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**RACIAL AND ETHNIC DISPARITIES IN THE ERA OF DEVOLUTION:  
A PERSISTANT CHALLENGE TO WELFARE REFORM**

**A REPORT OF RESEARCH FINDINGS FROM  
THE SCHOLAR PRACTITIONER PROGRAM OF THE DEVOLUTION INITIATIVE  
THE W.K.KELLOGG FOUNDATION**

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## INTRODUCTION

The legacy of racial and ethnic disparities in the United States seeds new concerns in the current era of devolution. As state policymakers receive greater discretion and flexibility in how they implement federally funded social programs, the socioeconomic divide between whites and populations of color is growing.

The 1996 enactment of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), which transformed welfare “as we knew it,” has been the key catalyst for devolution of authority and responsibility to the state level. However, this transition of power has posed challenges to the ability of racial and ethnic communities (as compared to whites) to achieve self-sufficiency and self-determination, as they confront the vicissitudes of shrinking state budgets, poor economies, and diminishing social supports. Moreover, emergent research brings to light the significant dynamic of racial and ethnic disparities (RED) in the inequities inherent in the implementation and operation of state welfare policies. It poses both a heuristic and a real barrier for researchers, advocates, and policymakers as they continue to investigate the efficacy of welfare reform and plan for its reauthorization.

This paper reports on recent findings from research on racial and ethnic disparities conducted under the W.K. Kellogg Foundation’s (WKKF) Devolution Initiative (DI) by affiliates of the Scholar Practitioner Program (SPP) and DI grantees under devolution. This research not only considers disparities arising from historical inequities in the socioeconomic status between whites and communities of color, but focuses specifically on “program disparities,” or those imbalances deriving from the implementation of state and local level interpretations of the federal TANF program.<sup>1</sup> The paper also includes a discussion of the gaps that still remain in RED research and warrant further study. Additionally, it outlines key considerations for Reauthorization of Federal welfare legislation and strategies for expanding research and debate on this critical issue.

### **I. The Relevance of Welfare Changes to Racial and Ethnic Minorities**

**Policy Change:** Several wholesale policy changes have resulted from the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 that have particular relevance to communities of color. First, the nation’s poorest families are no longer entitled to federal financial assistance as they had been under AFDC (Aid to Dependent Families and Children). Moreover, eligible families can only receive financial support for up to five years (unless the state mandates a different time frame) under the block granted replacement, TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families),<sup>2</sup> Second, the ideology behind providing assistance to families is radically transformed under PRWORA: the emphasis has changed from sustaining income to encouraging work. Work requirements promulgated under the 1996 law now require eligible TANF recipients to participate in some type of work activity, unless exempt, as

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<sup>1</sup> Walters, W., DeWeever, G., and Frye, J. (2000) *The Scholar Practitioner Program of the Devolution Initiative: Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Welfare Reform. A Selected Bibliography of Sources*. College Park, MD: African American Leadership Institute. p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Greenberg, M. and Savner, S. (1996) *A Detailed Summary of Key Provisions of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Block Grant of HR3734*. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy. p. 2.

dictated by state guidelines.<sup>3,4</sup> Furthermore, states are required to meet work participation goals in order to maintain federal funding.<sup>5</sup> Third, the law promotes a set of moral values that encourage marriage and disavow out-of-wedlock births.<sup>6</sup> Fourth, significant changes to benefit eligibility for immigrant populations severely curtails access to assistance for many of the nation's non-natives. Although some benefits have since been restored under recent policy changes, key segments of the country's poor immigrant communities are no longer able to receive food stamps and many are ineligible for benefits for the first five years after they arrive in the United States.<sup>7</sup> Finally (though not consummately), PRWORA denies TANF and Food Stamp benefits to persons convicted of drug felonies.<sup>8</sup>

Recent research has provided enough evidence to raise concern that all of these policy changes may lead to potentially negative outcomes for TANF recipients of color seeking to move from poverty to solvency. Foremost, the transition of welfare from entitlement to block grant rescinds the guarantee that the poorest families will always be entitled to government support. Given the "status" disparities that have existed between racial and ethnic communities and their white counterparts prior to welfare reform, this dilution of federal policy may potentially expand the widening socioeconomic divide between races. Furthermore, there remains on the welfare rolls a preponderance of families whose circumstances pose significant challenges to self-sufficiency and are therefore viewed by government support agencies as harder to serve. The percentage of these families who represent racial and ethnic minorities continues to grow as TANF recipients reach imposed time limits.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the crafters of PRWORA who deliberately promoted its "work-first" maxim and ideology designed the legislation with the assumption that TANF recipients face a level playing field in the job market. However, the welfare law does not account for discriminatory practices in the private sector. Research has also evidenced an overrepresentation of minority groups in low-paying jobs, and this trend is predicted to continue as more TANF recipients are encouraged to accept work, regardless of whether the work pays a living wage.<sup>10</sup> For

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<sup>3</sup> Greenberg, M. and Savner, S. *Key Provisions of TANF, Op. Cit.* p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Single parents of children under the age of six are protected by the federal law that prohibits states from reducing or rescinding cash assistance if they cannot meet work requirements for lack of child care. Greenberg, M. and Savner, S. (1996) *Waivers and the New Welfare Law: Initial Approaches in State Plans*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Law and Social Policy. [<http://epn.org/clasp/newwelf.html>]

<sup>5</sup> Levin-Epstein, J. (1996) *Teen Parent Provisions in the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996*. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy. p.5.

<sup>6</sup> Stated in the Purpose, Section 401 of Public Law 104-193, (PRWORA) requires that state TANF programs adhere to four purposes including: "[ending] the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage; [preventing] and [reducing] the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and [establishing] annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies; and [encouraging] the formation and maintenance of two-parent families." (1996) P.L. 104-193 Section 401.

<sup>7</sup> Zimmerman, W. and Tumlin, K. (1999) *Patchwork Policies: State Assistance for Immigrants under Welfare Reform*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute. [<http://newfederalism.urban.org/html/occa24.html>]

<sup>8</sup> There are a number of policy changes that occurred as a result of implementing PRWORA which are not included here in this discussion. Those that are mentioned here have significant relevance with respect to racial and ethnic minority groups and the research that is being conducted by the Scholar Practitioner Program.

<sup>9</sup> Walters et al. *Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Welfare Reform. Op. Cit.* p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

those individuals whose employment options are limited as a result of drug use, addiction, or a previous criminal record, the prospects under the new federal legislation are even more tenuous. For example, prohibitions against serving drug felons deny services and benefits to those convicted of drug “possession, use, or distribution.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, populations who have been historically targeted by law enforcement for commission of these crimes are therefore at greater risk of being denied benefits.<sup>12</sup>

Changes in federal welfare policy at the federal level promoted a shift in the policy process towards greater control at the state level. PRWORA did mandate performance standards for states in moving people off the welfare rolls however, under the new block grant, states are permitted greater flexibility in their application of TANF funds in serving needy families.<sup>13</sup> As a consequence of this expanded latitude, states are less obligated to expend resources to serve the needs of particular populations. In some cases, minorities who once benefited from state supported safety nets may find themselves more vulnerable to the threat of poverty and service *disintegration*.

Given the research that finds race as a strong basis for negative attitudes toward the welfare system and, the potential for abuse of welfare clients in the administration of TANF with respect to their race or ethnicity causes a substantial concern.<sup>14</sup> More especially is this the case in an atmosphere where states have been given great administrative flexibility, and where the administration of the various aspects of TANF may involve decision-making which is ideologically driven, or at the very least subjective in nature.

- States can allocate TANF funds to provide direct cash benefits, “non-cash assistance,” and support services. States can also use these funds to cover overhead, administrative costs,<sup>15</sup> and diversion payments to discourage clients from applying for full TANF benefits.<sup>16</sup> The concerns for minority populations with respect to this broadened state role are multifold. One issue is that there may be discrepancies in who receives ancillary services and who is diverted from TANF all together. Another is that the state may not be directing TANF funds to assist those populations in greatest need or to tailor services to adequately meet the needs of its diverse population.

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<sup>11</sup> Greenberg and Savner. *Op. Cit.*

<sup>12</sup> Collins, M.A. (1999) *ABA Report Finds Incidents of Crime Are Down But Drug Use Remains High*. Washington, DC: American Bar Association. [<http://www.pressroom.com/~afrimale/socjr.htm>]

<sup>13</sup> Under PRWORA’s “maintenance of effort” regulations, states are required to maintain state welfare spending at a level equal to at least 80 percent of what they spent in fiscal year 1994 in order to qualify for federal TANF funding. States also had to demonstrate that an increasing percentage of families receiving assistance were involved in work activities. As of FY 1999, this percentage was 90 percent. Greenberg and Savner. (1996) *Op. Cit.* p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Much of this research has been summarized in: Jill Quadagno, *The Color of Welfare: How Racism Undermined the War on Poverty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.)

<sup>15</sup> Greenberg and Savner. (1999) *Op. Cit.* p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> Gallagher, L. J., Gallagher, M., Perese, K., Schreiber, S., Watson, K. (1998) *One Year after Federal Welfare Reform: A Description of State Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Decisions as of October 1997*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute. [<http://newfederalism.urban.org/html/occas6.htm>]

- States can determine TANF eligibility requirements using their own eligibility criteria.<sup>17</sup> Federal guidelines only require that states maintain a spending level consistent with their FY1994 spending.<sup>18</sup> For example, the state of Virginia instituted a family cap policy that denied incremental cash benefits to parents of children born 10 months after receiving assistance.<sup>19</sup> States also have flexibility in determining which assets are counted or excluded when determining families' eligibility for assistance.<sup>20</sup> The main concern here is the opportunity for state agencies to limit or expand access to certain groups (e.g. women who get pregnant while receiving benefits) by modifying eligibility criteria.
- States are able to extend or reduce the 60-month TANF time limit set under PRWORA. States are also allowed to exempt up to 20 percent of their caseload from time limits. In addition, although the law states that TANF recipients have a lifelong, 60-month time limit for assistance, states are able to reduce or extend time limits for families. If they extend time limits, they must fund continued benefits with state resources. Given the recent statistics indicating that whites are leaving the welfare rolls more quickly than their racial and ethnic counterparts,<sup>21</sup> time limits will most likely challenge ethnic and racial minority groups, particularly African Americans, to a greater extent than they will affect whites. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the reason for this disparity and to eradicate any discriminatory practices that may contribute to it.
- States also have discretion in determining exemptions from the work requirements mandated under welfare reform. States are able to modify exemptions from work activities for parents whose children are under six years of age and who are unable to find appropriate childcare. TANF recipients who live in communities offering limited child care resources may be at greater risk of having to accept inadequate, unsuitable, or inappropriate child care as a result of stipulations imposed by the state. Minority groups, once again, may be disproportionately penalized.
- States have discretion in how they seek to levy sanctions against TANF recipients who fail to comply with welfare policies. States can deny direct cash benefits to families who are sanctioned or otherwise encumbered by the state's welfare policies

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<sup>17</sup> Greenberg, M. and Savner, S. (1999). *The Final TANF Regulations: A Preliminary Analysis*. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy. p. li.

<sup>18</sup> Schott, L., Lazere, E., Goldberg, H., and Sweeney, E. (1999) *Highlights of the Final TANF Regulations*. Washington, DC: Center for Budget and Policy Priorities. [<http://www.cbpp.org/4-29-99wel.htm>]

<sup>19</sup> Stark, S. and Levin-Epstein, J. (1999) *Excluded Children: Family Cap in a New Era*. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy. P. 25.

<sup>20</sup> Gallagher, L. J., Gallagher, M., Perese, K., Schreiber, S., Watson, K. *Op. Cit.*

<sup>21</sup> A study by the Urban Institute using data from the National Survey of America's Families demonstrates that between 1997 and 1999, the percentage of non-Hispanic, black TANF recipients has increased while the percentage of white recipients has decreased. Zedlewski, S.R. and Alderson, D. (2001) *Do Families on Welfare in the Post-TANF Era Differ from their Pre-TANF Counterparts?* Washington, DC: The Urban Institute. p. 8.

(such as family caps or time limits).<sup>22,23</sup> However, discretion at the local level may lead to inconsistencies in how individuals are sanctioned or exempted.

- States can create individual development accounts (IDAs) to assist TANF recipients in pursuing microenterprises, education initiatives, or home purchases. According to recent guidance from the Department of Health and Human Services, these IDAs cannot be counted against a recipient's TANF grant.<sup>24</sup> However, not all states or jurisdictions make these available to every TANF recipient. Moreover, it is unclear how local agencies are instructing caseworkers to provide this option to recipients. Again, the flexibility in discretion makes discriminatory practices possible.
- In connection with the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 states receive additional funding to support TANF recipients who experience the greatest challenges in entering or re-entering the workforce.<sup>25</sup> Recent statistics reveal that this population is becoming more racialized. However, there is no clear indication that the vendors and programs receiving welfare-to-work or other employment-related grants are equipped to handle the specific challenges of the populations they serve.

Thus, given the widespread opportunity that states and localities now have to tailor welfare services to their own specifications, there exists the potential for inequity and discrimination. In response, researchers have begun to investigate the prevalence of biases in the reformed system and to consider strategies for circumventing these eventualities.

**Population Profile Change:** As welfare policy has changed, so, too, has the welfare population. Whereas a decade ago, whites represented the largest proportion of cases, accounting for almost 4 million recipients, now blacks predominate in the ranks. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, blacks in 1999 comprised 38%, Hispanics 25%, Asians 4%, Native Americans were just under 2%, while whites were 31%.<sup>26</sup> These percentages are even more pronounced in the child welfare population. In FY 1999, 40% of the children on welfare were black and 26% were Hispanic compared to only 25% who were white.<sup>27</sup> Recent studies predict that this trend

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<sup>22</sup>Family caps are imposed in some states where no additional assistance is provided to families when children are born into families already receiving TANF benefits.

