

# Center for Urban Research and Learning

Information on CURL University/Community Partnerships



Fall 1999

## CURL Launches Two New Collaborative Initiatives

### Community of Opportunity

Over the summer CURL has organized a new initiative with numerous community-based groups in Rogers Park. The Community of Opportunity project addresses three issues identified by community leaders. Affordable housing, child care, and micro-enterprise development are key components in maintaining Rogers Park as a racially, socially, and economically diverse community. As the site of Loyola's largest campus, the university joins its neighbors in efforts 1) to reduce displacement of low income residents as reinvestment in the community increases and 2) to enhance opportunities for current residents to participate in reinvestment in their community.

Three collaborative teams have been formed, each defining its research agenda. The Community of Opportunity Affordable Housing Coalition has attracted broad-based involvement. Its initial research will involve updating and expanding an existing database of all Rogers Park residences. Graduate Fellow Kim Ebert (Sociology and former Urban Semester student) will work closely with Mary Jane Haggerty of the Rogers Park Community Council which created and maintains the database. A community meeting sponsored by the coalition was held in mid-September to gauge community support for affordable housing North of Howard.

Family Matters, a youth and family leadership development organization located in the North of Howard, has taken responsibility for convening the coalition. Tom Pigman, Family Matters' community organizer, and Kim DeLong, Director, are facilitating the group's work. Other participants in the coalition representing diverse constituencies and interests are: Roberta Buchanan and John Fitzgerald (Howard Area Community Center), Kathy Vates (Rogers Park Community Development Corp.), Cary Steinbeck and

### Passport to Chicago

Scholars and political observers alike agree that the state of civic involvement is alarming. How do we counter disengagement? One way is to engage youth in a project, Passport to Chicago Community Network: Utilizing Technology to Involve Youth in Policy Identification, Research and Action.

In each of the two years of the project, 30 youth from West Town and Rogers Park will join in a program to define issues of concern to them, utilize the Internet and other research sources to gather data, propose solutions or recommendations, and prepare presentations for public officials. The goal is to teach youth to utilize tools to engage in the political process before they reach adulthood. One outcome at the end of the two years will be a curriculum that can be shared with educators.

Alan Gitelson, Professor of Political Science, is the lead faculty on the project. Assisting him will be Brian Shea (Philosophy) as a teaching fellow. The project coordinator is Tony Small, formerly with the Science Linkages in the Community program at Loyola. Derek Pasnick (Sociology) is the computer lab resource staff. Community partners are Erie Neighborhood House, Family Matters, and Howard Area Community Alternative High School. The project is supported by a \$250,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

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## DIRECTOR'S CORNER . . .

CURL is moving ahead on three different projects, all of which address major policy issues that our community partners have identified as critical issues over past years.

First, we have taken on the issue of how communities can attract investment without displacing low-income families who can benefit from the new opportunities from community revitalization. For too long, low-income families have been moved around the city like pawns on a chess board, being pushed out of neighborhoods just as new jobs, safer neighborhoods, better stores, better support services, and other opportunities emerge. The Community of Opportunity program described on the first page is an effort to develop a local model of "even" development where low-income families can remain in the community and move into the middle-class. One item of late-breaking news: just as our newsletter was going to press, we received word that CURL and our community partners have received a three-year, \$400,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Community Outreach Partnership Center (COPC) to support this work.

Second, through our Passport to Chicago project, we are seeking new models to engage youth in policy making. As described on page 1, the project will train high school youth in policy research around issues of importance to them—not issues defined by a static curriculum. In an era when everyone laments the loss of civic engagement, this project promises to identify new ways to engage youth in their communities and in planning their nation's future

Finally, since a large number of community partners have approached us over the past few years to complete program evaluation projects, we are embarking on a participatory evaluation research initiative. By working with community organizations in completing evaluations, we will not only produce research responsive to community needs, but will help to build community capacity to complete their own future program evaluations. Yolanda Suarez-Balcazar (Psychology) and Christine George (Sociology) will be the two faculty working on this project. A Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) grant will provide funding for university and community activities related to this effort.

Phil Nyden, Director

## *Opportunity, Continued from p. 1*

Carol Golden (Rogers Park Community Council), Fran Tobin and Herb Zeigeldorf (Rogers Park Community Action Network), Ken Govas (DevCorp North), Bud Ogle, (Good News Partners), Kale Williams, David Van Zytveld, Lin Von Dreele, and Phil Nyden (CURL).

