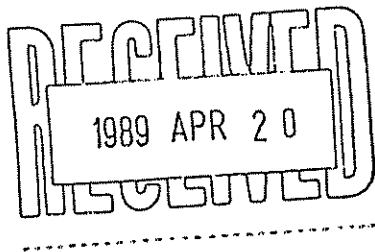


A Call to Action

An Agenda for Boards

*Poverty & Child Abuse
Social Assistance Review Committee
Community Response*



1st Printing

March 1989

Institute for the Prevention of Child Abuse

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Foreword

In our affluent society there are 215,000 children whose everyday existence depends on social assistance. This is a staggering 10% of the province's child population, and it means that many of Ontario's children, our most valuable asset, must live in a state of poverty and constant denial. Compared to children of higher income groups, poor children are less likely to complete their education, and more likely to be victims of illness, accidents, and violence.

In the fall of 1988 the Social Assistance Review Committee (commonly known as the *SARC Committee*) completed its review of Ontario's system of social assistance and published its findings in a document entitled *Transitions*. In its review, the committee addressed the plight of these 215,000 children, (as well as the plight of other recipients of social assistance) and made over 200 recommendations for improvement.

In January of 1989 the Institute for the Prevention of Child Abuse commissioned a paper entitled *Poverty and Child Abuse*. This paper shows that the condition of poverty, as an environmental stressor, places children of the poor at a greater risk for abuse than children of higher income parents.

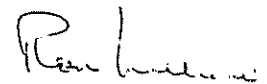
The findings of these two documents, *Transitions* and *Poverty and Child Abuse*, clearly complement each other and, equally as clearly, they demand action.

The following paper is designed to help Boards and individual Board members take that action. Its purpose is to provide guidelines for advocacy to ensure that the *SARC* recommendations, particularly as they affect children, are kept alive on the political agenda. It is a "Call to Action" on behalf of those victims of poverty who cannot speak for themselves.

We recognize that many of you have already taken action; we commend your initiative and encourage you to continue. For those of you who have not yet begun, we urge you to act now.



Robert Bates, MD, FRCP (C)
Chairperson



Ron Luclano
President/CEO

March 1989

Acknowledgements

The Institute for the Prevention of Child Abuse would like to thank a number of people for their support and contribution towards this project. As is always the case, success depends on cooperation, consultation and a willingness to share, and this project was no exception.

Special thanks must go to Melvin Finlay, who not only reduced the 540 pages of *Transitions* into 9, but who also prepared the "Call to Action" section; and to Dr. Richard Volpe, who authored the original paper, *Poverty and Child Abuse*.

Our thanks also to George Thomson and other members of the Social Assistance Review Committee, who brought the plight of the poor into prominence. Their extensive report is a telling social document. Dr. Dan Offord and his colleagues must also be acknowledged. Their findings in the Ontario Child Health Study provided grim details about the likely future of children who are raised in poverty.

As well, we would like to acknowledge the Laidlaw Foundation, and particularly Nathan Gilbert, Executive Administrator, for their leadership in making this advocacy issue a prime concern for *all* Ontarians.

To the IPCA staff who worked so hard at the paper's production, we extend our thanks.

And finally, we would like to acknowledge all those Ontarians who have been, and will be, advocating on behalf of disadvantaged children. Without your continuing efforts, there will be no changes.

Patricia Sibbald
Director, Public & Professional Education

March 1989

Poverty & Child Abuse

Poverty and Child Abuse

The following is a summary of a paper prepared for the Institute for the Prevention of Child Abuse (1989) by Richard Volpe, Ph.D., entitled: *Poverty and Child Abuse*. For a copy of the full paper, contact IPCA, 25 Spadina Road, Toronto, Ontario, M5R 2S9.

Introduction

Child abuse occurs among all income groups and in all social classes. In recent efforts to recognize the pervasiveness of child maltreatment, however, there has been a tendency to obscure the role that poverty plays in child abuse.

Through this literature review, the Institute for the Prevention of Child Abuse wants to highlight the fact that poverty creates a climate within which child abuse is more likely to occur.

We support the need for reform of the social assistance system in Ontario, as documented in the Report of the Social Assistance Review Committee. The devastating effect of poverty on children and their families is so pervasive and so debilitating that we urge immediate action.

Poverty as a risk factor

The poor appear to bear the greatest portion of social problems. They are consistently disproportionately represented among officially reported cases of child abuse (Blumberg, 1964; Holter and Friedman, 1968; Bennie and Sclare, 1969; Elmer, 1971).

Martin (1974) believes that there is a predominance of low socio-economic status (SES) families among both reported and non-reported abusive families. He argues that socio-economic factors, in addition to impinging on the daily lives and welfare of poor children, place them at risk in terms of minimal prenatal care, prematurity, low birth weight, crowding, poor medical care, marginal nutrition, and unsatisfactory physical environment.

Based on the Ontario Child Health Survey (1986), Offord concludes that poverty is a major risk factor for children. Moreover, this study demonstrated that in addition to low income, the fact of being on social assistance is correlated with a range of childhood disorders. Low socio-economic status was found to be associated with psychiatric disorder (poor conduct, poor school performance, hyperactivity, neurosis, and somatization). In a separate and more detailed analysis of conduct disorder, it was concluded that poverty appreciably increased the odds of such behaviors as being mean to others, destroying things, vandalizing, stealing, and setting fires (Offord and Boyle, 1986).

Alford, Martin and Martin (1985) found that the majority of abuse occurs in low socio-economic status homes. Citing Kornberg and Caplan (1980), Martin has concluded that poverty exacerbates conflict within families.

