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WORK EXPERIENCE AND TRAINING: THE UTAH PROGRAM AND THE MILWAUKEE PROJECT

I. THE UTAH PROGRAM

Utah's mandatory work program for certain welfare recipients is a relatively new program in this field. Some 1,000 recipients are employed in government or nonprofit positions under the state's Work Experience and Training program (WEAT).

The WEAT program was created in June 1974 by Chapter 35, Laws of 1974. As stated in Chapter 35, the Legislature mandated that the Department of Social Services:

Require that all employable welfare recipients — primarily adult males and mothers of school age children — must report regularly and accept jobs or job training, or take part in a community work force. Refusal will mean loss of aid. Those recipients classified as unemployable shall be exempt. If this policy is not enforceable administratively, the Department of Social Services shall prepare legislation to implement such policy.

The purpose of the Work Experience and Training program is to make available to welfare recipients work experience, job training, and the opportunity to develop effective work habits. Each client works three days a week (24 hours) on the WEAT project with two days (16 hours) available for job search activities. These activities include the utilization of the employment service, improving work habits, completing job applications, and other activities that may improve the marketability of the client.

The program is supervised by a staff member of the Office of Assistance Payments Administration (APA) in the Department of Social Services. The staff member coordinates the program throughout Utah and works with local or district Assistance Payments Administration employees who oversee the WEAT program on a district level.

Work project agreements have been established with the three levels of government, school districts, and private nonprofit agencies. Currently there are 71 sponsors located at 320 sites throughout Utah who have signed work project agreements. Among the sponsors are alcohol rehabilitation centers, the armed services, churches, colleges and universities, cities, courts, libraries, executive branch agencies, the U.S. Forest Service, the YWCA, and numerous other institutions and agencies.

II. WEAT'S OBJECTIVES

The Office of Assistance Payments Administration established several objectives in developing project sponsors for the WEAT program. It has attempted to eliminate transportation hardships by establishing work projects in the areas where clients reside. It has also established a variety of work projects so that the client's assignment could possibly coincide with whatever skills he or she possesses. Finally, APA has sought to increase or develop each client's talents to enhance chances for employment.

The Office of Assistance Payments Administration contends that it has been successful in meeting these objectives. It claims that only about one percent of the registrants were exempted from the program because of the lack of work project sponsors in an area. The number of diversified jobs that are assigned to WEAT candidates suggests that skills and employment opportunities are being effectively matched. In addition, with the wide range of jobs and significant training available, skills are being increased and new ones are given a chance to develop. Examples of the jobs assigned to the clients are carpentry, accounting, painting, typing, youth counseling, journalism, and teacher's aide.

III. WHO IS EXEMPT?

Obviously not all welfare recipients are highly employable. The handicapped, the sickly, the elderly, and parents with small children are often considered unemployable. Under Utah's WEAT program these recipients are exempt from the mandatory work program, as well as those who live a great distance from work sites. While being handicapped, old, or a parent with small children may be rather obvious, an illness may not always be as easily determined. If it is claimed that illness prevents participation in the program, the recipient must provide APA with a doctor's statement verifying the illness and inability to perform in the project. When refusing to participate in the project, a recipient has the right to a hearing by APA to determine sufficient cause for exemption.

If the recipient is assigned to a particular job and performs less than satisfactorily on the project, that person is removed from the financial assistance grant. The client is informed immediately that he is being removed from the household grant, and a reduced grant, based on the size of the household minus the offending member, is issued. The action takes effect on the following month's grant. However, if the person who performed in an unacceptable manner states that he will improve his performance and does so for two weeks, the grant may be restored by the District Assistance Payments director.

IV. WIN AND WEAT

The Work Incentive Program (WIN) is a program set up by Congress to help people on Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) secure employment or prepare for employment. All individuals applying for or receiving AFDC, except those who are exempt under the law, must register for WIN. Those who may be considered exempt are children under 16, or under 21 if they are attending school regularly (unless their state, such as Wisconsin, limits benefits to children under 18); individuals who are sick, incapacitated, or elderly (65 or older); individuals living too far from a WIN project or caring for a sick or incapacitated member of the household; mothers or other relatives caring for children under six; and mothers or other women caring for children in homes where fathers or other male relatives take part in the WIN program. In Wisconsin the program is run by the Department of Industry, Labor and Human Relations. However, WIN is administered by each of the 72 counties in Wisconsin.

According to Utah officials, the WEAT program is not in conflict with the Work Incentive program, but an extension of the Federal project.

All clients must first register with WIN. If the WIN representatives from the Job Service and the Division of Family Services determine that the recipient should be placed in an unassigned category, then the individual is eligible to be assigned to a WEAT program. If the two representatives determine that the candidate is employable and can be assisted, he is assigned to a WIN component for further training. WEAT's clients may also be reassigned by WIN and required to return to the Federal program.

