

## **VENTURA COUNTY WELFARE REFORM AND CHILD CARE SERVICES**

### **INTRODUCTION**

A study was conducted involving The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, commonly known as federal welfare reform, and the future effect it will have on various child care services throughout Ventura County.

### **BACKGROUND**

On August 22, 1996, the President signed into law The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. This new law is designed to incorporate current welfare recipients into the mainstream workforce within a specified time frame.

According to Congressional sources, approximately 70 percent of the individuals receiving financial assistance are children. The remaining 30 percent tend to be single women with limited job skills. In order for these women to get off welfare, most will have to return to school or obtain formalized job training. Adequate child care must be provided during the course of either one of these actions and continued until gainful employment is obtained.

If current projections are realized, Ventura County, through its Public Social Services Agency (PSSA), will need to find available child care services for up to an additional 10,500 children.

In an attempt to acknowledge and address the unique needs of children and caregivers, the Ventura County Child Care Planning Network was formed in December 1995. This body is comprised of approximately 200 members representing Ventura County governmental agencies, Ventura County School Districts, Ventura County Public Health Agency, Ventura County Community College District, libraries, nonprofit and developmental child care agencies, and family and center-based child care providers.

The primary goals of this planning network are to identify ways to meet the child care needs and priorities for Ventura County, work to improve the quality of child care, and to educate and keep the community informed about various child care services.

### **SCOPE**

The study's main focus was directed toward addressing the following issues of importance:

- The new Child Care and Development Fund proposed by the State.
- What the new eligibility rules and standards will be.
- How the State plans on distributing the funds which will go directly to County Welfare Departments.
- Finally, that the proper amount of information and services are provided along with an adequate seamless delivery of child care services utilizing a centralized waiting list.

## INQUIRIES

The Grand Jury conducted interviews with the Work / Family Coordinator of Ventura County Personnel Department, the Executive Director of Child Development Resources of Ventura County (CDR), the Project Manager of the County Welfare Reform Steering Committee, and personnel representing PSSA.

Informational data were received and reviewed from the following sources: The Children's Defense Fund, California Child Care Resource and Referral Network, Children Now, The National Association for the Education of Young Children, The National Center for the Early Childhood Workforce, The California Legislative Analyst's Office, and associated local newspaper reports focusing on child care needs within the County.

In addition, the monthly meeting of the Ventura County Child Care Planning Network, held on October 28, 1996, was attended.

## FINDINGS

- The welfare reform legislation eliminates the seven existing Title IV A federal child care programs and replaces all of them with one Child Care Block Grant called The Child Care and Development Fund.
- The new Child Care and Development Fund has three funding sources: the old Title IV A funds called mandatory funds, the old Child Care and Development Block Grant funds called discretionary funds, and the new additional federal funds called matching funds.
- The Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program provides that at least 70 percent of the new Child Care and Development Fund must be used to provide child care assistance.
- A provision of the Child Care and Development Fund calls for a minimum of four percent to be expended on quality and/or supply building activities. California expects to allocate \$20 million to quality activities for FY 96/97. This represents a \$10 million increase from the previous year.
- Payment rates under the Child Care and Development Fund must be sufficient to ensure equal access for eligible children to comparable child care services that are provided to children whose parents are not eligible to receive assistance under any other programs.
- The immigration provisions of welfare reform (including those addressing both legal and illegal immigrants) do not explicitly discuss limiting access to child care benefits for immigrants. The California Department of Education asserts that child care is an integral part of the State's basic public education and therefore, should be exempt from all restrictions based upon immigrant status.
- Every \$1.00 invested in quality child care returns \$7.16 to the government in lower costs for remedial education and juvenile justice programs.
- Child Development Resources of Ventura County (CDR) provides the only comprehensive resource and referral data base of approximately 1,400 state licensed child care providers within Ventura County.
- CDR completed 4,674 public child care referral and assistance calls during FY 95-96, an increase of 700 from the previous year, along with the addition of 283 new, licensed child care providers to their data base.

CONCLUSIONS

- There will be a significant increase in the number of available child care spaces that will be filled under the provisions of welfare reform.
1. Since welfare reform legislation requires eligible recipients to seek gainful, full-time employment within a mandated time period, having an adequate amount of quality child care services available that are both accessible and affordable is an issue of impending major concern.
  2. The Ventura County Child Care Planning Network provides an efficient and effective source of combined ideas and strategies in addressing and identifying the child care needs and priorities for Ventura County.
  3. Child Development Resources of Ventura County is a valuable, private, nonprofit corporation that continues to develop, secure, and promote various programs as well as to provide leadership in drawing both the public and private sectors of the child care community together. This organization serves as a clearinghouse for child care resources in Ventura County.
  4. PSSA is faced with an enormous task of coordinating the proper placement of their clients within the most cost effective, quality child care programs while adhering to the various provisions set forth in the new legislation.
  5. The need to develop and maintain an adequate amount of spaces for the children of these recipients who are trying to become self-sufficient, along with constantly supplying adequate program funding, are the major areas of concern faced by the various agencies involved.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Child Care and Development Fund Block Grant should be closely maintained and monitored efficiently so that funding is equally distributed utilizing a time limited system which would gradually be reduced over time, freeing money for future children to receive assistance.
2. PSSA should train all intake personnel about the variety of child care services available within the County as well as provide centralized computer access to the necessary information needed to process a client's application at the time eligibility is established.
3. Ventura County should continue its established alliance with CDR in trying to consolidate funds into a single network coordinating agency to eliminate system fragmentation.
4. The Board of Supervisors needs to become more supportive and seek greater community involvement in helping to establish more on-site child care centers at the various businesses where parents moving off welfare are to be employed.
5. Utilize the only extensive centralized waiting list established by CDR, of available child care services within Ventura County, in order to centralize resource and referral services.

RESPONSE REQUIRED

PSSA  
Board of Supervisors