Similar conclusions have been drawn by Gil (1970), who undertook one of the first national studies attempting to unravel the socio-economic dimensions of child maltreatment. He found that 60% of families involved in reported cases of abuse had been on welfare during the time of, or within the year prior to, the survey. Thirty-seven per cent of the abusive families were receiving social assistance at the time of the incident.

It is important to underline, however, that although he found an over-representation of low socio-economic status families, Gil did not conclude that poor people are more violent than the affluent. Nor did he claim to have found a causal link between poverty and child abuse. Rather, he called for a multidimensional view of child maltreatment that considers both personal and contextual factors. He was careful to point out that any explanation of family violence that is pertinent to both social policy and preventative efforts must deal with poverty as a major source of family distress and debilitation.

The link between poverty and child abuse that is recorded in Gil's investigation has been reinforced by a U.S. national study undertaken by the American Humane Society (1978), as well as several local surveys (Young, 1971; Pelton, 1978). In a British study, Smith and Hanson (1974) reported that families of physically abused children reported a significantly higher incidence of adverse economic circumstances than families in their control group.

A major mortality study reported by Weston (1980) revealed that of 24 children dying from abuse, 80% were from families receiving social assistance.

Class and child abuse

Several researchers have criticized this portrait of the interrelationship between poverty and child abuse, primarily on the grounds that there is over-reliance on official reports from public agencies disproportionately used by the economically disadvantaged. This, they argue, under-represents the middle and upper classes in that they are able to maintain privacy through their ability to access private social support systems. (Steinmetz and Straus, 1973; Steinmetz, 1987).

Other researchers go even further. Gelles and Straus (1988) conclude that child abuse is pervasive and classless. They believe this conclusion is substantiated by research using university students that suggests that physical and sexual abuse are common occurrences in the lives of middle and upper income groups (Finkelhor, 1979; Parcell and Kanin, 1976; O'toole, Turbett, and Nalepka, 1981; Cate, Henton, Koval, Christopher, and Lloyd, 1982; Laner and Thompson, 1982).

However, Pelton (1981) provides several compelling arguments for rejecting the use of undiscovered evidence of middle and upper class abuse as proof of the classlessness of child abuse:

1. Recent increases in reporting that have resulted from a rise in public awareness and new legislation have not led to a change in the socio-economic patterns of reporting.
2. Even within lower income groupings, the incidence of child abuse tends to be greater at the lowest end of the income scale. (Giovannoni and Billingsley, 1970).
3. The argument based on lack of public scrutiny of middle and upper class families cannot account for why severity of abuse is related to level of poverty (Elmer, 1971).
4. "Undiscovered evidence is no evidence at all" of the classlessness of child abuse.

Bouchard (1988) asserts:

... Refusal to admit the negative impact of poverty on relationships among family members allows or leads society to delay taking the major decisions needed to prevent intra-family violence. Indeed, we must realize and assess the tremendous effort required for such a change; if economic factors are an important causal element in the breakdown of family relationships, then it is in that sphere that preventative action must be taken. (p.9)

The relationship between child abuse and poverty

While there is a link between poverty and child abuse, poverty is not a sufficient explanation of child abuse. Greenland (1987) rightly notes that the simplistic conclusion that poverty causes child abuse fails to explain why most poor parents do not act violently and why child abuse is not solely a problem of the poor.

Gil (1971) outlined a number of ways in which poverty is related to child abuse. First, cultural approval of force in child-rearing appears to be stronger among the socio-economically deprived. Second, there seems to be less inhibition among the poor to express and discharge aggression. Third, the poor have fewer opportunities than the non-poor to obtain parenting relief. Finally, the stresses of daily life are constant and severe for the poor.

Poor people feel their poverty more when it affects their children (Parton, 1985). The Institute for the Prevention of Child Abuse, in their nation-wide survey on attitudes toward child rearing (1988), found that more lower socio-economic status respondents than any other SES group perceive child abuse as a "very serious social problem".

Poverty and stress

Poverty debilitates families. It reduces a person's available repertoire of coping resources. In cases other than those involving a caregiver with a character disorder, the occurrence of child abuse may be seen as a breakdown in the ability to cope, the ability to mobilize resources (personal and contextual) to protect, nurture, and support a child.

Stress is a felt discrepancy between resources available and challenges faced. It has been repeatedly linked to child abuse (Helfer and Kempe, 1974, 1976; Martin, 1976).

Generally, there are two types of stress: acute and chronic. Acute stress creates a crisis situation. The resources a person needs to meet a challenge are suddenly lacking, either because they are unavailable or because the individual is unable to mobilize them.

In contrast, chronic stress emerges from a day to day inability to cope. This type of stress is insidious, lowers motivation, lessens immunity, and undermines social organization.

Poverty can be both acute and chronic. Chronic structural poverty, a form of institutional abuse, is likely the characteristic which is associated with both the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage and family violence (Rutter and Madge, 1976).

Factors in reducing stress

Volpe and Posener (1989) have identified three features associated with viewing stress as a discrepancy between resources and challenges.

First, mobilizing capabilities and skills in response to a challenge is a form of coping. Coping can be understood in terms of efforts to solve the problem. Problem solving ability can be enhanced by both skill training and the direct provision of resources.

Second, this notion of stress implies that the meaning attributed to the stress, and the motivation of people experiencing the stress, must be considered. This is necessary in order to understand the problems they face and to develop specific solutions to the problems. As W.I. Thomas (1966) has stated: "...if men [or women] define situations as real, they are real in their consequences." (p.9)

Third, the actual material, social, and spiritual resources available to people need to be assessed.

