Welfare Reform and Opportunities for Collaboration between Welfare and Child Welfare Agencies

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This paper is part of the Urban Institute’s *Assessing the New Federalism* project, a multiyear project to monitor and assess the devolution of social programs from the federal to the state and local levels. Alan Weil is the project director. The project analyzes changes in income support, social services, and health programs. In collaboration with Child Trends, the project studies child and family well-being.


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Assessing the New Federalism is a multiyear Urban Institute project designed to analyze the devolution of responsibility for social programs from the federal government to the states, focusing primarily on health care, income security, employment and training programs, and social services. Researchers monitor program changes and fiscal developments. In collaboration with Child Trends, the project studies changes in family well-being. The project aims to provide timely, nonpartisan information to inform public debate and to help state and local decisionmakers carry out their new responsibilities more effectively.

Key components of the project include a household survey, studies of policies in 13 states, and a database with information on all states and the District of Columbia, available at the Urban Institute’s Web site (http://www.urban.org). This paper is one in a series of occasional papers analyzing information from these and other sources.
Contents

Executive Summary vii

Data and Methods 4

Casework Collaboration 4
  Communication between Workers 5
  Coordinating Services 5
  Case Plan Requirements 6
  Joint Case Planning 6
  Casework Collaboration Summary 6

Program Development 7
  Dual-System Families 7
  Sanctions and Time Limits 8
  Relative Caregivers 9
  Domestic Violence 10
  Teen Parents 11
  Clients with Complex Service Needs 11
  Prevention 12
  Program Development Summary 12

Infrastructure 13
  Institutional Planning 13
  Information Sharing 13
  Training 15
  Staffing 17
  Infrastructure Summary 18
Executive Summary

Welfare and child welfare agencies have a large set of clients in common, referred to in this report as “dual-system” clients. Yet despite this overlap in clientele, interaction between welfare and child welfare agencies has traditionally been minimal. However, the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), which replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), opened the door to greater collaboration between welfare and child welfare agencies. The new legislation prompted the expansion of existing efforts and encouraged the development of new programs and practices.

The Urban Institute conducted in-depth case studies in 12 states and many local sites in 1999 to assess collaboration between welfare and child welfare agencies. Researchers conducted semistructured in-person interviews with a broad range of welfare and child welfare stakeholders, including state and local administrators, policy officials, researchers, frontline supervisors, legislative representatives, and advocates. Focus groups were also conducted with child welfare workers at each local site.

The term collaboration is used loosely in this report to include all efforts to improve service delivery that occur as a result of input from both welfare and child welfare agencies. These efforts can range from joint case planning to creating new programs to holding strategic planning meetings. This report looked at three types of collaborative efforts:

- **Casework practice** includes collaborative efforts on the front line. Do workers talk to each other about cases, do they package services based on what each agency can provide, do they advocate for clients to the other agency, do they do joint case planning? A few of the studied localities are implementing formal joint case planning, and administrators in some localities are taking steps to make child welfare activities count toward TANF case plan requirements.

- **Program development** includes joint efforts by welfare and child welfare agencies to create new programs and services. Do agencies develop programs targeted to particular client populations they share, such as domestic violence victims, teen parents, or kinship care families? Child welfare and TANF agencies in many localities are jointly developing programs and services to address the needs of dual-system families, relative caregivers, sanctioned families, families experiencing domestic violence, teen parents on welfare, families with complex service needs, and families at risk of abuse or neglect. While many of these programs are in their infancy, there is a notable awareness of their potential. As welfare reforms continue to evolve and client needs become clearer, we expect these types of programs to develop further and become more common.
• **Organizational infrastructure** includes the ways in which the system supports collaborative casework and programs. Do agencies hold joint planning meetings, train staff on issues related to the other agency, develop channels for information sharing, or reorganize staff by creating liaison positions or colocating offices? Planning mechanisms were put in place to anticipate the potential effects of welfare reform and usually included representatives from multiple agencies. Some agencies considered ways to share information more effectively between the two agencies. Training on changes to welfare policies was occasionally offered to child welfare workers, although generally the training was not effective and workers requested more information. With only a few exceptions, welfare workers did not receive training on child abuse and neglect. Some localities colocated offices or reorganized staff with positive results.

Administrators, supervisors, and workers also identified several factors that help or hinder collaborative efforts.

• **Agency history and politics**: Collaboration was more likely to occur after welfare reform if it had occurred before reform and when agency directors or workers had established relationships. Where agencies had more contentious relationships, collaboration was impeded.

• **Leadership and policy direction**: State-level policies that require local coordination and articulate the benefits to both sides can strongly contribute to collaborative efforts. The absence of policies requiring caseworker coordination makes collaboration on any widespread basis less likely.

• **Resource availability**: The availability and flexibility of TANF funds has spurred collaboration between agencies. However, some administrators expressed concern about the long-term availability of TANF dollars, and said that using TANF dollars was complicated and political.

• **Information systems**: Automated information systems that permit mutual sharing of automated data on dual-system families can prevent potential case plan conflicts and overlaps in service delivery.

• **Colocation**: Colocation of workers from both agencies in a single office prompts discussions and joint training sessions, and in some cases facilitates joint case planning.

• **Staffing and workload**: When agencies have enough staff to serve families adequately, collaboration is more likely. Inadequate training of child welfare workers on TANF requirements and TANF workers on child welfare requirements inhibits collaboration.

• **Confidentiality**: Child welfare agencies often cite client confidentiality and privacy as factors that hinder collaboration, but the practices of some states suggest that coordination can take place without placing a family’s well-being and privacy in undue jeopardy.

• **Palpable payoffs**: If workers can see how collaborations benefit their client families, continued collaboration is more likely.
Overall, a strong and growing recognition of the potential for collaboration resonated in most localities, although many issues remain to be resolved. The long-term viability of relying on TANF funding to pay for collaborative efforts and the expanding roles of already overburdened caseworkers are of current concern. Moreover, many child welfare administrators report that welfare reform is not the most pressing matter on their agendas. Issues related to implementing the timelines imposed by the Adoption and Safe Families Act legislation, new information systems, and high caseloads continue to pressure child welfare agencies. It was clear, however, to staff at all levels that collaborative efforts could help agencies reach their goals more efficiently and effectively. So, as many collaborative projects are just being implemented and many more are just being conceived, guidance from initial experiences, as highlighted in this report, will be vital to promoting their successful growth.
A mother in California working to meet TANF requirements and taking parenting classes to satisfy her child welfare plan has only Saturday evenings to visit with her children in out-of-home placement.

In Massachusetts, a mother misses a court hearing regarding the abuse of her children because she cannot leave her job without failing to meet the work requirements of the welfare agency.

A child welfare worker in Michigan calls a mother’s employer to explain that she must take her baby to the doctor, so she will miss work, despite her obligation to the welfare agency.