Demand for child care is increasing for all income levels, and it is incumbent upon communities to insure options for working parents. Three Rogers Park/Edgewater organizations concerned with child care issues are Loyola Preschool, Howard Area Community Center, and Families Together Cooperative Nursery School. Each serves different income levels and scheduling demands; all are equally concerned about quality care. Representing each of the three providers, respectively, are Bev Donovan, Roberta Buchanan, and Mike Rohrbeck.

Since each organization is part of the Early Childhood Providers Network, an effort launched by St. Rep. Carol Ronen to better coordinate services along the northern lakefront and bring more resources into the area, it was decided to coordinate the research agenda with the Network. Mary Ruth Back (Sociology) will work closely with Kate Sacknoff, the Network coordinator, and Christine George, Visiting Prof. Dept. of Sociology.

Micro-enterprise development and support are critical to broaden the economic foundation of a community. DevCorp North is a community-based development corporation that has taken the lead in major redevelopment projects in Rogers Park, most notably the Gateway Plaza complex at Howard and Clark streets presently under construction. In its role as the Chamber of Commerce for Rogers Park, DevCorp also wants to strengthen its services to small businesses. Graduate Fellow Maribeth Pender (Counseling Psych.) will be working with DevCorp's Ken Govas and Pat Horton to find ways to expand micro-enterprise services. To be researched is an "incubator without walls," a concept to utilize resources such as Loyola MBA and Law students. Jill Graham, Associate Professor in the Dept. of Management, and Joseph Stone, Director of the new Business Law Center in the School of Law, are members of the research team on this project.

CURL will support graduate students from existing foundation funds; however, a proposal has been submitted to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for a Community Outreach Partnership Centers (COPC) grant. If awarded, the COPC grant will partially underwrite the Community of Opportunity project for three years. The Graduate School supports CURL Fellows with tuition scholarships, thus providing a substantial commitment of university resources for community benefit.

## SSI – An Underused Resource For Disabled TANF Recipients in Illinois

By  
Michael A. O'Connor, CURL Community Fellow\*

*As welfare reform moves into a more mature stage of development, there are increasing concerns about time limits, the challenges of placing the remaining Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) recipients into employment, and the problems with job retention. The significant incidence of severe disabilities among TANF recipients – both adults and children – and the availability of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits have not been part of the public policy discussions to date. Michael O'Connor, a current CURL Community Fellow, is an attorney who brings years of research and service experience to the issues of public benefits. Mr. O'Connor is conducting research into a range of welfare reform issues, focusing on potential options for state priorities during an economic downturn.*

*Mr. O'Connor will be a panelist when the Poverty Task Force next meets on Monday, October 4, 1999 from Noon to 2:00 p.m. at the Donor's Forum, Suite 740, 208 S. LaSalle Street. All are welcome at this brown bag luncheon and presentation.*

### Introduction

As welfare reform enters a more mature phase of implementation, policy makers, administrators, and others are expressing concerns about the challenges to be confronted in placing the remainder of adult Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) recipients into employment. The limited work history, limited skills, and other needs of TANF parents have caused Illinois to make substantial investments in childcare, job training, transportation, and domestic violence services. There is also growing recognition that parents (and in some cases their children) may have severe impairments that prevent or substantially limit gainful employment. States generally make referrals for severely disabled parents to the Supplemental Social Security Income (SSI) program. Several states, including Illinois, have supplemented these referrals with investment in advocacy for SSI benefits on behalf of disabled TANF recipients. Despite these efforts, careful research and analysis indicates that substantial opportunities exist to move thousands of parents and children from TANF to SSI.

This article summarizes a paper on the CURL web site (<http://www.luc.edu/depts/curl>) that reviews the research literature assessing the incidence of severe impairments among parents and children who are receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and TANF. Further analysis develops estimates of the number of persons eligible for, but not receiving SSI in the Illinois TANF caseload. The paper also reviews current investment in screening for eligibility and pursuing SSI benefits for TANF recipients, and articulates a rationale for further investment. Prior research supports an estimate that up to the 40,000 children, and up to 145,000 adults in Illinois are SSI eligible but not enrolled. Substantial numbers of these adults and children are currently receiving TANF.

### Need for Expanded Investment in Screening and Advocacy

Illinois has supported SSI advocacy for more than 10 years through a contract with the Legal Assistance Foundation of Chicago; however, that project only covers Cook County and has a budget of about \$1 million. By comparison, Maryland last year announced a \$5 million per year SSI advocacy initiative – in a state 1/3 the size of Illinois! The paper on the CURL web site reviews in detail the fiscal incentives that justify further expansion of state investment. Each dollar spent on screening and advocacy will be recovered in savings of TANF dollars within 9 to 16 months.

