

## MEMORANDUM

TO: David T. Ellwood  
Mary Jo Bane  
Bruce Reed  
Avis LaVelle

FROM: Jim Hickman 

SUBJECT: AFDC Focus Groups on February 28 and March 1, 1994

DATE: February 23, 1994

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The Working Group on Welfare Reform, Family Support and Independence is participating in a series of focus groups with women receiving public assistance. These focus group meetings are sponsored by the Foundation for Child Development and will be conducted by Jan Hagen from the Rockefeller Institute of Government of SUNY Albany and Lian Davis from the University of Kansas. They are designed to provide the opportunity to consider welfare reform issues from the perspective of the recipients of services and to bring the recipients' perspectives into the on-going policy discussions.

The focus groups are being held in the Sixth Floor Auditorium of the Administration for Children and Families, at the Aerospace Center located at 901 D Street, S.W. in Washington, D.C. The schedule for the focus groups is as follows:

Monday, February 28

Group 1: JOBS Participants with Children 3-5 years old

9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	Focus Group with Clients
11:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.	Break
11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.	Discussion with Working Group

Group 2: Teen Mothers

2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.	Focus Group with Clients
4:00 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.	Break
4:30 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.	Discussion with Working Group

**Tuesday, March 1**

**Group 3: Wait-listed, JOBS-eligible Clients**

12:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.            Focus Group with Clients  
2:30 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.            Break  
3:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.            Discussion with Working Group  
4:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.            Wrap-up Session with Moderators

Scheduled Working Group participants include David T. Ellwood, Mary Jo Bane, Bruce Reed, and Avis LaVelle.

Each focus group will run approximately three hours. The first two hours will consist of a broad discussion solely between the recipients and the moderators. The discussion topics will cover four major areas: welfare's impact on family life, welfare prevention, time-limited benefits, and child care issues. Through discussion, the moderators will seek to identify with the participants the major issues they foresee in their lives and the lives of their children in these four areas. At the conclusion of the focus group discussion, members of the Working Group and other parties will join the participants for a general discussion of the major themes and issues that the group identified.

These focus groups are voluntary and confidential. The Foundation will provide each recipient a stipend of \$50.00 to cover their time and travel expenses. The nature of the recipients participation will be reviewed with them prior to each focus group and each participant then will be asked to sign a consent form. Also, any interaction between the focus group participants and members of the Working Group and staff will also be considered confidential.

Finally, I have attached a copy of the draft focus group guide for your review. This will be the basis of the discussion with the recipients. If you have any comments on the guide or the proceedings, please give me a call at 401-6958.

cc:            Ann Rosewater  
              Melissa Skolfield  
              Naomi Goldstein  
              Jeremy Ben-Ami  
              Patricia Sosa  
              Marcy Carlson

**FOCUS GROUP GUIDE****INTRODUCTION 10 minutes**

Welcome—we are glad you could come to this meeting today. My name is Jan Hagen and with me is Liane Davis. Liane is from the University of Kansas and I am from the University at Albany in upstate New York.

We are here today to talk with you about your ideas on changing welfare. There are lots of suggestions for changing welfare. We want to know how some of those suggestions for changing welfare would affect your lives and your children. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions we are going to ask; what's important to us is to get as many of your thoughts and ideas as possible.

We also want to use our discussion to get ready to meet with some members of the White House Working Group on Welfare Reform. They are concerned about welfare and are working now on proposals to change welfare programs. It's important to them too to hear from you—to learn what your reactions are to various suggestions for changing welfare and how these would affect you.

We are going to talk about four broad areas today: 1) how work and welfare affect you and your children, 2) how to help people avoid getting on welfare in the first place, 3) how long people stay on welfare without working, and 4) child care issues.

Before we start though, we want you to know that what you say this morning/afternoon is confidential. We don't work for the welfare office and we won't be reporting your specific comments back to them. Your names will not be used and you will not be identified with your comments. Your participation today will in no way affect your AFDC benefits or benefits you receive from any other program. We also want you to know that the suggestions for changing welfare that we will be discussing are not our ideas nor are they suggestions that we necessarily agree with. So, you can say whatever you want about them. And remember, these are just ideas about how to change welfare; they are not happening now.

We are going to tape our discussion today. This will give us a record of our meeting; what you say is important to us and we don't want to miss it.

We ask that only one person speak at a time--and that you speak up so we get it on tape. We also want to make sure everyone has a chance to talk. And, although Liane and I are going to introduce the topics, it's important that you speak not just to us but to everyone in the group. We are going to cover a number of topics so it may be necessary for us to cut off the conversation some times. We will do this to be sure we have time to discuss everything. To help keep us on track, Liane and I will be looking at this discussion guide from time to time.