Welfare and child welfare agencies1 share a large set of clients in common, referred to in this report as “dual-system” clients. More than half of all foster children come from homes that are eligible for welfare (U.S. Congress 1998), and close to half of all identified incidents of child abuse or neglect occur in families receiving welfare (Pelton 1994). Moreover, recent studies have documented a link between welfare receipt and future child welfare involvement (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2000a; Needell et al. 1999; Shook 1999). For example, in 1990, one in four new child entrants to Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) in California had had some contact with child welfare agencies within the past five years (Needell et al. 1999).

Yet despite this overlap in clientele, interaction between welfare and child welfare agencies has traditionally been minimal. Child welfare staff may have contacted welfare staff to determine a child’s eligibility for federal foster care payments. The welfare office may have contacted child welfare to learn when a child was removed from the parent’s home to determine whether welfare receipt should continue. It is reasonable to assume that more extensive collaborative efforts between agencies, such as coordinated case planning, could ease client burden and hence improve services. Similarly, jointly administered programs might reduce the occurrence of overlapping services, thus improving agency efficiency.

With a benefit to both the clients and the agencies, there appears significant incentive for agencies to work together. Yet a lack of collaboration between agencies is not uncommon, and a vast literature has identified significant organizational barriers that impede collaboration (Meyers 1993; Moore 1992; Waldfogel 1997). Many
of these barriers help explain the lack of coordination between welfare and child welfare agencies:

- **Workers are overburdened.** Frontline welfare and child welfare staff are already sufficiently burdened. To coordinate without additional time, authority, or resources is difficult.

- **Agencies are underfunded.** Sometimes welfare and child welfare agencies struggle to fund services. Further, categorical funding and reimbursement for particular services encourage agencies to be restrictive and autonomous with regard to their clientele.

- **Agencies have competing goals.** The welfare agency is striving to move clients into the workforce, while the child welfare agency wants to ensure children’s safety. These goals may be compatible if parents’ ability to secure employment improves their parenting skills. Conversely, the goals may be incompatible if employment is unstable or creates more stress, interfering with their ability to parent or forcing them to leave their children unsupervised.

- **Agencies in the public spotlight fear collaborative efforts that loosen their control over services.** This is a particularly salient issue for child welfare agencies, as they are often in the public spotlight if a child is injured or dies while under their supervision. If a collaborative program requires that the child welfare agency relinquish some of its responsibility for particular cases, child welfare may feel it has less control and there is greater risk of a child being endangered. And should a child actually be harmed, the child welfare agency would likely bear the brunt of the negative publicity.

- **The relationship between agencies is strained.** Generally child welfare workers are licensed social workers or trained as family caseworkers; before welfare reform, welfare workers were trained primarily to be eligibility technicians. Collaboration attempts among workers who have such different orientations, different education and training, and often different salary levels can create turf problems, mistrust, and competition.

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), signed into law in 1996, replaced AFDC with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and opened the door to greater collaboration between welfare and child welfare agencies. The new legislation prompted the expansion of existing efforts and encouraged the development of new programs and practices. Several aspects of the legislation brought about these changes:

- **Added requirements for receiving assistance:** The legislation removed the entitlement for needy families to receive cash assistance and imposed conditions, such as work requirements, on the receipt of benefits. While in the past receipt of welfare simply required the client to be income eligible, now the welfare agency would develop a self-sufficiency plan for the client. Dual-system families would have to meet the demands of two case plans.

- **Made funds available in new ways to serve child welfare clients:** The legislation folded funding for several programs into a block grant to states, giving states the flexibility to develop programs most suitable to their populations. The
legislation allowed TANF funds to be used to assist child welfare clients if the services were to promote the goal of self-sufficiency. Experts have suggested that one of the strongest incentives for agencies to collaborate is the potential to secure additional funding (Meyers 1993; Moore 1992).

- **Suggested that collaborative efforts would be vital to the success of welfare reform**: The legislation incorporated many different services in its provisions—such as child support, child care, Medicaid—and recommended an integrated planning process. The legislation required that states allow local governments and private-sector organizations to consult regarding the plan and design of welfare services. The legislation said that these organizations had at least 45 days to submit comments on their state’s plan and the design of such services (Greenberg and Savner 1996). The tone of this legislation set the stage for collaborative efforts.

So how did collaboration occur? The term collaboration is used loosely in this report to include all efforts to improve service delivery that occur as a result of input from both the welfare and child welfare agencies. These efforts can range from joint case planning to creating a new program to holding strategic planning meetings. This report considers three types of collaborative efforts:

- **Casework practice** includes collaborative efforts on the front line. Do workers talk to each other about cases, do they package services based on what each agency can provide, do they advocate for clients to the other agency, do they do joint case planning?

- **Program development** includes joint efforts by welfare and child welfare to create new programs and services. Do agencies develop programs targeted to the particular client populations they now share, such as domestic violence victims, teen parents, or kinship care families?

- **Organizational infrastructure** includes aspects of the system in place to support collaborative casework and programs. Do agencies hold joint planning meetings, train staff on issues related to the other agency, fine-tune channels for information sharing, or reorganize staff by creating liaison positions or colocating offices?

Overall, there were some changes in practice, the beginnings of many new programs, and several types of organizational change to support these new programs and approaches to practice. One of the most salient impressions was a growing awareness of the potential for collaborative efforts in the future, as new sources of funding became evident, as helping clients to become self-sufficient required new approaches to service delivery, and as case plan conflicts for dual-system clients became more apparent. At the same time, the factors that help and hinder these efforts became increasingly clear. This report documents examples of collaboration around practice, program development, and infrastructure. It concludes with a discussion of the opportunities for collaboration presented by welfare reform, the challenges encountered in the early stages of planning and implementation, and the circumstances under which these efforts have the best chance of succeeding.
Data and Methods

The Urban Institute conducted in-depth case studies in 12 states and many local sites in 1999. These case studies, extending assessments conducted in these same sites in 1997, included semistructured in-person interviews with a broad range of welfare and child welfare stakeholders, including state and local administrators, policy officials, researchers, frontline supervisors, legislative representatives, and advocates. Focus groups were also conducted with child welfare workers at each local site. Interview protocols for both the semistructured and focus group interviews centered on changes in the interaction and collaboration between the child welfare agency and the welfare office, recent changes in staffing and staff responsibilities, the resources available for the child welfare agency and how they have changed since welfare reform, recent changes in service delivery policies and practices, and changes in the number and types of families coming to the attention of child welfare. The case studies were supplemented by telephone interviews with a stratified random sample of 135 county child welfare officials in our 12 case study states and Mississippi. These conversations touched on the same issues as the case study interviews.

