Welfare Services:
An analysis of Welfare Policies

A Field Research and Case Study Paper

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Introduction

Welfare services are something that many people are ashamed to admit that they are currently receiving or received in the past. The fact is that two million people in the County of Los Angeles rely on different welfare services each month. In the Long Beach area alone approximately 152,657 people are currently dependent upon some type of welfare service (DPSS). Some of these people are relying on the system to make it on a day-to-day basis, while others are simply using it as a supplement to an insufficient income. When trying to find out about the welfare services and about what the people currently on the system think of it, it is extremely hard to get a straight answer out of people whether or not they are currently using the system. It is most definitely a pride issue. Although most people are actively trying to better themselves financially so that they do not have to continue to receive this aid, there are those who are simply out to take advantage of and to abuse the system.

This is a case study research paper on the current Welfare System of the Long Beach area. The project was assigned in a Cultural Anthropology class as a sample project for future classes in Anthropology as well in other classes. The assignment was simple, go out and research the Welfare Services offered in your city. Talk to clients and employees, both current and past, to gain an overall sense of how the clients and employees feel about the services given, and to then take that information and compare it with what the county's stated goals and missions. Then we were to assign the county (or city) a letter grade depending upon how they are doing.
The Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services states that their mission is:

To provide accurate and timely benefits and effective services to individuals and families in need, which both alleviate hardship and promote personal responsibility and economic independence. To focus on positive outcomes, quality, innovation and leadership. To maintain a high standard of excellence Department-wide (DPSS).

They go on to define their philosophy as follows:

We believe that we can help those we serve to enhance the quality of their lives, provide for themselves and their families, and make positive contributions to the community. We believe that to fulfill our mission, services must be provided in an environment which supports our staffs professional development and promotes shared leadership, teamwork and individual responsibility. We believe that, as we move toward the future, we can serve as a catalyst for commitment and action within the community, resulting in expanded resources, innovative programs and services, and new public and private sector partnerships (DPSS).

The county, while trying its hardest to stick to its mission and to its philosophy, may not be living up to the citizens standards. The service tends to be poor and slow, the employees are often seen as unfriendly and cold, many feel that not enough cash aid is given and the centers are not located close to most clients.

The services that the Los Angeles County Dept. of Public and Social Services offer include Cal WORKs, a service that provides temporary financial assistance and employment focused services to families with children under the age of eighteen with income below the State maximum limits. General Relief (OR) is a county funded program that provides cash aid to families that are indigent to southern California and certain sponsored legal immigrants and only to those who are not eligible for federal or state programs. SSJAP (supplemental security income assistance program) assist physically and mentally disabled as well as aged OR participants with the initial SSI
application process. The food stamp program was established to improve the nutrition of people in low-income households, this program increases their food-buying power. Food stamps are issued in dollar denomination coupons and are used instead of cash at the more than 8,000 grocery stores that participate in the county. Parents and their children under age 22 who live together are considered only if their income level does not meet the State maximum.

There are also health care services provided such as Healthy Families, Medi-Cal, AIM (Access for Infants and Mothers), CCS (California Children's Services) and California Kids. There are other smaller programs such as WIC (Women Infants and Children), TANF (temporary assistance to needy families), and GAIN (greater avenues for independence which began as an employment program for AFDC participants) (DPSS).

There are many programs that people either do not know about or think that they will not qualify for because they are already on one program or another. In fact they can use as many different programs as they need and qualify for and are urged to use them especially if they have children and are lacking in an area that is important for daily living, whether it be food to put on the table or a place to take their child for day care or health care.

Los Angeles County recently published a "strategic plan" that would help to make the welfare system run smoother and make the quality of life in Los Angeles County better. The core goals of the Plan reflect the five main countywide goals: 1. Service excellence 2. Workforce excellence 3. Organizational effectiveness 4. Fiscal responsibility and 5. Children and Families well-being. Within each goal there are two or
three objectives to help to better direct the strategies and clarify what the goals mean. (See Appendix A for document stating the goals and sub-division goals).
History and Origin of Welfare Services

The early 1920s in America seemed like an age of endless prosperity. Construction boomed, business flourished, and the stock market soared. Then on October 29, 1929, the stock market crashed (How Welfare Began).