Does anyone have any questions?

**GENERAL QUESTION TO START 15 MINUTES**

Let's start by having everyone introduce themselves. Please tell us your first name and how many children you have. Since we are going to be talking about suggestions for changing welfare, tell us about any ideas for changing welfare that you've heard and what you think about them.

**NOTES**

- Push for specific, not generalized, responses in order to model types of answers
- Generate a list of the suggestions they have heard about and opt to mention. Use these if possible to make transitions into the four topics.

**IMPACT ON FAMILY LIFE 15-20 MINUTES**

We want to start off talking about how you see the tradeoffs between work and welfare. We want to know how work and welfare affect you and your family.

Welfare and Parenting

- How do you feel about being on welfare? Does it affect how you look at life, how you feel about yourself?

- How does that affect your ability to be a parent?

- Does it make a difference to your children that you are on welfare? In what ways?

- Are there services like parenting courses, help with money management and budgeting, or counseling about family issues that might help you in raising your children?

Work and Welfare: Tradeoffs

- Are there advantages to being on welfare? Does it provide some sense of security for you and your children? If so, in what ways?

- In another study I am doing, I heard talk about people on welfare getting "cold feet"--as people get closer to completing their education and training, they get worried about losing their welfare benefits. Has/might this happened to you?

- What kinds of things would you worry about?

- Would you worry about losing Medicaid? Food Stamps? Subsidized housing?

- Would you worry about being able to afford child care?

- Would you worry about not being able to manage your money or being able to keep to a budget?

- Do you have any ideas for how the welfare office could help you deal with these worries?

- Do you see advantages for you to work instead of being on welfare? If so, what are they?

- What kinds of things prevent your getting a job?

**PREVIEW 15-20 MINUTES**

Our next topic has to do with preventing people from needing welfare in the first place. These suggestions range from giving absolutely no welfare benefits to a mother who has never-married to making sure that mothers receive financial support from the child's father. We'd like you to discuss several of these options for preventing people from getting on welfare.

**Teen Pregnancy**

- Let's start with those suggestions that say mothers who have never married would not get any welfare benefits. Do you think this would encourage young people to delay having children until they are married, until they are mature enough to raise children?

- Another idea is to give welfare only to those teen mothers who live with their own parents or grandparents. What impact do you think this would have on the lives of young women? Would it encourage them to delay having children? Would it create other problems for teen mothers and their families?

- Should we try to prevent teenage pregnancies? What approaches might be taken? Are there things we can do in the schools, in the local communities?

- What ideas do you have about how people can get more information about birth control? What about actually getting birth control devices?

**Paternity and Child Support**

- Some people think we should change welfare by doing a better job of having fathers provide financial support for their children. One of the barriers to this is that some times women don't want to identify the father of the child.

- What kinds of things might make women hesitant to name the child's father?

- What would make it easier for women to identify the child's father? What kinds of things would encourage them to identify the father?

- Sometimes people have trouble getting child support. What kinds of things get in the way?

- Do you have suggestions for how it might be easier to get child support?

**TIME-LIMITED BENEFITS 30 MINUTES**

One proposal being considered is to limit the time people can get welfare to two years. During that two-year period, people would receive education, training, and help in finding a job. After that, people on welfare would have to get a job or participate in a work program. This work program would arrange placements in community services. For example, if you didn't get a job after two years of education or training, you might be assigned to work for pay in a school or library. Or you might be assigned to do secretarial or clerical work for a government program in exchange for getting your welfare check. Part of the idea here is for the welfare office to give more emphasis to training and work.

Now, we have a number of questions we'd like you to react to regarding this type of change.

**Changing the Welfare "Culture"**

- Do you think it would be a good idea for the welfare office to put a greater emphasis on helping people find jobs and get training for jobs?

- How could the welfare office do a better job of helping people find work or get education and training?

- Do you have any suggestions for how the welfare office could give more attention to jobs and training and less attention to welfare eligibility?

**Two-Years to Prepare for Work**

- Let's go back to the two years of education and training. What kinds of services would best prepare you to be without welfare in two years? To get a job that would support your family?

- Is two years enough time to expect you to prepare yourself to get a job that would support your family?

- Are there things that would make it difficult for you to be off welfare in two years?

**TIME-LIMITED BENEFITS (Continued)****Work for Welfare or Work for Pay**

- Now imagine that the two years are up but you have been unable to find a job.

- Do you think it's fair for welfare to require you to work in order to get some financial assistance after you've been on welfare for two years and received education and training?