The poor are usually excluded from opportunities to acquire the resources they need to deal with stress. Intervention, then, should facilitate the development of personal and communal coping skills in an effort to maximize the potential to deal with challenges in the future.

Money can compensate when personal resources are low. Sitters can be called in, children can be sent off to day care, a friend can be taken to lunch. Lack of money makes these things difficult, if not impossible.

The problems in living that are most stressful are those that require individuals to exceed their normal level of functioning. These challenges require adaptation, the outcome of mobilizing resources to meet challenges or demands (Volpe 1987a).

Competent and successful parenting is adaptive parenting that nurtures and supports children's immediate needs and increases their life chances. In addition to providing financial support to alleviate the obvious impact of poverty, social supports must also be added to improve the probability of parenting becoming adaptive parenting (Volpe 1987a).

Social assistance: The need for change

The interrelationships between poverty and child abuse that are described in the literature are confirmed by the findings of the Social Assistance Review Committee. They received more than 1,500 briefs and submissions. Again and again they heard confirmation of the unfair situation created by the current social assistance system.

Not only do recipients have to contend with lack of material resources; their ability to cope with life has been undermined, and their children suffer. The very system that was supposed to help them stands in the way of a successful transition to self-reliance and independence. Poverty is perpetuated by the current system.

Clearly, reform is needed. It is needed *now*.

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Summary of "Transitions"

Background of the Report

In the summer of 1986, the Ontario Government established an independent committee, the Social Assistance Review Committee, to undertake a public review of the province's social assistance system. George Thomson, former Family Court Judge, was appointed to head the group which became known as the "SARC Committee". The mandate of the committee was to examine four questions:

- ▼ What principles and objectives should guide social assistance programs?
- ▼ Is the present system meeting these objectives?
- ▼ What strategies for change should the province adopt?
- ▼ What parameters should the province accept prior to legislating changes?

Philosophy underlying the Report

The Social Assistance Review Committee, having examined these questions, based its proposals for major reform of the social assistance system in Ontario on a clearly articulated philosophy. This philosophy, outlined in the Committee's 1988 Report, *Transitions** (or the *SARC Report*), has two cornerstones:

- ▼ Each person is of inherent worth and should be presumed capable of reason, choice, self-realization, and independence;
- ▼ Each person is interdependent with other members of society and needs to participate in, and be related to, family and community in order to fulfil his or her potential.

The Report states that society is responsible for assisting its members in their development and integration, and must do so "within a framework of economic equality and social justice". (p. 8)

In keeping with this philosophy, the Committee designed a social assistance system that views all recipients as people who are, as are all members of society at some stages in their lives, in "transition". The social support system, according to the Committee, "should function as a spring-board" which helps recipients make "the successful transition from social assistance to self-reliance". (p. 88) Rather than imprisoning recipients within it, the system must act as a buffer while automatically "propelling people upward again." (ibid.) Moving recipients from dependence to self-reliance is the main theme underlying the 274 recommendations of *Transitions*.

* Unless otherwise stated, all quotes in this section are from *Transitions*.

Social assistance and the Canadian economy

The Report places social assistance expenditures within a very broad economic context. Quoting from the findings of the Macdonald Commission (1985) it notes that, at the time of that commission's deliberations, there was "no evidence that a crisis existed as a result of the level of social spending. ... [and, in fact] ... if the political will existed, Canada could afford to spend more on social programs." (as quoted in *Transitions* p. 523)

Blais and McCallum, (1986) in a research study prepared for the Macdonald Commission, reported:

Perhaps the most puzzling aspect of our findings is the apparently positive relation between economic growth and social security payments...Our finding that the welfare state has, in general, been a positive factor in economic growth, therefore, comes as something of a surprise (as quoted in *Transitions* p. 524).

As reported in the *Globe and Mail*, this conviction has been echoed as recently as February 1989 by Conrad Black, chairman of Hollinger Inc., and Robin Korthals, president of the Toronto-Dominion Bank. Both base their support for reform of the social assistance system on their belief that the government can save money in the long run by introducing programs that help put people back into the work force.

But there are more than economic benefits to a sound social support network. Blais and McCallum are quoted further:

The welfare state may create a climate of social consensus that results in better labour-management relations, greater political stability, a higher degree of cooperation among the "social partners" and less alienation at the work place. All of these factors may contribute to higher productivity and higher economic growth. Certainly there is at least indirect support for these ideas in the political science and economic literature. (as quoted in *Transitions* p. 524)

Government support to the private sector

There is a common misconception that governments provide financial support only to individuals, through various social security programs. In point of fact, substantial subsidies are paid to business, industry, and other segments of the private sector. Expenditures on social assistance need to be understood in the context of total government expenditures, rather than be seen in isolation.

The Federal Task Force on Program Review (1985, the *Nielson Report*) discovered 218 distinct programs that provide incentives to the private sector. These programs require the services of more than 68,000 civil servants and cost more than three times as much as all of the social assistance programs in Canada combined.

Over 4% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is spent on supporting the private sector, compared to the 1.2% spent on social assistance (1986 figures). (pp. 79, 80)

What is particularly startling about these statistics is that the 1.2% of Canada's GDP that is spent on social assistance programs "provides income support to between 7% and 8% of the country's population at any point." (p. 79) No figures are given for the percentage of the population that benefits directly from the 4% of GDP that supports the private sector.

