

Human Services Agency

Background

The Human Services Agency (HSA) is one of the largest agencies in Ventura County. Its mission is to reduce the effects of poverty, abuse and neglect visited on some Ventura County residents. The agency oversees a wide range of mandated Federal, State and County programs, as well as Veterans' Services and Senior Nutrition programs.

Findings

Budget

HSA was slated to spend about 15% of the Ventura County FY 1998-99 budget. However, as most of its funding comes from the Federal and State Governments, the Human Services Agency costs the County only 5% of the total budgeted for it. Even this percentage is smaller than that provided in the previous two years as a result of the January 1998 implementation of SB 1542, the state welfare reform legislation known as CalWORKS. The money available and the number of people employed by HSA have increased (Figure 1).

	1996-97 ACTUAL	1997-98 ACTUAL	1998-99 ACTUAL
Appropriations	\$121,486,900	\$115,029,990	\$122,304,700
Revenue	\$113,108,500	\$108,396,743	\$116,107,800
County Cost	\$8,378,400	\$6,633,247	\$6,196,900
Positions	871	873	948

Figure 1- Human Services Budgets 1996-1999

Welfare Reform

HSA administers CalWORKS, California's version of the welfare reform program passed by Congress in 1996. Since January 1998, this program has taken the place of Aid to Families of Dependent Children (AFDC) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) for the purpose of changing the direction of aid to applicants from cash assistance to gainful employment. Instead of sup-

porting the families with dependent children with welfare funds until the children grow up, this program limits families to 60 months of cash assistance for each eligible individual's lifetime, and offers training and employment help to make each family self-sufficient. However, the program provides food stamps and Medi-Cal when needed, as well as General Relief to indigents.

The federal government pays for half of CalWORKS; the rest of the cost is shared between the State and its counties. If the State does not meet the federally mandated performance outcomes, fiscal sanctions may be imposed.

The two great problems the agency faces in changing persons who were formerly on welfare into job-holders are lack of transportation, as fewer than half of the clients have cars, and child care, as they all have children.

In trying to solve the problem of lack of transportation, several programs are being developed:

- One plan, introduced by the Board of Supervisors, required the County to buy used cars, which were repaired to driveable condition, then sold to the heads of households at a low interest rate on loans guaranteed by the County. This plan had provided three cars to three families before the county transferred this program to Many Mansions, a private non-profit organization located in Thousand Oaks.
- Tokens are available to be used on buses, if the buses are close to the client's home, child care and place of employment and if the schedules fit the clients' needs.
- A representative of the Ventura County Transportation Commission offers transportation information at each Job/Career Center through its web-site www.goventura.org.
- Ventura County Transportation Commission (VCTC) has applied for a grant to buy nine vans, to be used by the seven Job/Career Centers.
- Another grant which VCTC has applied for would buy 29 vehicles, to be used on a loan basis at the Job/Career Centers.
- A program called Guaranteed Ride Home assures an employee who did not get to work by automobile that he/she can call a cab or rent a car up to twice a month if a family emergency occurs or his/her employer asks him/her unexpectedly to work late.

The other crucial problem which many new jobholders face is affordable quality child care. Two-thirds of former welfare clients are children. New jobholders may not be able to afford good child care. CalWORKS does pay for child care on a sliding scale as long as it is needed. However, there are few child care facilities that begin early

in the morning and continue late at night, as well as weekends, to accommodate parents' non-standard work hours. Moreover, there is a need for second and third level support systems to fall back on if the children are sick and the parents cannot take time off from their jobs.

Research by the Children's Resource Center indicates that areas with the most child care facilities do not coincide with the areas of greatest need (i.e., where the greatest number of CalWORKS clients live). For example, the greatest number of child care facilities are in Thousand Oaks, while the cities with the greatest needs are in Oxnard, Port Hueneme, Santa Paula and Fillmore.

CalWORKS pays for the training of former welfare recipients at the three County community colleges to prepare CalWORKS clients in the field of early childhood education.

Job/Career Centers

Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) committee members visited the Job/Career Center in Oxnard located in a shopping center well-served by buses, and found it to be a beehive of activity.

The Center was set up with the purpose of getting welfare clients self-supporting, and offers, without charge:

- Registration into a job search program.
- Computer access to information on jobs.
- Help using the computer.
- Job search workshops which include resume preparation training.
- Fax machines, telephones, bus tokens or taxi fare.
- Information about places that take care of children.
- Information about transportation.
- A public health nurse on the premises.
- A drop-in child care program close by so that parents could concentrate on their needs.

A total of seven Job/Career Centers are planned: two more in Oxnard, two in Ventura, one in Simi Valley and one in Santa Paula.