It is important to note that the examples of collaboration presented in this report do not represent an exhaustive list of collaborative practices between TANF and child welfare agencies around the country. Moreover, examples at the county level are not indicative of the degree of collaboration occurring in the rest of that state. Similarly, examples of collaborative efforts at the state level are not representative of the level of collaboration between TANF and child welfare in the nation. Instead, the examples highlight some of the most innovative, unusual, or comprehensive collaborative practices and policies noted in the localities we studied.

Casework Collaboration

A primary reason TANF and child welfare workers might collaborate is to help dual-system clients who are experiencing conflict between the requirements of two case plans. As noted in the introduction, parents often have difficulty attending parenting classes or court hearings and meeting their employment requirements at the same time. Sometimes the intended goals of the policies of one agency conflict with those of the other. For example, in Hudson County, New Jersey, when TANF sanctions a family, the loss of income makes it difficult to pay for housing and utilities. A child welfare agency may step in to prevent eviction. This intervention keeps the children from becoming homeless, but some might argue that it weakens the effect of the sanction on the parents. Collaborative efforts at the casework level, such as the following, have evolved to address these conflicts:

- At the most basic level, agencies communicate informally about particular cases.
- At another level, workers from the two agencies may coordinate services for clients.
- More formally, agencies have developed specific policies to allow child welfare case plan objectives to count toward TANF requirements.
• Finally, a few localities are involved in joint case planning, with workers from both agencies meeting to develop a single plan for the client.

**Communication between Workers**

Workers from TANF and child welfare sometimes contact each other to resolve conflicts. Child welfare workers in Chelsea, Massachusetts, obtain a release from families to allow the TANF worker to convey information about the family’s work requirements. This information may be used to make the child welfare services plan concur with requirements in the TANF plan. Or the child welfare worker may use the information to help the client comply with the TANF activity requirements, perhaps by providing transportation to services or arranging child care while the client is in a service program. A child welfare worker with an active TANF case in Emmet County, Michigan, is expected to touch base with the TANF worker.

It can be difficult, however, to track down the appropriate TANF worker for a particular case, according to workers in many of the studied agencies. In Los Angeles County, California, TANF workers are organized in “banks.” Child welfare workers said it is difficult to identify the right eligibility worker. As a result, workers do not make these contacts often.

It is mandatory for TANF workers to report abuse and neglect, and they may contact the child welfare agency if they fear a client’s children are at risk. Similarly, child welfare workers notify the TANF office to discontinue the TANF grant when a child is removed from the home and to reinstate the grant when a child is returning home. Communication around these issues occurred before welfare reform and has continued since its implementation.

**Coordinating Services**

TANF and child welfare workers sometimes coordinate to arrange services. TANF recipients in Suffolk County, New York, who live in homeless shelters or emergency housing are required to work or they can be evicted. In such situations, the parent must present a plan showing where the children will go if the family becomes homeless. Child welfare preventive services staff work with these families to make sure the plan is adequate for the child’s safety, though these cases are not officially opened as child welfare cases.

Services are being tailored to help accommodate clients’ scheduling conflicts in several of the studied localities. Child welfare workers frequently said they arrange services, such as mental health and substance abuse programs, in the evenings to make it easier for their working clients to attend. Supervisors in Hudson County, New Jersey, arranged a few nighttime services but said child care and transportation were not always available to help clients attend. In many localities, child welfare workers changed their own work hours to visit clients in the evenings.
**Case Plan Requirements**

Child welfare activities are used in some localities to count toward the TANF work requirement, or at least as grounds for deferral from the work requirement or time limit clock. TANF workers in Texas can give dual-system families a three-month “good cause” exemption on a case-by-case basis. Child welfare workers in San Diego County, California, can write to their TANF counterparts to request an exemption from TANF requirements for a specific family.

Actual policies to formalize these arrangements are being developed in some of the studied localities. Alameda County, California (Oakland), administrators want to make child welfare case plan activities count toward TANF work requirements. In Denver County, Colorado, counseling was recently defined as a TANF work activity for child welfare clients and domestic violence victims. These cases would not be technically exempted from work requirements or time limits, but they would not be sanctioned—they would be “allowable” according to TANF policy.

Foster parenting is counted as an allowable work activity in some of the studied localities. Certain foster parents are exempt from work requirements in Massachusetts because foster parenting is considered work, but they are not exempt from the time limits. The TANF administrator in that state worried that these families might reach their time limits without having received help finding employment.

**Joint Case Planning**

Joint case planning is being used to address case plan conflicts in some of the studied localities. In Kern County, California, two child welfare workers, two TANF workers, one employment counselor, and one foster care technician work together with the families they have in common. They make joint home calls and draw up joint case plans. The project was piloted and has been sufficiently successful, and expansion is being considered. In Riverside County, California, TANF workers are located in child welfare offices to jointly staff dual-system cases. Staff there do not want families to receive contradictory information.

Some localities are using joint case planning and incorporating case goals from the two agencies into one plan. For some dual-system families in Erie County, New York, the TANF goal of self-sufficiency is being incorporated into their child welfare case plan, and they receive coordinated services from workers from both agencies. El Paso County, Colorado, uses an “integrated staffing system” to fold the child welfare case plan for dual-system clients into their TANF Individual Responsibility Contract. The clients’ efforts under this plan count toward county work requirements. Plans are also under way in the state of Washington to implement joint case planning.

**Casework Collaboration Summary**

Dual-system clients experience conflict trying to fulfill the case plans of two agencies. Efforts are being made at the practice level to try to alleviate these conflicts. In some of the studied localities, workers from the two agencies contact each other to discuss a case—although this is not a common practice. Many child welfare workers reported
working evening hours to accommodate their working clients. A few of the studied localities are implementing formal joint case planning, and administrators in some localities are taking steps to make child welfare activities count toward TANF case plan requirements.

**Program Development**

Several aspects of welfare reform prompted welfare and child welfare agencies to develop programs and services collaboratively. Programs evolved to address the conflicts faced by dual-system clients discussed previously, as well as the following issues:

- kin receiving TANF child-only grants to care for relative children;
- domestic violence as a work impediment to TANF parents and also as a risk to children;
- teen parents receiving TANF who cannot live at home because of abuse or neglect;
- multiple service needs of clients remaining on welfare after many have left the rolls; and
- the need to prevent TANF families from becoming involved with child welfare.

**Dual-System Families**

To help clients resolve case plan conflicts and to avoid duplication of services, TANF and child welfare agencies in several of the studied localities are developing programs that coordinate services. The most salient example was found in Denver County, Colorado, where, using funds from both agencies, the child welfare and TANF agencies created two units within the child welfare agency specifically designed to serve dual-system families. The first unit, called the intake unit, has seven workers who try on the front end to alleviate problems that dual-system families face. This unit serves families who are involved with child welfare because there is a risk of abuse or neglect but for whom an allegation of abuse or neglect has not yet been made. The goal is to prevent abuse. The second unit, called the intensive services unit, employs six workers who work with cases in which the children have been removed from the home and efforts are being made to reunify. The workers and supervisors in these new units were moved from existing units; they are not filling new positions. Along the same line, Ulster County, New York, administrators are seeking funds to create a unit that identifies dual-system clients, including clients leaving TANF, and provides intensive case management services.

