WELFARE IN THE AREA OF PRESTONSBURG

by

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Modern Social Problems

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This paper will deal with how the people of Prestonsburg feel about the above. There is no thesis statement as such. The paper is simply the result of about twenty interviews with people and it is a result of what these people have to say about welfare — their gripes and complaints, of which there are many — and then possible suggestions for improvement or solutions, of which there are few. The reader may feel that the author comes to no valid conclusion because I really did not obtain a solution to the problem. People know it is a problem, but they simply do not know what to do about it. But it seems evident that something is going to have to be done, because I think eventually the public will rebel against paying such a substantial amount of their hard-earned money to keep up what they consider to be people who simply do not want to work.

Before starting, I will give the intended purpose of welfare, as explained by one of the interviewees Mrs. Robert Hughes: To help people through rough times until they can find a job and get back on their feet. Also, I would like to explain that there will be very few direct quotes because it is very difficult to take down interviews word-for-word. The author has however tried to portray the gist of what the people had to say. There are no footnotes because the speakers will be listed before their paraphrased interviews.

Problems or Inadequacies of the Present Program
Created by the Present Welfare System

Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Combs; retired engineer and teacher, respectively; April 3:

Mrs. Combs stated the problem as the willingness of so many people to accept government support as they feel is due them. Willingness to work and self-respect have been destroyed by this government support. Small school
children have the attitude that there is no need for an education and work because the government will give them money. These people have no respect for anything. "The more trifling they are, the dirtier their places are."

Our educational system has nurtured these people; "pride in achievement has been made null and void."

Mrs. John Dale; schoolteacher; April 17:

Welfare takes away initiative for people to do things for themselves.

Mr. Hardin Short; worker with an oil company; April 18:

The give-away program is eating away at a large portion of our people, and it takes away incentive and initiative.

Mr. Stephen Best; assistant coordinator for the state of Kentucky for Work Incentive (WIN); April 18:

WIN is designed to get people off welfare and the like, and get them working. Unless we change welfare from the idea of sufficiency, it is self-defeating and accomplishing nothing. It encourages a class of people to breed the like. (While the interviewee felt that we had to have welfare he felt that welfare created more welfare.) The present system does not provide incentive to work to get out of what put them there in the first place. Money earned is counted against welfare checks.

Mr. Best went on to say that being on welfare has become socially accepted at least in this area. In fact it has become attractive for some because they feel they are accomplishing more than or are smarter than the average person because they are getting something for nothing, whereas the workers and taxpayers have to work for what they get.

Mrs. Robert Hughes; social worker; April 18:

The structure of welfare is bad. It penalizes those who try to better themselves and show some incentive and helps those who do not. If a man is able-bodied, he should do some kind of work. You value something more if you work for it than if it is just given to you. The people on welfare can-
not get out of their ruts. It keeps them at the poverty level.

The workload of social workers is too heavy for them to give adequate attention to their clients. This does not allow room for the worker to actually do more for the family than to keep the check coming. There is no time to encourage them to put out gardens, keep in better health, etc. The caseworker has about 300 families and she is required to make a home visit once every three months, and then file a report. She is also required to spend every other day in the office available to people who may need to see her, and then to spend four days a month making and filing reports. The person interviewed cited an example of a caseworker who had this family, and the family had a retarded grandson. The caseworker did not learn of the child's presence in the home for about a year because the grandparents always had the child hidden when she came. She did not have the time to sit and talk and make observations and have the family confide in her. Mrs. Hughes says the state works on a limited budget and cannot hire more workers.

Steve Best said concerning this that he questions the need for all the reporting that is asked for. To enroll in the WIN program, he says there are seven different forms to be filled out with a total of twenty-six pages.

Dr. and Mrs. George Archer; physician and mayor; April 3:

People get penalized for trying to better themselves because welfare gets cut back. The Archers feel that people should be able to make about $4-5000 and still get welfare.

Factors that Contributed to Making Welfare a Problem

Instructor at College here; April 15:

People in the "power structure" tend to block out those "newcomers" who may try to come in and help. They do not want the boat rocked. These people coming in pose a threat to their stability and positions. The instructor felt that human nature and a lack of desire to find out what other person is trying
to do before blocking them out are causal factors for this problem.

Mr. Hardin Short:

It has been going on too long; i.e. third generation families. Welfare was readily made available after World War II. There was a boom in the coal business because factories and stockpiles were depleted. Automation came in and coal miners were thrown out of work. The people needed some sort of aid then and took advantage of it, but it has just carried over now.