- How would you feel about being assigned to work at the minimum wage in a local agency or program like Headstart or a library? In other words, you'd go to a work assignment but you would get a pay check for the job. If you missed work, you'd lose pay for the time missed. You'd be paid about \$4.25/hour and your child care would be paid for too.

- How would you feel about working in a local program not for wages but in exchange for your welfare check? In other words, you'd have to go to a work assignment but you'd still get a welfare check. Again, your child care would be paid for.

- Which of these two approaches do you think is better if you can't find a job after two years?

**Going to Work**

- Now imagine that the two years are up and you find a job that pays \$4.35 an hour but the job has the potential for higher wages later. What kinds of services or supports would you need to make a "go" of it until your wages increased?

[Probe for health care, child care. Transition to child care unit.]

**CHILD CARE ISSUES 20 MINUTES**

We'd now like to spend some time talking about child care. We know that finding child care and feeling good about the care your child is getting can be hard.

- In the past, have you used child care? What kind of care did you use?
- If you think about going for training or education or if you get a job, what kind of child care would you try to arrange? Let's assume cost is not an issue.
  - Would you prefer to have your children with someone you know, like a relative, or in a child care center, or maybe in a program that focused on preparing your child for school, a program like Headstart?
  - Still thinking about getting a job or going for training or education, what kinds of child care problems would you anticipate?
  - What services would make it easier for you to set up child care arrangements? To keep those child care arrangements over time?
  - For how many hours a day do you think it's ok to have your child in child care?
  - What kind of child care arrangements do you think would be important for your children who are in school?

**CLOSURE AND TRANSITION 20 minutes**

- We know being on welfare and raising children is very hard sometimes. What kinds of things help you make a "go" of it on welfare? What is it that keeps you going?

- Thinking over what we have talked about, is there anything you'd like to add, is there an issue that's important to you that we haven't considered? Do you have other suggestions about how we should change welfare and the services it provides?

- Now, we'd like to conclude by drawing out the main concerns you've raised in our discussion.

**NOTES**

- Moderators with participants summarize the issues and concerns raised in the four areas

- Remind group of purpose of meeting with Working Group members

- After we take a 15-30 minute break, we will meet with the members from the Working Group on Welfare Reform. It's important to them too to hear from you--to learn what your reactions are to various suggestions for changing welfare and how these would affect you. We hope that at the end of our discussion with them, they will be clearer about the different kinds of issues and concerns you have.

- Collect brief demographic information

**BREAK 15 -- 30 MINUTES**

**MATERIALS**

2 tape recorders and cassettes (will bring)  
Flip charts and tape (request from Jim)  
Poster board -- 4 sheets (request from Jim)  
Magic Markers (will bring)  
Consent forms (will bring)  
Demographic sheet (will bring)

**MEET WITH WORKING GROUP MEMBERS ONE HOUR**

- Introductions
- Set context for discussion

The reason we are now meeting with \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ is so they can learn about your views on various suggestions for changing welfare. They are concerned about welfare and are working now on proposals to change welfare programs across the country.

- Outline for Working Group members issues and concerns raised in focus group (Moderators or group members)
- Discussion: Who's going to serve as facilitator here?

February 1, 1994

TO: David T. Ellwood  
Mary Jo Bane  
Bruce Reed  
Avis Lavelle

FROM: Jim Hickman *GIA*

RE: Private Foundation Sponsorship of Recipient Focus  
Groups

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The Foundation for Child Development (FCD) has designated an existing grant with Jan Hagen of SUNY Albany to support a "prototype" series of AFDC recipient focus groups with some participation by representatives of the Working Group. This is a first step in our effort to explore ways that the foundation community can participate in the welfare reform process.

FCD and the Rockefeller Institute of Government will conduct three focus groups that will explore how recipients would react to the welfare reform proposals presented by Charles Murray, the House Republican Welfare Reform Bill, and the Working Group on Welfare Reform draft discussion paper. These focus groups are designed for general input and reaction to various welfare reform proposals and not for the specific vetting of any particular plan. A later series of focus groups similarly sponsored is under discussion and could be geared towards a more in-depth review of proposed welfare reforms.

Focus group participants will be drawn from three diverse groups: teen mothers; JOBS participants with at least one child aged 3-5, and long-term welfare recipients that have been on AFDC for 36 months or longer. Four topic areas will be covered: welfare prevention; time-limited assistance; child care, and impact on family life.