<sup>23</sup> Gallagher et al. *Op. Cit.*

<sup>24</sup>Department of Health and Human Services. (1999) *Summary: Final Rule: Temporary Assistance For Needy Families (TANF) Program*. Washington, DC: Department of Health and Human Services. [<http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/ofa/exsumcl.htm>]

<sup>25</sup> Relave, N. (2000) "Collaboration between the Welfare and Workforce Development Systems." *Issue Notes*. Washington, DC: Welfare Information Network (A Special Activity of the Finance Project.) 4:2.

<sup>26</sup> In some states and jurisdictions, the predominance of particular minority groups is noteworthy: in FY 1999 in Washington DC, blacks comprised 98% of the welfare rolls; in New Mexico, Hispanics made up close to 60% of the welfare caseload; more than half of Hawaii's welfare population was Asian, and in Alaska, over 35% of welfare recipients were Native American. Department of Health and Human Services, *Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) Program: Third Annual Report to Congress*. (DHHS, August, 2000)

<sup>27</sup> Department of Human Services, *Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, TANF Program: Third Annual Report to Congress*. (DHHS, August, 2000)

will persist as minority populations spend longer periods on the welfare rolls than their white counterparts. Research from the Center for Law and Social Policy maintains that more than half of the Hispanic welfare population and 40% of black recipients are expected to receive welfare until they reach the federal, five-year time limit, compared to less than 30% of their white counterparts who currently receive welfare.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, higher salaries and earlier entry into the job market do not safeguard minority graduates from the welfare program against returning to the rolls. In fact, contrary to expectation, minorities may still end up back on welfare sooner than white recipients despite these advantages.

Persistent status disparities also factor into the equation. Plummeting unemployment rates have been noteworthy in the past decade; however, minorities have not enjoyed the benefits of an open job market to the same degree as whites. In 1995 the white unemployment rate was 4.9% but was almost double—9.6% for minorities. During this time period, the unemployment rate for blacks was 10.4%. As the unemployment rates begin to climb again in the wake of the September 11, 2001 tragedy, the differential between whites and other minorities is continuing to increase.<sup>29</sup>

Given the persisting racial divide, minority welfare recipients face numerous challenges as they navigate the added complexities associated with state and local welfare policies. In order to appreciate these complexities, it is important to understand their relevance to minority populations at the national level.

## **II. Racial and Ethnic Disparities and its Implications – Emerging Research from the Scholar Practitioner Program**

Since 1996, the Kellogg Foundation has funded the Devolution Initiative to investigate welfare reform implementation. While several of the grantees funded under this initiative have analyzed policy practices that have implications for racial and ethnic minorities, the Scholar Practitioner Program (SPP) has undertaken specific studies to broaden the base of research in this area.

Established in 1999, the SPP has bridged the work of national and local grantees funded under Kellogg's Devolution Initiative (DI) to provide both an academic and community-based perspective to the ongoing investigation. Operating in five states (Florida, New York, Mississippi, Washington, and Wisconsin), Scholar Practitioner teams were comprised of a senior level mentor, 2-3 research practitioners and a community advocate. These teams capitalized on their expertise in interpreting how public policies affect low income and minority populations and they serve as technical advisors to Kellogg grantees in state and locally-based community organizations, as well as other advocates and researchers. In connection with these endeavors, each of the five SPP teams has also undertaken independent studies to examine some of the recent changes in state policies and local practices under welfare reform.

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<sup>28</sup> Steve Savner, *Welfare Reform and Racial/Ethnic Minorities: The Questions to Ask*. (Poverty and Race, July/August 2000)

<sup>29</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, "The Employment Situation, October 2001," *Employment Situation Summary*. (United States Department of Labor, October 2001)  
[<http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.nr0.htm>]

The SPP teams have periodically reported their findings at Kellogg-sponsored events that are summarized here to accomplish the following:

- To provide insight into the racial and ethnic disparities emerging under welfare reform;
- To specify some of the key research questions that are critical for welfare analysts to consider in their research; and
- To identify and prioritize those areas of welfare policy analysis requiring further investigation on the subject of racial and ethnic disparities (RED).

Each of the five SPP teams has pursued a different focus of RED research relevant to the communities in which they base their academic research and the research they are conducting as part of the Kellogg DI:

**Florida:** The SPP team at Florida International University conducted a statewide survey of income disparities across black, white, and Hispanic TANF recipients who became employed after leaving the welfare rolls.

**Mississippi:** SPP researchers at Jackson State University and the University of Southern Mississippi are investigating potential disparities within the Congressional districts across the state, focusing on differences in the delivery of support services to TANF recipients.

**New York:** At the Graduate School of the City University of New York, the SPP team has designed a research agenda that includes disparities in employment, housing, and health care for TANF recipients and families earning low incomes.

**Washington:** The scholar practitioners at the University of Washington summarized research on a number of indicators of racial and ethnic disparity including social and economic support, educational performance, health, substance abuse, child safety, and incarceration among residents of color.

**Wisconsin:** This team from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee is conducting a survey of former and current TANF recipients to determine the existence of racial and ethnic disparities in their experience with employers and welfare agency personnel.

Despite the different foci, the key areas of research at these distinct sites include analyses of both “status” and “program” disparities. In other words, the teams have considered in their studies the contextual disparities that already exist in the communities they are investigating (such as differences in socioeconomic status and educational attainment) as well as inequalities in welfare reform service delivery and operation. The content foci and depth of analysis vary across the different studies ranging from general mapping of status differences among different ethnic and racial populations to detailed inquiries into the challenges these populations face in seeking to become self-sufficient.

## Washington

The Washington SPP team mapped out the existing “status” disparities occurring across the state from reports which used a variety of indicators to measure quality of life of children of color. While their focus population was children, this SPP team focused on critical determinants that can contribute to disparities experienced by both children and adults. The SPP researchers reviewed two reports: *The Real Facts of Life for the Children of Color in Washington State* and *The State of Washington’s Children*, to examine data on socioeconomics, health, safety, language barriers, education, and youth development.<sup>30</sup> Their summary of findings holistically profiles the divergent social condition of racial and ethnic minorities and white residents of the state. The summary report accounts for both external (institutional racism, diminished access to health care, etc.) and internal/personal (educational attainment, health status) factors which give rise to disparities among ethnic and racial populations. The data collectively provide an incisive inquiry into the racial disparities that exist in Washington and establish a fundamental research prototype for considering performance expectations and outcomes among different populations.

In all of the areas examined by the Washington team disparities exist, but the most compelling is the difference in socioeconomic status. Not surprisingly, the team analyzed data showing that family income for people of color was significantly lower than for the white population: African American, Native American, and Hispanic families earned an average of \$20,000 – \$23,000 per year compared to the \$35,000 - \$40,000 average income of white families.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, a majority of the adults in families of color with incomes below the poverty level earned their incomes by working at low-paying jobs.<sup>32</sup> Children fared worse. One third of all Washington children are in families whose income does not cover their basic needs (housing, food, clothing, etc.) The circumstances for minority children are even more severe: two thirds of Hispanic children, one half of African American, and one half of Native American children face these conditions.<sup>33</sup> White children fare somewhat better.

It is important to note, however, that disparities in income offer only part of the whole picture; disparities in overall wealth (assets less liabilities) are often more pronounced. Historically, minorities have not reported owning stocks, mutual funds, pension plans, or homes to the same degree that whites have.<sup>34</sup> While information

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<sup>30</sup> Brandon, R.N. and Maranan, P. (2000) “The Real Facts of Life for the Children of Color in Washington State,” *Washington Kids Count Special Projects*. Seattle, WA: Human Services Policy Center.

<sup>31</sup> Scott, J.W. (2000) *A Brief Summary Report of Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Washington State in the Year 2000*. WA: University of Washington.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Asian children demonstrate the same levels of poverty as the aggregate—one in three face these conditions. University of Washington School of Public Health and Community Medicine and Human Services Policy Center. (1999) *The State of Washington’s Children*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington School of Public Health and Community Medicine.

<sup>34</sup> The HHS Data Council Working Group on Racial and Ethnic Data and The Data Work Group of the HHS Initiative to Eliminate Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health. (1999) “Contributing Factors to Racial and Ethnic Gaps in Health,” *Improving the Collection and Use of Racial and Ethnic Data in HHS: Joint Report of the HHS Data Council Working Group on Racial and Ethnic Data and The Data Work Group of the HHS Initiative to Eliminate Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health*. Washington, DC: Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. [<http://aspe.os.dhhs.gov/datacncl/racerpt/chap2.htm>]

pertaining to disparities in wealth was not discussed in great detail in the Washington studies, the report by the Health Services Policy Center and Children's Alliance did note that 30 percent of whites owned their own businesses, compared to only 16 percent of minorities.<sup>35</sup>

The value of family wealth and income is dependent on family size, more or less, by the more people among whom limited resources must be shared. Moreover, families headed by single parents generally rely on one income and therefore, face additional economic challenges. The SPP team included data from, *The Real Facts of Life* study on the number of families living with one adult. This report noted that about 20 percent of Native American and African American children were living in families with only one adult while only half as many white, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander children did so.<sup>36</sup> More than 50 percent of Native American and African American children in Washington were born out of wedlock.

The factors that contribute to income discrepancies between whites and minorities remain multifarious and complex to dissociate. However, the SPP team considered a broad set of linked conditions from two reports that may account, in part, for some of the apparent disparities in socioeconomic status.<sup>37</sup> These conditions can be mapped on a flow chart to represent the wide array of factors that can adversely influence the earning potential of different populations. The proceeding discussion expands on these factors, based on the data summarized by the SPP team.

Family income is clearly related to job earnings.<sup>38</sup> And researchers agree that a new strategy is needed to increase wages and benefits for minority families.<sup>39</sup> However, The SPP team has cited numerous impediments to job security and mobility. Institutional racism and discriminatory practices in the labor market constitute significant barriers, for example. Refusing employment or imposing limitations on upward mobility to persons of color based on race clearly interfere with an individuals' pursuit of job prospects.<sup>40</sup> Researchers and policy analysts must therefore develop effective tools for measuring and interpreting the impact of these factors on minority populations' ability to acquire jobs to increase their earning potential.

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<sup>35</sup> Brandon, R.N. and Maranan, P. (2000) *Op. Cit.* p. 6.

<sup>36</sup> Brandon, R.N. and Maranan, P. (2000) *Op. Cit.* p. 21.

<sup>37</sup> The HHS Data Council Working Group on Racial and Ethnic Data and The Data Work Group of the HHS Initiative to Eliminate Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health have identified similar contributing factors to disparities in socioeconomic status. The HHS Data Council Working Group on Racial and Ethnic Data and The Data Work Group of the HHS Initiative to Eliminate Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health. (1999). *Improving the Collection and Use of Racial and Ethnic Data in HHS: Joint Report of the HHS Data Council Working Group on Racial and Ethnic Data and The Data Work Group of the HHS Initiative to Eliminate Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health.* Washington, DC: Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. [<http://aspe.os.dhhs.gov/datacncl/racerpt/chap2.htm>]

<sup>38</sup> The Washington reports examined by the SPP team focused on children and therefore did not include measures of employment rates that should be considered when investigating SES disparities. These measures are included in Table 1, however.

<sup>39</sup> Brandon, R.N. and Maranan, P. (2000) "The Real Facts of Life for the Children of Color in Washington State," *Washington Kids Count Special Projects.* Seattle, WA: Human Services Policy Center. [[http://hspc.org/wkc/special/facts\\_of\\_life/index.html](http://hspc.org/wkc/special/facts_of_life/index.html)]

<sup>40</sup> Human Services Policy Center and the Children's Alliance. (2000) *The Real Facts of Life for the Children of Color in Washington State.* Seattle, WA: Human Services Policy Center.

Beyond the external influences that can hamper an individual's success in obtaining a job, there are personal deficits (or aspects of individual's backgrounds that detract from their qualifications) which can also create barriers to employment. These include limited academic achievement, limited language proficiency, poor health status, history of incarceration, and inadequate work experience—all of which can be exacerbated by external factors such as institutional racism. Education is clearly associated with job attainment, so the SPP team highlighted a number of measures of academic achievement across races.<sup>41</sup> The team included findings from the Washington study that showed educational backgrounds differed among racial and ethnic populations. In particular, Hispanics were less likely to have completed high school or college than whites or other minorities: whereas 70 percent of Hispanics had achieved a high school diploma, college experience or degree, or higher, 80 percent of the minority population as a whole had achieved this level of education.<sup>42</sup>

Probing further, the researchers found that differences in educational performance took root early in Washington's school systems. Fewer minority children were able to meet performance standards in math, writing, or reading at the fourth grade level than their white counterparts, and African American, Hispanic, and Native Americans fared worse than Asian students.<sup>43</sup> By the seventh grade, only one in twenty minority students (African American, Native American, and Hispanic) were able to meet the standard math requirements for their grade. White and Asian students performed much better: Asian students performed best, with 25 percent of Asian students meeting the requirement, compared to 20 percent of white students.<sup>44</sup> Thus, minority job applicants from Washington State were less likely to have had the same or better educational preparation as white applicants had.

Also of note was the finding that white students seem to be separated geographically from other minority children. White children were more likely to be enrolled in schools with a white majority than their minority counterparts (although most Asian children were found to have attended predominantly white schools). Moreover, minority students—specifically Hispanic and African American youth—were more likely than white students to be employed at jobs where they worked long hours and thus became more distracted from their educational pursuits.

Another critical obstacle to gainful employment for some minority job seekers is language proficiency. SPP researchers extracted report findings that many families of color in Washington spoke English as a second language—particularly Hispanics and Asian/Pacific Islanders. They also cited data that showed that many immigrants who

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<sup>41</sup>This finding is substantiated in numerous research studies. However, it has also been demonstrated that “economic return for the same educational attainment is lower for racial and ethnic minorities. The HHS Data Council Working Group on Racial and Ethnic Data and The Data Work Group of the HHS Initiative to Eliminate Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health. (1999). *Improving the Collection and Use of Racial and Ethnic Data in HHS: Joint Report of the HHS Data Council Working Group on Racial and Ethnic Data and The Data Work Group of the HHS Initiative to Eliminate Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health*. Washington, DC: Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. [<http://aspe.os.dhhs.gov/datacncl/racerpt/chap2.htm>]

<sup>42</sup> Scott. *Op. Cit.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> University of Washington School of Public Health and Community Medicine and Human Services Policy Center. (1999) *The State of Washington's Children*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington School of Public Health and Community Medicine.

had resided in the United States for more than five years still did not speak English as their primary language.