In addition to new programs, services were often expanded or workers’ abilities to access services in other agencies improved to serve dual-system clients better. In Alameda County, California, TANF services are available to child welfare clients, and child welfare workers said they are learning how to access them. In Harris County, Texas (Houston), more services are available to child welfare families as a result of welfare reform, according to child welfare supervisors. They specifically identified
child care, drug testing, training and education opportunities, and housing services. The increased availability of these services, they thought, was very beneficial for child welfare clients. Denver County, Colorado, supervisors said that some mental health services are now available for child welfare clients through the TANF office as a result of welfare reform. In New Jersey, child welfare mothers with a substance abuse problem who are also on TANF can access new substance abuse services under a TANF initiative.

**Sanctions and Time Limits**

As welfare reform policies were developed, concern grew about low-income parents’ ability to care for their children if their TANF payments were reduced by a sanction or because they reached interim or lifetime time limits. As a result, several TANF agencies presently coordinate with child welfare and other agencies to monitor sanctioned families or families who reach time limits. Child welfare is not always directly involved in a particular monitoring effort, but it is the agency that receives referrals if there is risk of abuse or neglect in a family being monitored.

The TANF office in Massachusetts developed a program with the Department of Public Health (DPH) entitled Follow-Up, Outreach, and Referral, for families who are no longer on TANF or are transitioning off the program. The program includes an 800-number assistance telephone line, home visits, and links to follow-up services. Child welfare staff work closely with TANF and DPH staff to provide services to these former TANF families.

Similarly, the TANF office in Michigan collaborated with the Department of Community Health (DCH) to develop the Child Well-Being Initiative. Before a TANF case is closed for noncompliance, a TANF worker meets with the family for four months to try to resolve the issues. If the agency still has to close the case, the family is referred to the DCH, which sends a home visitor to inform the family about other available community services. The case is referred to child welfare if there is suspicion of abuse or neglect.

It is state policy in Florida that when a family is sanctioned for noncompliance with TANF requirements, a referral is made to child welfare, which must investigate to ensure that the safety of the child is not compromised. Initially, families reaching their time limit were also reviewed, but because of the increased workload, child welfare is assessing only sanctioned families. Similarly, Lyon County, Minnesota, families are referred to child welfare when they have been sanctioned and do not appear to be making progress toward compliance. Child welfare assesses the family for child protection issues and works with TANF to provide support for the children.

Administrators in Alameda County, California, discussed future plans to develop coordinated services for sanctioned families. They said programs would involve home visits by child welfare workers to find out why families were not meeting requirements and to assess child well-being. The goal would be to intervene as early as possible and offer voluntary services.
Relative Caregivers

Child welfare agencies are increasingly relying on relatives to care for children in the foster care system (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2000b). Relatives, if they are licensed, can receive the federally reimbursed foster care payments. Many do not seek these payments, however, because they do not choose or are not able to meet the family foster care licensing requirements. Relatives not receiving foster care payments are entitled to a monthly child-only payment from the welfare office to help with caretaking expenses. In 1996, these payments ranged from $60 to $452 per child per month, depending on the state, with an average of $207 per child per month. These amounts are prorated at a declining rate for each additional child and do not vary depending on the age of the child. Given that many relatives caring for kin children rely on this payment, some TANF and child welfare agencies are working together to modify or expand child-only payment programs. In particular, in some states there is concern that if the child-only payment is not sufficient to meet the kin caregiver’s needs, the family will seek services from the child welfare agency or, if already involved with child welfare, will return the child for placement in traditional nonkin foster care. To prevent this, some TANF agencies are collaborating with child welfare agencies to provide more comprehensive services.

The TANF offices in Denver and El Paso counties in Colorado provide supplemental payments (additional cash assistance, with the amount varying by household size) and supportive services to family members such as grandparents or aunts and uncles who care for children. Many of the children in these kin placements are involved with child protective services, and the TANF office developed this program to prevent placement in traditional nonkin foster care. Such comprehensive support for these relative cases did not exist to this degree before welfare reform. Administrators said the availability of these arrangements has resulted in collaboration between TANF and child welfare.

The child welfare and TANF agencies in Mobile County, Alabama, jointly developed a kinship care pilot project using only TANF money. The relative caregiver has custody of the child and receives additional services to support the placement and to keep the child out of foster care. Program administrators also want to include families caring for relative children and receiving TANF but not involved with child welfare.

Florida’s state legislature established a Relative Caregiver program using TANF funds to provide a payment greater than the TANF child-only payment and less than the foster care payment to kin caring for children who have been abused or neglected. Again, many relatives do not seek the higher foster care payment because they do not want to go through the eligibility process or cannot meet the family foster care licensing requirements. Yet the TANF child-only payment is often insufficient to meet their needs. By providing these payments to child welfare clients, administrators hope to promote collaboration between the child protection worker and the economic self-sufficiency worker. However, because a home study still must be completed for kin to be eligible for the relative care payment, a lot of the money allocated to the relative caregiver program was unspent because families did not want to be involved with the child welfare agency.
Wisconsin, as part of its welfare reform plan, replaced the TANF child-only payment with a state kinship care program that provides $215 a month to relatives caring for a child who would be at risk of abuse or neglect if at home with his or her parents. Child welfare agencies implemented the program and are responsible for determining whether families are eligible. They also conduct annual assessments of families receiving the payment. With the new program, the traditional child-only payment no longer exists in Wisconsin. Relatives caring for kin children must participate in an assessment to determine risk of abuse or neglect. Child welfare workers and supervisors in one county said the program has been problematic as it has created substantially more paperwork for the agency and made it more difficult for relatives to access assistance. Child welfare administrators, however, say the program is beneficial in that it allows for a more thorough assessment of families’ needs. Enrollment in the program has exceeded policymakers’ expectations. Additional funding was allocated to alleviate waiting lists.

Future plans for collaboration around kinship programs also exist in many of the studied localities. The state TANF administrators in Michigan are planning a pilot project on kinship care, in which the TANF worker rather than the child welfare worker would stay involved with the family. The state is also considering increasing payments for child-only grants to kinship caregivers in 2001.

**Domestic Violence**

Policymakers recognized that some TANF recipients may not be able to meet welfare reform’s work requirements because of domestic violence. This recognition prompted the federal government to allow states to adopt the Domestic Violence/Wellstone-Murray Provision of the PRWORA legislation, known as the Family Violence Option (FVO). Adopting the option allows states to provide battered women with temporary waivers from work requirements under TANF. Specifically, if a woman reaches her federal five-year time limit and if she had a domestic violence waiver for some part of that time, the state could extend her time on welfare past the federal five-year limit because domestic violence was responsible for her continuing on the welfare rolls. The FVO also allows a state to have more than 20 percent of its welfare population exempted for hardship if domestic violence is the reason for the exemption. All the states visited except Wisconsin have chosen to adopt the option.

