Case Studies of Families Involved with Welfare and Child Welfare

Instructional Guide to Chapter V

Purpose:

• To illustrate ways in which dual system involvement (with both welfare and child welfare services) may affect families.

Content:

• This section of the curriculum contains six detailed case examples, drawn from a qualitative study of ten families involved with the welfare and child welfare programs.
• The introduction, accompanied by Table 5.1, “Possible Outcomes of Dual System Involvement Under Welfare Reform,” outlines the potential impact of welfare reform on child welfare. It provides a framework for the case studies that follow.

Use:

• This chapter is meant to facilitate in-class discussions and activities around the effects of welfare reform on families who are at risk of, or are currently involved with, the child welfare system.

Teaching Aids:

• Questions for discussion are provided at the beginning of this chapter.
• The group activity: vignettes at the end of the chapter facilitate the use of case examples for examining child welfare outcomes. Five case examples are provided along with questions to be used in small group discussion.
• Additional activities to be used outside the classroom are provided at the end of the chapter.

This chapter can be used to foster the following curriculum competencies:

• 1.9 Student understands and uses knowledge in the provision of child welfare services to cultural and ethnic populations.
• 1.11 Student is able to advocate for equity in availability of resources and services.
• 2.2 Student is able to assess the interaction of individual, family, and environmental factors which contribute to abuse, neglect, and sexual abuse, and identifies strengths which will preserve the family and protect the child.
• 2.4 Student gathers, evaluates, and presents pertinent information from informants, case records, and other collateral sources to support or refute an abuse or neglect allegation.
• 2.5 Student has knowledge of the special characteristics and situations of the low income family and the single parent family.
• 2.11 The student understands the mission and goals of public departments of social services and the network of community child welfare services.
• 3.1 Student demonstrates social work values and principles; this includes self determination, respect for human dignity and worth, and respect for individual differences.
• 3.2 Student conducts effective ongoing case assessment and planning.
• 3.3 Student demonstrates the ability to evaluate and incorporate information from others, including family members and professionals in assessment, treatment planning, and service delivery.
• 3.5 Student understands the importance of and demonstrates the ability to work with the client in the community, including home, school, etc.
• 3.10 Student has knowledge of how clients are nonvoluntarily referred to public child welfare.
• 3.17 Student assesses the family from a person-in-environment (PIE) perspective.
• 3.18 Student develops and implements the case plan based on the assessment.
• 4.7 Student understands the interaction between environmental factors especially in terms of racism, poverty, violence, and human development.
• 6.2 Student demonstrates knowledge of specific laws, policies, court decisions and regulations essential to child welfare services.
Case Studies of Families Involved with Welfare and Child Welfare

This section examines the ways that economic stress and disruptive life events interact with the psychological and social experience of parents, and the resulting impact on family life and parenting quality. The focus on these factors is based, at least in part, on theory and research about the links between economic stress and parent-child relationships. Generally-speaking, this literature proposes that the psychological processes of parents are important mediators between poverty and parenting behavior (e.g., Conger, McCarty, Yang, Lahey & Kropp, 1984; McLoyd & Wilson, 1990, 1991). The literature also suggests that the quality of a parent’s social support network is important, especially for parents at risk of neglecting their children (e.g., Beeman, 1997; Coohey, 1995). These and other characteristics of parents influence the ways in which they cope with living in poverty, and the outcomes that their children experience. Although there are some commonalities among groups of welfare participants, this discussion emphasizes (a) that each experience of life on welfare is an individual one, and (b) that the effects of welfare participation, and changes in the welfare system, are simply embedded in the daily life experience of many parents. Coping with or utilizing aspects of welfare are experiences that accompany life in poverty.

The section below outlines a set of possible pathways from welfare to child welfare outcomes, to provide a framework for thinking about families’ experiences. It then presents a series of case examples, designed to illustrate the dynamic processes by which aspects of welfare policy may ultimately influence outcomes for parents and children. The purpose of the case examples is to provide child welfare workers with an understanding of some of the ways that involvement with TANF and CalWORKs may affect families, particularly those who are at risk of new or continuing child welfare intervention. Case examples offer the reader a qualitative exploration of ways that parenting may be compromised for those who live in conditions of poverty, and rely on the welfare system for support. The reader can then identify potentially useful services and supports, for which child welfare workers can advocate.
Potential “Pathways” from Welfare to Child Welfare

Table 5.1 outlines several possible “pathways” from welfare receipt to child welfare involvement. We can imagine at least three general “groups” of families who might experience different kinds of outcomes related to TANF. Possible outcomes 1 through 5 are grouped together because of the presumed negative impact of welfare reform on child welfare. Outcomes 6 through 8 are grouped together because they signify possible positive effects. Possibilities 9 through 13 are grouped together because of their complicated effects and the difficulty predicting the exact nature of an outcome. It should be noted that none of these pathways are mutually exclusive, and some families may experience both positive and negative effects.