Health status is yet another factor related to socioeconomic status that contributes not only to securing a job, but also to maintaining it. The Washington team cited disparities across a number of health indicators covering both physical and mental health as well as high-risk behaviors that can impair health. However, the most salient, which relate to socioeconomic status include measures of substance abuse, tobacco usage, depression, and health care coverage.<sup>45</sup> The reports reviewed by the SPP team analyzed youth usage of harmful substances and found no significant disparities across races with the exception of higher usage rates of tobacco by Native American youth. Only small differences were noted in levels of depression experienced across races, with youth of color reporting a somewhat higher incidence. However, past studies have linked exposure to racism and discrimination with psychological trauma that leads to depression and other health problems, particularly among African Americans.<sup>46</sup> All of these risk factors could potentially influence job attainment, however, among Washington youth, disparities were minimal. Incidence in the adult population was not considered here, but nevertheless would be a useful measure to include when examining disparities in socioeconomic status.

The study of health insurance coverage among youth of color in Washington State also showed significant disparities. The two Washington reports found that white children were more than twice as likely to be covered by health insurance than children of color. This measure is critical to include when considering disparities in socioeconomic status because it serves as a proxy for access to medical care.<sup>47</sup> Working families who lack health coverage are required to pay for health costs out of pocket and therefore have fewer resources to meet other basic needs. In addition, they may be less inclined to seek routine or preventive care, which necessitates more expensive treatment later on if illnesses or diseases go undetected. More than 25 percent of Hispanic women, for example, did not seek prenatal care during the first trimester of pregnancy.<sup>48</sup>

Health status, in turn, can also be affected by inadequate housing, yet another factor which can contribute to disparities in socioeconomic status.<sup>49</sup> Research has shown that exposure to sub-optimal living conditions is associated with poor health and

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<sup>45</sup> Neither the SPP teams nor the Washington reports cover incidence of diseases that represent the leading causes of death. However, these are included in Table 1 because of their prevalence among communities of color. Persons suffering from these diseases (cancer, cardiovascular diseases, etc.) may manifest disabilities that impair their ability to work. If certain minority populations suffer disproportionately from these diseases, this may contribute to disparities in socioeconomic status.

<sup>46</sup> The HHS Data Council Working Group on Racial and Ethnic Data and The Data Work Group of the HHS Initiative to Eliminate Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health. *Op. Cit.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Brandon, R.N. and Maranan, P. *Op. Cit.*

<sup>49</sup> A number of environmental factors contribute to poor health outcomes including occupational health hazards, exposure to air pollution and other environmental toxins, and violence. Although these were not cited in the Washington reports, they are included in Diagram 1 and Table 1. The report by the Human Services Policy Center and Children's Alliance did note that data on housing in Washington state was not readily accessible. Human Services Policy Center and the Children's Alliance. *Op. Cit.* p. 6.

educational outcomes.<sup>50</sup> In turn, these conditions affect the ability of individuals to work and care for their families. Housing discrimination may also have an impact on socioeconomic status when families are refused home mortgages or denied tenancy. Minority families become unable to amass wealth or build credit by owning their own homes and can be relegated to areas less amenable for finding work, that are more violent, and less accessible to public services.<sup>51</sup> In Washington State, the majority of families of color did own their own homes (56 percent). However, the disparity is evident when compared to the white population, 75 percent of whom own their own homes. For most families, housing represents their largest expenditure. However, for poorer families (and often for minority families), this expenditure can often require as much as 50 percent or more of their available resources. Therefore it is important to consider this indicator—the number of families who spend at least half of their income on housing—when examining disparities in SES, and the impact this has on their economic wellbeing.<sup>52</sup>

One final consideration is experience with the criminal justice system, a factor that can significantly contribute to limited opportunities for financial success. Incarceration and/or possession of a criminal record can seriously hamper an individual's opportunities for earning a viable wage. The degree to which certain populations are disproportionately represented in the penal system can lead to disparities in SES. The SPP team included data pertaining to youth detention in their summary report and cited findings which showed that higher percentages of minority youth were detained than were whites.

The data compiled by the Washington team thus serves to highlight key areas for investigation when studying racial and ethnic disparities. Table 1 organizes these subject areas to provide a template for basic study in any community. (See Appendix)

### **Implications for State DI Activities**

In Washington state, the SPP Team has worked with two state grantees: the Children's Alliance and Washington Citizen Action. The Children's Alliance, a NACA affiliate, has focused on policy action working with both the state's governor and legislature on the efficacy of welfare reforms. Washington Citizen Action (a FUSA affiliate), through its Consumers for Quality Health Care activities, has concentrated on community activism, informing localities about their eligibility for welfare and other social service programs. This organization also published a report on the status of the working poor in Washington State that illustrates the complexity of RED.<sup>53</sup> Washington Citizen Action's health care coalition provides research and technical support to investigate pertinent health policy issues and strategies for community mobilization to take action. The coalition has also focused on patients' bill of rights and the transition of Washington's Blue Cross Blue Shield insurer to non-profit status.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> The HHS Data Council Working Group on Racial and Ethnic Data and The Data Work Group of the HHS Initiative to Eliminate Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health. *Op. Cit.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> This report, entitled, "The Washington Economy: Working But Not Earning A Living," was co-produced by Consumers for Quality Health Care and Citizen Action. W.K. Kellogg Foundation. (2000) *Devolution Dialogue*. 4(2) *Op. Cit.* [<http://www.wkkf.org/documents/devolution/newsletter/00feb.asp>]

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

The Scholar Practitioner Team drew their RED summary highlights from report co-produced by the Children's Alliance entitled, *The Real Facts of Life for Children of Color in Washington State*.<sup>55</sup> This report assessed the socioeconomic status and quality of life for children and their families across a range of indicators including health care, personal and community safety, and education.<sup>56</sup>

The Alliance also was responsible for organizing a media event that drew dozens of grassroots leaders together to discuss issues related to elevating the poor and working poor out of poverty. Gathered together as part of the state mobilization effort, this group demonstrated that data resources and community activism could foment a meaningful dialogue on public policy. The Alliance learned that Washington legislators eventually amended the state budget to include measures for better evaluating the efficacy of the state's welfare reform initiative.<sup>57</sup>

The Scholar Practitioner team in Washington State offered the state complementary services to augment the work that the two state mobilization grantees have initiated. Now that the state has already utilized data collected by the state mobilization grantees to inform policy, policymakers are clearly receptive to purposive research. Scholar practitioners can work with community-based organizations to provide RED research to promote and disseminate information that can inform policy decisions that largely affect communities of color.

## **New York**

The Scholar Practitioner Team in New York designed a project on racial and ethnic disparities that can be viewed as a hybrid of the Washington and Florida studies. They researched RED under welfare reform as the Florida practitioners did, but examined these issues with a breadth similar to the Washington SPPs' report, covering factors ranging from discriminatory policy and employment practices to disparities in home ownership. In addition, the New York team considered RED in health status and health care and they also examined both factors that directly related to welfare as well as contextual issues that helped frame underlying disparities.

The State of New York poses many challenges for social science researchers and policy advocates with extremes such as the highest concentrations of welfare recipients (more than a quarter of a million people received TANF between October 1998 and September 1999) and one of the largest state budgets. It also has the greatest number of immigrants in the country and therefore the highest number of immigrants who were dropped from the rolls.<sup>58</sup> However, trying to collect and use the data available on the numerous cases of TANF recipients and welfare leavers proved to be "formidable." As a strategy, the New York practitioners turned to data compiled by both government and non-government organizations and pieced together data sets

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<sup>55</sup> Brandon, R.N. and Maranan, P. (2000) "The Real Facts of Life for the Children of Color in Washington State," *Washington Kids Count Special Projects*. Seattle, WA: Human Services Policy Center.

<sup>56</sup> The report considered data from 1997. *Ibid*.

<sup>57</sup> W.K. Kellogg Foundation. (2000) *Devolution Dialogue*. 4(5)  
[<http://www.wkkf.org/documents/devolution/newsletter/00may.asp>]

<sup>58</sup> Mullings, L., Aparicio, A., David, D., Jacobs, A.L. (2000) *Racial and Ethnic Disparities and Welfare Reform in New York State*. New York: City University of New York. p. 15.

surveying New York City and New York State.<sup>59</sup> They profiled the state as a whole, investigating welfare, poverty rate, and employment statistics to better understand the context in which possible disparities in welfare experiences might emerge. What they found was that many New Yorkers, minorities and whites alike, were not attaining the levels of self-sufficiency envisioned. Even with the Workfare program, which employs approximately 40,000 TANF recipients, many New Yorkers still are unable to earn a living wage.<sup>60</sup> In an 8-month period (July 1996 to March 1997), less than one third of welfare leavers had found full-time or part-time work.<sup>61</sup>

However, more current research indicates that some TANF recipients are working before they even leave the rolls. They found that close to 20 percent of adult TANF recipients were already employed and another 20 percent were not seeking to be employed.<sup>62</sup> When they examined employment statistics, the SPP team learned that unemployment rates have been dropping for whites in New York while they have remained elevated for blacks and Latinos. When they looked at the racial and ethnic composition of New York's TANF beneficiaries, they found that the majority of adult recipients (close to 80 percent) were persons of color (although immigrants make up only a small part of these numbers).<sup>63</sup>

Examining data on disparities within New York City where most of the state's TANF recipients are concentrated, the team found that most of New York City's poor are black and Latino and a large percentage of them are children.<sup>64 65</sup> They utilized data compiled by the New York City Welfare Reform and Human Rights Documentation Project and the New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey Questionnaire to compare the racial composition of TANF recipients in the years 1996 and 1999. They found that the percentage of black, Puerto Rican, Dominican, and Asian recipients increased while the percentage of white recipients decreased.<sup>66</sup> They also found that minorities—specifically blacks and Latinos—were not receiving Food Stamps to the degree they had been prior to welfare reform.<sup>67</sup>

In addition to the status disparities, the team researched program disparities among New York's diverse communities. They reviewed complaints submitted to the Office of Civil Rights and discovered that advocates had lodged complaints against New York City's welfare office on behalf of TANF recipients for not offering them "language

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 2-3

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* p.12.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* p. 12.

<sup>62</sup> These figures were for the time period between October 1998 and September 1999. US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation. (2000) *Third Annual Report to Congress, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program*. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation. p. 132.

<sup>63</sup> The breakdowns for families and for children receiving welfare were almost identical. *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> The SPP team found that, in 1997, New York City TANF recipients comprised around 70 percent of the state's welfare population. Mullings *et al.* *Ibid.* p. 7.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* p. 7.

<sup>66</sup> The white population made up only 7.5% of the New York City population of TANF recipients in 1996, compared to 5.5% in 1999. The percentage of Cuban, Central South American, and other Latino recipients also decreased slightly. Mullings *et al.* *Op. Cit.* pp. 3-4.

<sup>67</sup> Mullings *et al.* *Ibid.* p. 3.

appropriate services.”<sup>68</sup> They also learned that the Workfare program, designed to introduce recipients to the workforce, was not providing training for skilled jobs; rather, many poor black and Latino workers were supplying menial labor in exchange for their cash benefits. Furthermore, they were not learning new and transferable skills that would help them get jobs outside of Workfare.<sup>69</sup>

There were also allegations that in New York City recipients were being diverted from receiving cash benefits as well as Food Stamps and Medicaid by having to complete unnecessarily cumbersome applications. Because the city has a disproportionate share of the state’s minority population, this has led to racial disparities in those who were able to move from welfare to work.<sup>70</sup> Flexibility in New York’s welfare law also has given caseworkers discretion in deciding whether an individual’s grant could be reduced, thereby introducing another opportunity for recipients to encounter discrimination.<sup>71</sup>

The SPP team also found disparities beyond the welfare office. Disparities in childcare have exacerbated the difficulties minority recipients found in moving from welfare to work. While only 6 percent of the more than a quarter of a million families in the state had access to subsidized child care, minority families tended to be at greater risk of being unable to locate suitable care for their children. In New York City black and Latino families were disproportionately denied childcare due to lack of available providers and subsidized slots.<sup>72</sup>

Poor families face similar problems when it comes to finding affordable quality housing. As a result of the Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act, housing providers are able to reserve more subsidized housing units for higher income families. In New York, the ramifications of this legislative action are remarkable. New York City alone will realize a loss of 10,000 – 16,000 units for those families living well below the poverty line.<sup>73</sup> The SPP team also found that even families earning no income would be responsible for a minimum monthly charge of \$50 and for working families, the situation was equally dire, considering the fact that in New York City, more than half of all renters cannot pay the fair market rate. TANF families who are eligible to receive the highest grant amount still fall short of the \$825 monthly (fair market) cost of a two-bedroom dwelling by over \$600.<sup>74</sup> Even when units are available to low-income families, though, discriminatory practices often prevent minority families from accessing them. Immigrant families face the greatest challenges and, as a result, experience the negative consequences that derive from discrimination: smaller percentages of immigrants own their own homes, larger proportions of immigrants reside in undesirable neighborhoods, and they spend higher percentages of their incomes on rent.<sup>75</sup>

The NY SPP team also learned that more whites are housed in rent-controlled apartments than minorities, who are most often relegated to public housing.

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<sup>68</sup> Mullings, L., Aparicio, A., David, D., Jacobs, A.L. (2000) *Racial and Ethnic Disparities and Welfare Reform in New York State*. New York: City University of New York. p. 11.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* p. 13.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 13-14.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* p. 14.