With the awareness that domestic violence can be a barrier to work also comes a greater understanding of how the experience of domestic violence affects children. Experts have argued that the experience of domestic violence has traumatizing effects on some children and that children in homes with domestic violence are at a higher risk of child abuse and neglect (Edleson 1999; Straus and Gelles 1996). So as state TANF agencies develop programs for domestic violence victims, many localities are partnering with child welfare to find the best ways to protect the children in these families.

The primary way agencies are collaborating is through referrals of TANF recipients experiencing domestic violence to child welfare. In Kern County, California, if a family applies for TANF and discloses domestic violence as a reason for being unable to work, or if it is in a crisis situation, the case is referred to a child welfare
worker who assesses the case for risks to the children. In some of the studied locali-
ties, TANF makes referrals to child welfare in domestic violence cases whenever a
child is involved, although officials frequently specified that such referrals are not
considered formal reports of child abuse or neglect.

**Teen Parents**

Under welfare reform, teen parents are required to live with their parents to receive
assistance for their minor child. If the teen’s parents are abusive, however, the teen
can be granted permission to live with another guardian or in a group home. In some
of the studied localities, TANF agencies request the assistance of the child welfare
agency to determine when abuse or neglect is occurring in the teen’s home. In
Waseca County, Minnesota, a child welfare worker is specifically assigned to handle
these cases.

TANF and child welfare also work together in some localities to provide alterna-
tive living arrangements for teens and their children. In Massachusetts, for example,
state TANF and child welfare administrators created the Teen Living Program (TLP)
to provide alternative living arrangements for teens who cannot live at home. In New
Jersey, TANF and child welfare officials established “second chance homes” for
mothers under age 18.

**Clients with Complex Service Needs**

In helping recipients prepare for work, states are finding that many clients have com-
plex service needs. Those who have been on welfare for many years or those who face
disabilities limiting their ability to work often require the assistance of many types of
service providers. In response, some of the studied localities developed collaborative
service efforts to meet the needs of these clients more efficiently and effectively.
Some efforts were initiated by the TANF agency, some by child welfare, and some
(involving both TANF and child welfare) by a third agency.

A county mental health agency in Hennepin County, Minnesota, sought funds
from the welfare office, and together they developed the IRIS (Integrated Resources
for Independence and Self-Sufficiency) program. This program identifies barriers to
employment and helps TANF clients with both social service and child welfare needs
through intensive and comprehensive services. TANF administrators claim that the
program has a remarkable success rate, although it is time-intensive and expensive.
They say the program offers a new approach to helping a population that was not
quite so visible under the AFDC program, when assistance was an entitlement and
such services were not necessary.

In Milwaukee County, Wisconsin, the child welfare agency collaborated with rep-
resentatives from TANF, substance abuse, and mental health agencies to develop and
implement the Safety Services program. Families are referred to the program if an
assessment indicates that it is safe to keep the child in the home and the parents are
willing to cooperate. This program offers 18 in-home, up-front, intensive services
provided by vendors. One administrator said the program does not necessarily
involve more services, just more collaboration between services. At the time of this
study, about 600 families, 35 to 40 percent of whom were involved with TANF programs, were receiving Safety Services.

Alameda County, California, is creating three new service integration units. Cross-classification teams will be formed and will include a child welfare worker, a social worker from adult services and aging, a TANF eligibility technician, an employment counselor, and a paraprofessional welfare services aide to be drawn from among former clients. The staff will be colocated to allow teams to draw on the expertise of their various members. It is expected that over time the workers will learn from one another and become less professionally specialized, and will master a wider-ranging set of skills. Approximately 300 families will be assigned to the service integration teams initially, with priority given to sanctioned families, two-parent families who show no signs of increased earnings, and families observed to be at risk of abuse and neglect or who volunteer that they are having problems. Referrals will come from TANF, child welfare, and other agencies. All of the service integration team members, with the exception of the eligibility technician, will be responsible for conducting initial assessments of referred families. The effort is funded by TANF for three years, and the agency has hired a management analyst to evaluate the implementation and outcomes of the effort.

**Prevention**

Many child welfare experts anticipated that the number of families coming into the child welfare system would increase as a result of welfare reform. They expected that with work requirements and the possibility that some families could lose income because of sanctions or time limits, families would be under more stress, potentially leading to more abuse and neglect.

Child welfare and TANF agencies in a few of the studied localities collaborated to provide services to families that might be at risk of abuse or neglect but that had not yet been referred to the child welfare system. In St. Clair County, Michigan, a child welfare prevention worker coordinates with the TANF agency to profile all TANF cases. The child welfare worker determines whether child welfare services are appropriate for any of the families to prevent abuse. New Jersey child welfare administrators are considering working with TANF to provide supportive services to TANF families around parenting, employment, and access to transportation in an effort to prevent child abuse and neglect.

**Program Development Summary**

Together, child welfare and TANF agencies in many localities are developing programs and services to address the changing needs of clients in an era of welfare reform. Programs are addressing the needs of dual-system families, relative caregivers, sanctioned families, families experiencing domestic violence, teen parents on welfare, families with complex service needs, and families at risk of abuse or neglect. While many of these programs are in their infancy, there is a notable awareness of their potential. As welfare reforms continue to evolve and client needs become clearer, these types of collaborative programs are likely to continue to develop and become more common.
Infrastructure

Some states and localities adjusted how their social services are organized—that is, their system’s infrastructure—to ease implementation of welfare reforms and improve services to clients. Frequently these changes were made to support the creation of new programs and practices such as those discussed in the previous sections; often these adjustments brought child welfare and welfare agencies together. Such efforts involved

- developing institutional planning through joint committees and steering groups;
- improving information sharing by adjusting information systems;
- expanding staff training by sharing knowledge about the mandates of other agencies; and
- reorganizing staff by colocating offices and creating liaison positions.

Institutional Planning

Many states and localities sought to address the potential impacts of welfare reform by convening meetings or establishing committees composed of administrators from TANF, child welfare, and other agencies. A steering committee formed in Alabama included state representatives from child welfare, TANF, and child support, as well as local workers in each of these areas. Similarly, Los Angeles County, California, administrators from TANF, child welfare, and many other health and community agencies formed a planning group. Both TANF and child welfare administrators in Wayne County, Michigan, met regularly to discuss cross-office areas of interest, such as welfare reform.