In Ontario, social assistance "consumes less than 1% of the province's GDP" and accounts for "only 4% to 5% of Ontario's total budget." (p. 81)

None of these figures supports the myth that a vast proportion of tax dollars is spent on "those people on welfare."

The current social assistance system

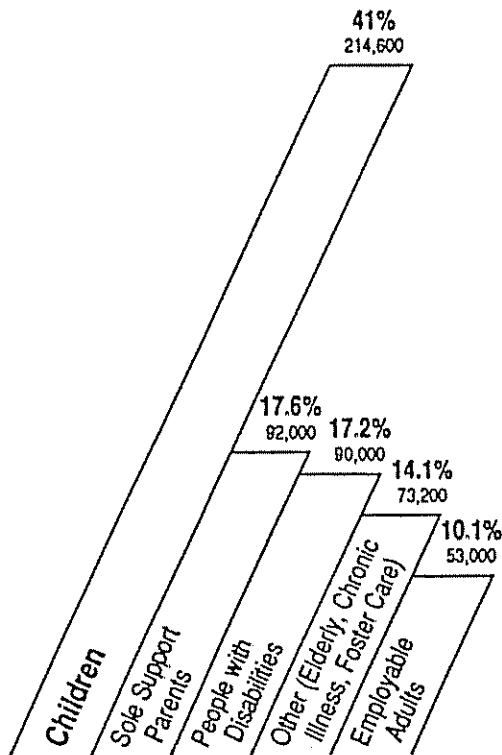
The *SARC Report* documents the chaotic and illogical state of the current system. Altogether, there are 17 separate categories of eligibility under the provincially administered Family Benefits program (FBA) and *five* under the municipally administered General Welfare program (GWA). As well, there are 36 different benefit levels for a single mother with one child, while existing child benefits are delivered by *three* different levels of government involving *eight* separate administrative bodies located within *six* different government ministries or departments. According to the authors of the *SARC Report*, "there is little ... effort to coordinate or rationalize this package of benefits." (p.113) The different, and sometimes contradictory, objectives are often based on very different criteria. The authors conclude that "these factors combine to result in a set of programs that often work at cross-purposes." (ibid.)

In addition to the chaos and lack of logic, the present system is expensive. The time expended and amount of paperwork required of social assistance field workers is overwhelming. It is estimated that the average time required to complete one new application for assistance is about four hours and the average number of forms to be completed is 18. "Depending on the circumstances of the individual recipient, up to eight mandatory forms might have to be completed [in addition to] 79 supplementary or administrative forms. For many applicants, 18 separate forms seem to be the norm." (p. 241)

Even more important is the effect of poverty on our children. It is well documented that being poor and being on social assistance can have a pervasive and devastating impact on the lives of children (Offord, 1986). Children of the poor are raised in an atmosphere of constant denial. They are more

likely than children of higher-income groups to be admitted to the care of a children's aid society, are less likely to achieve academically, are more likely to become ill, and more likely to die from "accidents, poisoning, violence, and respiratory and digestive disorders, some of which are preventable." (*Transitions*, p. 460) Clearly, such a system demands reform.

The face of social assistance in Ontario



Approximately 1 of every 10 children under the age of 18 - some 215,000 children in total - are recipients or beneficiaries of social assistance. In June 1988, they constituted a staggering 41% of all social assistance beneficiaries, up from 37% just one year previously.

Even though the population of Ontario is aging, the number of children under the age of five who are dependent on social assistance continues to increase. This group accounted for more than 60% of the total increase in children dependent on social assistance between 1983 and 1987. (p. 48)

Nearly 75% of the children who are dependent on social assistance live in single-parent families. These families make up 30% of the total caseload. (p. 37) This reflects the fact that the numbers of single-parent families in the population as a whole "are increasing at about 2 ½ times the growth rate of two-parent families". (p. 41) They now make up 15% of all families in Canada.

Contrary to a popular myth, single parents on social assistance do not have large numbers of children. According to the Report, the average is about 1.7 children, which is not much different from the average for families in the larger population. (p. 32)

Once on social assistance, single mothers are trapped. The system is designed in such a way that there is no financial incentive to make the transition to self-reliance. In fact, there are serious financial penalties for those who try.

A single mother receiving FBA who also worked could earn up to \$140 [per month] before having any of her social assistance benefits reduced. But on the next \$100 of earned income she received per month ... her social assistance cheque would be reduced by \$50. ...for every dollar she earned over \$240, her cheque would go down a dollar. While she might make \$240 from a job, she would only be \$190 to the better because her social assistance would be reduced. There would be no point in trying to earn more than \$240 because her social assistance cheque would be reduced as her earnings rose. (pp. 277-278)

Once the cash benefit entitlement is reduced to zero, eligibility for all in-kind benefits is removed; paying full OHIP premiums alone will cost a single person \$357 or a family \$714 a year. (p. 277-278)

Clearly, the system is not fair. It is not fair to the children and families who try to survive under its punitive rules. It is not fair to those who administer it. It is not fair to those whose tax dollars support it.

What would a reformed social assistance system look like?

The Report outlines two characteristics of the reformed system.