First, there is the most precarious segment of the welfare population, the group of families about which we have been most concerned (see Table 5.1, possible outcomes 1-5). For some, a decreased family income due to the punitive aspects of welfare reform (e.g., the family cap, sanctions, time limits) may lead to increased maltreatment and increased use of the child welfare system. This will include, for some families, entry into foster and kinship care. Additionally, this same set of requirements could create economic conditions that lessen the likelihood of successful reunification (for those already involved with the child welfare system) or increase the chances of reentry to care (for those who have reunified). Work requirements, coupled with limited availability of child care, might lead to some parents being unable to adequately supervise their children; a situation that could lead to child welfare intervention. There is the possibility that increased exposure to professionals or surveillance by various authorities, as a result of increased contact with parts of the welfare system, will lead to greater numbers of families being involved with child protection. Finally there has been some concern that the administrative difficulties of welfare reform, in which welfare and child welfare agencies might fail to coordinate their service planning, might lead to increased stress on families and decreased chances of either economic success or stabilized parenting.
Table 5.1
SOME POSSIBLE OUTCOMES OF DUAL SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT UNDER WELFARE REFORM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WELFARE REFORM CHANGES</th>
<th>FAMILY EFFECTS</th>
<th>CHILD WELFARE CONCERNS</th>
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| 1. Family cap, time limits, sanctions | Decreased family income | ● Increased maltreatment  
● Increased use of child welfare services (CWS), including increased entries into foster and kinship care |
| 2. Family cap, time limits, sanctions | Decreased family income | ● Lowered likelihood of successful reunification  
● Increased chances of reentry for those who reunify |
| 3. Work requirements with limited availability of child care | Parents choose inadequate care for their children | ● Increased CWS involvement |
| 4. Increased surveillance | Increased exposure to social service personnel | ● Increased CWS involvement for poor families |
| 5. Lack of coordination between welfare and child welfare agencies, conflicting case plan requirements | Additional stress on dually-involved families | ● Decreased chance of economic success or stabilized parenting |
| 6. Increased employment due to welfare-to work program | Increased income leading to improved parental well-being | ● Decreased maltreatment  
● Decreased CWS involvement |
| 7. Services made available or accessible through TANF dollars (e.g. domestic violence counseling, child care, family preservation) | Positive impact on family’s special needs | ● Prevent families from entering CWS  
● Promote successful exits from CWS |
| 8. Service utilization through CWS | Economic and social buffer for most precarious families | ● Avoid some negative repercussions these families might otherwise experience under welfare reform |
| 9. Option for exemption from welfare-to-work requirements for kin caregivers, coupled with problems finding quality child care | Increased use of informal kinship care for parents on welfare | ● Unknown (positive and/or negative) effects on children and families |
| 10. Other specific stipulations (e.g., teen parent requirements to live at home and participate in CalLEARN; school attendance requirements for parents of adolescents; paternity reporting for child support; immunizations) | Varied, unknown effects on families and parenting | ● Varied, unknown effects on CWS requirements |
| 11. Increased employment in low-wage jobs | Limited economic advantage, however more contact outside the home for parents and children | ● Range of effects depending upon quality of the parent-child relationship and the quality of available child care |
| 12. Psychological impact of new set of welfare policies | Unknown effects on parental stress, motivation and behavior | ● Unknown effects on CWS involvement |
| 13. Policy and program changes due to welfare reform | No substantive impact on some parents, for whom welfare is a short-term solution to an economic and/or social crisis | ● No effect on CWS involvement |
The second group (see Table 5.1, possible outcomes 6-8) includes those for whom welfare reform will reduce their child welfare risk, because aspects of welfare reform produce significant and positive changes in family life. For example, increased employment due to involvement in welfare-to-work programs might increase income for some, as well as parental psychological well-being and their relationships with their children. (This likely requires a certain kind of educational and work history and mental health status). Alternatively, services might be made available through the flexible use of TANF dollars to prevent some families from entering the child welfare system. Services may act as an economic and/or social buffer for some precarious families, and either temporarily prevent the need for foster placement or help the family to exit the child welfare system.