Not only was the crash of the stock market going to effect businesses but it was going to put a strangle hold on many American families. With the Great Depression came about 18 million elderly, disabled and single mothers with children already living at a bare subsistence level. State and local governments banded together with other private charities to reach out and help these people. The impact of all of the events during and right after the Great Depression led people to realize that they alone would not be able to properly provide adequate savings for their old age, and that some form of greater security should be provided by society. Local governments, usually counties, started to provide relief in the form of food, fuel, and sometimes cash to poor residents. They in return were required to work for the town or county often doing hard manual labor jobs that no one else wanted. Although some worked for their government aid, most were not capable of doing so because they were widows, children, the elderly or disabled. Local governments were known for discriminating against those applying for the aid based on race, nationality, or religion. Single mothers had a tough time during this period, if they applied for aid they were branded by society as unfit mothers, but if they went out to find work and left their children unattended they were criticized for neglecting them.

In 1909 President Theodore Roosevelt called a White House conference to try to find out how best to go about fixing the problem of poor single mothers and their children. This meeting was ultimately unsuccessful although his ideas were on the right
path, preserving the family in the home was preferable to placing the poor into institutions that would be only criticized and costly being left only to fail. "Mothers Pension" plans were put into effect in Illinois in 1911 and sought to provide state assistance to poor fatherless children who would remain in their own homes and be cared for by their mothers. This plan in effect would excuse poor single mothers from working outside of the home and would allow them to help prevent juvenile delinquency as they would be able to watch their children full-time.

By 1933 "Mothers Pension" programs were operating in all but two states. In 1934 the average state grant per child was eleven dollars per month, although they varied greatly from state to state. These programs were still excluding large numbers of families due to the mother being divorced, deserted or minority race or religion. About thirty states at this time provided some welfare aid to poor elderly persons without any source of income. Local officials made all rulings on who deserved Mothers Pension or old-age assistance.

Additional federal welfare aid was provided to destitute old people, the needy blind and crippled children. Financed partly by federal tax money, the states would still be in charge of setting their own eligibility requirements as well as benefit levels. Roosevelt and the members of congress who helped him to write the welfare provisions into the Social Security Act thought that the need for assistance to dependent children and poor old people would be reduced as employment rates improved and as those over age sixty-five began to collect their Social Security Pensions.

In 1992 then candidate Bill Clinton promised in his speeches to "end welfare as we know it." In 1996 a Republican Congress passed and President Clinton signed a
reform law that returned most of the control over welfare back to the states and away from the federal government, this ended the sixty years of federal responsibility of the welfare program (DPSS).
**Client Interviews**

As we conducted our projected, it was quite difficult for us to find clients to interview whom received any type of welfare. We had to search for our own people to interview since we were denied access by the Los Angeles Department of Social Services to talk to any of their employees or clients. We were almost left hopeless and literally thought of giving up the project. However, we were able to maintain ourselves and we decided to go out in the city and seek out people who received any welfare on our own.

We were finally able to find clients to talk to by visiting the local Christian Outreach Appeal. We asked the Pastor there if it would be alright if we spoke with some of the people there while they ate their dinners. Our results were fantastic as we were able to come up with six clients to talk to. The questions we asked each individual during the interview process included:

1. Pre-question... Are you currently receiving any type of welfare assistance?
2. How long have you been receiving welfare assistance?
3. What led to your beginning Welfare assistance?
4. Are you actively trying to get off Welfare services?
5. What does your family think of you and your family receiving Welfare assistance?
6. Do you work? (Steadily or irregularly)
7. Do your children attend school? (Steadily or irregularly)
8. How many total members in your family live with you and benefit from the Welfare assistance you receive?
9. What are their ages and relationships to you?
10. How do you feel about the Welfare service given to you? (Polite, compassionate, generally nice and interested in helping you)
11. How could it better improve?
12. What are some positives and negatives about the services given?
We will refer to each of our clients as letters ranging from A to F. Our first Client A, was an African-American male in his late twenties that just applied to receive welfare assistance about three months ago. He applied because he lost his job as being an in home for a woman who recently moved into a convalescent home. His family knows that receiving welfare will just be a temporary thing because as he puts it, "Some income is better than no income at all." Client A is still forward to going back to work for the woman as a nurse again because they will be getting an apartment together soon. A wife and infant child accompanies client A. He believes the welfare office gave him good service. However the only improvement he would like to see is that they would approve cases much quicker to receive cash and food stamps without the hassle of first completing the requirements. For example, he needed cash when he signed up and only received food stamps, which didn't help as much because he claims he needs "...money to ride the bus." As for the services given, the positive was that he had a good caseworker that seemed to care about him and was friendly. The negative aspect about the services given is that he needed cash the moment he signed up and couldn't receive it early enough.