Emphasis should be given to, first, preventing the need for people to turn to social assistance and, second, facilitating the return of those who do require assistance to the mainstream of community life as quickly as possible. (p. 337)

Emphasis is placed on prevention, which should be targeted at those people entering the system who run the highest risk of long-term dependence. (p. 337)

The most likely candidates for long-term welfare dependence are young, never-married women with young children and the *SARC Report* notes that this group is one of the most responsive of all groups to intervention:

Comprehensive programs in the U.S. aimed at pregnant and parenting adolescents have resulted not only in reduced probability of future long-term welfare dependence, but also in lower infant mortality, higher birth weights, fewer repeat pregnancies, and lower (school) dropout rates. (p. 306)

Three proposals affecting children

The Social Assistance Review Committee proposes the development or expansion of three major programs that impact children and families:

1. A new children's benefit

The Committee proposes a new children's benefit that would be available to all families with children in Canada. It would combine most, if not all, existing child benefits, including family allowances, the child tax credit, child-based portions of both the provincial and federal sales tax credits, and social assistance benefits paid for children.

For low income families, the children's benefit would be significantly higher than the total of existing benefits. The Committee proposes a maximum of \$3,300 per child per year in 1988 dollars. An income test would be applied at an income threshold of \$15,000. Families with earnings above \$15,000 would have the benefit reduced by an amount equivalent to 25% of the additional earnings. (p. 115-116)

It could be delivered through the income tax system on a quarterly or monthly basis as a refundable tax credit. (p. 116)

The children's benefit would "remove all children from social assistance and, ultimately, from the ranks of poverty." (p. 88) When combined with earned income, it "should be sufficient to keep many sole-support parents and their families out of poverty." (p. 289)

2. Handicapped children's benefit

The Committee proposes the continuation of the Handicapped Children's Benefit to help low- to moderate-income parents defray the extraordinary costs associated with raising a handicapped child.

The benefit should continue to be income tested. In the words of the Report, this "ensures that the program is delivered to those who would otherwise experience financial difficulties in providing for the extraordinary needs of their children." (p. 158)

3. Foster parents' benefit

The foster parents' benefit, which covers 5,000 children, "is separate and distinct from the foster care programs administered by Children's Aid Societies". (p. 154) It is used by relatives and friends who, on an informal basis, take over the care of a child for an indefinite period of time.

It has at least two positive results: (p. 157)

1. It can be an effective tool in preventing children from requiring the protective services of a Children's Aid Society, particularly in combination with supplementary funding and services.
2. It can be a highly effective way to promote "customary-care arrangements" within Native communities.

Benefits should remain as high as possible, to support the involvement of the extended family in child care. The program should also be removed from social assistance legislation and placed within child-based legislation, such as the Child and Family Services Act. (p. 157)

Opportunity planning

The Committee proposes mandatory *opportunity planning* as the prerequisite for social assistance recipients to make the successful transition from dependence to self-reliance. It has a two-fold purpose:

1. It is the vehicle that allows the system to meet its obligation to the recipient.
2. It allows those recipients whose entitlement to assistance is conditional to fulfil their obligations and responsibilities. (p. 211)

Working together, the opportunity planner and the recipient would develop an action plan that:

- ▼ Builds on the recipient's existing skills and strengths; and
- ▼ Is in keeping with the resources and opportunities in the community.

The opportunity plan would take into consideration the recipient's longer-term goals and aspirations and would identify the activities, services, or programs that might enable the recipient to attain his or her personal goals. To be successful, opportunity planning must, as far as possible, be tailored to the individual. (p. 206)

Three groups will require a specialized approach:

1. Adolescent sole-support mothers (p. 217)
2. Sole-support mothers who are victims of family violence (p. 217)
3. Young people leaving the child welfare system (p. 219)

Where employment is not feasible, the opportunity planner would be obliged to help individuals develop other strategies that would increase their self-reliance and their ability to participate in the community. (p. 214)

Reform proposals in summary

Authors of the *SARC Report* see the continuation of a social assistance program, but a different and much more coordinated program than now exists. The envisioned program would be smaller and directed more toward those who require a period of *transition*. It would come into place as provincial or national income-support programs for disabled persons and children are introduced. Changes would blend with new policies related to income supplementation, housing, minimum wage, and pay and employment equity. The province would play a much stronger role in providing direction and control but, where possible, the social assistance program would be delivered by local governments. The proposed system would be one which would have a "much greater capacity to assist recipients to identify and obtain the related supports they need." (p.414)

Reforms to the benefit structure are proposed in 11 major areas: (pp. 133-135)

1. One social assistance system instead of two.
2. Minimization of automatic ineligibility.
3. Rationalization of categories.
4. A new and workable definition of disability.
5. Transfer of handicapped children's benefits.

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6. A new and flexible definition of the benefit unit.
 7. An approach to assets and income that supports the transition principle.
 8. Adequacy of income.
 9. A rational approach to shelter costs.
 10. Mandatory and non-mandatory benefits.
 11. A different approach to in-kind benefits.

In a proposal that clearly has its genesis in the Child and Family Services Act, the Committee advocates that each area of the province develop a comprehensive "service plan" that would incorporate the following components: (p. 419)

- a) Measurable goals for social assistance, including resources assigned to opportunity planning and the results such planning is expected to achieve;
- b) An outline of the specific training and employment programs to be made available, along with the mandatory employment-related supports, such as child care;
- c) Plans for increasing the supply of affordable housing for those of modest means;
- d) An outline of community programming to ensure that the health care system is able to provide rehabilitation services, assistive devices, and preventive health services;
- e) Programs for abused spouses, potential school dropouts, and young people in the midst of family crises;
- f) Proposals to increase integrated employment opportunities for persons with disabilities and to increase the capacity of mainstream services to meet their needs.

Stages and costs of implementation

The Committee proposes that its recommendations be implemented in five stages. Because of our focus on children and families, we have excerpted only those items that relate to those two groups.