The third group (listed in Table 5.1 as possible outcomes 9-13) contains those for whom the impact of welfare reform is more complex. For this group of families, it is difficult to predict the quality of an outcome related to child welfare. Take, for example, kin caregivers who are exempted from welfare-to-work requirements, coupled with the challenges of finding quality day care for parents who move from welfare to work. This could lead to an increased use of informal kinship care for some parents on welfare (which could have positive or negative effects on children and families; depending on a variety of other factors). For other families, increased employment in low-wage jobs might provide little economic advantage compared to welfare receipt, but contact outside the home for parents and children (in subsidized day care) might have any number of positive and negative effects. This will depend on the preexisting quality of the parent-child relationship, and the quality of available child care. The effects also depend upon the psychological impact of the new policy environment on low-income parents. How will the requirements of welfare reform affect parental stress levels, influence their motivations related to work, and alter (or not) their ways of relating to their children? How will other specific stipulations, such as the requirement for adolescent parents to live at home, for adolescent children to attend school, for paternity reporting and immunizations – affect parenting? These remain to be seen. Finally, in some cases welfare reform may have no substantive impact. For example, in families where welfare
is purely a short-term solution to an economic or social crisis, and the transition off welfare does not constitute a dramatic change in the family’s previous state.

It is the first set of concerns (e.g., decreased income or intensified poverty, leading to increased maltreatment) that most readily captures our attention and our concern. This is because of the well-documented link between poverty and maltreatment, particularly neglect. This concern is also due to the possibility that there is a group of families who may not qualify as part of the exempt population, but will be tremendously precarious and likely to experience poor outcomes under welfare reform. This precarious group is not the only one that we will focus on here, however. Some families may actually benefit from aspects of welfare reform in ways that reduce their child welfare risk; their pathways are important to understand in part because they may shed light on ways to proactively assist those facing significant barriers to success.

The 6 case examples that follow\(^1\) are based upon data collected in a longitudinal, ethnographic study of 10 families during the post-welfare reform era (between 1999-2001). All of these families lived in urban communities in Alameda County, California that were characterized by relatively high concentrations of low-income families. All relied on TANF as a primary source of income around the time they entered the study, and all had at least one infant or toddler. Additionally, more than half of the sample was involved with the public child welfare services agency because of child neglect. The circumstances of their lives varied, as did their relationships to the welfare and child welfare agencies. (A summary table describing the sample, and its key characteristics, is provided in Chapter VI). The data are based on in-person interviews with family members that occurred approximately monthly, for about a year, with an effort to follow-up with families at the end of the second year. The frequency of these visits, and the exact number of months of participation, depended upon the nature of the family’s relationship with the interviewer and the study. This is the reason that some case examples presented here have greater depth and detail, than others. All families were interviewed about the same general set of topics, however, with a focus on their

\(^1\) All names and identifying details have been changed to protect the confidentiality of participants.
experiences of parenting their children, and the experience of living in conditions of poverty, as well as their experiences of the welfare and child welfare systems. All interviews were audiotaped, as were the extensive interviewer observations about the parent-child relationship, and any other details (such as descriptions of the neighborhood, the home, the relationship between interviewer and participant). The audiotapes were transcribed, and these verbatim notes were studied to provide an understanding of trends in the day-to-day lives of the families. (The methods of sample selection, data collection and analysis are described in greater detail in Chapter VI, “Applying Qualitative Research Methods Toward Improving Child Welfare Practice”).

The 6 cases that follow were selected because their “child welfare outcomes” cover each of the three groups outlined above (positive, negative, or equivocal). Still, of the 13 possible outcomes of welfare reform that have just been outlined, only 5 are represented by these case examples. This is because families’ outcomes were unknown at the outset of the study, and because the links between welfare and child welfare were often subtle. Further, this explains the choice of one case, presented here, where the family was not known to be involved with public child welfare services during the interview period. The case was included because of the way that welfare reforms appeared to affect the quality of the relationship between the parent and her children, and the questions it raises about the potential for future child welfare involvement. Seldom were distinct effects of welfare reform observed during this study: within a 12-month period, change proved to occur slowly, and the links between a family’s economic conditions and the quality of care the children received, were not always obvious. To discern the impact of welfare reform, over time it seemed necessary to view living in poverty as the context of family life, and living with welfare as simply one dimension of that broader context.