The goal of all these groups was to ensure that clients would be prepared for work yet also able to care for their children adequately. They also wanted to prepare for clients who failed to meet the new requirements and were at risk of becoming involved with child welfare. A wide range of issues was discussed at these meetings, and many new policies and programs resulted. In Michigan, joint home visits by TANF and child welfare workers, joint case plan development, and inviting TANF workers into case planning meetings were discussed and may occur in the near future. In Los Angeles, a plan is being developed to deliver holistic services, using TANF money, to meet families’ multiple needs and help them achieve long-term self-sufficiency. Alabama leaders will use TANF funds directly for child welfare families to keep children in their homes and prevent foster care placements. Many of these interagency committees still meet, while others disbanded after TANF was implemented.

Information Sharing

Welfare reform prompted the need for greater information sharing. Sanctioned or time-limited families involved with child welfare might be at risk of further abuse or neglect. If the child welfare worker is aware of the sanction or impending time limit, steps may be taken to prevent negative effects on the children. Moreover, to prevent
case-plan conflicts, workers benefit from knowing the other agency’s requirements of the client and services to the client.

In most localities, methods for sharing basic client information, such as whether the client is involved in the other system, are well established. Some workers obtain information informally by talking to families or other workers. Some workers have access to more complex information systems. But sharing extensive information about a client’s case status to serve dual-system clients better was being done in only a few localities.

One of these states is Massachusetts. The state welfare agency compiles monthly lists of dual-system clients whose time limits are approaching and provides these lists to local child welfare offices. Child welfare workers then check with these families to ensure their financial stability. Similarly, in New York County, New York (New York City), child welfare workers receive printouts, produced during the initial child welfare investigation, that provide coded information on whether there is an active or sanctioned TANF case.

Some problems arose with these lists. In Massachusetts, the lists were generated at the administrative level but did not always reach the workers. In New York County, workers did not always know the codes used on the lists. And for ongoing cases, workers had to request an updated printout from the TANF information system to stay current on the family’s TANF involvement after the initial investigation.

Yet most child welfare workers in the studied localities know whether a family is receiving TANF despite the lack of extensive information sharing. Many obtain this information directly from the families or from other workers. Moreover, many child welfare agencies request this information during intake. Information systems are also available in most localities to provide information to workers or to confirm information they may have already received from the family. Most of these systems were in place before welfare reform.10

Child welfare workers thought that TANF workers were less likely to know whether a family was involved with child welfare because the family would be reluctant to share this information. In counties in Colorado, Michigan, and Wisconsin, TANF workers can access a computer system to find this information. In some Colorado counties the information system allows workers to determine whether a case is involved in any other systems, including TANF, child welfare, or child support. The system also lists the worker to contact in the other system.

Access to the information systems, however, was sometimes problematic. In Seattle, Washington, and Denver, Colorado, child welfare workers received special training in how to use the TANF computer system. In Seattle, however, there was disagreement over whether all workers could receive this training, and some workers did not realize it was available. Denver workers have had access to the computer system for about a year, but not all workers received training. Child welfare workers in Racine, Wisconsin, said that they needed a license to access the system, and not all workers had equal access.

Confidentiality was also cited as a reason information is not always shared electronically. TANF workers in Hillsborough County, Florida (Tampa) are able to share the welfare status of their clients with child welfare workers only verbally. The
systems are not linked electronically because of privacy concerns. In Hennepin County, Minnesota, child welfare workers do not officially share information with TANF workers because, according to child welfare workers, the information on families is private. Administrators noted, however, that child welfare screeners have access to the TANF information system and can obtain this information for the child welfare worker. In Michigan, where data are shared electronically, a child welfare administrator said confidentiality is not a problem because TANF workers know only whether a family is involved with child welfare but do not know the specifics of the case.

Training

Welfare reform has altered the job responsibilities of social workers in both agencies. TANF workers formerly involved solely with eligibility determinations are now conducting assessments and making service referrals. Child welfare workers in the past simply made sure clients submitted the paperwork to receive welfare payments, but today they are counseling clients on how to find work and use supportive TANF programs. Most of the studied localities provided child welfare workers with some information on welfare reform, and a few provided formal training. Very few workers, however, viewed this information or training as effective, and most obtained information about welfare reform from the media or their clients. On the welfare side, some localities provided additional training to prepare eligibility workers for their new social work responsibilities, but few included information about recognizing and reporting child abuse and neglect in their curricula. Most, however, did include training on domestic violence.

Training for Child Welfare Workers

Workers in most of the studied localities did not feel well informed about TANF and expressed a need for more information, although most administrators reported training workers about TANF. The types of training described generally ranged from the distribution of pamphlets and newsletters to informal lunch meetings. Many workers said they heard about welfare reform mostly through the media and even from their clients.

The most profound impact of the lack of training is that child welfare workers do not know about services available to their clients through the TANF office. Further, without information about when clients are sanctioned, how time limits will be implemented, and what exemptions child welfare clients are eligible for, child welfare workers have difficulty advocating on behalf of their clients in the TANF office. In Alameda County, California, workers who had just recently received training on TANF services said they were very surprised at the many resources available to their clients and wished they had received the information sooner.

Workers noted several aspects of the training that may have contributed to its ineffectiveness. The timing of the training was important. In some localities, sessions were conducted when state welfare reform legislation first passed in 1997. Workers in these states said they needed more current information about the situation. On the other hand, workers in one state where training was provided more recently said
they would have benefited from receiving it two years ago. It is clear that workers need both initial and ongoing training.

Second, who received the training influenced its overall effectiveness. Many long-tenure workers noted that they had received training during the initial stages of TANF implementation but that most newly hired workers had little or no training on TANF. In a couple of localities, however, training about TANF services was incorporated into the training curriculum for new staff. For example, in Buffalo County, New York, new staff receive the very thorough “passport” training program, which gives trainees information about other divisions within the Department of Social Services. While useful, training only newly hired staff often left long-tenure staff uninformed. Workers also noted that if training was voluntary and workers were overwhelmed, which they often are, they would choose not to attend. They said they had been inundated with training opportunities, and additional sessions were burdensome.

Third, training was often informal, and workers said it sometimes lacked the detail needed to be effective. Trainers did not always have all the answers. Moreover, policies continued to change after the training. In Alameda County, California, workers said they received training on services available to child welfare clients but did not receive the details needed for accessing the services. In a few localities, workers said the director of their unit knew the director of the TANF office, so workers from the TANF office did an informal training just for their unit. When TANF staff provided training, workers commented that rather than attend these sessions, it was more efficient to obtain information directly from a TANF worker.

Fourth, in most cases, formal training was not offered, but occasional handouts, information bulletins, agency newsletters, and policy memos were distributed. Many workers did not believe this to be an effective medium for receiving information. Some workers said administrators distributed this information believing it would “trickle down” to staff who needed it, but often this did not happen, leaving frontline staff uninformed. Also, workers said when the information did reach them, often they were already so overwhelmed with paperwork that they did not have a chance to read it.

