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Poverty Welfare : Designing a Welfare System

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POVERTY WELFARE

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Designing a Welfare System

By **Fern L. Chamberlain**, Welfare consultant, CENCOAD, formerly chief, Research and Statistics, S.D. Dept. of Welfare, 1937-1966, and **Wanda M. Leonard**, Public Affairs Agent, Economics Department, South Dakota State University

If you are critical of the present welfare system, why not try devising one you feel would be satisfactory. For this purpose, you might assume the role of a member of the governing body of an entirely new city, who has been assigned the responsibility to draft a plan for the welfare system of that city. There are no rules in existence for you to follow, your plan does not have to conform to any state or national guidelines. The people

in this city are the same people who live in South Dakota. The welfare system for which you are to draft a plan is defined as that activity which is related to providing basic necessities to the persons in the city who do not have them available to them in any other way.

As you begin to work on your assignment, it becomes evident that some general decisions must be made before you can come up

with specific details. What should be the primary goal of the system? Who should be permitted to enter the system and how? What should be the output of the system (cash allowances, aid-in-kind, services)? What should be the functions of the system? What should be its relationship to other systems such as health and education? The first step in drafting your plan will be, therefore, to examine each of these questions.

EC 699—A Series on Poverty and Welfare

Part A—What Are Your Feelings about Welfare?
Part B—What Is Welfare?
Part C—What Are Your Beliefs about Welfare?
Part D—Welfare: Historical Perspective.

Part E—Welfare: Opinions and Facts.
Part F—Poverty Awareness Worksheet
Part G—South Dakota Poverty Data.

Part H—Welfare: the Poor, the Near Poor, the Receipts and the Cost.
Part I—Poverty, Welfare and Reform.
Part J—Designing a Welfare System.

WELFARE RECIPIENTS IN SOUTH DAKOTA

As of February 1972, S. D. Dept. of P.W.

4,551 persons 75 or older
2,035 persons 65 through 74

72 persons 50 or older, blind
45 other persons, blind

1,173 persons 50 or older, disabled
649 other persons, disabled

3,912 children under 5 years of age
8,641 children 5-14 years of age
2,127 children 15-18 years of age
130 19-20 years old, disabled
or in school

987 children in foster care
15 girls pregnant out of wedlock

83 mothers under 19 with infants
2,306 mothers with 3 or more children
412 incapacitated fathers at home
362 mothers employed
566 in WIN or other training programs
412 not in WIN because training opportunities
not available
41 other adults, mostly women
29,419 TOTAL

I. What should be the primary goals of the system?

- To keep deprived people from rioting?
- To rehabilitate non-productive members of society so they can support themselves? (What are the realities? See box at left.)
- To insure equal opportunity for all?
- To provide assistance to persons not meeting the proficiency standards for entrance into the productive system?
- To provide purchasing power to those outside the productive system in order to maintain consumption?
- To bolster the recipient's self-image so he will make the most of his potential?
- To punish people who do not conform to group standards?

(Which of the above are compatible, which are not?)

BASIC NECESSITIES

Food	Transportation
Clothing	Medical and dental care
Shelter and utilities	Community participation
Personal items	Recreation
Household operation	Other?

II. Who should be permitted to enter the system?

- Anyone in need? How do you define "need"? What are the necessities? (See box at right.)
- Only those who are aged, blind, disabled, or other special circumstances? What special circumstances?
- Only established, long time residents of an area?
- Only persons who conform to group standards of culture, life style and values?
- Only deserving persons? Define deserving. What happens to those not deserving?
- Other

(Are the decisions made in question II compatible with goals determined in question I?)

III. What is to be the output of the system?

- Cash payments. At what level? (See box at right.)
 - Survival
 - Minimum subsistence
 - Minimum adequate
 - Adequate
 - Comfortable
 - Luxury

EXAMPLES

Standards at Different Levels
Family of Four

	Per Month
Minimum wage \$1.60 per hour, 40 hours per week	\$277.33
S.D. Dept. of Welfare Standard*	\$310.00
Proposed minimum wage, \$2.00 per hour, 40 hours per week	\$346.67
Median income in S.D. (U.S. Census 1970)	\$357.58
U.S. Poverty level- 1973 non-farm family	\$358.33
Average (mean) family earnings from wages and salaries	\$619.00
US Dept. of Agriculture Economy plan†	\$167—\$333
Low-cost plan	\$333—\$500
Moderate-cost plan	\$500—\$833
Liberal plan	\$833 up

*The standard adopted in 1959 was based on the low-cost plan of the US Dept. of Agriculture.

†To be used in temporary situations when funds are limited.

- B. Aid-in-Kind
 1. Food Stamps
 2. Housing
 3. Medical Care
 4. Protective Care
 5. Other?
- C. Services
 1. Daycare
 2. Homemaker services
 3. Homehealth aides
 4. Housekeeping and maintenance aids
 5. Vocational training and retraining
 6. Problems-in-living counseling
 7. Credit and money management counseling
 8. Protective services (children and adult)
 9. Prevention and treatment of alcoholism and other drug use
 10. Other?

(Which of the above should be available only to persons in financial need?)

IV. What are the functions of the welfare system—

- A. To force people to work?
- B. To offer equal opportunities to children to develop?
- C. To keep people alive?
- D. To ease burdens which are beyond the persons' coping ability?
- E. To teach people good housekeeping skills?
- F. To enforce moral standards?
- G. To support parents in their efforts to care for their children?
- H. To force estranged fathers to support their children?
- I. To strengthen family life?
- J. To train people to become self-supporting?
- K. To determine the causes of poverty and seek to alleviate them, such as:
 1. Schools that do not educate
 2. Malnutrition, especially of pregnant women and infants, which leads to physical and mental health problems and general apathy
 3. Excessive medical costs which deplete a family's resources
 4. Discrimination in employment, housing, and other systems
 5. Overcrowding and poor housing conditions.
 6. Other:

Are there other agencies with responsibility for any of these functions?

V. What is the relation of the welfare system to other systems?

In each instance, define the role of the welfare system and the role of the other system. What role is

required from the welfare system to enhance the role of the other system?

A. Communication

For example:

1. What role does communication play in the myths regarding the receipt of welfare which abound?
2. Should assistance from public funds be enough to permit persons to have a telephone and buy a newspaper?

B. Religion

For example:

1. What responsibilities do religious institutions have for the attitudes of their members toward welfare and recipients of aid?
2. Would change in attitude or more adequate assistance payments reduce the number of the poor who withdraw from organized religious activities?

C. Transportation

For example:

1. What effect does lack of transportation have on various aspects of a poor person's life? Employment? Medical care? Social participation?
2. Would public transportation be more efficient and economical (not to mention more environmentally sound)?

D. Health

For example:

1. What proportion of the need for welfare can be attributed to poor health?
2. What effect would more preventive services have?

E. Education

For example:

1. What is the relationship of poor nutrition to apathy and dropouts?
2. What is the relationship of poor education to poor health habits?

F. Political

For example:

1. What are the political implications of "welfare reform"?
2. Is income redistribution politically feasible?

(Continued)

G. Economic

For example:

1. Should marginal laborers be guaranteed a job or provided for through some form of welfare?
2. Would adequate grants of assistance stimulate the economy? Is this stimulation desirable?