The box on the following page offers a suggested activity for instructors, which makes use of the case examples.
Leticia and Dashon

Leticia is an African-American mother in her mid-30’s who, when she was first interviewed in April of 1999, lived with her 2 1/2-year old son Dashon in an apartment on the grounds of her drug treatment program. She had been in recovery for approximately 3 years, after over 15 years of drug abuse, in particular the use of crack cocaine. Leticia had made powerful efforts to change her life in the past few years, displaying her determination to care for her son and her hopes for his future. She spoke of how

"I was thinkin' ...the other day when I was ridin' on the bus. I was sayin', 'God, I love my chil' so much.' An' then I was sayin', 'An' I jus' don' love him because he's my chil', it's – it goes beyond that... I jus' want him to have what I didn' have. I didn' have all that love, you know what I'm sayin'? But I want him to have it.

Leticia’s relationship with her son was full of warmth and responsiveness, and Dashon appeared to be blossoming. He is a tall, strong, solidly built child who because of his size appeared much older than his 2 ½ years, and whose cognitive development and language seemed to be on target. He was playful and engaging, funny and energetic with his mother and other adults. He was clearly loved by the women in the nearby recovery program, who would come by to visit. Leticia talked with him often, played with him when she was not too tired, and responded to his needs for physical and emotional care and protection. In several very loving interactions during the interviews, they would playfully tease one another and then hug each other tightly. She could be very thoughtful about the effects of her own emotional state on Dashon, about his internal experience of important events (such as separation from her), and about what she wanted for him as he grew up. During the interview period it seemed clear that Leticia had a strong capacity to provide for Dashon. Her only difficulties involved times when she had trouble managing the potential hazards in the apartment or the surrounding environment, because of resource limitations (for example, she lived with a threat of eviction for a time and also
with the need for repairs to her apartment building, problems that were difficult to fix on a low income).

Leticia worried, to some extent, about providing her son with the necessities (food, clothing, as well as toys), and felt that because she was so exhausted sometimes she wasn’t as available to him as she wanted to be. She also worried about Dashon’s future. She was raising an African-American boy in an urban environment where a significant proportion of those boys would not live to see adulthood, and if they did, they were relatively unlikely to graduate from high school and stay out of jail. Leticia had lived in poverty all her life and experienced first-hand the violence that accompanies drug addiction. Living in an urban environment that is dangerous on a daily basis, Leticia worried about her son’s future relationship to drugs. She said, “I just hope my son don’t do that [sell drugs, like her brother who had been in prison for nearly 10 years]. An’ it’s a shame that this stuff [drugs, and drug-related crime] is gon’ continue to be here. It’s not gon’ never go nowhere. It’s not gon’ never go anywhere.”

Aside from these concerns, however, Leticia was at ease with herself as Dashon’s parent, and equally at ease with her child. She found tremendous enjoyment in her relationship and could experience his needs and think about how to meet them without any apparent difficulty (this was unlike some other parents in the sample, for whom the experience of being a parent was tremendously anxiety- or insecurity-producing, and for whom thinking about parenting was very challenging). In spite of her worries about Dashon, she remained hopeful that Dashon would have

\[ all \text{ that he needs and all that he wants. An’ that he have his own business...an’ it jus’ expan’ and expan’ and expan’. An’ even though he got his business an’ he’s makin’ big money, he don’ let it go to his head. He don’t mistreat anybody, an’ he have only one woman.} \]

Early in Leticia’s life, her mother was heavily involved in drugs and not able to adequately care for her, and as a result Leticia spent most of her childhood in foster
care and group homes. As a teenager, Leticia herself became involved with drugs, dropped out of school after the eighth grade, and left her last group home for the street. She had her first child when she was 18 years old, and began receiving AFDC. Over the next five years, she had two more daughters and continued to receive aid. Then her AFDC benefits were cut off when her three children were taken into the child welfare system for reasons related to her drug use. At the time of the interviews, her parental rights had been terminated on two of the children, and she had minimal contact with the third daughter, Mandy, who herself ran away from a group home approximately a year before. Leticia’s own mother was murdered in a drug-related incident about 5 years before the first interview.