**Training for TANF Workers**

With the exception of those in a few states, TANF workers did not receive any new training on child abuse and neglect as a result of welfare reform. Such training is important to prevent inappropriate reports of abuse or neglect by TANF workers. Since welfare reform, TANF workers have had greater contact with families. Child welfare workers said TANF workers are now expected to draw more out of interviews with recipients, especially identifying problematic family dynamics. Child welfare workers linked this additional contact with an increase in the number of reports they received from TANF offices since welfare reform. These reports are not always appropriate. Child welfare workers hypothesized that TANF workers often inaccurately equated poverty with child neglect, as they were not used to making the distinction. Training could improve the accuracy of the reports child welfare receives from TANF workers and minimize unnecessary investigations, which some experts consider a significant drain on agency resources (Besharov 1990). In addition,
training could improve TANF workers’ knowledge of the obligations dual-system clients face in carrying out their child welfare plans.

A few of the studied localities acknowledged this need and are providing training. In Wisconsin, TANF workers receive training on case management and assessment, including training on making abuse and neglect referrals. Los Angeles County, California, is in the process of training its 10,000 TANF workers on child abuse and neglect. The child welfare agency was asked to conduct this training, but, owing to the magnitude of the activity, it is providing only input and oversight. The training curriculum for training TANF workers in Michigan was modified to include information on how to identify child abuse and neglect.

While many localities studied do not provide abuse and neglect training for TANF workers, the majority do train them on screening for domestic violence. To provide FVO waivers to battered women, states need to train workers on how to identify domestic violence within their caseload and work with women to address the issue. A number of federal funding opportunities have given states resources to provide domestic violence training to TANF workers. Given the tendency for domestic violence and child abuse to co-occur (Edleson 1999), it is surprising that more localities do not include information on abuse and neglect in these training sessions.

**Cross-Training**

Some states and localities have plans for training child welfare and TANF workers together in the future. Alabama is planning joint training sessions for TANF and child welfare workers. The Alabama TANF trainer recently attended the statewide child welfare certification training in order to identify issues for joint training opportunities. Likewise, Michigan is making plans to have child welfare and TANF workers train one another. The state envisions child welfare staff training TANF workers on social work principles to help TANF staff make the shift from eligibility work to social work.

**Staffing**

Some of the studied localities reorganized staff to promote collaboration. They colocated staff or created specialized staff positions in the child welfare and TANF offices. Often these examples of colocation occurred before welfare reform. Even so, child welfare workers and administrators repeatedly noted the benefits of colocation in facilitating collaboration with TANF staff as welfare reform occurred. Specialized staff positions, however, were often created as a direct result of welfare reform in an attempt to improve coordination of services and staff.

In several localities studied, child welfare and TANF divisions are located in one building. For example, in Racine, Wisconsin, administrators, supervisors, and workers can visit with each other by passing through a doorway that separates the two divisions in a shared building. Staff say this definitely facilitates communication. In several local offices in Seattle, Washington, TANF and child welfare have been colocated for a number of years. Local administrators noted that the colocation is of more benefit now that welfare reform is promoting collaboration across systems.
Administrators in San Diego County, California, noted that more interaction occurs between child welfare and TANF eligibility workers than in the past thanks to the colocation of the agencies. Conversely, in Los Angeles County, California, child welfare and TANF departments were under one umbrella agency during the 1980s but are now separate. Child welfare supervisors noted that they used to contact AFDC eligibility workers frequently but rarely do so now.

Specialized staff positions were created as a result of welfare reform in a number of the studied localities. Colorado administrators reassigned a TANF administrator and a child welfare administrator to work as a team liaison to the counties to provide technical assistance on ways to better coordinate services between the two agencies. And in El Paso County, Colorado, a TANF eligibility worker has been moved into child welfare to work with dual-system cases. Some child welfare workers in Seattle, Washington, set up informal liaison relationships with the TANF workers assigned to their child welfare clients. One worker described the collaborative relationship as “an informal series of favors.”

**Infrastructure Summary**

Administrators altered aspects of organizational infrastructure to support new programs and policies prompted by welfare reform. Careful planning mechanisms were put in place to anticipate the potential effects of welfare reform and usually included representatives from multiple agencies. Some agencies considered ways to share information more effectively. Some training on changes to welfare policies was offered to child welfare workers, although workers generally said that the training was not effective and they needed more information. With only a few exceptions, welfare workers did not receive training on child abuse and neglect. Finally, some localities colocated offices or reorganized staff, with positive results.

**Discussion**

The examples described in this report suggest wide variation in how collaborative efforts have been conceived and are evolving. In some of the studied localities, these efforts are so ingrained in their practices and history that when administrators were asked whether collaboration was occurring, the answer was “of course we collaborate.” In other localities, administrators were grateful to be asked about collaboration because they had not considered it before. As we assessed degrees to which collaboration was occurring, factors that provide an impetus for collaboration, factors that both help and hinder efforts when they do occur, and some of the early outcomes of collaborative efforts became apparent.

**Impetus for Collaboration**

As anticipated, many of the factors related to welfare reform were mentioned by TANF and child welfare officials as reasons for collaborating. For example, when TANF was being implemented, the TANF agency had unspent or unobligated monies that could be accessed by developing collaborative programs. Sometimes the
harder-to-serve population required the services of both agencies. To help these clients, administrators of the two agencies recognized that they were often working toward a similar goal—self-sufficiency—and that by working together they could reduce fragmentation of services and avoid duplication. Further, officials in some localities recognized that as each agency took on social work functions, role clarification would be necessary and would require communication between the agencies.

When collaborative efforts were initiated at a state or administrative level, they were more often initiated by the TANF agency than the child welfare agency. This was true for several reasons. First, the TANF agency worried about the possible effect of time limits on cash assistance, work requirements, and sanctions on fragile families. Second, the TANF agency manages the flexible funds and the potential use of monies for clients involved with other agencies. Third, child welfare workers are overwhelmed, and many report that greater collaboration would be a “luxury.” Child welfare workers feel pressure from high caseloads, additional paperwork, and new computer systems, reducing the time they have to interact with TANF workers. Finally, child welfare agencies tend to be more crisis oriented, and welfare reform frequently took a back seat to more pressing issues.

Where collaborative practices were initiated from the bottom up, by workers and supervisors, these practices tended to be more ad hoc in nature rather than routine or officewide. They were usually born of personal relationships between workers who had communicated in the past and established a connection. Child welfare workers believed that they usually initiated these discussions. They said the TANF work requirements and sanctions hindered parents’ abilities to fulfill child welfare requirements, so child welfare workers had to advocate on behalf of their clients to ensure that child welfare requirements would still be met.

**Factors That Help or Hinder Collaboration**

Administrators, supervisors, and workers identified several factors that help or hinder collaborative efforts.