Mrs. John Dale:

People were forced into accepting welfare at first because of low employment rates. It became accepted and nobody cares to be on welfare now.

Mr. Stephen Best:

Medical care is the biggest part of welfare. It is a self-sustaining cancer. The interviewee knows of doctors in some other counties who actually get some patients with medical cards addicted to drugs so they will be dependent on him. These would mainly be counties where there is just one doctor so he would profit directly from the sale of medicine.

Dr. George Archer:

One psychological factor that keeps people from working is that they are afraid of responsibility. If they were trained for jobs and found jobs, and were able to get off welfare, they would be on their own to some extent and the pressure might be too much for them.

Mrs. Robert Hughes:

Welfare has been with us for so long and some people have been on it so long, it has become accepted. If you are born in a welfare home and this is all you have known and perhaps your parents do not care for you, you tend to feel defeated before you make any attempt at rising above your situation. The money you get on welfare is not enough to get ahead. And Mrs. Hughes says that it is not true that anyone who wants to go to school can.
The kids need money for clothes, food, transportation; besides money for
tuition and books, and many times all the aids and work study grants are
already taken.

Possible Solutions or Improvements

Mrs. Robert Hughes:

There should be more education and training designed to put people in
jobs.

The government should have programs to put able-bodied men to work,
and their pay should be docked just like anyone else's if they miss a day.
They should be taught work habits and taught to learn some kind of skill,
because everyone can be taught something.

There should be a board of directors consisting of social workers,
doctors, and psychologists to determine if people should be sterilized.
Mrs. Hughes advocated sterilization before marriage and before any children
were born (whether the couple is on welfare or not) if both partners were
feeble-minded.

If a couple or a family is on welfare, it should be mandatory for them
to practice birth control until the husband can get a job and support a
family.

The people need to be educated and the caseworker needs to spend more
time with them. There should be some way of seeing that they buy the right
groceries rather than wasting it on food they do not need, and then going
hungry at the end of each month.

Some form of fixed income might eliminate some problems.

People should be able to earn above and beyond their check to a point
so that they will be doing some work and will not be penalized for it.
Dr. and Mrs. George Archer:

The people who are able but unwilling to work should be kicked off. But the Archer's advocate taking care of widows, orphans, and those unable to work. They also advocate sterilization. Mrs. Archer said that the first time is a mistake but the second is a way of life. She believes in sterilization after the second illegitimate baby and for those who are feebleminded.

They feel that giving people money is wrong. An advantage of food stamps is that they cannot be used to buy other things.

The dental program and providing clothes for the children is a step in the right direction. The "happy pappies" were also on the positive side.

Instead of paying social security, which you never get completely back because you do not live that long unless you are disabled early in life, it should be mandatory to buy stages of insurance so at least when you die, the money can be bequeathed in your will rather than having it fall to the government.

Mr. Stephen Best:

Work Incentive is partially successful. It tries to give people a marketable skill. It takes people who are not working and who are recipients of Aid to Families and Dependent Children (AFDC) and gives them training to make them employable and assists in finding jobs. It costs about $4000 for the period people are on WIN if they are helped against between $12-18000 for each person while on welfare.

Mr. Best feels there is no way to break the welfare cycle under democratic government. You would have to sacrifice one generation and concentrate on younger generation and take children out of home to get them away from the environment that possibly produced their parents.
Mr. Best feels that a better education system might contribute to a remedy. He also feels that there should be more light industry here and local people should be trained for it.

Social workers should be given a chance to do their jobs and get out and help people. Cut down on the paperwork required on each family.

Nixon's welfare reform pack Family Assistance plan is basically like WIN. Responsible family members will be required to try to advance themselves. With a lot of work and luck, there will be some success with it.

Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Combs:

There needs to be something to provide incentive to work. If a man is offered a job and able to work, he should be required to take it. Do not continue money if he refuses to work. If he has children, tell him the children will be taken away and if he loves his children and wants to keep them, he will take the job. The children would have to be put in state institutions which might lead to socialism.

Mrs. Eugene Crass (housewife; April 17) suggested putting children in homes, but then said that might be a bigger tax hardship than welfare. Mrs. Robert Hughes said the state would have to build more homes and there was not enough money to do that. She said there was already a waiting list of six hundred for the home in Frankfort.

Mr. and Mrs. Combs went on to say that some of the jobs provided might be to clean up litter, make over strip-mined areas, clean up rivers, and other conservation projects.