After losing custody of her three children, Leticia did not receive any federal aid for the next eight or nine years. She was heavily involved with drugs during these years, in and out of prison. In 1996 and part of 1997, Leticia received SSI for her drug and alcohol addiction; a form of support that was terminated in 1997 when addiction was deemed no longer a qualifier for receiving SSI. Leticia began to address her addiction in 1996 when she discovered she was pregnant. Approximately halfway through her pregnancy, Leticia entered outpatient drug treatment, but shortly after the birth of her fourth child, Dashon, she relapsed, was arrested, and again sent to prison.

While Leticia was in prison, Dashon was cared for by Leticia’s partner of 10 years, Pat. After several months of caring for Dashon, Pat applied for guardianship. This action resulted in Dashon being taken into custody when the CPS investigation revealed numerous problems in the family. After her release from prison, Leticia immediately entered drug treatment, and was able to regain custody of Dashon in January 1998, through demonstrating a year of successful recovery. When she first reunified with Dashon, she received an emergency grant from CalWORKS and began collecting monthly TANF check shortly thereafter. Leticia and Pat’s relationship has since ended and during the interview period she had two boyfriends; one who was clean from drugs, and the other who relapsed during the year.
Leticia received TANF for the first year of living with Dashon in the treatment program, and then she obtained the first job of her life in early 1999, taking inventory in a warehouse. She did this without the help of CalWORKs, but instead through the recommendation of a friend.

... it feels good to have a job. I never worked in my life. And when I went for the interview the lady was like “uhm why you ain't never worked before? You like being at home, being a housewife or what?” I said, “I think I've had a rough life, that's why ... My parents, my mother was an addict so, you know, I didn't have nobody to tell me nothing. That's why. I had a rough life.” And she I guess she liked it 'cause then afterwards she just hired me.

Although she enjoyed having the job, she complained of not being able to work enough hours due to problems finding transportation. After approximately 2 months, Leticia quit the job and attended a CalWORKS orientation, in April 1999, because she heard that the agency would pay for child care if she did so. Then in August, she got a job housecleaning at $5.75/hour, which she quit, after three months, to take a job with a maid service that paid $7.50/hour. After 4 months cleaning with the maid service, however, Leticia was beginning to analyze the costs associated with the job versus the benefits.

So, you know, I'm beginning every day to realize this job is not worth it, 'cause they only give you ... a bus pass. I have to get on [the transit system] again and then I'm traveling, I'm doing all this traveling, I'm not getting paid for traveling time. There's no benefits in this job.

In spring, 2000, she again switched jobs, becoming employed as a housecleaner at a convalescent home for $8.50/hour. While Leticia was at work or at recovery group meetings, Dashon was cared for by a local childcare center, paid for by CalWORKs. Leticia was comfortable with the arrangement, stating that "it's a real nice daycare" and "he (Dashon) is happy with it."
Although at $8.50/hour Leticia’s earnings were well above minimum wage, her hours were not reliable (she rarely worked more than 20 hours per week) and her financial situation remained precarious. She did not expect her situation to change.

*I’m lower class… I don’t see me going’ no farther than I am… most middle class and upper class – they have skills and stuff like that- the only thing I know is cleaning. I’m okay being where I am, I guess.*

She also felt that she might have a learning disability of some kind, saying that

*Maybe, I should go back to school… I have to think some more about it … I don’t know why I ain’t got no faith in that I can’ pass my GED. But, you know what though? I don’t think that I comprehen’ very good….you know, understan’, comprehen’.*

Leticia’s hourly wage had risen quite a bit during the study period (from minimum wage to $8.50), but she found the logistics of work very challenging. She left one cleaning job, in the fall, because she was pregnant. When she terminated the pregnancy she reported “I feel better now. I can get up an’ go. An’ see, I got me a job!” Even when she was not pregnant, she was often exhausted, and said that it was difficult to live on a schedule like this, because she had never had a job before. Just the process of getting up every day and getting her child to daycare, and then working and returning home, involved an unusual effort for someone who had previously lived a very different lifestyle. For this reason, she said “I always miss some durin’ every week. So I think I would probably bring home more if I jus’ worked every – but I can’ do it. I be too tired.” Additionally, she found it virtually impossible to track the hours she worked, and the amount of money she made, in part because the rules of the working world were all new to her.

