

THE SOUTHERN INSTITUTE  
on Children and Families

INFORMATION OUTREACH  
TO REDUCE WELFARE DEPENDENCY  
A Georgia Welfare Reform Initiative

Final Report

December 1996

Alabama  
Arkansas  
Delaware  
District of Columbia  
Florida  
Georgia  
Kentucky  
Louisiana  
Maryland  
Mississippi  
Missouri  
North Carolina  
Oklahoma  
South Carolina  
Tennessee  
Texas  
Virginia  
West Virginia

**INFORMATION OUTREACH  
TO REDUCE WELFARE DEPENDENCY  
*A GEORGIA WELFARE REFORM INITIATIVE***

**FINAL REPORT**

**Prepared for the**

**DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES  
DIVISION OF FAMILY AND CHILDREN SERVICES  
STATE OF GEORGIA**

**by**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Georgia Information Outreach to Reduce Welfare Dependency Project began in January 1996. The Georgia Department of Human Resources, Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS), commissioned the Southern Institute on Children and Families to conduct the project.

Phase I of the project focused on the development of three information outreach brochures for use with welfare families, community organizations and employers. Appendices to this report contain black and white copies of the brochures and results from nine focus groups where the brochures were tested.

Phase II was launched in September 1996 with three briefing sessions sponsored by state DFCS to preview the three information outreach brochures for major user groups prior to statewide dissemination. Following the state level briefings, 30 presentations on the brochures were held in 10 Georgia counties at events hosted by county DFCS offices. In December 1996, a statewide training session on the information outreach brochures was held for DFCS staff.

The information outreach brochures were extremely well received by community organizations and employers who attended the briefing sessions. County DFCS directors were enthusiastic about the brochures. Reaction from county DFCS staff was positive overall. County staff stressed the need to have enough brochures for widespread dissemination throughout the community and for internal use.

It is always a challenge to turn an effective pilot project into an effective statewide program. To greatly enhance the chances that the results attained in the project can be realized statewide, the Southern Institute recommends that state DFCS take the following actions:

- 1) Assign responsibility to a specific office to assure that counties receive the support they need to fully utilize the opportunities presented by the three information outreach brochures.
- 2) Establish state policy directing that the brochures be distributed and briefly reviewed at application and redetermination interviews.
- 3) Develop cross training opportunities with other public agencies.
- 4) Request that county DFCS offices that were not part of the project hold community briefing sessions to preview the brochures with local employers and community organizations.

## CHAPTER 1 BACKGROUND

The Georgia Information Outreach to Reduce Welfare Dependency Project began in January 1996. The Georgia Department of Human Resources, Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS), commissioned the Southern Institute on Children and Families to conduct the project based on the results of a similar project conducted by the Southern Institute in North Carolina.<sup>1</sup>

The Georgia Information Outreach to Reduce Welfare Dependency Project was conducted in two phases. Phase I was the developmental phase and Phase II was the implementation phase.

Phase I of the project was completed in August 1996. Black and white copies of the three information outreach brochures developed during Phase I are included in Appendix A. The three brochures discuss benefits available through Medicaid, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), the Georgia Low Income Credit, child care subsidies and Food Stamps. The information outreach brochures present information on complicated programs in a user friendly, colorful and eye-catching format.

Each of the three brochures is targeted for use with specific groups, as follows:

- ***Leaving Welfare for Work Isn't As Scary As It Seems*** is for use with families on welfare (cash assistance). This brochure should be reviewed with cash assistance recipients at redetermination interviews to be sure that families know that they do not have to be on welfare in order to receive benefits that can help them meet the needs of their children while working in low wage/no benefit jobs. This brochure outlines benefits available to families during the one year transitional period, as well as benefits available beyond the transitional period.

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<sup>1</sup>Sarah C. Shuptrine and Genny G. McKenzie, Information Outreach to Reduce Welfare Dependency: A North Carolina Welfare Reform Initiative, Final Report, prepared for the North Carolina Department of Human Resources (Columbia, SC: Southern Institute on Children and Families, May 1996).

- ***Have You Heard About Benefits for Working Families???*** should be reviewed with families who apply for cash assistance as part of efforts to divert families from welfare. It should also be reviewed with families who are applying for Medicaid or Food Stamps and it is appropriate for general community outreach. The information contained in this brochure can help families who are struggling to meet needs and are unaware that they can receive Medicaid and other benefits without having to be on welfare. This brochure also has a section on child support to let parents know that they do not have to be on welfare to get help in collecting child support. The brochure should be widely available to community organizations and to employers for dissemination in the workplace.
- ***Facts for Employers*** provides employers with information on how they can help low wage workers connect with benefits available to low income families with children. This brochure explains advantages to employers who hire welfare recipients and is designed to help DFCS staff build relationships with employers. It is an effective communication tool for DFCS to use in personal visits to companies and to hand out during presentations to business groups.

The Phase I report of the Georgia Information Outreach to Reduce Welfare Dependency Project includes details of nine focus group sessions used in the development of the brochures.<sup>2</sup> In cooperation with county DFCS offices, focus groups were held with recipients, community organizations and employers in Coffee, Colquitt and Richmond counties.

Appendix B provides results of the pretests administered at the focus group sessions. The responses given on the pretests clearly demonstrate the need for information outreach. Appendix C shows the statistically significant gains in knowledge for focus group participants after simply reading the information outreach brochures.

This report provides results of Phase II and presents recommendations for statewide implementation of information outreach.