The Homeless

The Homeless Services Program provides services to homeless and marginally-housed families and individuals. It works with public and private agencies and offers short-term case management. During the Cold Weather Shelter season, a team of three social workers and a supervisor who also has clients makes regular visits to living areas to check on individuals' welfare and their needs.

A survey in 1991 of the County's homeless estimated a population of between 2,000 and 4,000, most of them staying in the larger cities. A more recent survey in 1998 revealed that 25% are employed, 33% received some form of public assistance, the number of families and single women is rising and that 21% acknowledged substance abuse. In addition, the Ventura County Alliance for the Mentally Ill has pointed out that the mentally ill form a large category of the homeless, estimated at 27%.

From October to March, a few Cold Weather Shelters are available at night only. The National Guard Armories, where cots were set up for some years, increased rents and imposed conditions on occupancy which were difficult to meet. Some 35 men can be housed in a center in Ventura each night that was formerly a center for the mentally disturbed. Churches and temples in some cities offered shelter for one night a week for women and children.

The problem intensifies when it rains. According to an official at HSA, the homeless look for shelter any place where they will not be driven off: libraries, shopping centers, under awnings in back of restaurants. The only 24-hour shelter in all of Ventura County is called River-dwellers Aid Intercity Network (RAIN), at Camarillo Airport, which offers housing and living services to about 50 people, half of them children.

This official stated that what is urgently needed is more transitional housing, where those without homes can shower, lock up their possessions safely, do laundry, play with their children, receive mail, and in general, pull themselves together. For the homeless mentally ill, the Ventura County Alliance for the Mentally Ill urges more treatment facilities where they can be housed for indefinite periods and they can be sure to continue the drug therapy which might keep them functioning.

Adult Services

Services available to senior adults include:

- In-Home Supportive Services, which provides help to eligible aged, blind and disabled persons to assist them in remaining safely in their own homes.
- Adult Protective Services, which protects elders and dependent adults from abuse, neglect and exploitation regardless of income.
- Senior Nutrition, which serves meals to people age 60 and over, either at a meal site or at home.

Children's Services

This department of the Human Services Agency assists families where children are found to be at risk of serious abuse or neglect. The safety of the children is the primary concern. Intervention ranges from referrals to other agencies to placing children in safe places after they are removed from their homes. This department also recruits and monitors foster homes.

Conclusions

Human Services Agency provides care to the needy citizens of Ventura County. Ninety-five percent of its funds comes from Federal and State appropriations. In spite of the money available, the dedicated HSA staff deals with serious problems daily.

1. In the CalWORKS program, convenient, reliable transportation to jobs, shopping and child care is needed. A better fit between the needs of parents for quality child care and available sites is also needed. Although the CalWORKS program seems well set-up for preparing former welfare recipients for training and obtaining jobs, the Human Services Agency is aware that there needs to be support system for the continuation of gainful employment, and is considering mentors.
2. For the homeless population, year-round transitional housing is needed, where those without homes can choose to shower, lock up their possessions safely, do laundry, play with their children, receive mail and in general pull themselves together.
3. Another serious need is for 24-hour shelters, particularly in inclement weather.
4. For the homeless mentally ill, long-term treatment facilities are urged by their supporters.

Recommendations

- CalWORKS and public transportation officials must work closely together to better serve the specific needs of CalWORKS clients. CalWORKS could survey its clients' needs continuously and pass this information on to transit officials.
- The balance between need and child care sites should be adjusted.
 - a. Nursery schools could be encouraged to extend their half-day programs to all day, with the prospect of increased income.
 - b. Churches and public schools could make their facilities available all day and seven days a week, if appropriately supported.

- c. Child care facilities could be a condition of large businesses establishing themselves in Ventura County with necessary incentives like tax credits.
 - d. School districts should establish supervised after-school programs at all school sites.
 - e. Boys and Girls Clubs and the YM&WCAs currently offer successful programs of wholesome activities under professional supervision, programs which are worthy of replication and expansion.
 - f. As an important component of quality of care, teachers who have more training and experience could be rewarded with a pay scale above minimum wage.
- To relieve the plight of the homeless, the Board of Supervisors must assume a leadership role and coordinate the efforts of the cities and other organizations.
 - a. The Board could request city and county agencies to furnish an inventory of spaces where the homeless could find shelter.
 - b. The Board could set up plans for transitional housing, to help the homeless get on their feet, should they so choose.
 - c. Human Services Agency should publish acknowledgements regularly in the media to those churches, industries and agencies that house the homeless and furnish care, thereby keeping their problems and the resolutions in front of the public.

Responses Required

Board of Supervisors

Human Services Agency

Ventura County Transportation Commission