Leticia’s housing subsidy was important to she and her son’s economic survival, especially given the unpredictability of their financial circumstances month to month.
She had a thin margin for error with her finances, leading her to rely, it seems, on “men friends” for some significant income supports. Regarding her rental costs: For much of 1999, Leticia shared her apartment with a roommate. They each paid $400/month in rent to their recovery program, which in turn paid the owner of the property. But in July 1999, Leticia’s roommate relapsed on crack and was murdered; an event that was quite traumatic for Leticia, who also worried about the effects of her resulting anxiety on her son. Additionally, Leticia initially thought she would have to move because she would not be able to afford the $700/month rent. When she informed her child welfare worker, however, the agency paid her rent for a month and a half so that she would not lose her lease. The following month Leticia was approved for a Shelter Plus housing subsidy that, according to Leticia, paid up to 100% of her rent. She was on the waiting list for Section 8 and hoped to be approved if and when she became ineligible for the Shelter Plus certificate. Regarding transportation: With the savings on rent for several months, Leticia managed to save $1000, and after obtaining the first driver’s license of her life she purchased a used car in January, 2000.

Leticia had three sources of social support in her life: her recovery program, her boyfriends, and her family. The first was a positive resource; living in such close proximity to the treatment program meant that she had daily contact with other women in recovery (who also had children). It also meant that she had access to group activities, and some emotional support, as well as to women who occasionally helped one another out with child care and concrete assistance (e.g., “can I borrow your frying pan?” “Only if you give me some of that chicken when you’re done!”). Finally, Leticia had formed a close relationship with the woman who ran the treatment program, Ms. Jones, who cherished Dashon. Ms. Jones provided regular daycare, and even took Dashon overnight, at times, to give Leticia a break.

Boyfriends, for Leticia, appeared to be a complicated source of social and economic support. Leticia received a rather significant amount of help from her “men friends,” one in particular who was known to give her up to a couple of hundred dollars at a time. She had little contact with her relatives, because other than those who were dead
or incarcerated, “the majority of my whole family is on drugs,” she said. Thus, the role of her recovery program was important, but the fact that all her positive support was tied to her continuing recovery was somewhat problematic, as well. Leticia once spoke about a time when she was offered crack cocaine, by a woman for whom she cleaned house. Leticia declined, but was afraid to tell anyone from the recovery program about the incident. In a different interview she described to me a situation in which she was tempted to drink.

*I was real lonely an’ I was needy, not sex wise but was jus’ needy. My roommate had left for the weekend an’ all the other women leave, see, ‘cause I be here every weekend’, I don’t go nowhere. I felt so needy and lonely and sad and depressed...then I got the thought in my head that I’m goin’ go drink. An’ I guess God was with me because I had went to the bus stop and it was the weekend an’ the bus took a long time on the weekend. So me and Dashon was sittin’ at the bus stop an’ it wasn’t sunny outside an’ it was real cold...But my thought was to have a drink...but the bus took so long coming an’ it was getting cold and I say, “Dashon, you wanna go home and just order a pizza?”

So I came back here, ordered us a pizza, ate my pizza, turned on the T.V. and felt a little better. But it was just God helpin’ me out ‘cause I probably – I wasn’t really hooked on drinkin’. I only dranked when I did drugs. But alcohol talks to you and tell you to do things that you don’t wanna do. “Well, you don’t have to just drink. Now let’s go get some crack or let’s go get some coke or let’s go get some weed”... It was a rough day. I didn’t have nobody to talk to. Couldn’t call nobody. I be getting lonely ‘cause everybody they be gone with their boyfriends and their families. They go over to their family houses an’ I can’ go to my family house ‘cause they all on drugs an’ they all scattered, half of ’em I don’t even know where they at. So I don’t have nowhere to go on the weekends.

Given the instability of Leticia’s income and employment status, combined with the stress of maintaining her recovery while parenting her child, it seemed that Leticia’s
stability was somewhat precarious. While Leticia was reveling in her new lifestyle, it seemed possible that she might not be able to resist the temptation to use drugs or alcohol to fight her loneliness; and/or that she could turn to the wrong person in her life, a boyfriend or a family member, who could reintroduce her to the lifestyle she was wanting so desperately to avoid. In addition, it was clear that she relied on her support network to help her out financially. While this was a perfectly legitimate and creative source of income, it seemed to leave her somewhat vulnerable.