A WEAT official claims that a considerable number in the registrant pool of unassigned recipients were inactive. They were merely collecting their checks without being required or encouraged to work. The WEAT program was actually a response to the number of inactives in the pool. It provided a mandatory work program for those determined ineligible for work by the WIN representative. Such ineligibility may be the result of one or more of the factors listed above.

V. THE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF WEAT

A primary source of irritation has been the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW). According to one APA official, Utah has had "battles" with HEW, but has received the agency's approval and still receives Federal funds. It took Utah three years to get its mandatory work program approved by HEW. For 18 months, HEW withheld contributions to Utah's program for Aid to Families with Dependent Children. It cost Utah almost a million dollars to make AFDC payments entirely from state funds. The major problem with HEW lies in the fact that the Federal Government has, with few exceptions, denied Federal financial participation in payments for work performed.

Nevertheless, the Office of Assistance Payments Administration and proponents of the WEAT program cite encouraging and positive results. 1,850 clients were assigned to the program from June 1974 to June 1976. Almost 49 percent of the 1,850 became unavailable for the project. In essence, this means that almost half either failed to perform, had their file closed per the client's request, were hired by the sponsor, obtained employment, or closed out their file for other reasons. Over this two-year period 21 percent secured employment and no longer needed financial assistance.

In addition, the APA points to the monthly savings of over \$14,000 that resulted from those individuals who were on assistance but had their files closed for various reasons. The APA claims that 32 percent of the savings can be attributed to the WEAT program. Additional savings were reported by the Department of Transportation in labor costs by using WEAT clients in their agency.

The APA claims that other nonquantitative factors also substantiate its belief that the WEAT program is a success. Based on the correspondence received from the sponsors, the Administration proudly points to a gradual improvement in workers' attitudes, improved self-image, and added confidence as strong evidence of success.

However, before issuing a "stamp of approval" on the Work Experience and Training program, it must be pointed out that the encouraging statements and data are based on a limited time frame. A two-year period is probably not enough time to assess and generalize on a matter as involved as mandatory work programs. For example, the positive results that many of the sponsors have reported may be of a temporary nature. Many of the clients have not been in the program for even two years and their actual work week is still limited to only three days. Whether their attitudes will continue to be positive or boredom and absenteeism will develop is still largely an unanswered question.

Another possible problem is that the jobs that are being filled by the WEAT program may aggravate unemployment. In short, the program is providing labor to those agencies and organizations who might otherwise have to hire from the labor pool outside WEAT, thus aggravating the unemployment problem. However, it is unknown whether the agencies would hire from the outside or simply not hire at all.

VI. MANDATORY WORK PROGRAMS IN OTHER STATES

Connecticut has recently enacted a law requiring a mandatory work program for selected welfare recipients, and Oklahoma has a program that requires anyone 18 or older in a family receiving AFDC to register with the local employment office and sign up for a job that is available. Recently North Carolina and Texas also passed laws requiring welfare recipients to register for work. In the State of New York, all employable individuals receiving general welfare assistance payments are required to work three days a week in a local government agency if jobs are available. Unfortunately, four-fifths of the employables covered by the program are in New York City, where in recent years thousands of public employes have been laid off in the city's effort to solve its financial crisis.

In Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis recently cut off welfare payments for employable adults without children, and announced a work experience program for men with families. Beginning in September 1977 some 2,000 fathers who have not been employed for two years will have to work for a government or nonprofit agency for three days a week. The penalty for refusing to participate in the program is the termination of the father's share of AFDC.

VII. WISCONSIN: THE MILWAUKEE PROGRAM

The State of Wisconsin does not have a program similar to Utah's WEAT project. However, Milwaukee County has a locally run Pay-For-Work program requiring all able-bodied welfare applicants to take jobs in local government or in the private sector. Recipients are paid \$2 an hour for a 32-hour workweek. In Utah clients are not paid on an hourly basis and are required to work three days a week (24 hours) with two days reserved for other job related activities.

Chapter 50 of the General Ordinances of Milwaukee County, which became effective July 24, 1969, provides for the Work Experience and Training Projects Division. Provisions of the ordinance do not apply to mothers with preschool children nor to persons who are found to be physically incapable of working.

Two unique features of Milwaukee County's Pay-For-Work program are its prompt payment for services rendered and the emergency and supplemental grants of assistance. Both provisions help in providing for the current needs of the individual and dependents. The client may request immediate assistance from the Work Experience and Training Projects director or the Director of the County Department of Public Welfare.

According to Milwaukee County officials the results have been encouraging. While national and local welfare cases have been increasing, Milwaukee County's general assistance rolls have been decreasing. From July 1970 to July 1976 there was a reduction of 2,358 cases or 39 percent. In addition, the cost for general assistance and the Pay-For-Work program has been reduced from a high of \$12,510,750 to \$8,618,492 in 1975, excluding administrative costs. Other nonquantitative factors, such as improved work skills and improved self-image, have been cited as proof of success.