More should be done in the education line to make people more self-sufficient. There should be more emphasis on vocational schools on the high school and college levels. We could have possible "indoctrination" of younger kids that it is better to work for what you get than to have it
given to you and that it is nothing to be ashamed of to go to vocational school and then get a job, rather than go four years to college. We need to show young people the way in which they themselves can help themselves.

Mrs. Russell Hall; housewife; April 3:

Social and welfare workers should do better jobs. There is not enough follow-up in programs. Workers go out and interview once, but do not know enough about the people to really be able to help them knowledgeably. People should work to some degree to deserve to be on some program.

Concentrate on next generation to combat laziness so they will not expect money, etc. to be given to them.

Mr. and Mrs. Gus Kalos; music and English instructors respectively at the College here; April 17:

Eliminate assistance on the local level and let the federal government handle it. There is a minimum income a family can get a year and still remain on welfare. This should be changed somewhat to keep from discouraging people to work.

Mrs. John Dale:

Take away the vote of people on welfare, except those who are physically incapable of working. The welfare people keep the politicians in office because they keep their money coming. If we cut off their vote, we might be able to get rid of some of these politicians, and also we would have some say-so about welfare people. As it stands now, our hands are kind of tied. Politicians would not be so easy with our money if they knew we were not going to vote for them.

Sterilize women on welfare after second illegitimate baby.

There should be more education that prepares people to do something in this world. People need to be taught that decent work is better than welfare, even if it is not white-collar work.
Instructor at College here; April 15:

People in the local "power structure" should do more to alleviate "politicking" and be more interested in actually getting help for the people.

Mr. Hardin Short:

Welfare should be administered differently. There should be doctors who report on people who want welfare to see if they need it, but politics would have to be overcome for it to work.

Welfare should be administered under one program.

Take children away if parents refuse to work and make children wards of the state.

Mrs. Alva Robinson; recipient of public assistance and public support; April 22:

The interviewee said that public assistance is nice to have especially if you do not have a husband. She is divorced with six children, and appears to be in her mid-to-late twenties.

The family was burned out of their house on Middle Creek and the mission (with Mr. Frank Collopy) at David aided them in finding housing at David. When the family moved, their public assistance check did not increase even though the cost of housing at David was more than it had been at Middle Creek.

Mrs. Robinson complained that on public assistance, you are not allowed to have any income without having something cut out. She felt that you should be able to earn $10-15 extra a month and not have any money deducted from your check. She was receiving $206 a month at the time of the interview. Mrs. Robinson felt that the programs such as welfare and public assistance should not be so strict on incomes.

Contrary to what some people believe, people who receive this type of help are not all unwilling to work. Mrs. Robinson worked at the health department for awhile and then had to quit for health reasons. She also
was coming to the College with Mrs. Henry Campbell and helping with a sewing class. If I remember correctly from the interview, she was doing this without pay because part of her money would be cut off if she were paid.

Mrs. Robinson was receiving some kind of aid at the time of her marriage and she said that after she was married, her husband worked for about three months and then decided to quit and live off her check, which of course was not enough. She said her husband was brutal to her and she finally got a divorce.

Conclusion

The original purpose of welfare has been lost or abused. People on welfare who possibly honestly want to get off are kept under because there is not enough money in it to get ahead. I think social workers should be genuinely interested in helping people, and more people should be employed to handle the workload so each family can have more time with the social worker. This way she would have more of a chance to accomplish what her job is designed to accomplish. Rehabilitation and correction to living habits should be emphasized rather than just doling out money. From talking with people, these are some things that should be done; but as to exactly how to go about accomplishing these, no one seems to know the answer.

Rather than penalizing people who would work some by cutting off their checks, they should be able to work to some extent and maybe this way they could get a little ahead and possibly want to work and get off welfare. This might be an incentive to them.

Self defeat keeps a lot of people on welfare.

I believe some responsible program of birth control and sterilization should be an integral part of welfare.
Taking children away from homes would certainly cause inequities, because you are certainly bound at one time or another to take many children who do not want to leave their parents and what little security they have known. Taking children would create a generation of parentless children who had very little individual attention. We cannot measure the psychological and emotional damage it could do to them.

Appendage

While interviewing, other issues that I came across that people in Prestonsburg considered problems were: drugs, general public apathy (particularly about the town and a lack of caring on a one-to-one basis for other people), lack of facilities for the young people, lack of things for homemakers to do, poor or inadequate medical care, mental illness, the public school system, and others.