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<sup>2</sup>Sarah C. Shuptrine and Genny G. McKenzie, Information Outreach to Reduce Welfare Dependency: A Georgia Welfare Reform Initiative. Phase I Report, prepared for the Georgia Department of Human Resources, Division of Family and Children Services (Columbia, SC: Southern Institute on Children and Families, August 1996).

## **CHAPTER 2 STATE AND COMMUNITY BRIEFING SESSIONS**

During Phase II of the Georgia Information Outreach to Reduce Welfare Dependency Project, the focus was on dissemination of the three brochures. Activities during this period are discussed below.

### **State Briefing Sessions**

Phase II was launched with three state DFCS sponsored briefing sessions held in Atlanta, Georgia in September 1996. The purpose of the briefing sessions was to preview the three information outreach brochures for major user groups prior to statewide dissemination.

The first briefing session was held for state DFCS staff. The second session was held for other state agencies, statewide advocacy groups and Atlanta area advocacy and service organizations. The third session was held for statewide employer groups and Atlanta area employers. A total of 37 representatives of community organizations, 21 employers and 28 DFCS staff attended the state briefing sessions.

### **Community Briefing Sessions**

During September, October and November 1996, a total of 30 briefing sessions were held in the following 10 urban and rural Georgia counties:

- Bibb County (Macon)
- Chatham County (Savannah)
- Coweta County (Newnan)
- DeKalb County (Decatur)
- Dougherty County (Albany)
- Hall County (Gainesville)
- Liberty County (Hinesville)
- Muscogee County (Columbus)
- Tift County (Tifton)
- Walker County (LaFayette)

The briefing sessions were hosted by the county DFCS and the county director delivered opening remarks. A representative of the state DFCS office and a representative of the Taxpayer Education Division of the Internal Revenue Service attended each session.

Three briefing sessions were held in each of the 10 counties. The groupings were the same as the state level briefing sessions. A total of 344 DFCS staff, 321 representatives of community organizations and 84 employers attended the county briefing sessions. Table 1 provides a summary of the attendance in each county.

<b>TABLE 1 NUMBER OF PERSONS ATTENDING THE COMMUNITY BRIEFING SESSIONS BY COUNTY AND BY GROUP</b>			
<b>COUNTY</b>	<b>DFCS STAFF</b>	<b>COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS</b>	<b>EMPLOYERS</b>
Bibb County	33	10	7
Chatham County	33	44	13
Coweta County	23	9	8
DeKalb County	35	31	0
Dougherty County	45	51	9
Hall County	28	24	12
Liberty County	43	25	4
Muscogee County	43	48	14
Tift County	31	42	12
Walker County	30	37	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>344</b>	<b>321</b>	<b>84</b>
Source: Southern Institute on Children and Families.			

At each briefing session, the presentation of the information outreach brochures was made by the Southern Institute. In order to increase awareness of the amount of assistance received by families on welfare, the Southern Institute presented information on benefits. Community organizations and employers were shown Table 2 to illustrate the monthly benefits for a typical family on welfare which consists of a mother and two young children.

**TABLE 2  
MONTHLY VALUE OF CASH ASSISTANCE AND  
FOOD STAMP BENEFITS FOR A FAMILY  
OF THREE WITH NO INCOME, JANUARY 1996**

<b>AREA</b>	<b>CASH ASSISTANCE</b>	<b>FOOD STAMPS</b>	<b>COMBINED VALUE</b>
Georgia	\$280	\$313	\$593
Southern States	\$261	\$312	\$573
United States	\$401	\$302	\$703

Note: Southern states include Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia and the District of Columbia.

Source: Southern Institute on Children and Families based on data provided by Congressional Research Service.

Two other benefit areas were reviewed—Medicaid and housing. It was pointed out that families on welfare are also eligible for Medicaid coverage for the parents and children. However, contrary to general perception, most welfare families do not receive any form of housing assistance. Table 3 was shown to illustrate that only 26% of welfare recipients in Georgia receive any form of housing assistance.

**TABLE 3  
PERCENTAGE OF CASH ASSISTANCE FAMILIES  
RECEIVING HOUSING ASSISTANCE, FFY 1995**

<b>AREA</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE</b>
Georgia	26%
Southern States	29%
United States	23%

Note: Southern states include Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia and the District of Columbia.

Source: Southern Institute on Children and Families based on data provided by the Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services.

Both Table 2 and Table 3 were effective in communicating that families on welfare are faced with limited resources. The Southern Institute pointed out that the dilemma for welfare families is that even though the combined benefits of cash assistance and Food Stamps fail to lift them out of poverty, they cannot make enough money to pay for the extra costs incurred when they go to work full time, especially the cost of child care and health coverage.

The Southern Institute presentation also touched on the wage realities for families leaving welfare for work. Most recipients will be unable to obtain jobs that pay much beyond the minimum wage or jobs that have benefits. A comparison of minimum wage earnings with expenses generally incurred with full time employment illustrated that a mother with two young children is unable to meet basic living expenses at a minimum wage salary. Table 4 was shown to community organizations and employers who attended the community briefing sessions to illustrate the earnings of a full time, year-round minimum wage earner.

<b>TABLE 4 EARNINGS OF A FULL TIME MINIMUM WAGE WORKER</b>		
<b>EFFECTIVE DATE</b>	<b>HOURLY</b>	<b>ANNUAL</b>
October 1995	\$4.25	\$8,800
October 1996	\$4.75	\$9,880
September 1997	\$5.15	\$10,700
Source: Southern Institute on Children and Families.		

The purpose in sharing the above information at the briefings was to build greater public awareness of the economic realities involved in leaving welfare for work and to stress the need for information outreach so that families are aware of benefits that can help them meet basic needs while working in low wage/no benefits jobs.













































