WELFARE PEER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE NETWORK

Chicago Child-Parent Centers Site Visit

Chicago, Illinois

April 2, 2003

Background

To assist States in strategically and creatively utilizing their Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) dollars, while yielding better outcomes for low-income families, the Welfare Peer Technical Assistance (TA) Network sponsored a 1-day site visit to the Chicago Child-Parent Center (CPC) Program in Chicago, Illinois on Wednesday, April 2, 2003. The CPC program was designed in 1967 and is the second oldest federally-funded early childhood program in the United States. It is managed by the Chicago Public Schools, Office of Early Education, and targets children between the ages of 3-4. Furthermore, the CPC program is comprised of education sites or centers located within low-income areas with high concentrations of former Aid to Families With Dependent Children (AFDC) program participants.

CPC program eligibility is based on two criteria: first, participants must reside in designated low-income areas; and second, parents or guardians must commit to consistent parental participation and exemplary school attendance. It is the parental involvement and participation component that distinguishes the CPC program from other preschool programs. While children are actively involved in classroom activity throughout the day, their parents are often engaged in various school activities as well. These activities include parenting classes, providing clerical assistance, developing resources for other participating parents, and coordinating school projects. Many of these parents are unemployed, working part-time, or are participating in work programs such as TANF.

The Welfare Peer TA Network became familiar with this program through a TA request we received from the Louisiana Department of Social Services, Office of Family Support. Louisiana is interested in utilizing their State TANF dollars to develop Child-Parent Centers in the Baton Rouge area. They were extremely interested in obtaining guidance on the CPC development and implementation process. Therefore, the Peer TA Network coordinated a customized TA event to meet Louisiana's TA needs, while highlighting the positive outcomes of the Child-Parent Program. This peer-to-peer event was structured to facilitate a candid interactive exchange of information amongst TA participants and Chicago staff persons.

TA participants included Federal representatives from the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Region V Office, and a team of Louisiana representatives. This team was comprised of the following professionals within the Louisiana Department of Social Services:

- *Family Support Program Director;*
- *Family Support Program Specialist;*
- *Consultant;*
- *2 Program Specialists;*
- *Director of the Bureau of Licensing; and*
- *Head Start Collaboration Project Director.*

Overview of Workshop Sessions

Dewey Child-Parent Center

This TA event began with a site visit to the Dewey Child-Parent Center. The Dewey CPC has received public and media attention for its commendable work with its students and parents, especially fathers. During their time at the Center, participants were permitted to tour classrooms and interact with students and the teaching staff. In addition, TA participants were also afforded an opportunity to meet the Center's principal, head teacher, and parent resource teacher, all of whom provided a detailed overview of the activities and accomplishments of the Dewey Center. Center staff also shared information on the growing needs of the parents that utilize the Center, as well as strategies for engaging fathers and working parents who have minimal opportunities to participate in Center activities.

The Dewey CPC offers parents a variety of services and supports such as parenting classes, guidance in accessing social services, life-skills building, self-esteem building, conflict resolution, and professional skill building. The staff reminded TA recipients that the success of a CPC program depends greatly on the parents of the children utilizing the program. Parents are more likely to support the learning process if they deem the Center to be a safe place to access support and build relationships. In addition, the parents utilizing the CPC program have varying needs; therefore, it is imperative that their needs are considered, embraced, and met when possible. The Dewey staff clearly demonstrated and depicted a strong belief in partnering with parents and involving them in the learning process, both as individuals and parents.

Von-Humboldt Child-Parent Center

Next, participants visited the Von-Humboldt Child-Parent Center, which is primarily comprised of Latino students, in addition to a small population of African-American children. Staff provided TA recipients with a forthright examination of the cultural strengths, needs, and issues of the families that utilize the center. Challenges such as language barriers, the lack of interaction between Hispanic and African American parents utilizing the center, and parental gang involvement were a few of the intriguing topics shared. Moreover, staff highlighted a few of the supportive services afforded to Von-Humboldt parents, such as domestic violence presentations, immigration assistance, GED preparation, and nutrition classes.

Similar to the Dewey visit, participants toured the Von Humboldt facility and watched as children participated in classroom activities. Participants were fascinated as they observed children who spoke limited English at the time of enrollment now communicating with their

English speaking teachers and classmates. Interestingly, English is the primary language used among Von-Humboldt teachers.

Chicago Public Schools, Office of Early Childhood Education

The site visit ended with a working lunch held at the Chicago Public Schools, Office of Early Childhood Education. TA participants met with the Officer of the Office of Early Childhood Education as well as other senior level staff members. This session involved a truly interactive experience that allowed Louisiana representatives to share their challenges and concerns with their CPC program implementation. Additional discussion topics included:

- The need for collaboration and support from key community stakeholders;
- Strategies for educating the community on the benefits of the Child-Parent Program;
- The infrastructure needed to support a CPC program over time; and
- Strategies for building a coalition of various service providers around a common goal.

Through the information shared, participants were able to critically examine their own plans, limitations, and anticipated outcomes for implementing a CPC program in Louisiana while Chicago representatives provided participants with directives and recommendations.

Next Steps

At the completion of this event, participants unanimously identified the need to engage other Louisiana social systems, legislators, educators, and families on the benefits of implementing a CPC program. Participants asserted that this critical step was not fully implemented during Louisiana's initial CPC planning process. However, based on the resources facilitated through this TA event, participants will begin to develop a more collaborative CPC program design model to be implemented within Baton Rouge.

A more detailed summary of this workshop will be available on the Welfare Peer TA site visit. For more information about this event, please contact Chandra Robinson at 301-270-0841 or e-mail crobinson@afyainc.com