- **Agency history and politics:** Collaboration was more likely to occur after welfare reform if it had occurred before welfare reform. Similarly, when agency directors or workers had established relationships, they were likely to continue to work together or even expand collaboration as a result of welfare reform. Where agencies had more contentious relationships, however, collaboration was impeded. For example, some child welfare workers expressed frustration about working with the TANF agency. They described an “us against them” culture. They believed the TANF agency put barriers in the path of families in order to minimize the TANF agency’s caseload. They said the question becomes who is going to end up with this client, and child welfare usually “loses” (that is, gets the client) because it is ultimately responsible for the child’s welfare. Competition to avoid responsibility is the antithesis of coordination.

- **Leadership and policy direction:** State-level policies that require local coordination and articulate the benefits to both sides can strongly contribute to collaborative efforts. For example, the state-level policy developed in Massachusetts to generate monthly lists of TANF families nearing time limits and send them to
local child welfare offices promotes a systematic practice of monitoring dual-system families. The absence of policies requiring caseworker coordination makes collaboration on any widespread basis less likely. It will not, however, prevent the ad hoc, individual worker coordination initiatives that do occur in many localities (nor will it guarantee them).

- **Resource availability:** The availability and flexibility of TANF funds spurred collaboration between the two agencies, according to many administrators. However, concern was expressed about the long-term availability of TANF dollars, and several administrators said that using TANF dollars was complicated and political.

- **Information systems:** Automated information systems that permit sharing of data on dual-system families can prevent potential case plan conflicts and overlap in service delivery. However, new automated information systems that are more labor intensive than the paper forms and files they replace could ultimately limit time for collaboration.

- **Colocation:** Colocation of workers from both agencies in a single office prompts discussions and joint training sessions and, in some cases, facilitates joint case planning. This was particularly evident in several rural counties where both agencies are in the same building. Similarly, when agencies are housed under one umbrella organization, agency leaders frequently participate in collaborative planning and program development, which provides important high-level coordination.

- **Staffing and workload:** When agencies have enough staff to serve families adequately, collaboration is more likely. Unfilled positions result in uncovered cases being redistributed to the remaining workers. This exacerbates the caseload-per-worker burden and reduces the time workers have for coordination. Likewise, inadequate training of child welfare workers on TANF requirements and of TANF workers on child welfare requirements inhibits collaboration. Workers frequently said they did not know what services were available in the TANF agency for child welfare clients. When such information was made more readily available, workers said that they could serve clients more effectively. Los Angeles County workers complained that everything must be accomplished so quickly, they have “no more time for the human touch,” much less for collaborating with another agency.

- **Confidentiality:** Child welfare agencies often cite client confidentiality and privacy as factors hindering collaboration, but the practices of some states suggest that while confidentiality needs to be addressed, coordination can take place without putting a family’s well-being and privacy in undue jeopardy.

- **Palpable payoffs:** If child welfare workers could see tangible benefits for their families from having collaborated with TANF workers, collaboration was more likely to continue.
Outcomes of Collaborative Efforts

Since many of these programs are just getting under way, information about the outcomes of collaborative efforts is minimal. There was some evidence that greater interaction between child welfare and TANF workers increases the number of people involved and can inadvertently slow workers’ abilities to provide services. At the same time, some child welfare workers reported that collaborative efforts have revitalized community groups and that more child- and family-centered services are now available. Child welfare workers also said that when joint case planning occurs, the collaboration with the TANF worker has a positive impact on resolving some of the conflicts dual-system clients face.

Conclusion

Child welfare and TANF policymakers find themselves in a unique circumstance. In the past few years, state and federal funding for child welfare services has increased fairly dramatically (Bess, Leos-Urbel, and Geen 2001), and block grants have provided some agencies with greater flexibility in offering services. Moreover, the PRWORA legislation has created substantial common ground between the two agencies. Agencies are becoming aware of the many clients they share and the often similar services they provide. Some might consider the current environment ripe for extending efforts to make child welfare and TANF services more collaborative.

Yet many issues remain to be resolved. The long-term viability of relying on TANF funding to pay for collaborative efforts and the expanding roles of already overburdened caseworkers are of current concern. Moreover, many child welfare administrators report that welfare reform is not the most pressing matter on their agendas. Issues related to implementing the timelines imposed by the Adoption and Safe Families Act legislation, new information systems, and high caseloads continue to pressure child welfare agencies. As a result, the development of collaborative programs and practices might not be a high priority.

A strong and growing recognition of the potential for such practices, however, resonated in most localities. It was clear to staff at all levels that collaborative efforts could help agencies reach their goals more efficiently and effectively. Since many projects are just being implemented and so many more are just being conceived, guidance from initial experiences, as highlighted in this report, will be vital to promoting their successful growth.
1. Welfare agencies provide income assistance to needy families. They determine eligibility and may provide job readiness and placement services. Child welfare agencies seek to protect children from abuse and neglect. They may intervene in families in which such behavior is suspected, offer services to such families or require that families complete service programs, and remove children from their homes and place them in state-supervised care if the risk of abuse or neglect is imminent or ongoing.

2. The 12 states visited were Alabama, California, Colorado, Florida, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin. Mississippi was included as a study state in the Urban Institute’s Assessing the New Federalism project, but was not visited as part of the intensive child welfare case studies.

3. Subsequent reports will document changes in states’ financing of child welfare services and other major changes affecting child welfare agencies.

4. We attempted to complete 15 interviews in the seven states we anticipated would vary significantly at the local level and 5 interviews in the six states we anticipated would vary less. Overall, we completed 110 phone interviews, for an 81 percent response rate. For each state, we had at least an 80 percent response rate. Mississippi was included in the county phone calls but was not visited as part of the intensive case studies.

5. Qualitative information provided through the case studies, county telephone interviews, and a variety of secondary documentation was coded and analyzed using Nud*ist content analysis software.


7. These data are based on an annual benefit survey conducted by the Congressional Research Service and on Urban Institute tabulations of AFDC state plan information.


9. The child must have been placed with the relative by the child welfare agency because of a filed dependency petition. The child is placed with the relative after a minimum of six months of supervision by the child welfare agency.

10. The 1993 federal Budget Reconciliation Act required child welfare agencies to develop a Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS), prompting agencies to create new databases and electronic systems for collecting and sharing information.

11. This is not to say that TANF workers did not receive any training on abuse and neglect, but new training did not generally occur as a result of welfare reform. In many states, TANF workers are mandated reporters of abuse and neglect. Some administrators said information on abuse and neglect was included in the initial training of new workers.

12. It is important to note that when we visited these localities, the impetus for collaboration may have been in its infancy. In most states, the ultimate five-year (or less) lifetime limit on cash assistance had not yet been reached by the vast majority of families, and would not be reached until 2001.
References


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