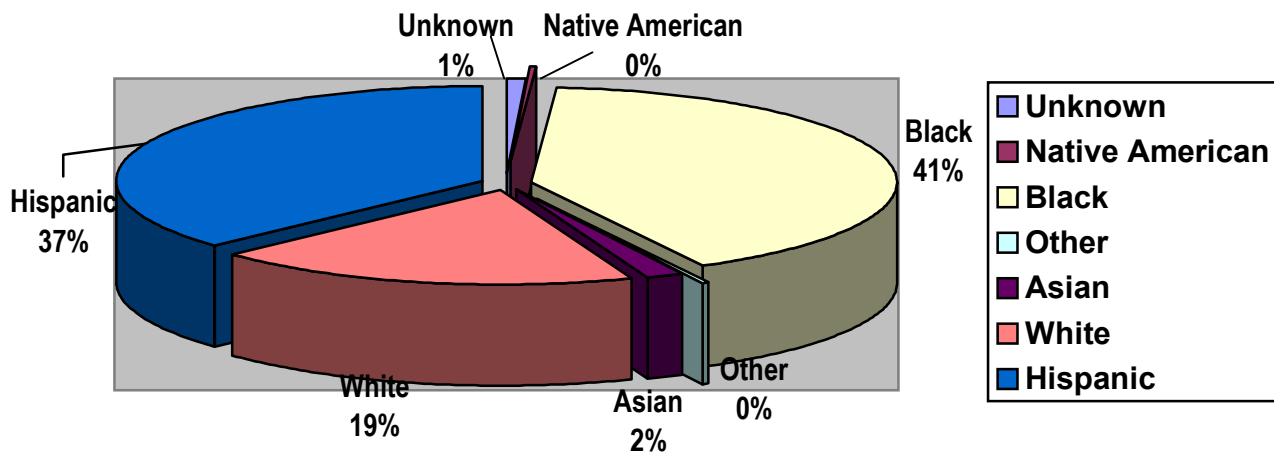
<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* p. 18.

<sup>73</sup> This loss in housing units for the lowest income groups will occur over the next decade. *Ibid.* p. 19.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* p. 20.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* p. 21.

Diagram 2. Racial and Ethnic Composition of Adult TANF Recipients in New York (10/98-9/99)<sup>58</sup>



Government agencies have filed litigation against New York landlords who divert minorities into segregated housing or remove them all together from their units. Moreover, upon reviewing reports from the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights SPP team members noted evidence of housing discrimination in three NY cities that thwarted low-income minority families from moving from the city to the suburbs.<sup>76</sup> Given the greater availability of jobs in the suburbs and the lack of reliable and accessible transportation for poor and low-income families, these families find it even more difficult to overcome the barriers between poverty and self-sufficiency.

Finally, the New York Scholar Practitioners investigated disparities in health. They reviewed documentation on the incidence of asthma because New Yorkers contract the illness at higher rates than elsewhere in the country. They discovered that the highest concentration of the disease is found in the black, Latino, and immigrant communities, with the primary victims being poor children.<sup>77</sup> While the state has taken measures to ensure that children and poor families are covered by health insurance through Child Health Plus, many New York residents do not qualify for these and other health insurance benefits.<sup>78</sup> Sick people cannot work effectively or efficiently and sometimes cannot work at all. When people of color suffer disproportionately from diseases and have limited access to health care and insurance, their ability to seek employment is jeopardized.

### Implications for State DI Activities

The State of New York offers complexities that are unparalleled by the other four DI states. The relationship between the SPP team and its three co-partners bears this out. Each of WKKF's three lead partners—CDF, NACA, and Families USA—are represented in the DI collaborative in New York State. The Children's Defense Fund of New York, the Citizens Committee for Children of New York, (the NACA affiliate), and the New York State Health Care Campaign/Citizen Action (NSHCC/CA the Families USA affiliate) joined together to work on health and welfare reform issues in New York City and Upstate New York. Each state grantee chose to focus on a particular aspect of the issues that the collaborative is investigating as a whole:

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> The SPP team found that the highest rates of asthma in the United States are found in the South Bronx and East Harlem. *Ibid.* p. 23.

<sup>78</sup> New York has proposed HealthSTAT to cover more families but it excludes many immigrants and poor working families. *Ibid.* p. 24.

CCC-- focused on informing communities about ways to improve childcare opportunities for poor families in New York City.

CDF-NY – focused on the implementation of Child Health Plus through facilitated enrollment, in addition to working on a host of other health and welfare related issues in both New York City and New York State.

NYSHCC/CA – helped inform communities about the need for expanded health care and spearheaded the development of Family Health Plus.

The SPP team worked both individually and collaboratively with these three organizations to research relevant issues and to provide ongoing technical support. The team published a newsletter that highlights the accomplishments of the state grantees and reported on research that they conducted on RED, welfare, and health care related issues including the family wellbeing of New York's poor families, school lunch programs, child health insurance, and immigration issues.<sup>79</sup>

The NY Scholar Practitioners also initiated a research and dissemination activity—the Community Outreach and Research Project—that targets specific communities in New York City for intense evaluation and mobilization efforts in Harlem. The SPP-State Mobilization Team collaborative hopes to use this mechanism to enable local non-profits to respond more effectively to community needs and amplify concern to policymakers about how they can meet these community needs.<sup>80</sup>

The challenges faced by the NY SPP are multifold—working with three separate organizations at the city and state level to address a variety of issues related to health care and welfare. However, just as this endeavor posed challenges, it also offered great opportunity. Each campaign undertaken by the three state grantees involves a process of building coalitions, informing and engaging communities, and creating dialogue with state and local legislators. The SPP team investigated the theory behind these strategies and analyzed them for application to RED research. Just as each grantee built separate campaigns tailored to the audiences they worked with (childcare providers, state legislators, medical doctors, etc.), the SPP engaged the community in an attempt to answer questions objectively about what works in mobilizing communities and how these strategies can help raise awareness about RED.

## Florida

Rather than examine racial and ethnic disparities in socioeconomic status across the total state population, the Florida team focused on welfare leavers. The target population was persons of color (blacks and Hispanics)<sup>81</sup> and whites who left the welfare rolls for work between 1997 and 1998.<sup>82</sup> The goal of the Florida SPP team was to determine whether there was county variation in the types of income disparities evidenced at the state level. They also wanted to compare the mean incomes for each

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<sup>79</sup> W.K. Kellogg Foundation. 4(2) *Op. Cit.*

<sup>80</sup> Walters. *Op. Cit.* p. 18.

<sup>81</sup> Each study referred to different minority groups using categories specified in their individual projects, so in some cases blacks are referred to as African Americans and in some cases Hispanics are referred to as Latinos.

<sup>82</sup> Dunn, M., Eilert, J. G., Marichal, C., Beneckson, R.E. (2000) *Racial and Ethnic Disparity Study*. Miami, FL: Florida International University. p. 2.

target group to the federal poverty level to determine if those leaving welfare were able to work their way out of poverty.

The team reviewed state income data for over 65,000 former welfare recipients who joined the workforce between 1997 and 1998.<sup>83</sup> The findings showed that most of these individuals did not earn incomes above the Federal poverty level (\$2,103 per quarter) once they left welfare.<sup>84</sup> This finding was fairly consistent across counties regardless of whether they were urban, rural, or suburban communities. The finding was also consistent across races—the majority of most ethnic and racial population groups in each county region studied did not earn living wages. Moreover, in the quarter beginning in January 1998, the team showed that Black welfare leavers earned, on average, less than they would have earned had they been receiving welfare benefits.<sup>85</sup>

The SPP team did witness disparities in earnings, however, Hispanics were consistently found to be the highest wage earners, followed by whites, then blacks. This finding was repeated in most counties, even regions in Northern and Central Florida where community networks among the Hispanic population might not have been as well organized as in the Southern part of the state.<sup>86</sup> The team reviewed income data earned one year after former welfare clients left the rolls during the first quarter of 1998. They found that on average Hispanics earned more than both blacks and whites—blacks earned a little over 75 percent of Hispanics earning and whites earned slightly more than 80 percent of the average income earned by Hispanics—differences that were statistically significant. When the team conducted income calculations in each of the 24 county regions (from the second quarter of 1997 to the second quarter of 1998), 16 county regions showed Hispanic welfare leavers earning more than either blacks or whites.<sup>87</sup> Of the 8 county regions where this result did not obtain, 7 did not have populations of Hispanic welfare leavers significant enough for statistical evaluation. First Coast County was the only region whose Hispanic population earned less than their white or black counterparts. In this region, Hispanics earned 97 percent of blacks' earnings and 90 percent of white earnings.<sup>88</sup> However, in order to understand why these disparities exist, additional data is necessary.

In one study conducted at the Florida International University on welfare leavers, 53 percent of whites, compared to 32 percent of blacks, reported leaving welfare to take

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<sup>83</sup> The SPP Team used data from the Florida Education and Training Placement Information Program that collects state data on WAGES recipients.

<sup>84</sup> However, the federal monthly poverty level for a family of three was \$1220 at the time. Many individuals with families therefore fell far short of this income level. Correspondence from Robert Beneckson, Florida International University. June 20, 2001.

<sup>85</sup> According to Rob Beneckson, member of the FL Scholar Practitioner team, the maximum benefit level for a family of three was \$303 and the maximum Food Stamp benefit was \$345. Even without added benefits including Medicaid, utility and transportation assistance, and housing subsidies, this income total (\$1944) is still higher than the average income of Black wage earners who left welfare for work. With benefits, the total income on welfare is significantly higher than the mean income off welfare. Correspondence from Robert Beneckson, Florida International University. June 20, 2001.

<sup>86</sup> This information was derived from an interview on June 7, 2001, with Robert Beneckson, Scholar Practitioner for Florida.

<sup>87</sup> The state of Florida separates organizes its 67 counties into 24 regions when reporting data.

<sup>88</sup> Dunn *et al.* "Mean Income by Ethnic Group from 2/97 – 2/98." *Op. Cit.*

a job.<sup>89</sup> If former recipients were sanctioned off welfare versus leaving welfare to accept employment, they might have different wage-earning experiences. This could lead to racial and ethnic disparities. For example, if blacks left the rolls because they were sanctioned, they might find it harder to secure employment and therefore have lower wages than Hispanics who left welfare to work at a job. Since most leavers in the Florida study did not earn salaries that could move them out of poverty, therefore, many still might have been eligible for benefits and subsidies such as Medicaid, Food Stamps, WIC, and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). If racial disparities existed in which groups continued to receive these benefits, this could influence disparities in income.

Finally, economic disparities may be impacted by the length of time spent on welfare, since research has shown that welfare recipients often cycle on and off the rolls.<sup>90</sup> Those who have remained on welfare for long time periods may face substantial challenges in securing employment. In the welfare leavers study conducted at the Florida International University, researchers found that the greatest disparities between blacks and whites in length of time on welfare was among those who had spent four years or more on the rolls. Only 25 percent of the white participants surveyed had been on welfare for four years or more before leaving the rolls, compared to 39 percent of the black population. As welfare recipients now begin to face time limits, this issue becomes more critical.

While the Florida SPP researchers were limited by the information available from state data files on welfare leavers, they were able to provide basic research to engage a critical discussion of welfare policy efficacy. Whereas the Washington team chose to profile disparities on general issues across a broad range of indicators, Florida practitioners focused on disparities specific to welfare reform. Although their research serves as a preliminary inquiry into existing disparities among blacks, whites, and Hispanic populations in Florida, the findings that surfaced from their study can provide useful information to policymakers. Most important are the findings that 1) welfare leavers are not working their way out of poverty, and 2) Hispanics are earning more than their white and black counterparts once they do leave welfare. While many previously conducted research studies have shown that policymakers and welfare recipients themselves feel they are better off since welfare reforms were implemented, the Florida study provides alternative documentation that welfare leavers are unable to realize economic success.<sup>91,92</sup> The research from the Scholar Practitioner Program also

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<sup>89</sup> The Florida International University researchers interviewed 115 welfare leavers from five Florida counties in the northern part of the state. The sample population had all been on and left welfare between October 1996 and December 1998. Clarke, L. L., Jarmon, B., Langley, M. (1999) "People Who Have Left WAGES," *Qualitative Study of WAGES*. Miami: Florida International University Welfare Reform Collaborative. [<http://ssw.fsu.edu/welfare/index.html>]

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.* p. 122.

<sup>91</sup> The Manpower Research Demonstration Corporation reported that "there was little evidence of additional hardship resulting from time-limited welfare," in the study they conducted in Escambia County, Florida. They also noted that in Miami, recipients could receive extensions on their WAGES grants once they reached the time limit. Berline, G. and Michalopoulos, C. (2000) *The Impact of Welfare-to-Work Programs by Race, Ethnicity and Other Subgroups*. Washington, DC: Manpower Research Demonstration Corporation. p. 5-2. However, the Florida study showed that most welfare leavers in Florida were unable to move out of poverty and therefore did face hardships. There is no documentation in the Florida SPP report as to why the population they studied left the welfare rolls or whether the existence of time limits motivated their behavior. However, the fact that they were not better off financially

raises concern about what will happen to welfare leavers when time limits preclude them from using welfare as a safety net—especially when they are unable to earn incomes to successfully sustain themselves.

### **Implications for the State DI Activities**

The state mobilization team in Florida is comprised of two partners: the Communication Health Action Information Network (CHAIN—for which the Human Services Coalition of Dade County/CHAIN is the lead organization)—and Making WAGES Work (MWW), an initiative based at the Center for Governmental Responsibility at the University of Florida, Levin College of Law. The Florida SPP has been working with both CHAIN (an expansive coalition led by a Families USA Affiliate) and Making WAGES Work (a CDF affiliate) to involve and inform Florida communities about welfare reform.<sup>93</sup>

The Florida Scholar Practitioner Team has compiled research for CHAIN and has provided technical support to MWW. The SPP team has also helped CHAIN design strategies for conveying welfare messages and research to large audiences, including state legislators. The Florida SPP Team, headed by Dr. Marvin Dunn, has shared its expertise with CHAIN organizers in recruiting local residents for a community monitoring initiative. This project seeks to examine welfare recipients' experiences related to income, childcare, transportation, and housing as they look for work.<sup>94,95</sup>

The very goal of Florida's state mobilization team is to build a coalition involving all sectors of Florida's diverse communities. The RED research conducted by the FL SPP team can therefore be a crucial resource: 1) helping communities realize the disparities that do exist in income levels for different racial and ethnic communities; 2) exploring the rationale behind the success of the Hispanic welfare leavers in garnering higher incomes; 3) increasing awareness about the low wages earned by welfare leavers across races; 4) translating data findings to educate legislators about welfare policy impact and 5) targeting outreach efforts to particular minority populations.<sup>96</sup> The SPP team members also established a web page for the exchange of information to different target audiences.<sup>97</sup> As a result of SPP team contributions, CHAIN is better poised to inform policymakers about RED and to pursue the questions raised by the Scholar Practitioners' research with the communities affected.