The paper further offers strategies for strengthening screening and identification of severely disabled adults and children in the TANF caseload:

- Job training, childcare, domestic violence, and other supportive service contractors should be engaged – and trained – to help identify individuals with impairments that may be sufficiently severe to qualify for SSI benefits. Staff of these programs typically have more contact with individuals and are better able to observe functional impairments that may not be apparent during a monthly 20 minute conference with an Illinois Department of Human Service (IDHS) casemanager;
- A computer tape match using diagnostic and utilization criteria could be applied to Medicaid billing data to identify adults and children;
- Linkages with the Early Intervention Program under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) would help identify very young children with severe impairments;
- Local school districts should be engaged in helping to identify TANF children who have severe learning disabilities.

Screening for potential SSI eligibility should also be directed to TANF parents working part time, as well as to parents who re-apply within a month or two of obtaining employment. Part-time workers may be unable to work full time because of a severe disability and may qualify for SSI if earnings are less than \$500 per month. Parents returning to TANF after a brief period of employment may be unable to maintain employment because of their disabilities.

SSI advocacy support should be extended to all areas of the state and should be expanded to allow for representation of all TANF recipients, including children, who have meritorious claims for SSI. The project should also be extended to provide representation for SSI recipients in TANF families, or in families that received TANF in the past two years, where there SSI recipient receives a notice of “continuing disability review” (CDR). This is a periodic redetermination of SSI eligibility that is somewhat similar to the initial application. SSI benefits will be terminated upon a finding that an individual’s disability has diminished, and SSI recipients often require assistance in responding to these notices.

Currently, help with SSI claims is available to the following persons: any adult residing in Cook County who receives TANF and any adult in Chicago who receives cash assistance in the Transitional Assistance or “P-3” categories. For assistance regarding a claim for SSI benefits, call the SSI Advocacy Project of the Legal Assistance Foundation of Chicago at 312-427-5200.

\*CURL Community Fellows are awarded \$10,000 to work, generally, over a period of a year to develop a program or conduct research that has policy and/or community impact. The fellowships are funded by the McCormick Tribune Foundation. See 7 for an article on another Community Fellow, Marrice Coverson.

## Cracks in the System: Conversations with People Surviving Welfare Reform

A Report by

Howard Area Community Center

Loyola University Chicago Center for Urban Research and Learning

Organization of the NorthEast

*The following is a summary of the full report\*which is available on CURL's Web page (<http://www.luc.edu/depts/curl>) or from Loyola University Chicago Center for Urban Research and Learning, 820 North Michigan Avenue, 10<sup>th</sup> floor, Chicago, Illinois 60611, 312-915-7760 or E-mail: [rdiab@luc.edu](mailto:rdiab@luc.edu)*

In 1996, President Clinton pledged to alter the current state of the welfare system in this country and to [end welfare as we know it.] The piece of legislation responsible for this monumental shift was known as the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. This legislation brought to an end the public welfare system known as AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children), and heralded the beginning of a new block grant program, TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families). *Cracks in the System* is a study which attempts to understand the lives of the people most affected by the latest wave of changes in welfare policy: families who are currently receiving welfare benefits or who have recently left the welfare system. The study is a bridge between the state's representation of the success of welfare reform and the reality of the daily lives of current and former welfare recipients. *Cracks in the System* is a collaboration between the Howard Area Community Center (HACC), Loyola University Chicago Center for Urban Research and Learning (CURL), and the Organization of the NorthEast (ONE). The study was researched and authored by CURL's Siobhan O'Donoghue and Sean Hill.

The specific population under consideration in the study are families who are TANF recipients. The findings of the report are based upon data gathered from interviews and focus groups with 41 participants. Interviewees were asked how welfare reform is affecting their lives. Particular attention was paid to the areas of education, employment, child care, housing, transportation and recipients' experience with the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS). Interviewees were also given the opportunity to make suggestions as to how they would make improvements to the current system.