What was unique about Client B was that he didn't receive any type of welfare assistance, but he did know many of family and friends who did and provided us with a great deal of information about how they all feel about the service as a whole. First of all, Client B is a Hispanic male in his late twenties who attends Los Angeles Community College. He claims not enough money is given because now days "...rent is off the ceiling!" When you visit the Social Services Department, it is a whole day process that is especially tiresome and bad if you have kids to bring along with you to the office. Almost all the people he knows said that everyone hated the application process. About the type
of services offered by employees, "There is no passion from the people that work there and the quality is bad." Client B also brought up a good point by mentioning that programs like welfare services that are given to people sort of trap the people within and keep them stuck. Meaning, it doesn't help them recover and get off the programs, it only keeps them down. Client B tells us "Back in the day General Relief was a fad and was abused... people were bragging about it and now days, it's considered shameful." Client B also mentions that most of the people he knows receiving any type of welfare aren't looking for work because they are lazy and also do not force their children go to school.

Client C is an African-American female in her early thirties. She had been on General Relief for the past couple years. The reason she receives welfare assistance is because she moved and didn't have much money after moving, but then got laid off. Currently, she just now got a part time job. Client C's family does not know much about her financial problems because they don't really talk. Client C has a child, age eight, who attends school and has a husband who also lives with her. When asked about the services given to her at the office, she replied, "The service was not great, but not bad either." She claims she still doesn't receive enough money to cover her rent cost. Also, she says that there is no emotion from the employees. "Some people are good but some are not nice or helpful, usually depending upon who you get on the day that you go."

Client D is a thirty-year-old Caucasian female who has been receiving food stamps for the past year. The reason for her eligibility is because she recently got laid off and a family member was sick in the hospital. Client D has been actively trying to get off receiving food stamps but she works temporarily at an agency, so until she finds a permanent job nothing can be done. Her family understands her situation but does not
attempt to help her. They believe Client D is "...just experiencing a life lesson that you have to deal with." Client D lives at home with her husband and two-year-old son. She definitely wants to send her child to preschool but is afraid of not being able to pay for his tuition. As for the type of service given by the employees, Client D believes it is satisfactory and needs a sufficient amount of improvement. If she could improve anything about the services given, Client D would ask that they make the process of receiving cash much quicker. On the upside, the positives about the service given include that it helps you financially and the office is located near by. However, the negatives about the services include how slow the process actually is, not enough money is given, and also "...it is embarrassing because there are so many people in the office at once and there is no confidentiality."

Client E is a Hispanic female in her late twenties that has been receiving food stamps for the past four months. The reason for her acceptance of welfare services is that she is a recovering alcoholic who wants to eventually get off food stamps as soon as she can get herself mentally, physically, and emotionally back together again. Her family knows she's been receiving food stamps but don't really care or say anything about it. Client E has recently just started working part time at Target regularly. She has four people in her household including two girls, ages five and six. Her boyfriend also lives with her and currently is unemployed. When asked about the type of services received by the employees of Social Services office, Client E simply replies, "They suck!" Her response may seem abrupt but she feels the employees need to be friendlier, the process of receiving money should be quicker, and the office is too crowded. Client E only likes that food stamps are able to pay her rent and keeps her kids fed.
Our last Client F is a Hispanic couple in their mid-twenties who have now been receiving food stamps for the past six months. The husband recently got laid off from work and the wife is a full-time student also working part time. The couple wants to abandon the use of food stamps as soon as they can financially stabilize themselves. The couple's family is not aware of their financial crisis because they live out on the east coast. They would feel embarrassed about telling so they rather not say anything. The husband now claims to be looking for a job and the wife is set with her part time job. The couple wants to start a family as soon as they can "...bring in a good amount of income." Client F also believes that the social service's office gives a satisfactory grade. The couple claims the employees need to become friendlier. The only positive side about receiving welfare is that it "...helps get through tough times." Otherwise, the process of applying and receiving welfare seems depressing to them. It makes them pity themselves.

