics of the lone parent population, the launching of the lone parent program, and the role of the lone parent program within the New Deal strategies for welfare reform in Great Britain. It concludes with some of the implications of the changes in Great Britain for the United States.

The implications for change include four areas for future research and policy development. First, welfare reform in the U.S. will need to become far more pro-family in terms of increasing the minimum wage and providing the supports for former welfare recipients to move out of dead-end entry-level jobs. The political sentiment does not appear to exist to return to an AFDC type of program focused on dependent children or a voluntary type of Lone Parent Program in Great Britain. Second, closer scrutiny of the earned income tax credit will be needed to see if it really helps the lowest income earners among the working poor. Similarly, it remains to be seen if the substantial Working Families Tax Credit can be sustained in Great Britain. Third, as temporary assistance (TANF) services become more professionalized to support those in greatest need, it

will be important to gain the client's perspectives on the nature of their discretion (experience with coercion) and satisfaction with the services. Fourth, the contracting of TANF services raises new questions about the quality of services and the capacity of non-profits to survive their own "living wage" battles as they are forced to employ a low-wage workforce with minimum job security or opportunities for advancement. And fifth, the impact of automation on welfare reform is projected to be profound as eligibility determination becomes automated and TANF applicants and recipients are confronted with new types of bureaucratic encounters. While welfare reform reauthorization will provide many new challenges ahead in the U.S., there is much to be learned from a comparative analysis of the experiences unfolding in Great Britain.

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