In the last interview with Leticia on May 24, 2000 she said that she was pregnant, but that she did not want to have another baby. Her boyfriend wanted a child, but Leticia said she instead intended to terminate the pregnancy, and get her tubes tied. She said,

Yeah, he wants a baby. Bad. But he a baby hisself. Uh, you know. He – I don' know. He wants one but – I don' think he's responsible enough for no baby yet. I mean he – he take care a me good. He gives me lots a money. When he gets his check, I make sure he gives me some money. [laughter] But he doin' it 'cause he wanna do it. Not 'cause I wan' him to do it. He do it 'cause he wanna do it. But still – so what. I don' wanna go through that right now.

A year later, on May 24, 2001, efforts to contact Leticia were unsuccessful. Ms. Jones, from the treatment program, said that Leticia had unfortunately relapsed on crack and disappeared. Six months previously she had given birth to a baby daughter, who she had named Tempest, after her mother. When she had disappeared, Tempest had gone to live with her father, and Dashon had been placed in (non-relative) foster care. Ms. Jones explained what she could, to try and make sense of this series of events. Leticia had been working for several months, she said, cleaning for the convalescent home and had apparently been doing very well. However Leticia had “slacked off going to meetings” (recovery/NA meetings), and had gotten back in contact with a relative who was using drugs. Leticia had initially still lived in the apartment near the recovery program, but
when Dashon was removed, Ms. Jones said, Leticia had “dived into her addiction” and she had since missed a court date about both children.
Kenisha, Ketanya, Shaunel, Dacey, Olisa, and DeMarco

Kenisha is a 40-year-old, African-American mother of four living children: Ketanya (20 years), Dacey (3 years), Olisa (2 years), and DeMarco (6 months). For most of her adult life, Kenisha has cycled on and off welfare. She has held numerous jobs, however most of them lasted 6 months or less. She recently completed an inpatient recovery program after many years of drug addiction and aims to achieve well-paying, long-term employment to be able to support her family.

Kenisha dropped out of high school during her senior year but received her GED a few years later while pregnant with her first child, Ketanya. She took various “odds and ends jobs,” frequently relying on welfare when she was not engaged in work. Additionally, she was often supported by “sugar daddies,” older men who provided financial support in exchange for sex and companionship. When she was in her early twenties, she completed an eight-month course at a local business college and became employed with a government agency as a receptionist. Shortly after, Kenisha’s mother died of breast cancer. Kenisha said she then quit her job due to stress; “it was just too much for me.” She began using crack cocaine, and shortly Ketanya went to live with her paternal grandmother. Kenisha continued to receive support from short-term jobs, “sugar daddies” and, given that she no longer had custody of her daughter, General Assistance.

In 1989, Kenisha gave birth to a baby boy, Shaunel, who was born addicted to crack cocaine and was taken immediately into foster care. Sadly, Shaunel lived only a few months, dying of apparent Sudden Infant Death Syndrome while in the care of his foster parents. A few years later, Kenisha had two more children, daughters named Dacey and Olisa. When Dacey was 1 ½ years and Olisa was four months old, the girls were taken into child protective custody, after Kenisha left them in the care of a woman who was in the process of being evicted. The owners of the house stopped by regarding the eviction, saw the two unrelated and inadequately supervised children, and called the child protection agency. When Kenisha did not return to pick up her children in a timely fashion, she was charged with neglect and the girls were placed in foster care. When the
children were first removed, Dacey was placed with an aunt, and Olisa was placed with Kenisha's cousin. Dacey did not get along well with the aunt’s daughter, however, and appeared very unhappy so Olisa and Dacey were eventually placed together with a non-kin foster family.

In 1997, Kenisha entered an inpatient drug treatment program and in May 1998 she was reunited with her children. Kenisha’s recovery is strongly motivated by her guilt surrounding Shaunel’s death. She visited him infrequently when he was in the hospital, and she believes this is one reason he was placed in foster care. In addition, if he had been in her care instead of with foster parents, she wonders, could his death have been avoided? Her remorse over Shaunel’s death permeates her feelings about being a parent. “I feel like I can’t let him [Shaunel] down, and I can’t let my kids down. I owe it to them and I owe it to Shaunel too, to make sure they have their life like he should have had his life.” This affects her sense of herself as a parent. She describes herself as “forgiving” with her children, a parent who ought to say “no” but cannot because of past mistakes that led to the children’s foster placement: “It’s like something hangin’ over your head. It’s like a debt that you hafta pay back or you won’t get no closure on it.”