*Cracks in the System* examines the barriers to employment which hamper the attempts of TANF recipients to become self-sufficient and explores how TANF recipients are negotiating the transition from welfare-to-work. In sharp contrast to AFDC, TANF introduced a whole array of new policies that limit the period during which one can receive welfare benefits to a lifetime total of five years. Moreover, new requirements demand the recipient work 25 hours per week, and will increase to 30 hours in October, 1999. The report shows that in the current 'Work First' environment, many welfare recipients perceive the existing TANF system as primarily working to cut them off the welfare rolls as soon as possible. The focus is on immediate job placement rather than on job training or education. The study concludes this solution is shortsighted and doomed to long-term failure for individuals in the system.

Furthermore, the findings of the study once again confirm that child care poses a major hurdle for women who are trying to make a successful transition from welfare-to-work. In particular, the current lack of child care during non-traditional hours is a huge barrier for women who are seeking to find and maintain employment. The need for affordable housing and improved public transportation services were also identified by many of the study participants as areas requiring attention. Only with the strong foundation of safe and affordable housing and the necessary transportation connection to jobs can welfare-to-work truly succeed.

The study illustrates that media reports which identify decreasing welfare rolls as the primary measure of welfare reform success are somewhat misleading. Many people are disappearing from the welfare rolls, not because they have found work and have successfully transitioned into the workplace, but because they have had their cases canceled and are awaiting reinstatement.

Seven specific recommendations resulted from the research findings. The first is that more emphasis be placed on job training and education to increase the job skills of TANF recipients rather than relying on the "Work First" approach. Investment in these areas would create opportunities for people transitioning from welfare to find more stable, higher

paying jobs with better long-term prospects. Moreover, more links to the business sector with a focus on long-term employment opportunities that provide prospects for career advancement and financial stability need to be produced. Tax breaks could be given to companies that hire former welfare recipients into full-time positions that offer benefits.

Second, jobs need to be created that pay a living wage and an income that can provide sufficient support for families. Because of the 'Work First' approach, many TANF recipients are being forced to accept low-paying jobs without prospects for advancement. Many of these jobs pay below the federal poverty threshold. In order to ensure the well-being of children and families, the state and private sector must invest in the creation of more jobs that pay a living wage.

Third, the minimum wage ought to be increased to provide sufficient support for families. Currently, a person who works full-time and earns minimum wage while trying to raise two children lives below the federal poverty threshold. An increase in the minimum wage would not only be a step in the right direction, but would help eliminate the need for support from other sources in moving people toward self-sufficiency.

Fourth, availability of affordable quality child care, especially at non-traditional hours ought to be expanded. The proliferation of single parent families, along with dual income families where both parents must work in order to provide for the family, has created an increased need for child care. State or federal aid could provide more subsidies for child care, which would allow more families to be free to pursue employment that may otherwise be prohibitive because of location or time of day. Employers who provide child care could benefit greatly through an increase in employee loyalty, higher levels of productivity and lower levels of absenteeism.

Fifth, IDHS ought to improve its support services to those who are trying to leave welfare. Participants in the study identified a whole range of services provided by IDHS that need to be improved in order to facilitate a successful transition from welfare-to-work. Among them are: better information for families on basic resources available to them; more honest recording of those who have made successful transitions from welfare to work; increased care and maintenance of the files of TANF clients; translation services in public aid offices whose first language is not English; individual assessment before a client is penalized for non-compliance with TANF policies; and more comprehensive training for caseworkers.

Sixth, availability of affordable housing ought to be increased. Housing acts as a foundation of stability for many families regardless of their income. Affordable housing is necessary not only for those families who receive TANF, but for all low-income families. Twenty percent of all new housing should be designated as 'affordable housing' or eligible for a rental subsidy through a program such as Section 8. Through such strategies we can move away from situations that come about because of depressed neighborhoods.

Last, the quality and availability of public transportation ought to be improved. More money needs to be invested in new and improved transportation systems linking low-income city communities to job-rich suburban communities. However, to avoid the creation of an American 'apartheid' system of low-wage workers returning to disinvested communities after work in more prosperous areas, these improvements in public transportation need to be made in concert with the other recommendations in this report.

Current reports that focus on the declining welfare rolls as being the primary measure of success mislead the public and mask the lived experience of those on the economic margins. With so much attention being placed on the decline in TANF caseloads and the booming economy, the day-to-day struggles of low-income families must not be ignored. The TANF recipients who participated in this study articulated that policy-makers need to do more to remove the barriers which hinder them in their attempts to make a successful transition from welfare-to-work. Such hurdles must be dismantled if recipients leaving welfare are to stand any real chance of forging a stable future. Real welfare reform success is not a mere numbers game.