Clearly, our results indicate that no one enjoys receiving any type of welfare service. People, who receive welfare, claim that they will abandon using it as soon as they both find a job and can establish themselves financially. Most clients complain about the long waiting period it takes to receive cash and the uncompassionate services given by the employees at the social services office. They would like the employees to feel more empathy for the people want to apply for welfare aid. Some people don't want to fall dependent upon welfare because it could possibly never allow you to become independent. The majority of the clients do find welfare services helpful in essence because it does bring in some income. Whether it is for the use of paying bills or puffing food on the table, it does help.
Summary and Conclusion

After gathering all our research and conducting client interviews, it is time we summarize and come to a conclusion with our findings. When accumulating all of the results, we were quite appalled because we didn't expect the city of Long Beach to do so poorly as it did. The lack of cooperation from the staff of the Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services and their widespread negativity throughout the people can show us just how bad the system actually operates. After all, the Department of Public Social Services is a community office; not a private one so there should not be any reason for them to keep information hidden from the public. They should openly discuss their issues whether they are positive or negative with all its community members. In fact, it should be considered a violation of peoples' rights and against the law if Social Services Department their information private from its citizens.

Through our extensive research, we have determined to give Long Beach a grade of D+ on how well the services of welfare operate within the city. Our clients we interviewed all disliked the kind of individual service that was given at the office. They thought the staff were rude and felt that they should ought to have a bit more and courtesy and empathy as well for the people who obtain their services. Besides behavior, our clients told us that the process for applying for individual aid is a long and tedious process. With our own experience of visiting the office and not being able to talk to anyone without getting written consent, proves how little cooperation we had from the staff. It was as if they did not want us to be there and were trying to avoid any questions we may have for them. Maybe they thought that we were a "threat" towards the work
they do and we might be able to expose what really goes behind the closed doors of the public office.
Suggested Further Research

To the next team that continues to further our research within the welfare services topic, we ask that you try and make a more revealing attempt into getting to know what really goes behind the closed doors of the public office. We need some basic information that might be able to determine why they act the way they do and for what reason do they not allow to disclose any information about their work to the publicly to the people. If you still can not get in touch with any "secret" kept information from the office, then try and make attempts to contact city officials and ask them to help resolve the situation. Possibly, making an attempt to contact an official about the situation and explaining to him/her the problem might just be able to allow further information to be released to the public. Cooperation is a main consideration. If everyone in the city were to work together, and if ultimately people were more willing to talk about being on welfare there would hardly be any problems doing this project. This project is a great way to find out how well our city is running its welfare programs and whether or not the services being provided are actually helping the people that are receiving them.
Appendix A

"Intimate partner violence and use of welfare services among California women"
Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare Dec 2004 by Rachel Kimerle and Nikki Baumrind

This article talks of how welfare services have successfully moved many individuals from welfare to work. This leaves a welfare population comprised primarily of women caring for children who experience more serious barriers to employment. It also suggests that particularly intimate partner violence against women is associated not only with poverty, but more with welfare.

WELFARE TO WORK
February 14, 2005
TV Channel: PBS

A report by Paul Solman of WGBH-Boston about families, especially single mothers, trying to get off welfare and into the work force in part one of a two-part series.

"Welfare and Poverty Trends in California." Public Policy Institute of California

This written manual talks about the welfare caseloads in California in comparison with that of the whole nation. It talks of which regions in California have the highest amount of caseloads and what type of families are most likely and least likely to receive welfare services. The charts presented in this manual are interesting and very insightful.

"Department of Public Social Services Strategic Plan" LA DPSS website written by Bryce Yokomizo, Director. October 2002

This is a breakdown of the LA DPSS core areas, goals and objectives for the strategic plan 2001-2005. For every goal the department has developed objectives to better direct and clarify what the goals are. While supporting the departments mission and the County vision the five core areas, underlying goals and objectives are meant to help better serve the community.


This is a summary of social and economic factors in Los Angeles County as well as the United States as a whole. The report touches on many things, such as social diversity of different areas, immigration rates, unemployment rates, job growth, poverty rates, health insurance coverage, the food stamp program and food security, as well as
housing and homelessness. This gave us a good idea of what the factors were in not only our own area but in other areas of the country as well.

"DPSS Caseload Characteristics" LA DPSS. December 2004

This was very helpful in our research, it gives all of the totals of people receiving different type of aid in the Long Beach area. Along with the number of people receiving the aid it tells you about the people, the gender, ethnicity, age, citizenship status, and primary language spoken.
Core Areas, Goals and Objectives

The DPSS Strategic Plan mirrors the goals and strategies in the Countywide Strategic Plan (Exhibit 1). The goals in the Countywide Plan are represented as the five core areas in the DPSS Strategic Plan. Strategies in the Countywide Plan are listed as DPSS' goals. For every DPSS goal in each core area, the Department has developed comprehensive objectives to better direct our strategies and clarify what the goals mean to the Department. The five core areas, goals, and objectives provide a holistic view of the DPSS Plan and a solid foundation for developing specific strategies that further the Department's mission while supporting the County vision. The DPSS Strategic Plan's goals, objectives, and strategies are listed in the Plan by core area. Goals and objectives for each core area are summarized below:

SERVICE EXCELLENCE (CORE AREA 1)

Develop standards for user friendly service (Goal 1.1).