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underlines the need for additional research to examine these factors and reassessment of the welfare policy that promotes getting any job over getting out of poverty.

<sup>92</sup> Clarke et al. *Op. Cit.*

<sup>93</sup> W.K. Kellogg Foundation. (2001) *Devolution Dialogue*. 5(11) p. 1.

[<http://www.wkkf.org/documents/devolution/newsletter/00feb.asp>]

<sup>94</sup> W.K. Kellogg Foundation. (2000) *Devolution Dialogue*. 4(7) p. 1.

[<http://www.wkkf.org/documents/devolution/newsletter/00july.asp>]

<sup>95</sup> W.K. Kellogg Foundation. (2000) *Devolution Dialogue*. 4(8) p. 1.

[<http://www.wkkf.org/documents/devolution/newsletter/00aug.asp>] 4(8)]

<sup>96</sup> The FL SPP team has already begun to evaluate how the Haitian community is accessing TANF support services. Walters, R. (2001) *Report of the Scholar Practitioner Program, Second Year Operation: May 1, 2000 – April 30, 2001*. College Park, MD: African American Leadership Institute, University of Maryland. p. 20.

<sup>97</sup> See <http://www.fla-spp.com/about.htm>.

## Wisconsin

The Wisconsin report on disparities covers many of the issues addressed completed by the previous three teams. It reports data on a broad array of status indicators (similar to the Washington summary), focuses on specific welfare populations as did the Florida report, and embeds its research in a contextual framework akin to the work prepared by the New York team.

The first phase of Wisconsin's SPP project includes a contextual assessment of the "Status of African Americans in Milwaukee," (1975-1995). This segment of the total report profiles the social and economic plight of a target minority group to document the existing status disparities that exist in one community.<sup>98</sup> Dr. Michael Bonds of the WI SPP, reviewed numerous indicators to assess the social condition of African Americans in Milwaukee across a 20-year span. He looked at socioeconomic status, employment, housing, entrepreneurship, and family structure. His findings reveal severe racism and racial disparities that have stymied the economic growth and success of the African American community.

Bonds' research depicts a dispossessed community that has fallen victim to negative social phenomena while benefiting little from the positive ones. Milwaukee's African Americans fared poorly during economic recessions and were largely excluded during economic revitalization. In the period between 1975 and 1995, Milwaukee remained one of the nation's poorest cities.<sup>99</sup> Over time, as the economic condition stagnated there, the poor African American population proliferated. In fact, as the city experienced an overall decrease in population size, it witnessed a 55 percent increase in its African American population. And many of these new residents were not economically solvent. Bonds cited a study that identified Milwaukee as one of the top ten centers in the country for poor African Americans.<sup>100</sup> Moreover, according to Bonds, between 1980 and 1990 the city had more African Americans living in poverty census tracts than ever before and the percentage of African Americans in this situation doubled over the course of the decade. Over this time period, as in the country in general, the divide between poor and wealthier families in Milwaukee increased significantly.<sup>101</sup> More African Americans turned to AFDC and General Assistance during this period, as well. The welfare roles grew by more than 30 percent and African Americans fueled this growth in large part. By 1994, when the city's General Assistance program was terminated, African Americans were the population most greatly affected. In fact, Bond cites the statistic that "over 80 percent of those males affected by the elimination of the General Assistance program were African Americans."<sup>102</sup>

Unemployment often precedes poverty; likewise, African Americans in Milwaukee experienced a notable rise in unemployment in the time period studied by Bonds. In the 1970s the rates for African American men and women were 8.3% and 8.2%, respectively. However, when the city government chose to work with business interests

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<sup>98</sup> This segment included in the Wisconsin report represents a chapter extracted from Dr. Michael Bond's book, *Plight of African Americans in Milwaukee*. Battle, S. et al. (2000) *Racial and Ethnic Disparity Study—Wisconsin*. Milwaukee, WI: University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 59-60.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.* p. 63.

<sup>101</sup> Children comprised the largest percentage of poor African Americans, however, and over 60 percent lived in poverty. *Ibid.* pp. 59-61.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 61-62.

to revitalize Milwaukee's Central Business District (CBD), African Americans did not benefit. In fact, unemployment rates escalated from 13.9% to 25.9% between 1980 and 1986. By 1990, the unemployment rate for African Americans had reached over 25 percent which was five times the rate for whites.<sup>103</sup> During this same period, unemployment rose for whites as well, but only from 3.5% to less than 5 percent, but Whites received 88 percent of the jobs that emerged from the CBD development.

Without money or the chance of earning it, many African Americans in Milwaukee were unable to afford housing. Those who were able to afford it were often diverted to less desirable offerings or hindered from owning property all together. As a result, Milwaukee has become "one of the most racially segregated areas in the nation."<sup>104</sup> According to Bonds, one of the few options for addressing this issue—having African Americans move into white neighborhoods proved difficult. Bonds found studies documenting discriminatory practices by real estate brokers and insurance companies in Milwaukee. These practices included directing African Americans towards segregated areas and denying them mortgages and mortgage insurance. Estimates of loss to the African American community reach almost \$2 billion in unrealized assets.<sup>105</sup>

Home mortgages were not the only loans denied African Americans—they faced discrimination by financial institutions across the board. Bonds notes that "between 1983-1988, African Americans were rejected for loans 24.2% of the time compared to 6.2% for Caucasians."<sup>106</sup> As a result, by 1994, Milwaukee experienced the greatest disparities in loan rejections in the country. African Americans were denied loans at a high rate despite their income—even those earning more than \$55,000 were more than nine times as likely to have their loan applications denied.

Finally, Bonds examined family marital status and family composition of African American and Caucasian families. He found that more than half of the African American community resided in female-headed households in 1980, whereas less than one third of the Hispanic population did. Only 16.4% of Caucasians lived in female headed households. By 1990 the rate had increased to two-thirds for African Americans.<sup>107</sup>

The Wisconsin team conducted original research to track disparities in welfare in the state by conducting a survey of 100 African Americans, Caucasians, Hispanics, Native Americans, and others, aged 21-65 years old who are current or former TANF recipients. The survey investigated recipients' experience within and without of W-2 (Wisconsin's welfare program, "Wisconsin Works"). The questions mirror the subject areas laid out in Table 1 in querying respondents on racial/ethnic background, socioeconomic status, health insurance employment, education, and family size.<sup>108</sup> The survey also includes specific questions for determining program disparities. The SPP Team designed the survey in three parts: 1) Experience with Employers, 2) Experience with W-2 Agencies, and 3) Demographics and Background Questions.

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<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.* p. 64.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.* p. 64.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.* p. 67.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.* p. 67.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.* p. 74.

<sup>108</sup> The survey did not include questions related to housing, entrepreneurship, incarceration, or language. The survey was designed for English speakers.

The demographic profile of W-2 survey sample respondents reveal that with respect to race and ethnicity, they are predominantly Hispanic (31.4%), followed by whites (28.4%), Blacks (22.5), Asian-Americans (13.7%) and others, with the majority in the age cohort of 18-35 (63.7%). The respondents was typically largely female (79.4%) , with a strong cohort of “never married” (58.8%) predominating and with only 14.7% divorced. Most had some high school (50%) , but only 29.4% were graduates, including 11.8% with the GED. A significant proportion of this group had college experience (12.7%) with 3.9% of this group being college graduates. Most of these families had 1-2 children (58.8%), while only 19.6% had 3-4 children in the household and only 6.9% with five or more. Income was also typically low at less than \$15,000 for 70.6% of respondents, with welfare comprising 47% of total income and either full or part-time jobs 11.8%. Social Security (SSI) income constituted only 4.8% and “other income” contributed 21.6%, 12.7% reporting no income.

With respect to RED findings:

- employers required a pre-employment test of 36.4% of Blacks and 30% of Hispanics, but only 14.3% of whites and 7.1% of Asians;
- few respondents overall were given tests related to job performance or basic aptitude, with Blacks and Asians being given more (17.4 and 14.3), but whites and Hispanics being given fewer (7.7 and 6.3);
- Caseworkers were least helpful to Blacks (30.4%), but more helpful to Whites (41.4%), Hispanics (40.6%), Asians (50%) and others (50%);
- W-2 Agencies were least helpful to blacks in providing job readiness skill training (69.6%), and more helpful to Whites (82.1%), Hispanics (92.9%) and Asians (100%);
- W-2 agencies were least likely to provide Basic academic skills, enrichment Or tutoring services to blacks (34.8%), but more likely to do so with whites (60.7%), Hispanics 57.1%) and Asians (100%);
- A larger percentage of blacks have had their food stamp benefits reduced or Cut (56.5%) than whites (37.9%), Hispanics (40%) or Asians (7.1%);
- A larger proportion of blacks (36.4%) must pay for medical services than Whites (21.4%), Hispanics (19.4%) or Asians (14.3%).

The third and final segment of the WI SPP research focused on disparities experienced in the Hmong community. Dr. Stanley Battle and Dr. Rai Kalyani used data from a study developed at the Institute for Wisconsin’s Future to report the demographics and welfare experiences of Wisconsin’s Hmong population.<sup>109</sup> They noted the challenges faced by Hmong families, such as having to learn a new language, accept cultural changes, and develop new skills—all of which make securing jobs difficult.

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<sup>109</sup> This study, conducted by Thomas Moore and Vicky Selkove in conjunction with the Milwaukee Hmong/American Friendship Association, examines Hmong communities’ involvement with W-2. It is based on interviews of 137 Hmong respondents representing “a convenience sample of approximately 50 percent of the total statewide Hmong population receiving aid.” Battle, S.F. (2000) “Racial Disparity in Wisconsin: The Wisconsin Experience,” *Racial and Ethnic Disparity Study—Wisconsin*. Milwaukee, WI: University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. p. 5.

The research study included interviews of 137 Hmong recipients. The demographics of this group are as follows:

- Most (more than 90 percent) of the population is over 30 years old
- 80 percent are married
- The majority have five or more children and 18 percent have eight or more children
- Many are political refugees

Battle and Kalyani summarized the barriers the Hmong face in finding work. Literacy is a major stumbling block as is language proficiency: close to three quarters cannot read Hmong and more than 90 percent cannot read English; 20 percent require training in English as a second language.<sup>110</sup> The Hmong also report lacking prerequisite job skills needed for the labor market. Close to half of the respondents cited this as their main barrier to working and almost all of them felt they lacked the skills outlined in the listing of W-2's areas of employment.<sup>111</sup>

Welfare agencies are not addressing the work barriers that Hmong adults face. In fact, the jobs where respondents were placed for work assignments provided little or no skill development. Moreover, few received specialized training or literacy assistance. Many could not effectively communicate with their own caseworkers and few (less than 20 percent) had the opportunity to connect with one who spoke Hmong. Understandably, fewer than half expressed positive sentiments towards their caseworkers' handling of their cases.

W-2 policies also penalize these recipients for having large families. Whereas under AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children), the grant would increase with family size, W-2 pays one flat rate for those who take work assignments (\$673) and another for those who are receiving benefits before transitioning into the work force (\$628). Both of these amounts fall short of the poverty level.<sup>112</sup> Most respondents in the study had more than five children and would have received at least \$709—still considerably less than the \$1,621 they would need to reach the poverty level, but still more than they receive under W-2.

Hmong families appeared to be worse off under W-2 than they were under AFDC in meeting their families needs. Beyond citing the income shortfall, Battle reports that one third of the respondents in the study admitted to not having enough food to feed their families at some point within six months prior to the survey. Most agreed that they could not clothe their families adequately.

### **Implications for State DI Activities**

The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF) serves as the sole lead organization for the WKKF DI mobilization effort in Wisconsin. As a child advocacy organization, the Council champions the cause of children across the state to secure for them needed health, education, and social services. As a matter of course, WCCF reviews welfare and health care policy and works with local communities to ensure that

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<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.* p. 5.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.* p. 6.

these policies are responsive to their needs. They provide reliable policy information, as well as training in strategic planning and advocacy.

In January of 2001, WCCF published and presented testimony on a report on the state's overhaul of the child welfare system in Milwaukee. The organization utilized resources from the WKKF DI, as well, to investigate and report on income disparities and achieving self-sufficiency.<sup>113</sup> Therefore, the subsequent research of the SPP team on status disparities that involve income could be utilized in such presentations to develop an accurate profile of low-income families in the state for policy makers.

In addition, given the prominence of Wisconsin in welfare research, the emerging picture of significant program disparities which finds that African Americans are often accorded less attention in such vital areas as employment preparation and experience more negative relationships with caseworkers in the administration of TANF should invite more investigation from researchers as causes for the relative lack of work performance by minority low income families.

The Wisconsin Scholar Practitioner team has also worked with the WCCF to train African American, Latino, and Hmong community leaders in the Milwaukee area in leadership, computer operations, and strategic planning. The team also designed a survey to assess welfare leavers' experiences. The RED data will serve the state mobilization effort well, particularly the timely research Dr. Stanley Battle and Dr. Rai Kalyani are conducting on the Hmong population in Wisconsin, since WCCF has already initiated outreach activities with the Hmong community in the Green Bay area. WCCF is also targeting the Latino community in Green Bay. WCCF can take advantage of the research to build a strategy for involving this community in the policy process.<sup>114</sup>

## Mississippi

Mississippi Scholar Practitioners conducted a state-wide survey of low-income families and together with the John C. Stennis Institute at Mississippi State University, compiled the findings into a report for the Mississippi Devolution Partnership. The jointly released report entitled, *Not a Way of Life*, which has received state-wide acclaim, contains important findings that have been disseminated to welfare recipients and leavers, as well as in community forums held across the state.<sup>115</sup> The research parallels the work initiated in Wisconsin in that it investigates racial disparities in welfare using client interviews. It is also somewhat similar to the Florida research in that it analyzes racial and ethnic communities across Congressional Districts however its uniqueness of its methodology resides in the use of community-based, participatory research.<sup>116, 117</sup> The RED report used client interviews to identify discrepancies in the perceived attitudes of how white and African American recipients toward their treatment by caseworkers.