We are planning to conduct two focus groups on Monday, February 28, and one focus group and wrap-up session on Tuesday, March 1, tentatively scheduled in the ACF Auditorium. Each focus group will last approximately three hours. There will be two hours of discussion with the recipients, moderated by Jan Hagen and her colleague. A group discussion guide will be developed outlining the general introductory question to the selected topics and follow-up questions for each topic. Jeremy Ben-Ami and I will be working closely with Jan Hagen on the guide and its contents.

After the two hour session with recipients, members of the Working Group on Welfare Reform will join the recipients and the moderators for an hour follow-up discussion. This is an opportunity for Working Group members to solicit participants' reaction to the discussion of various welfare reform proposals as well as engage in further discussion about the Administration's proposal.

One issue in the proposal that requires further discussion is the use of the focus group write-up and its disclosure to third parties. In her proposal, Jan Hagen indicates that the proceedings will be taped and further materials including journal articles may be prepared. Unless directed otherwise, I will negotiate an arrangement that ensures the comments of the participating Working Group members are kept confidential and any write-up that follows these meetings will focus solely on recipient responses. Since there is the likelihood that the results of these meetings will eventually become public, I can also negotiate the timing of the release of any academic writings to avoid any conflict with our activities.

The complete proposal for this pilot project is attached for your review. Jan Hagen is interested in your suggestions for discussion questions and any other comments you have about the proposal. You can send your comments to me and I will guide the proposal accordingly.

Finally, I will forward the appropriate scheduling and briefing material to your offices as soon as it becomes available. If you have any questions before then, please call me at 401-6958.

attachment

cc: Ann Rosewater  
Jeremy Ben-Ami  
Patricia Sosai

**MEMORANDUM****TO:** Jim Hickman, Working Group on Welfare Reform**FROM:** Dan Hagen**DATE:** January 28, 1994**RE:** Focus Groups on Welfare Reform

I am sending along a first draft on the focus group pilot project. It's more than you asked for but it was helpful to clarify as much as possible for myself. We can also use it as a check to be sure we are all going in the same direction. I look forward to the comments and suggestions you and others may have.

We have begun work on the focus group guide which attempts to lay out the structure very specifically as well as to frame the discussion questions. When Liane and I are a little further along, I will send it off to you and Sheila Smith for comments.

Liane and I are both pleased and excited to be involved in this activity. Thanks for asking us to participate!

**cc:** Sheila Smith, FCD

**FOCUS GROUPS ON WELFARE REFORM: PILOT PROJECT****DRAFT 1/27/94**

Jan L. Hagen and Liane V. Davis

**PURPOSE**

Under the auspices of the Rockefeller Institute of Government and with support from the Foundation for Child Development, three focus groups will be conducted with current AFDC recipients to explore how they would anticipate being affected by the various welfare reform proposals now under discussion. Key proposals to be considered are those presented by Charles Murray (1993), the Republican Welfare Reform Bill (H.R. 3500), and those being considered by the White House Working Group on Welfare Reform. These proposals include such provisions as no government support for never-married women with children, a two-year time limit on welfare benefits, mandatory work for wages or welfare benefits, and no additional benefits for children born after the mother becomes a welfare recipient. Based on this pilot project, recommendations will be made about the usefulness of focus groups with welfare recipients in exploring the implications of welfare reform proposals and the major themes that may be anticipated in these discussions.

**BACKGROUND**

Recipients of service are frequently overlooked in considering the effect of services on the lives of recipients and their children, and yet these recipients frequently have a different perspective on service delivery than the providers and administrators of those services. Various research methods are available to systematically collect information from recipients about the effect of services. Several studies of recipients' experiences with recent welfare employment programs have been conducted using telephone

interviews, personal interviews and focus groups (e.g., Gilbert, Berrick, & Mayers, 1992; Hershey & Patch, 1990; Martinson & Riccio, 1989; Quiroz & Tosca, 1990; Skricki, 1994; and Southport, 1992.) The renewed public debate on welfare reform provides a timely opportunity to consider welfare reform issues from the perspective of the recipients of services and to bring their perspectives into the on-going policy discussions.

#### **METHODS**

Three focus groups of between eight to twelve current AFDC recipients will be conducted in the Washington, D.C. area to pilot the feasibility of these groups to contribute to the policy debates. To capture some of the diversity within the AFDC adult population, we suggest that one group be comprised of teen mothers, one of JOBS participants who have at least one child aged three to five, and one of long-term welfare recipients (36 or more months on AFDC).

Topic Areas. Although the emphasis given to each area may vary based on the group's composition, each focus group will be asked to consider four topic areas:

- Welfare prevention initiatives such as pregnancy prevention, denying benefits to never-married mothers or to teen mothers living independently, and enforcement of paternity establishment and child support awards.