\*The summary report was edited by Peter Shaughnessy, former graduate fellow and editor of *PRAGmatics*, the journal of the Policy Research Action Group. Peter graduated in June with a master's degree in theology and has taken a position at Mr. Carmel High School on the South Side.

## Cristo Rey High School Students Come to CURL

As part of the work program at Cristo Rey Jesuit High School in Pilsen/Little Village, CURL will be an employment site for four students. Each student will work one day per week; the fifth day will be rotated among the four. The salary for the shared position pays partial tuition for each student.

Through this unique program, Cristo Rey students gain practical experience in the work world where they gain self-confidence and increase their skills. CURL was delighted to have one of the students over the summer who will be with us this fall. Daisy Torres proved to be a capable and resourceful worker, and we enjoyed her company.

## Suarez-Balcazar Presents at Aspen Institute

Dr. Yolanda Suarez-Balcazar (Psychology) and Mary Nelson, President of Bethel New Life, were invited to present the findings of a community impact report to a gathering of funders at the Roundtable on Comprehensive Community Initiatives organized by the Aspen Institute in Aspen, Colorado in August. *Documenting the Process and Impact of Bethel New Life's Community Development Efforts in West Garfield Park* is the result of a year-long collaborative project also involving Dan Kruger (Social Psychology) and Anita Jayaraj, Research Director at Bethel who is working on her master's thesis in Social Psychology. The project, funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, is in the process of securing two additional years of funding.

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### CURL's New Web Page

CURL has an updated Web Site where you will find the newest collaborative research reports as well as important announcements and the Urban Semester syllabus. In addition, there are new biographies on CURL staff. Check us out @

<http://luc.edu/depts/curl>

## Open Book Program is Underway

During the 1998-99 academic year, Marrice Coverson, former Executive Director of Elliott Donnelley Youth Center, was a CURL Community Fellow. In her time with us, she developed an educational and cultural enrichment initiative for adolescents. Entitled Open Book, the goals are to build youth literacy, analytical and communication skills; introduce youth to an array of future career options; and increase parent involvement in education. Through CURL's efforts, Lisa Swett, a graduate student in the School of Education, worked with Ms Coverson last summer to refine the concept and develop a curriculum.

Open Book was piloted last spring at Mayo School in Bronzeville where 22 8 – 12 year olds and 12 adults, both parents and students from the Illinois Institute of Technology, participated in four hours of afterschool enrichment weekly. Over a six-week period, youth read culturally sensitive books, video taped interviews of one another, and developed short plays about their lives and the community that reflected the books' themes. A noted illustrator and a radio host provided introductions to career options for those with excellent communication skills. The program will expand into 4 schools this fall.

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## Saying Goodbye . . . Saying Hello



Significant change has come to CURL. Maureen Abraham, who served as Administrative Manager at CURL since January, 1996, took early retirement July 1. Prior to this, she was Administrative Secretary for the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. Maureen was part of CURL's grounding, for it

was she who took care of the day-to-day administration that assured people were paid, contracts were signed, and details were tended. Part of her legacy is the efficiency of the physical space in which we work. Maureen saw to the fine points of space design and function that make the 10<sup>th</sup> floor such as pleasurable working environment.

Maureen's link to Loyola has been more than her job. Her four children received their undergraduate and/or graduate degrees. Maureen's husband, Julian, is a social worker at the Medical Center. Maureen's Loyola connection remains strong.

Maureen's new life will be filled with pleasures she postponed while raising a large family. She has all sorts of "home projects", not least of which is to build 3-season porch where she can read and plan her next challenges.

While we miss Maureen, we feel so fortunate to have as our new administrator, Ruth Diab, who came to us from Media Relations where she had been since 1997. Ruth and her husband Mel have two children, Nyla and Jordan, both of whom are Loyola students. Nyla is a senior, who was part of the first Urban Semester class, and Jordan is a sophomore. To paraphrase the old adage: "the family that studies stays together" has meaning for the Diab clan since Ruth is also a student at Loyola. She is completing her undergraduate degree in psychology.

Ruth's previous work experience has been in the manufacturing and service industries. She brings to CURL a warm, welcoming disposition and has already proven her ability to master the internal workings of the university and the complexities of CURL.



When asked to reflect on her first few months with us, Ruth said, "I appreciate the emphasis on the positive way CURL works; there is level of honesty and integrity. I feel everyone is treated with respect, including myself. It is easy to reciprocate."

When it's necessary to say goodbye, it's wonderful to bid a hearty welcome. Glad you're with us, Ruth!



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