Enhance the existing customer service system and/or develop and implement a new comprehensive customer service plan by identifying and working with partners necessary to effectively meet customer needs and increase the quality of service to our participants.
Design seamless ("One County") service delivery systems (Goal 1.2).

• Identify and prioritize services that can effectively be delivered in a seamless fashion to our customers. Refine and improve programs by identifying and working with partners necessary to deliver services to customers in a seamless fashion, including working towards a "No Wrong Door" customer policy.

Evaluate services based on results (Goal 1.3).

• Utilize performance measures and research techniques to evaluate services and assess the need for training programs that will enhance program effectiveness.

WORKFORCE EXCELLENCE (CORE AREA 2)

Recruit, develop, and retain dedicated and productive employees (Goal 2.1).

• Develop new training programs and enhance current employee training programs to provide staff with the skills and tools needed to fulfill their roles, meet employee performance measures, foster computer literacy, and accomplish the Department's mission.

Create a positive work environment (Goal 2.2).

• Identify and enhance employee well-being, morale, commitment, and related productivity by upgrading the physical infrastructure and equipment, improving current employee communication systems, and providing employee-related services.

ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS (CORE AREA 3)

Implement strategic management processes (Goal 3.1).

• Implement a Department's Strategic Plan and management processes that effectively support the Department and County missions.

Improve internal operations (Goal 3.2).

• Streamline and refocus key Departmental support systems that will identify and improve areas of operations to enhance quality and timeliness of internal Departmental services.

Collaborate across functional and jurisdictional boundaries (Goal 3.3).

• Develop structure and systems, and establish criteria to enhance collaboration and eliminate areas of overlap and/or conflict internally within the Department and externally with other departments and agencies.
FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY (CORE AREA 4)

Manage effectively the resources we have (Goal 4.1).

- Strengthen fiscal processes and establish reward systems for productivity improvements.

Invest in public infrastructure (Goal 4.2).

- Invest in public infrastructure to increase the quality of service and better support fiscal responsibility.

Increase public/private partnerships (Goal 4.3).

- Develop and implement programs with public/private partners and enhance strategic partnerships to deliver cost effective services.

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES WELL-BEING (CORE AREA 5)

Coordinate, collaborate and integrate services for children and families across functional and jurisdictional boundaries (Goal 5.1).

- In collaboration with necessary partners, develop and implement structures and programs to coordinate and integrate systems which realize and sustain improved outcomes for children and families in the following areas: access to services; customer service and satisfaction; data sharing; multi-agency service delivery; and funding for services.

Implement a system to measure progress towards improving the five outcomes for children and families (Goal 5.2).

- Implement systems to effectively measure progress toward meeting customer needs and increasing the quality of service consistent with the five outcome areas for children and families.

Engage individual departments in their planning efforts towards achieving the five outcomes for children and families (Goal 5.3).

- Properly identify and provide effective programs and services to families which promote responsibility, continuous growth, and economic independence consistent with the five outcome areas for children and families.
Like the Countywide Strategic Plan, the Department Strategic Plan is a five-year process that began with FFY 2001. Therefore, the FFY 2001 strategies that were developed to support the goals in the Strategic Plan are listed in each of the following sections of the Plan as achievements under the heading "Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2001."

The Strategic Plan also provides a vision of where the Department wants to be five years down the road under the heading "Federal Fiscal Years (FM 2002-2005.) As the Plan is a living document and the Department is continually making progress towards achieving the goals, some of the strategies reflected in the Plan for FEY 2002-2005 may already have been accomplished. New strategies are developed as needed to support the Department Strategic Plan and the Department's mission.

Due to new fiscal realities, the Department must rethink a few of the strategies previously planned for goal achievement which were curtailed with the current budget reprioritization process. Therefore, for a small number of objectives presented in the Plan as part of the Department's vision, determination of appropriate strategies are still in progress. Throughout the five-year strategic plan process, the Department intends to address all aspects of each objective. Fiscal issues will continue to play a major role in the Strategic Plan.
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