- Time-limit proposals and how these might affect their motivation, willingness, and ability to participate in welfare employment programs as well as how they would envision their lives and their children's lives at the end of those two years if no income supports or other assistance were provided or if they were required to participate in either community service for wages or work experience programs in exchange for welfare benefits.

- Child care issues as these relate to participating in welfare

employment programs, obtaining and retaining employment, and the well-being of family life. Consideration will be given to preferences for child care, the need for transitional child care benefits to make employment feasible, and the supervision of children before and after school.

- Impact on family life stemming from participation in welfare employment programs, employment, and required work assignments in either community service or work experience programs. Consideration will be given to the perceived importance these activities have on the recipients' ability to parent and serve as role models for their children.

Selection of Focus Group Members. Current welfare recipients meeting the above selection criteria will be invited to participate in these focus groups. The invitation to participate will be presented as voluntary, i.e., their participation or nonparticipation will not affect their public assistance benefits or services in any way. They will also be assured that their responses will be confidential. Jim Hickman, with the Working Group on Welfare Reform, will work with local program administrators to invite recipients to participate in the focus groups. The voluntary and confidential nature of their participation in the focus groups will be reviewed at the beginning of each focus group, and participants will be asked to sign a consent form. Participants will receive a payment of \$50.00 as compensation for their time and effort.

Process for Conducting the Focus Groups. Given that our purpose is to consider the views of AFDC recipients in four broad areas, the focus groups will be fairly structured discussions requiring a relatively high level of moderator involvement in the group process. A group discussion guide will be developed outlining the general introductory question to the selected topics as well as preplanned probes for each topic. Each focus group will be scheduled for two hours and followed by an hour long discussion with members

of the Working Group. Focus group sessions will be audio taped for the use of the focus group moderators. Basic demographic information on participants will be requested.

In general, each focus group will begin with an explanation of the purpose of the meeting, introduction of the focus group moderators, and introduction of participants. We will begin the discussion very broadly by spending a few minutes soliciting their comments about welfare reform. We will then devote the majority of the group discussion, approximately an hour and a half, to the participants' identifying major issues they foresee in their lives and the lives of their children in the four broad areas being explored. Specific time allocations will be given to each of the four areas based on the composition of the group. During the final ten to fifteen minutes of the focus group, each participant will be given an opportunity to make a closing statement. The participants will review the major issues and themes they identified in their discussion.

At the conclusion of the focus group discussion, members of the Working Group will join the participants for a general discussion of the major themes and issues that the group identified. The moderators or several group members will briefly summarize the major themes and issues identified in the focus group in order to bridge the transition from the focus group meeting to the discussion with members of the Working Group. This follow-up discussion will be appropriately one hour. [We need to decide who will "chair" these follow-up discussions: the moderators, a member of the Working Group, or someone else. We suggest the moderators serve as "chair."]

Focus Group Moderators and Their Role. The focus groups will be moderated by Jan Hagen and Liane Davis (curriculum vita attached). We will develop the format for the focus groups as well as frame the specific

questions to be addressed in the focus groups. Prior to conducting the pilot project in Washington, D.C., we will each conduct a focus group to test out the process and the framing of questions. As we develop the questions for the focus groups, we will seek suggestions and input from various experts. It is also necessary for us to submit this project for review by the University at Albany's Institutional Review Board, acting on behalf of the Research Foundation of the State University of New York. Welfare recipients are defined as a vulnerable population, and this review is necessary to comply with procedures for the use of human subjects in research.

After completing the three focus groups, we will hold a debriefing with members of the Working Group to discuss themes and issues that emerged across the three groups and the usefulness of conducting additional focus groups. We will also prepare a brief summary report highlighting major findings from the focus groups and providing suggestions and recommendations about the use of additional focus groups to consider various welfare reform proposals. Upon completion of this work, we may prepare, at our discretion, journal articles or other written materials based on the pilot project for further dissemination of this information.

Tentative Time Frame

- 1/31--2/11: Draft focus group questions and obtain suggestions
- 2/14--2/18: Conduct pre-pilot focus groups
- 2/21--2/25: Finalize questions and procedures
- 2/28--3/1: Conduct focus groups and hold debriefing
- 3/2--3/31: Complete draft of summary report
- 4/1--4/31: Revise summary report as needed and submit to FCD and

BHS

**REFERENCES**

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The Southport Institute for Policy Analysis (1992). "It's not like they say:" Welfare recipients talk about welfare, work and education. Washington, D.C.: Southport.