The costs we quote are for implementation of all of the reforms proposed by the Committee, regardless of the target population. It is impossible to separate out the costs that relate specifically to children and families.

Stage 1 The First Year of Reform

During Stage 1, the focus would be on immediate, achievable changes which mark the beginning of a transition. Following are the changes which would affect children and youth: (pp. 529-532)

- ▼ Extending eligibility to 18- to 20-year-old non-disabled persons living in their family homes;
- ▼ Collapsing categories for child-related benefits to two age groupings: age 12 and under, and over 12;
- ▼ Closing the gap between rates paid to single people who are considered employable and those deemed temporarily unemployable;
- ▼ Allowing child care expenses as a work-related exemption;
- ▼ Expanding literacy programs and co-operative education programs;
- ▼ Providing more employment-related services such as guaranteed access to child care; and
- ▼ Taking early steps to give recipients the choice of whether to bring applications for support in their own names or to have such applications brought by the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

Stage 1 will cost between \$380 million and \$415 million. The primary variable is the size of the general rate increase, shelter-related reforms being the most costly. (p. 532) According to George Thomson (1989), Stage 1 is *affordable* right now and *there are no requirements which must be met prior to its implementation*.

Stage 2 Drafting of New Legislation

Stage 2 would concentrate on changes that are necessary but which require more planning, design and consultation. Changes which would impact on children include reforms that would equalize the rates for adults and, subject to special conditions, extend eligibility to 16- and 17-year-olds. Other reforms would: (pp. 533-534)

- ▼ Complete the transfer to the Ontario Student Assistance Program of basic assistance for post-secondary students.
- ▼ Put a plan in place to increase youth employment.

Stage 2 would cost approximately \$225 million.

Stage 3 Implementation of New Legislation

Stage 3 would focus on implementing the new legislation. Continuing efforts would be made to assist recipients to become self-sufficient. (pp. 534-535)

The estimated cost of Stage 3 is \$200 million.

Stage 4 Income Supplementation and Benefit Adequacy

Stage 4 marks the achievement of full adequacy through implementation of an income supplementation program with tightly defined eligibility criteria. This stage is dependent upon completion of the three previous stages.

At Stage 4, "a snag could develop". Sole-support parents would suffer financially if no other program is in place to meet the income needs of children. (p. 299)

Stage 4 is costed in two parts: (p. 536)

- i) \$225 million in social assistance changes; and
- ii) \$1.3 billion for an income supplementation program.

Stages 1 through 4 would cost a total of \$2.35 billion (\$1.05 billion for social assistance and \$1.3 billion for income supplementation). However, the Committee believes that introduction of the income supplementation program will result in lower expenditures on social assistance, thereby reducing total expenditures from \$2.35 billion to approximately \$2.1 billion. The net increase to social assistance would be \$800 million, a 47% increase in the total cost by the end of Stage 4. (p. 536)

Stage 5 New Income Security Programs

Stage 5 would see the implementation of the last two elements of income security reform: children's benefits and disability income programs. These would be harmonized with the other elements of the overall income security system.

Because Stage 5 cannot be costed without substantial cost-benefit analyses, the estimated implementation costs are not included in the Report. (p. 536)

The authors note that implementation of their recommendations does not necessarily have to occur in the order they have set out. As stated in the Report's *Summary* (1988), "Some of the elements set out in Chapter 3, such as the children's benefit, could be implemented earlier if there is the political will to do so and if negotiations between the provincial and federal governments are successful." (p.109)

Conclusion

The Institute for the Prevention of Child Abuse supports the major directions of reform outlined by the Social Assistance Review Committee. We intend to use our province-wide base to generate strong community support for these reforms, particularly as they affect children.

The devastating effects of the present system on Ontario's children of the poor, and the role that poverty plays in child abuse, can no longer be ignored.

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A Call to Action

Introduction

Since its release in September 1988, the Report of the Social Assistance Review Committee (*Transitions* or the *SARC Report*) has had a substantial impact. A number of traditionally non-related interest groups have responded very favourably to the Report's substance. Business and corporate leaders, politicians from all political parties, the legal community, and professionals from the traditional helping services have joined forces in an unprecedented coordinated effort to support major reforms to Ontario's social assistance system. Many others in the allied fields of human services and non-governmental organizations have added their support.

The Report clearly demonstrates that the social assistance system needs a major overhaul. It is not helpful to the children and families who try to survive under its rules. It is a bureaucratic maze to those who administer it. It is not fair to those whose tax dollars support it.

All of these individuals and groups recognize that major reform is needed now, not in five or ten years.

The Institute for the Prevention of Child Abuse is committed to helping communities generate additional public and political support for these reforms. Although support for reform continues to grow, for the most part it is limited to larger urban centres. We want to ensure that support comes from all parts of the province, from rural and isolated communities, from small towns and villages, as well as from larger urban centres.

You have an important role to play, no matter what community you live in. The following action guide outlines ways in which **your help can make a difference.**

The Institute for the Prevention of Child Abuse encourages you to make copies of this paper, or appropriate sections, to distribute to others as you advocate for change in your community.

Introduction

Since its release in September 1988, the Report of the Social Assistance Review Committee (*Transitions* or the *SARC Report*) has had a substantial impact. A number of traditionally non-related interest groups have responded very favourably to the Report's substance. Business and corporate leaders, politicians from all political parties, the legal community, and professionals from the traditional helping services have joined forces in an unprecedented coordinated effort to support major reforms to Ontario's social assistance system. Many others in the allied fields of human services and non-governmental organizations have added their support.

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What do we need to accomplish?