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<sup>113</sup> W.K. Kellogg Foundation. (2000) *Devolution Dialogue*. 4(2) *Op. Cit.*  
[<http://www.wkkf.org/documents/devolution/newsletter/00feb.asp>]

<sup>114</sup> W.K. Kellogg Foundation. (2000) *Devolution Dialogue*. 4(7).

<sup>115</sup> Jackson State University and Mississippi State University. (2001) *Not a Way of Life: The Impact of the Implementation of TANF on Mississippi Families*.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> In the five Congressional Districts surveyed District One is predominantly white, Districts Two, Three, and Four, predominantly African American, and District Five is "racially diverse."

In the production of *Not a Way of Life*, the Mississippi team partnered with community based-organizations and researchers to apply a community-based strategy in order to collect from TANF client about their perceptions of its implementation. Surveyors comprised of representatives from nine community-based agencies and organizations queried participants across numerous indicators of satisfaction with and need for available social services. The team and their partners over-sampled the black community, achieving a cohort of over 1600 welfare leavers and recipients that was 87% black, 9% white, and 4% other races.<sup>118</sup>

The MS SPP Team researched the context within which welfare reform was implemented in Mississippi. They investigated the dichotomous racial tension that exists in the state between African Americans and whites. They also noted that Mississippi is one of the nation's poorest states in which more than one in five people (and almost one in three children) live in poverty. Moreover, poverty and race are linked together in Mississippi in that African Americans are segregated in the poorest parts of the state, while the most affluent areas are populated with whites.

Respondents underlined the need for transportation services, childcare, health care (as part of their employment package), assistance in obtaining child support, better screening for disabilities.<sup>119</sup> They also emphasized needed support for job training, housing and additional education. However, as with the Wisconsin study, the client interviews revealed limited confidence in the ability of welfare caseworkers to adequately address these needs, feeling that caseworkers were ill-equipped to assist them with support services. They also felt that caseworkers did not treat them respectfully and tried to deny them services. Nonetheless, most did not realize that there was anything that could be done to improve their situation.<sup>120</sup>

These findings were further substantiated by the RED research that demonstrated that overall, African Americans were less likely to receive support from caseworkers in accessing enabling services than their white counterparts. In their report on *Racial Disparities and Welfare Reform in Mississippi*, the Scholar Practitioner team noted that in District One, which has a majority white population, whites (as well as minorities other than African Americans) were more likely than African Americans to receive assistance finding a job, child care, transportation, training, education, child support, domestic violence and mental health counseling, and alcohol and drug treatment. They were also more likely to receive information about new rules and time limits. African Americans residing in that district were more likely to receive assistance in locating domestic violence counseling (regardless of whether it was relevant for them) and information on medical insurance or Medicaid.<sup>121</sup> The percentage of whites and African Americans who did not receive information about domestic violence counseling was almost the same. The difference in who received information about finding a job was quite remarkable: almost half of all whites received help or information to find a job, but only a little over a quarter of all African American clients did. In District Two, white respondents did not receive information and assistance as often as African Americans

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<sup>118</sup> The average age of respondents was 31 and the average size of respondent households was four. Less than 10% of the total sample had education beyond high school. *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

did. Then, only one quarter of the African American respondents reported that they had received assistance—a similar finding as in District One—while only 10 percent of whites reported being offered this kind of information.<sup>122</sup>

In District Two, the majority of whites (more than 60 percent for each of the following indicators) reported that they had not received information or assistance on childcare, transportation, training and education, alcohol and drug treatment, mental health counseling, or medical insurance and Medicaid. In this District, the percentage of African Americans who received information and assistance in securing transportation was twice that of their white counterparts.<sup>123</sup>

While data for District Three was not included in the draft report, findings from District Four suggested similar findings. In District Four (also largely African American) whites still reported receiving more information on finding a job than did African Americans. This was also the case in terms of getting assistance or information on domestic violence and mental health counseling. Both African Americans and whites reported receiving assistance on new rules and time limits to the same degree. However, with respect to help with transportation, training and education, child support, and medical insurance and Medicaid, other minorities fared better. African Americans received assistance more often with childcare, child support, and alcohol and drug treatment.<sup>124</sup>

In the fifth and final district examined—Congressional District Five—white respondents were found to be more likely than any of the other races to receive information and assistance from their caseworkers although the cohort of white respondents made up only 20 percent of all people surveyed. This finding was consistent across all eleven areas investigated,<sup>125</sup> Interestingly, this District was also described as the most racially diverse.

### **Implications for State DI Activities**

As indicated, the SPP team also used the data in connection with discussions from CDF forums and held focus groups to test community reactions to the findings.<sup>126</sup> CDF also communicated the findings to the Mississippi Governor, the state legislature, and the state's Legislative Black Caucus. In addition, CDF organized community field researchers to hold regional meetings to explain the report to laypersons across the state.<sup>127,128</sup>

The second state mobilization partner in Mississippi is MHAP, the Mississippi Health Advocacy Program, the state affiliate of Families USA. This organization built a network of seven affiliates across the state to disseminate information regarding state and national health care policy. Organizers from this group presented information at

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<sup>122</sup> Moreland-Young *et al.* *Ibid.* p. 7.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.* p. 8.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.* p. 9.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> W.K. Kellogg Foundation. (2000) *Devolution Dialogue*. 4(2) *Op. Cit.*

<sup>127</sup> W.K. Kellogg Foundation. (2000) "Children's Defense Fund Black Community Crusade for Children: Southern Regional Office," *Devolution Initiative Fact Sheet*.

[<http://www.wkkf.org/documents/devolution/factsheets/cdfbcccc.asp>]

<sup>128</sup> Walters, R. (2001) *Report of the Scholar Practitioner Program, Second Year Operation: May 1, 2000 – April 30, 2001.* *Op. Cit.* p. 19.

community forums and worked with other local organizations on media outreach and community activism.

The SPP RED research is directly relevant to MHAP projects in health care policy. Specifically, the SPP findings on minority populations' access to and experience with mental health services and alcohol and other substance abuse treatment could help MHAP focus their attention on outreach to adversely affected communities.

### **III. Gaps in RED Research**

The Scholar Practitioner Program has made a successful beginning investigating racial and ethnic disparities under devolution, both in its initial findings and by revealing substantial gaps in the currently available research on this topic. These gaps can be classified into three main categories: population focus, data availability and access, and issue content.

#### **Population Focus**

As the U.S. population continues to diversify itself racially, ethnically, and culturally, the need for a more thorough understanding of this multi-ethnic population becomes more critical. Social scientists and service providers alike face significant challenges when they attempt to account for and address the manifold considerations of diverse communities. As varied as racial and ethnic populations may be from each other, great variation exists within racial groupings. Furthermore, racial and ethnic populations in one community may speak the same language as another, but have vastly different needs and perspectives. Under the mantle of public policy, these subtleties become even harder to reconcile. When these communities have limited capacity for communicating their concerns or effecting change, there is greater probability that their interests will go unaddressed or be dismissed. This is especially important since these groups constitute such a large proportion of the poverty population in the United States as indicated by the recent demographics of the TANF program.

Given the more easily available data, the Scholar Practitioner teams have concentrated their research largely on African Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans, but there is, relatively speaking, even less research that has been conducted expressly on the experiences of Native Americans and immigrants in the new welfare reform.<sup>129</sup> Yet, both Native Americans and immigrant populations have great variation within their communities., comply with policies that distinguish them from the majority population and face considerable barriers to good health and self-sufficiency under the new policy reforms. However, profound research gaps have placed these communities at risk of remaining shut out from the dialogue on welfare and health care reform. The Scholar Practitioner Program has contributed to the Devolution Initiative's objectives to ensure that with respect to these communities, policymakers, researchers, and advocates access relevant information for making policies work effectively in meeting their needs.

While the DI research in each of the five target states has taken into account the response of immigrant communities to sweeping changes in welfare and health care,

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<sup>129</sup> The Scholar Practitioner Program secured Dr. Eddie Brown on its Board of Advisors. According to Sarah Hicks of the National Congress of American Indians, Dr. Brown is conducting the only available, "federally-funded, longitudinal" research on tribes' experiences with welfare reform. Hicks, S. (September 26, 2000) *Op. Cit.*

significant gaps remain in understanding the reactions that different immigrant communities have demonstrated in the wake of these reforms.

**Native Americans:** The Kellogg Foundation funded the National Congress of American Indians, a non-profit organization serving the needs of tribal governments, to investigate how welfare reform and devolution, in general, affect the Native American community.<sup>130</sup> NCAI has adopted a strategy that reflects the state mobilization work in the five states:

- Coalition building - NCAI researchers created networks that include non-tribal governments and links to national organizations.
- Information dissemination – NCAI compiled data and information on tribal issues related to welfare reform for distribution to interested parties.
- Outreach – NCAI spearheaded a public awareness campaign to apprise the public and policymakers about how Native Americans are challenged under welfare reform
- Training and Technical assistance – NCAI staff designed a college curriculum to facilitate tribal members' return to or entry into the workforce.<sup>131</sup>

NCAI also provided advocacy for tribes and engage in strategic planning activities.

The Scholar Practitioner Program has also received technical support and advice from this organization. Sara Hicks, NCAI Welfare Reform Program Manager, attended the September 2000 Networking Meeting in Washington and presented information on RED as a panelist with the SPP teams. Her involvement with DI and SPP researchers has provided insight into the unique and diversified experience of Native American communities facing welfare and health care reforms.

Hicks has underlined numerous concerns relating to the limited focus directed to the Native American community under devolution. Most stem from inefficiencies in data collection and the inadequacy of the data once collected and are exacerbated by inconsistencies in TANF program administration and the distinct circumstances associated with tribal governance.

Collecting welfare data is problematic in most states because once recipients leave the rolls, they are no longer tracked by government systems unless they continue to receive other social service benefits. Even then, data can be incomplete or inaccurate. In tribal communities, this problem is aggravated by several factors. For one, the numbers of Native Americans included in studies is usually insubstantial for performing statistical evaluation. In states where Native Americans reside in larger numbers, data collectors have not historically oversampled this community to ensure that they are adequately represented in their final analyses.<sup>132</sup> Secondly, there are inconsistencies in how some Native Americans identify themselves or are identified by other people. Therefore, the numbers of cases documented can often undercount the

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<sup>130</sup> WKKF and NCAI. (2000) "National Congress of American Indians," *Devolution Initiative Fact Sheet*. Battle Creek, MI: W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

[<http://www.wkkf.org/Documents/Devolution/FactSheets/Natlcongressindians.asp>]

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> Hicks, S. (September 26, 2000) Presentation at the Devolution Initiative Networking Meeting. Seattle, Washington.

number of Native Americans.<sup>133</sup> Third, data collectors do not often ask the types of questions of this community that are relevant to their unique circumstances and that would elucidate variations in responses or outcomes. According to Hicks, failing to ask whether a person lives on a reservation overlooks important information that might potentially have relevance to the data being measured.<sup>134</sup>

Variation in TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) administration also complicates matters. In some cases, tribal governments serve Native American families; in others, it is the state welfare agency that administers the cash assistance program. Because state agencies and tribes collect data differently, it becomes difficult to make comparisons or to aggregate data to gain a clear understanding of how this diverse community is responding to program change.<sup>135</sup> Furthermore, as more tribes take on the responsibility of operating TANF programs, implementation dates become more varied, making it more difficult to collect uniform data. In some cases, technical infrastructures are not fully established and hinder efficient reporting of data.<sup>136</sup> The concomitant circumstances that lead to these data deficiencies derail the Native American community from gaining a voice to inform policymakers, building coalitions together to address program inadequacies, and ultimately improving their own lives.

**Immigrants:** Likewise, immigrant communities often face many of these same barriers referred to above. Just as there is great variation across tribal communities, so, too is the variation across immigrant communities. Johns Hopkins University Researcher, Lingxin Hao found that Vietnamese, Dominican, and former Soviet immigrants were more likely to apply for welfare than other ethnic groups.<sup>137</sup> Wendy Zimmerman of the Urban Institute also agrees and notes that as more people immigrate to the U.S., the range of diversity expands.<sup>138</sup> However, as immigrants span out across the country, inhabiting once ethnically homogenous communities, the services available to the majority population are not necessarily equipped to meet their needs.<sup>139</sup> With the expansion of state jurisdiction over welfare implementation, there is greater concern that state, county, and municipal infrastructures may not be equipped to address the distinct needs of these constituencies. Also, just as the Native American community is differentiated from the majority population by a set of policy directives under sovereign jurisdiction, so, too have immigrant populations been distinguished from the citizenry by reforms in the welfare system. Under welfare reform, legal immigrants lost benefits and entitlements. With the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996, they became ineligible for food stamps and Supplemental Security Income (SSI).<sup>140</sup> Now those who immigrate to the United States (after passage of welfare

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<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> Thirty of 158 tribes have been approved to administer TANIF. *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> Hao, L. (2001) *Public Assistance and Private Support of Immigrants*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University. p. 36. [<http://www.soc.jhu.edu/People/hao/fdc4.pdf>]

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.* p. 26.