Knowing what we want is the first step to achieving it. Setting clear targets and keeping them at the forefront of our planning is critically important

What is needed is very clear:

1. Reform of the system which will result in a fairer chance for economically disadvantaged children;
2. Action by elected officials to implement the reforms proposed by the Social Assistance Review Committee; and
3. A change in public attitudes toward the social assistance system and those who benefit from it.

The Importance of Boards and Board Members

The *SARC Report* answers the question of what needs to be done. It remains for each one of us to answer the question: "What can I do that will make a profound difference for children caught in the social assistance system?"

Members of the Boards of Directors of child-serving organizations have a unique opportunity to help make a difference.

As a board member, you wear many different hats in your community, and each one offers broad scope for making your voice count.

You may be a business leader, a member of organized labour, a professional, a municipal politician, a member of a service club, professional association, church, synagogue, mosque or temple, or have any number of other affiliations. You are also part of a collective board. Each contact that you have represents an opportunity for influence.

The important thing is that you get started. Reform of the social assistance system can't wait.

In the following pages, we have provided working space for any notes you may wish to make as you consider possible action steps.

1. Become informed.

Learn about the magnitude of the problems confronting people on social assistance. Learn about its impact on children. Read summaries of the *SARC Report*. Talk to recipients.

2. Make reform of the social assistance system an issue in your community; use your contacts.

Talk it up. Talk to all of your contacts about it. Let people know that you are one of literally thousands of people across the province who care about what is happening to children, and you want their help.

3. Make reform of the social assistance system a priority.

Get involved by actively advocating for implementation of those recommendations which affect children.

How can I influence others?

As a Board Member, you are one of the people who shapes opinion in your community. There are several ways you can influence other people, both as an individual board member and as part of a collective board.

I. As an Individual Board Member

- ▼ Talk with other board members.
- ▼ Ensure that reform of the social assistance system is on the agenda of board meetings.
- ▼ Use your position as a board member to talk to the media.
- ▼ Organize and/or become part of a speakers' bureau that is available to open-line radio programs, local organizations and the media to speak on social assistance reform.

Action Notes

If you are also a member of other organizations:

Encourage and support the organizations and associations to which you belong into taking informed positions on reform of the social assistance system. Get them to:

- ▼ Discuss the need for reform;
- ▼ Develop positions;
- ▼ Initiate and support resolutions;
- ▼ Make presentations to Members of Provincial Parliament.

If you are also in business:

- ▼ Become informed about the impact of poverty on the Canadian economy, and the cost-benefits of social expenditures.
- ▼ Encourage and support the organizations and associations to which you belong into taking informed positions on reform of the social assistance system. Such groups include Boards of Trade, Chambers of Commerce, Junior Chambers of Commerce, Business and Professional Women's organizations, Junior Achievement, service clubs (Rotary, Kiwanis, Shriners, etc.), your church, mosque, synagogue, temple, or other religious body.
- ▼ Use your business to reduce the numbers of people on social assistance by creating employment opportunities. Take advantage of the numerous government incentive programs for the private sector to create jobs, provide training and upgrading and assist people to make the transition from social assistance to self-reliance.

In 1984/5 there were 218 such programs operating at a combined cost to the public of \$16.4 billion (more than three times the cost of social assistance across Canada). You can ensure that this money is well spent.

- ▼ Advocate directly with municipal councillors and with MPPs on behalf of victims of the social assistance system.

If you are also a member of organized labour:

- ▼ Examine the impact of poverty on the labour market, both in terms of social cost and types of training and upgrading that are necessary for people to make the transition from social assistance to self-reliance.
- ▼ Encourage union locals and broader labour forums, such as conventions and federations of labour, to make it a public issue.
- ▼ Encourage and support other organizations, associations, and religious bodies to which you belong into taking informed positions on reform of the social assistance system.
- ▼ Advocate that labour leaders, in their regular meetings with business leaders and government officials, urge that reform of the social assistance system be made a priority.
- ▼ Help develop apprenticeship programs and other employment opportunities for people on social assistance to learn the skills that are needed, including first-time exposure to the labour force. Such opportunities entail working directly with recipients of social assistance to make the transition smoother and easier.
- ▼ Join with business representatives and politicians in joint presentations in public forums, on cable TV, and on local radio or television programs to arouse public interest and develop pressure for reforming the social assistance system.

If you are also a member of a profession:

- ▼ Address the members of your professional association at its next meeting; make the poverty of children a professional priority.
- ▼ Write an article for your professional newsletter or journal encouraging other professionals to advocate for change.
- ▼ Circulate material, including this document, or appropriate sections, to your colleagues.

If you are also a municipal politician:

- ▼ Seek out opportunities for public discussion of the *SARC Report* and the social assistance system.
- ▼ Use these and other opportunities to change misconceptions about the system and develop supportive attitudes for reform.
- ▼ Bring forward resolutions supporting reform to your municipal council.
- ▼ Use your political connections to ensure that the issue continues to be addressed at the provincial level.

II As a Collective Board

The total Board can make much stronger representation than can individuals acting alone. This can be accomplished in several ways, as follows:

- ▼ Arrange to meet with and discuss your organization's support of the *SARC Report* with your local MPP. Encourage him/her to keep reform of the social assistance system on the government's agenda.
- ▼ Prepare briefs to local municipal councils, relevant Ministers, provincial Cabinet, and the Premier.
- ▼ Sponsor public forums.
- ▼ Send newsletters and other special appeals to the membership of your organization. *Feel free to excerpt from this document.*
- ▼ Pass resolutions in support of reform.
- ▼ Host media conferences.
- ▼ Incorporate monies and/or fundraising in your agency budget to advocate on behalf of social assistance recipients and to develop services to improve their situations.
- ▼ Form coalitions and alliances with other organizations and work in concert to achieve reform.