<sup>140</sup> Recent restorations now enable elderly and immigrants with disabilities to receive some SSI and food stamp benefits. Zimmerman. *Op. Cit.* p. 29.

reform) are not able to draw down Medicaid, TANF, or Child Health Insurance (CHIP) benefits for five years after residing here.<sup>141</sup>

The gaps in research on immigrant experiences under devolution are exacerbated by this new order. As federal and state welfare policies become more restrictive towards immigrants, more immigrant families are dropping off the welfare rolls. Even in cases where they remain eligible for benefits, some leave because they fear retribution such as deportation (for having accepted benefits).<sup>142</sup> Thus, when investigating what happens to immigrant leavers, researchers now face subjects with renewed fears of being reported to the INS. Therefore, the dropping number of welfare cases can not be attributed solely to work incentives and opportunities.<sup>143</sup> The need to gather information on this population remains critical as the number of ineligible immigrants increases and their inability to access services begins to affect the economy (i.e. reliance on expensive emergency room visits rather than using cheaper Medicaid services) and social order.

### **Data Availability and Access:**

Unreliable and inefficient data are not only problematic for immigrant and Native Americans populations. A key complaint of the Scholar Practitioner team (and other researchers, as well) is that states do not collect data effectively for gathering pertinent information regarding the experience of minority welfare recipients and leavers. First, the data on welfare leavers is often difficult to acquire on any race. For example, the New York SPP team reported that “there is general agreement that New York’s process for tracking welfare reform is inadequate. People are leaving the welfare rolls in record numbers, but there is little information...regarding what has happened to those individuals and families.”<sup>144</sup> A 1999 GAO (General Accounting Office) report confirms this assessment and claims that “much remains unknown about the economic status and well-being of most former welfare families nationwide.”<sup>145</sup> Moreover, only a minority of states publish comprehensive reports on welfare leavers. Those that do collect this data vary on what and whom they report. The GAO finds that “the studies [differ] in important ways, including the categories of families studied, geographic scope, the time during which families who had left welfare were tracked, and the extent to which the families for whom data were available are representative of all families in the sample.”<sup>146</sup> Moreover, out of 17 documented state reports in 1999, GAO confirmed that only seven contained data that could be extrapolated to the statewide welfare leaver

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<sup>141</sup> Zimmerman, W. and Tumlin, K.C. (1999) *Patchwork Policies: State Assistance for Immigrants under Welfare Reform*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute. [<http://newfederalism.urban.org/html/occa24.html>]

<sup>142</sup> Zimmerman noted that the Immigration Reform Act of 1996 fueled fears of deportation because of policies of reporting benefits receipt to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). Zimmerman (2000) *Op. Cit.* p. 30.

<sup>143</sup> Zimmerman reports that one California study showed over a 50% decline in immigrant applications for welfare in a two-year period following welfare reform. Zimmerman (2000) *Ibid.*.

<sup>144</sup> Mullings at al. *Op. Cit.* p. 6.

<sup>145</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office. (1999) *Welfare Reform: States' Implementation Progress and Information on Former Recipients* (Testimony, 05/27/99, GAO/T-HEHS-99-116). [<http://firwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/useftp.cgi?IPaddress=162.140.64.21&filename=he99116t.txt&directory=/diskb/wais/data/gao>]

<sup>146</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office. (1999) *Welfare Reform: Information on Former Recipients' Status*. Washington, DC: U.S. GAO. GAO/HEHS-99-48

population. However, none of the state leaver studies examined changes in family structure in order to assess if former recipients had children, got married, or got divorced.<sup>147</sup> Few states even know why welfare recipients leave the rolls unless they received sanctions.

Second, few states collect data on minority sub-populations (i.e. collecting data on people of Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Hmong, and Chinese (etc.) descent rather than just on Asian persons in aggregate). However, the cultural perspectives of these sub-groups are vastly different and can influence their participation in TANF programs and their ability to become self-sufficient. A recent study found that Puerto Rican communities residing in metropolitan areas tend to be more isolated than Mexican and Cuban communities.<sup>148</sup> The study also found that Mexicans tend to remain in low-paying jobs longer than other Hispanic populations, whereas Puerto Rican workers are more likely to transition out of low-wage positions.<sup>149</sup>

Third, there is limited infrastructure in states' data collection operations to ensure agency accountability for adhering to egalitarian practices in dispensing TANF. In other words, states do not demonstrate a capacity for internal investigation and public reporting on caseworkers to determine whether some recipients are treated differently than others. In her research on program disparities, Dr. Susan Gooden of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University conducted studies to determine whether there were differences in how caseworkers provided support to minority TANF clients as opposed to white clients. She found that Black respondents were less likely to characterize their caseworkers as helpful in informing them of potential job opportunities than their white counterparts. In addition, white respondents reported that their caseworkers encouraged them to advance their education (41% of the white clients in the sample reported this). However, not one of the Black respondents received this kind of encouragement. Gooden found similar results when she asked whether recipients had received transportation assistance from the Virginia Department of Social Services. Although most of the respondents in all race groups reported needing transportation services, close to half of the white clients affirmed that their caseworker had expressed a willingness to provide additional transportation assistance, whereas none of the Black recipients received any such provisions.<sup>150</sup> Given the expansion of states' oversight of TANF, these findings fuel concern that states and localities remain accountable only for reducing welfare roles and not for ensuring quality in service delivery to all clients. When the emphasis on state and local data collection focuses on how many recipients leave welfare rather than how many recipients leave poverty, states are less inclined to track leavers once they are off the rolls. In extreme cases, government agencies may refuse outright to collect or share this kind of information.

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<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> However, the study predicts that this distinction will change as the Mexican population continues to grow and new immigrants, seeking the culturally familiar, segregate themselves in urban ghettos. (2001) "Hispanics in a Multicultural Society," *American Becoming: Racial Trends and Their Consequences, Volume I*. National Academy Press. p. 110.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.* p. 111.

<sup>150</sup> Gooden, S.T. (1998) "All Things Not Being Equal: Differences in Caseworker Support Toward Black and White Welfare Clients," *Harvard Journal of African American Public Policy*. pp. 27 – 29.

New York Scholar Practitioners learned that New York City officials barred their own State Comptroller from accessing welfare data.<sup>151</sup>

Welfare leaver data is often difficult to obtain simply because those who leave the rolls are unwilling to subject themselves to further scrutiny once they no longer require welfare services. Researchers often must rely on small-scale studies to obtain data from recipients who are willing to share information about the post-welfare experiences.<sup>152</sup> In these cases, it might be difficult to obtain a critical representation of minority responses, even with oversampling.

These problems in data access and availability can deter researchers from investigating RED or from including analyses of RED in their studies of welfare and health care reform. With limited data and research, the dialogue on RED and its validity as a survey topic are compromised. Researchers therefore initiate discussions based on a few studies that cover a particular population in a specific region or only a few aspects of the larger issue—moving out of poverty and becoming self-sufficient. As studies are replicated, their subject matter gains credibility and additional research is funded. The difficulties associated with obtaining RED data discourages researchers who might explore broader aspects of the issue and retest hypotheses. The scholar practitioner program provides a vehicle and potential promoters, who can emphasize the importance of this research, stimulate discussion on the topic, encourage further inquiry, and hold accountable those researchers who are inclined to overlook RED issues.

#### **Issue Content:**

Clearly, given the breadth of the issue of RED in welfare and health care, numerous aspects of this research topic remain unaddressed. In their research pursuits, scholar practitioners unearthed a variety of issues facing minority welfare leavers. However, although the contributions of the five SPP teams have laid the foundation for future research, their work comprises a small subset of issues demanding further inquiry. There remain gaps in research in all areas related to moving from welfare to work and obtaining self-sufficiency, from the personal to the public.

**Mental Health:** Status disparities often arise when a community or population suffers disproportionately from various forms of exclusion and maltreatment. Little information is available, for instance, about how minority communities fare with mental health disability under welfare reform. Yet, research has demonstrated that minorities, in general, have worse health status than the majority population. Hispanics fare the worst, followed by African Americans and Native Americans.<sup>153</sup> Also, the incidence of substance abuse is greatest among low-income populations and since a high

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<sup>151</sup> Mullings *et al.* *Op. Cit.* p. 4.

<sup>152</sup> The New York Scholar Practitioners relied on studies using smaller data sets in order to enhance the data resources they had available for their RED research. They used data from the Welfare and Human Rights Project of the Urban Justice Center. Mullings *et al.* *Ibid.* p. 3.

<sup>153</sup> Thirty-three percent of low-income Hispanic adults report being in fair or poor health as compared to 23% of Blacks and 20% of Native Americans and low-income whites. Asians earning low-incomes fared the best with only 12% reporting poor health status. Staveteig, S and Wigton, A. (2000) *Racial and Ethnic Disparities: Key Findings from the National Survey of America's Families*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute. [[http://newfederalism.urban.org/html/series\\_b/b5/b5.html](http://newfederalism.urban.org/html/series_b/b5/b5.html)]

percentage of Hispanics and Blacks (as compared to whites) earn low incomes, they also tend to have high incidence rates of substance abuse.<sup>154</sup> African Americans suffer from mental health problems at a disproportionate rate, comprising 25% of the country's mental health needs while making up a little over 10% of the population. African American women are particularly vulnerable as they are at risk for discrimination, "cultural alienation, violence, and sexual exploitation."<sup>155</sup> Still, minorities are greatly underserved by the mental health services system.<sup>156</sup> However, poor mental health—especially when accompanied by other deficiencies—can be a considerable obstacle in securing or maintaining employment.<sup>157</sup> Few studies have examined this issue, though, for minorities returning to work from welfare.

**Housing:** Another under-researched issue is the relationship between poor housing and employment in terms of RED. Recent studies out of Chicago (Gantreaux Program) looked at how poor families fared when they were allowed to transition from public housing to locations that were in closer proximity to their jobs. The findings of greater family viability were confirmed.<sup>158</sup> However, in light of the vast literature on housing discrimination, there is little additional research investigating whether discrimination or segregation in housing impacts minorities adjustment to welfare reform to a greater degree than low-income whites. Beyond the issues of proximity to worksites, there are also other concerns such as viable local employment opportunities, public safety, and cost of and access to reliable and efficient transportation that can present additional barriers to finding suitable work.

**Diversion:** In terms of program disparities, issues such as diversion efforts, job training, employer relations, sanctions, and support services, while currently being investigated at policy think tanks and academic institutions, largely ignore the disparities among racial and ethnic groups. For one, inadequate research has been done to investigate how minorities might be diverted from welfare all together. States are able to offer poor families temporary cash assistance as an "applicant diversion" in order to stem the flow of entry onto the welfare rolls. In some cases, if a person accepts the diversion assistance, that person becomes ineligible to apply for welfare benefits during a specified time frame and states have great flexibility in how they apply this policy.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Johnson, R. A. and Larison, C. (1998) *Prevalence of Substance Use among Racial and Ethnic Subgroups in the United States*. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Office of Applied Studies (OAS), and the National Opinion Research Center (NORC).

[<http://www.samhsa.gov/oas/nhsda/Ethnic/Httoc.htm>]

<sup>155</sup> "Black Women and Mental Health," *Black Women's Health*. Oakland, CA: Black Women's Health.

[[http://www.blackwomenshealth.com/Mental\\_Health.htm](http://www.blackwomenshealth.com/Mental_Health.htm)]

<sup>156</sup> Chavez, N., Hyman, S. E., Arons, B.S. "Overview of Cultural Diversity and Mental Health Services," *Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General* Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services, National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Mental Health. [<http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/mentalhealth/chapter2/sec8.html>]

<sup>157</sup> Kramer, F. D. (2001) "Screening and Assessment for Physical and Mental Health Issues that Impact Recipient's Ability to Work," *Welfare Issue Notes*. 5(3). p. 1.

<sup>158</sup> Kaplan, J. (2001) "Prevention of Welfare Dependency—An Overview," *Welfare Issue Notes*. 5(1). p. 7.

<sup>159</sup> Kaplan, J. (2001) "Prevention of Welfare Dependency—An Overview," *Welfare Issue Notes*. 5(1). p. 6.

It is unclear whether there is equity in who receives this assistance and what the guidelines are for caseworker discretion. Once individuals join the welfare rolls, there may be disparities in who receives job training and how individuals are recommended for specialized courses or skill building programs. Information is largely unavailable as to whether organizations and agencies contracted by welfare offices to provide training and outplacement support to welfare recipients are equipped to address the needs of minority populations. In New York, for example, where the workfare program which has a significant proportion of minorities was implemented, it is unclear the degree to which minorities were recommended for community work details as opposed to employment and training opportunities which could raise them out of poverty.<sup>160</sup>

**Employment and Training:** Under the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, states are given support to coordinate a more tailored system of providing employment and training services to “hardly served” populations.<sup>161</sup> States are now creating and expanding partnerships between welfare agencies and employers, establishing “one-stop career centers,” and certifying employment training contractors under this Act. However, there is not much data on how this Act is serving the unique needs of minority populations. Clearly there is a need for improving relationships between welfare providers and employers, especially given the pervasive incidence of discrimination in the labor market.

Gooden surveyed welfare recipients in Virginia who were pursuing jobs in an effort to leave welfare for work. She found that whites on average reported being interviewed for jobs twice as long as blacks, whereas blacks were asked to complete pre-employment tests twice as often as whites as a condition of employment. Almost two thirds of the black respondents reported that their relationship with their supervisors was poor or below average as compared to one third of the white respondents.<sup>162</sup> Given these findings, if similar in other communities across the county, minority welfare leavers face added challenges in securing a job or advancing in that job. This pioneering research clearly should generate further investigation given the work-first focus of welfare reform.

**Child care:** Childcare is a critical support for all parents seeking jobs and subsidized childcare is an especially critical social service for many welfare parents. However, long waiting lists for insufficient slots makes the pursuit of affordable childcare a challenge for most. Again, there remain gaps in research on how minority families handle this crisis, particularly those for whom English is a second language. The largest concentration of minority families tends to be in large, urban areas where the demand for childcare is greatest and the availability of childcare is most limited.<sup>163</sup> This may be a primary contributor to racial and ethnic disparities in child care receipt. However,

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<sup>160</sup> Mullings *et al.* *Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> I use this term here rather than the more often used phrase, “hard to serve,” to change the emphasis from the client being the problem, to the agency inadequately offering services that meet clients’ needs.

<sup>162</sup> Gooden. “The Hidden Third Party.” *Op. Cit.* pp. 75-78.

<sup>163</sup> Recent research calculates that “29% of whites, 68% of blacks, and 60% of Hispanics live in inner cities.” Center for Community Change. (2000) “Racial Disparities in Welfare Reform,” *Organizing*. Issue 18. [<http://www.communitychange.org/organizing/18racism.asp>]

there are a number of other factors that may influence RED. Some cultures may reject the idea of caregivers external to the family assuming responsibility for childcare and may not pursue formal childcare arrangements. Others may face language barriers. In other cases, available and affordable care may not be located near the job or home of the parent. If availability of childcare is a major concern, then availability of childcare for children with special needs poses an even greater concern. Parents of children with disabilities, learning or behavior problems may find it almost impossible to locate responsible and appropriately trained providers to meet these needs.<sup>164</sup> Minority parents may have a higher incidence of children with these special needs given the fact that minority adults and children are at greater risk of being in poor health. All of these issues may be particularly challenging for minority welfare recipients and leavers.

**Sanctions:** Most of the discussion so far has focused on supports for those who “voluntarily” leave or avoid welfare. However, many people leave welfare either permanently or temporarily as a result of sanctions. The concern is that minority families may be sanctioned at a higher rate than white families. Already, research on the TANF population in Chicago has shown that white families tend to leave welfare for work whereas their minority counterparts may be leaving because of sanctions.<sup>165</sup> In a three-month period in 1997, just following the nationwide implementation of welfare reform, 38% of welfare leavers left as a result of sanctions.<sup>166</sup> While this rate may slow, there may be cause to suspect RED in sanction rates.

Under the PRWOA of 1996, states are required to respond to families who do not comply with work and child support directives with sanctions that can either reduce or cancel their TANF grants.<sup>167</sup> Grants may be reduced to sanction one member of a household or the entire household altogether. States can also sanction recipients for different lengths of time. However, with state flexibility in how they carry out sanctions, there is cause for concern that states are not applying sanctions uniformly, not notifying recipients responsibly, and not documenting the process or evaluating their usage.<sup>168</sup> Welfare recipients can be sanctioned for a number of reasons including but not limited to failure to comply with work requirements, failure to ensure that minor children attend school, or failure to immunize their children. Unfortunately, those people who receive sanctions are also less likely to find gainful employment, yet some welfare caseworkers feel that sanctions are motivators to encourage compliance with welfare program mandates.<sup>169</sup>

Nevertheless, there is comparatively little research that investigates how families of color fare under sanctions and how sanctions affect their ability to find and keep jobs.

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<sup>164</sup> Ganow, M. (2000) “Child Care Subsidies: Strategies to Provide Outreach of Eligible Families. *Welfare Issue Notes*. 4(10). p.2.

<sup>165</sup> Center for Community Change. *Op. Cit.*

<sup>166</sup> Vobejda, B. and Havemann, J. (March 23, 1998) “Sanctions Fuel Drop in Welfare Rolls,” *The Washington Post* p. A01 [<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/special/welfare/stories/wf032398.htm>]

<sup>167</sup> Welfare Information Network. (2000) *Sanctions*. Washington, DC: Welfare Information Network. [<http://www.welfareinfo.org/sanction.htm>]

<sup>168</sup> Kaplan, J.(1999) “The Use of Sanctions under TANF,” *Issue Notes*. Welfare Information Network. 3(3). [[http://www.welfareinfo.org/sanctionissue\\_notes.htm](http://www.welfareinfo.org/sanctionissue_notes.htm)].

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

Yet, while there has been much note made of the significant declines in welfare case loads, Robert Rector and Sarah Youssef found that part of the reason for such rapid declines in state case loads is the sanctions and diversion programs in use by many states.<sup>170</sup> In any case, research by Soss, Schram, Vartanian and O'Brien found strong positive correlations between states with harsh "full-check" sanctions, such as strong sanctions, time limits less than 60 months, or a family cap, with those having the highest percentage of blacks on the welfare rolls.<sup>171</sup> In fact, Schram says:

African American families on welfare were more likely to have to endure a more aggressive get-tough regime. Race not only affected the probability whether a state would adopt stricter welfare reforms, stricter welfare reforms were more likely to affect families based on their race. Where African American single mothers predominated on the rolls, the chances were much higher that the state would pursue an aggressive approach to choosing stricter get-tough policy options.<sup>172</sup>

Thus, it appears that African American in particular may have suffered most from the "get-tough" attitudes accompanying the administration of TANF through various policies to enforce work requirements.

#### **IV. Recommendations for Enhancing RED Research**

Given the limited availability of data and research studies on RED, policy analysts and researchers must still respond to the concerns arising from these disparities. Several strategies are possible:

- Pool available research. Scholar practitioners in New York were successful in using multiple data sources to obtain information on RED. Even though some studies used small data sets, there was adequate information to make inferences and raise questions for further investigation and to substantiate findings from larger studies.
- Research contextual information regarding status disparities on which there is a lot more available national data. Information such as geographic representation, income levels, public housing applications, and health disparities is available and can provide the basis for further inquiry. For example, when targeting a particular racial or ethnic population in a given area, investigating retrievable aggregate data such as transition from public housing (i.e. what was the turn-around rate for people in public housing and what was the percentage of minority occupancy), employment rates for the region, local data on intake at shelters and food pantries can provide insight into what happened to leavers within a community.
- Use proxies for missing data. In some cases where data on certain indicators is unavailable, it may be possible to consider associated subjects as proxies. For

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<sup>170</sup> Robert E. Rector and Sarah E. Youssef, "The Determinants of Welfare Caseload Decline," Report No. 99-04 (The Heritage Center for Data Analysis, Heritage Foundation, 1999.)

<sup>171</sup> Joe Soss, Sanford Schram, Thomas P. Vartanian, and Erin O'Brien, "Setting the Terms of Relief: Explaining State Policy Choices in the Devolution Revolution," *American Journal of Political Science*, 45, 2 (April 2001); 392.

<sup>172</sup> Sanford F. Schram, "Race and State Welfare Reform Choices: A Cause For Concern," Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research, Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania, 2000, unpublished, p. 16.

example, if racial and ethnic breakdowns for child care receipt is unavailable; it might be useful to look at minority employment rates. It is more likely that those parents who are fully employed are obtaining some form of childcare versus those who are not. For example, if in a racially diverse community with equal numbers of blacks and whites 50% of the black population is unemployed or underemployed compared to 25% of whites, it is likely that there will also be disparities in child care usage.

- Work with state agencies and policymakers to improve data collection practices. The Scholar practitioners can be a forceful voice to organize support for the improvement of data collection at the state and local levels. The Kellogg DI promotes information dissemination as a useful policy tool. Given the right coalitions and timing, the SPs and other researchers can be useful advocates for increased funding and more accurate accountability in welfare research.
- Create a clearinghouse and database for available research at the state and local levels. As more research becomes available on RED there needs to be a central location for disseminating findings. The Scholar Practitioner Program might be a viable option for housing this type of clearinghouse and establishing a database for useful cataloguing of emerging research and instruments for evaluating and tracking RED. There also needs to be a central locale or forum for training researchers in how to conduct RED research and how to communicate with minority populations.

#### **V. Conclusion: Implications for Future Policy Change**

The SPP embarked on groundbreaking work to investigate issues of racial and ethnic disparities in welfare and health care reform. In order for sweeping change to occur in the process of documenting and evaluating how minorities face the challenges of these reforms, it is necessary to involve a host of change agents including other researchers and policy analysts, government agencies and policymakers at the Federal, state, and local levels, community-based social service providers, and the public. If these communities of interests in this subject are successfully mobilized, there are at least two primary areas of focus that emerge from this initial research on the subject that have implications for the future improvement in the ability of low income families to be treated fairly in their attempt to achieve economic and social viability. The first implication is for those concerned with civil rights and the second relates to the perfection of public policy in the reauthorization process.

**Civil Rights:** Research on race and ethnic disparities helps to provide a factual foundation for activities being employed to counteract disparities. However, even based on cursory evidence, at the Federal level, the Department of Health and Human Services' Office for Civil Rights has reissued guidance stemming from the 1964 Civil Rights Act which prohibits the exclusion of individuals (including denial of benefits and other discriminatory practices) from federally assisted programs on the basis of race, color, or national origin.<sup>173</sup> This federal policy enhances the language on discrimination on the basis of national origin to protect those who do not speak English as their first language. Also, additional guidance on this Act maintains that both public and private

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<sup>173</sup> Office for Civil Rights, Department of Health and Human Services., "Policy Guidance on the Title VI Prohibition Against National Origin Discrimination As It Affects Persons With Limited English Proficiency," *Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964*, 45 C.F.R. Part 80. [<http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/lep/guidancecover.htm>]

employers “that administer, operate or participate in employment programs under TANF (even if these entities do not receive Federal assistance)” refrain from discrimination in employment.<sup>174</sup> The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) guidance also pertains to provisions of the welfare reform act of 1996 (PRWORA) and mandates that states adhere to nondiscriminatory practices even as they further regulate and deny benefits to immigrant populations. Moreover the federal regulations clearly state that “programs **may not exclude or deny welfare benefits** to persons based on their race, color, national origin, disability, or age, or on the basis of sex in education programs.”<sup>175</sup> The following examples are lifted directly from the guidance:

- “Welfare caseworkers may not reject an applicant for benefits because he is or appears to be an African-American, Hispanic, Asian, American Indian, Alaskan Native, or a member of another racial or ethnic minority.”
- “County employees may not make an assumption regarding a person’s citizenship and/or eligibility for welfare or food stamp benefits based on the person’s last name and then reject the applicant on this basis.”
- “A TANF contractor’s employees may not deny benefits to persons who are not fluent in English because they assume persons who are or appear to be from other countries, and are not English proficient, are not eligible for such benefits.”<sup>176</sup>

The guidance also distinctly prevents welfare agencies from making welfare determinations different for one race over another. Local agencies are prohibited from requiring additional documentation from certain individuals over others. It also prevents caseworkers from reporting potentially illegal aliens to the INS and mandates that welfare offices translate materials in communities of high concentrations of non-English speaking people.<sup>177</sup>

There are also laws in place to protect minorities from discrimination in employment that are upheld by the Office of Civil Rights. These laws clearly “prohibit discrimination in all aspects of the employment process: hiring and discharge, compensation, assignments, and all other terms, conditions, and privileges of employment.”<sup>178</sup> These laws and the guidance from the Department of Health and Human Services provides a legal framework in which individual welfare recipients can find recourse for discriminatory practices that lead to RED. The Office of Civil Rights has referred to Gooden’s research and has heard complaints filed against local welfare

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<sup>174</sup> Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Civil Rights. (1999) “Civil Rights Laws and Welfare Reform - An Overview.” [ <http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/overview2.htm> ]

<sup>175</sup> Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Civil Rights. *Welfare Reform TA*. [ <http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/ta3.htm> ]

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Civil Rights “How Are the Nondiscrimination Laws Enforced?” *Technical Assistance for Caseworkers on Civil Rights Laws and Welfare Reform*. [ <http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/ta6.htm> ]

agencies for failure to adhere to the guidelines mentioned above.<sup>179</sup> Clearly RED research can inform policy implementation.

**Public Policy:** RED can also inform policy development. As Congress prepares to debate on Reauthorization of PRWORA, there is much that SPs can do to inform this legislative discussion. There are several important questions that RED research helps to raise:

- How can RED research inform how TANF funds should be reallocated to move people out of and keep people from poverty?
- What types of provisions for data collection and management should be legislated?
- Who should be given responsibility at the state level of TANF administration to protect minority communities from discrimination and what safeguards can be incorporated in the Reauthorization language to achieve this?
- How can research on the disparate treatment of Native Americans under TANF support tribal governments' claims for enhancing their sovereignty and continuing to receive appropriate forms of state support?

In working to inform the national welfare agenda, these and other questions on the status of racial and ethnic populations in the wake of welfare reforms are appropriate to raise with the relevant federal, state and local officials. Moreover, given the fact that those states with the most punitive welfare policies also have the highest concentrations of minorities underlines the gravity of understanding the full implications of RED in practice.

While each SPP Team is pursued a different area of research in connection with their state mobilization grantees, together they offer lessons of scholarship and policy practice. Several key contributions are evident from their DI experience and from their RED research.

Since instituting the Scholar Practitioner Program (SPP) in 1999, the Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) has funded the SPP to not only conduct research relevant to devolution, but to become involved in the policy process by bridging academics with activism. The Scholar Practitioner teams have not only collected data in isolation; rather they have worked in tandem with both national and state Devolution Initiative (DI) grantees to translate research findings for dissemination at the local level. Their partnership with policy analysts, community advocates, and other scholars has created a synergy that has fueled the formation of new strategies for implementing federal and state policies and engaging low-income communities and communities of color to ensure successful implementation of these policies.

Beyond informing national and state level activities, the SPP's RED work also has immediate agency for helping localities to become more aware and sensitive to the needs of its racial and ethnic populations. Furthermore, this work can instruct other researchers of welfare and health care reform to appropriately design studies to capture the nuances of racism and uncover disparities in policy implementation.

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<sup>179</sup> Mullings *et al.* *Op. Cit.* p. 11.

The compilation of research submitted by the Scholar Practitioner Teams in the five states examined under the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's (WKKF) Devolution Initiative (DI) collectively informs not only future research on racial and ethnic disparities, but welfare policy, as well. The theoretical questions posed by their research and the methodologies they used to conduct it can foment and advance the growing knowledge base on what contributes to the great disparity in economic success between racial and ethnic minorities and whites in this country.

Furthermore, as legislators prepare to reauthorize federal welfare policy, the SPP team's research can also inform the debate on whether welfare reform has been effective in moving recipients into the workforce, particularly with respect to the minority population. Finally, as emerging scholars and experts in their fields (ranging from public policy to psychology to anthropology), they can pave the way for the next generation of academics and practitioners to investigate persisting inequities across the racial divide.