- ▼ Encourage and assist the organization to develop and maintain a data base that tracks and records inter-relationships between poverty and problems affecting children and families. This can provide the factual information for numerous presentations and plans.
- ▼ Ensure that prevention strategies are included in the agency Service Plan.
- ▼ Work with professionals and citizens outside the board to form coalitions and alliances. This will maximize the available resources and give added strength to reform efforts.
- ▼ Work with the boards of other agencies to develop a coordinated approach to planning and delivering local services.

III Working with community-based Child Abuse Coordinating Committees

Child abuse coordinating committees are in place in several communities across the province. They offer many of the same opportunities for influencing public opinion as are available to Boards of Directors. They have one additional advantage, however: members of the committees, as direct service providers, have first-hand knowledge of the devastating impact of poverty on children and families.

These committees can help in that they can:

1. Advocate on behalf of recipients, drawing on the combined experiences and various professional perspectives that are represented on the committee;
2. Present a comprehensive picture to the public, as well as to elected officials, of the total impact of poverty:
 - ▼ on the individuals and families experiencing it; and
 - ▼ on services in the community that are intended to alleviate it.

Action Notes

From the Child Abuse Coordinating Committees can come models for effective inter-professional cooperation and collaboration.

Such committees can be powerful promoters of the need for change in community and individual attitudes toward the social assistance system, those who are victimized by it, and those who seek to make it work.

Individual members of these child abuse coordinating committees have the same avenues available to them as to others in the community: service clubs, religious affiliations, professional associations, union locals, inter-agency councils, and so on. Influence through these larger bodies can be exerted at the local, regional and provincial levels.

As collective groups, child abuse coordinating committees provide outstanding opportunities for the "multiplier effect" to take hold. Through the interconnected network that individual members have, as well as through the strong voice and networks that the committee as a whole has and can develop, the voice of the individual can be multiplied geometrically.

The mandate of these committees often includes public awareness and professional education. Working in concert with them can be mutually advantageous in advocating for change. As the board of a child-serving organization which has considerable impact on the lives of children, your role in the public and professional education field is critical to acceptance of the *SARC Report*. Your discussions, within the organization and externally, can help to keep the Report on the social agenda.

Make your voices heard.

What will it cost?

Efforts to influence public opinion and support reform of the social assistance system have costs attached, both in terms of dollars and of time.

Indeed, one of the reasons social policy reform is so difficult to achieve is that it requires a significant investment of dollars. Often, no attempt is made to set the costs of reform over against the real costs of the current situation - for example, costs to the economy, hospitals, child welfare agencies, mental health services, the prison system, and numerous other social agencies.

A number of influential businessmen are beginning to consider these cost/benefit analyses and, as a result, are supporting reform of the social assistance system.

There are also more immediate costs in trying to reform social policy and programs. The time spent in promoting one's views, formulating positions, actively advocating for change - each represents a cost.

And there are the costs of printing, mailing, and so on, which are associated with any effort to present information to others.

Recognizing this, some agencies are identifying specific amounts in their budgets to be allocated to advocacy activities, or are promoting special fund raising activities for this purpose. In addition, a number of Foundations provide funding to groups that want to undertake efforts to support reform of the social assistance system.

By pooling staff resources and sharing the costs of developing materials among several cooperating agencies, expenses to any one group can be minimized.

The *SARC Report* makes it abundantly clear that we cannot afford *not* to invest in helping social assistance recipients make the transition to self-reliance.

Action Notes

What difference can I make?

We have already referred to the "multiplier effect" that individuals can have. We have outlined a few ways in which board members and members of child abuse coordinating committees can maximize their impact.

The Social Assistance Review Committee was made up of 12 individuals. They have presented compelling reasons for us to add our individual and collective voices to support reform of the social assistance system. More importantly, they have provided concrete recommendations for ways to substantially improve the social assistance system, and have proposed that the changes be implemented on a phased basis.

Their call has been picked up by numerous individuals across the province. The voices supporting reform need to become so strong that the plight of children and families who are victimized by the current system cannot be ignored.

Each one of us can make a significant difference. By working together, we can multiply that difference. And that difference can mean that a chaotic, illogical and often punitive system is exchanged for a social system that creates opportunities for disadvantaged children.

**Public/Professional
Education**

To increase and promote awareness of child abuse prevention, IPCA produces and distributes a variety of educational materials to professionals and the public. Publications include a newsletter (*IPCA Report*), newsbriefs, brochures and pamphlets.

The Information/Resource Centre offers:

- A reading room open to the public three days a week
- On-line searches
- An audio-visual lending library

Training

IPCA offers a variety of training programs to enhance professional skills and community cooperation in the prevention of child abuse. These training programs include:

- Child protection training, a series of specialized training programs for child protection social workers and supervisors. IPCA also offers a native child protection workers training program and training to assist foster parents in caring for abused children.
- Interdisciplinary training, a unique training program which offers community professionals a multi-disciplinary perspective and current information on the causes, treatment and prevention of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse of children.
- Specialized training requests. IPCA is able, on a cost-sharing basis, to provide specialized training programs for particular disciplines, agencies or community organizations.

IPCA's Mandate

To reduce the incidence of child abuse through consultation, research, education, and training.

**For more information about our programs,
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