Kenisha began collecting TANF at the time she regained custody of her daughters. Her children lived with her at the recovery program until October 1998, when the family moved into an apartment, subsidized by the recovery program and considered “transitional housing.” Kenisha paid $266 per month in rent, which was equal to 30% of her income at the time. She was allowed to remain there with her children for up to 3 years. Kenisha talked of feeling that the child welfare agency helped her out by giving her a “wake-up call.” However, she subsequently felt herself to be under constant surveillance, in which her behavior could be critically examined at any time.

*CPS helped me out a lot, because it was dealing with my kids and everything and the thought of losing my kids, that's what really woke me up to say, hey, you can't be playing around. So they helped me out a lot, but still when you're going through that, it's like you don't have no say so over nothing and they can take*
Kenisha's involvement with child welfare services initially damaged her feelings of control over her relationship with her children, and weakened her already fragile self-esteem. Although she had made major changes to her life, she felt that the child welfare system continued to base its judgments of her, on her past mistakes. She therefore believed that she would never be free of monitoring from the child welfare system. Although her case was dismissed early in our months of interviews, Kenisha felt that the child protection agency would reenter her life if she made the smallest mistake. "They're just watching me from afar, you know, waiting for me to pop." This perception of constant surveillance added to the pressure Kenisha felt, to maintain her employment status (discussed below), and to care for her children well. But over the course of the year of interviews, this generated some pride in her accomplishments. "It just makes me feel proud now that whoever watching me can say, 'yeah, well, this chick, she's pretty tough - so far so good. She's still all right.' I'm showing whoever's looking at me that people can change."

In the fall of 1998, Kenisha took a job with a new government agency, with a starting salary of $7.38/hour. She gained this job without any assistance from the CalWORKs program. At this hourly wage, she continued to receive financial assistance that included approximately $186/month TANF, $30 food stamps and $100 WIC. After roughly nine months at the job, her salary increased to $12/hour and her TANF grant was cut to zero. Kenisha received an Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) of $1500 for 1998, which she used to purchase furniture. CalWORKs continued to pay for her child care costs, and she also continued to receive MediCal for the family.

Kenisha is aware of the changes under welfare reform, and is especially sensitive to the effects of time limits and the family cap. As a result, she feels increased pressure
to achieve stable employment, pressure that only intensifies her conflict between her need to work, and her desire to spend time with her children.

*I want to spend a lotta time with them (her children), but I feel like I have to work and I can't afford to, you know, because if I don't work then we ain't gonna be able to survive, you know, especially with CalWORKs reform, you know. I'm feeling like even though I need to be working and stuff, because I wasted a lotta time, that I'm being pushed, you know, like I have to even if I didn't [waste years doing drugs] ... my kids are so little, I really need to be with them... Even though you have to work it's almost not worth it, you know... because you really don't gain that much, and then you lose the most important things.*

Kenisha feels the stress of her job impacts her relationship with her children. "A lot of times when I come home I'm tired and stressin' and trying to get them in here and get them situated and ready to go back to daycare - it takes a lot out of me raising them and spending time with them - having the patience and, you know, being gentle with them." Thus, along with limiting the time she has available for her children, work also impacts Kenisha's parenting when they are together.

Although Kenisha regrets these effects of leaving welfare for work, she also recognizes rewards of working. "Working I feel independent and, you know, like I'm doing what I should be doing." However, with only a temporary job she is not sure if the benefits of working outweigh the costs. Kenisha feels a full-time, permanent position would be more stable, would offer vacation time and would provide medical and dental insurance for herself and her children.

Kenisha gave birth to her youngest child, Demarco, in June 1999 and took three months maternity leave from her job. She did not receive any additional assistance upon the birth of her son due to the family cap. She feels that the family cap is an attempt to control women's reproductive behavior.
I feel like it's a way of telling people that they don't need no more kids. Or should not have no more kids if they can't work for 'em. So, I think it's unfair too...I always wanted to have a big family. But I'm not gonna let welfare and nobody else tell me when I had enough kids. You know, 'long as I'm doing the right things ... it just makes me wanna work.

Before welfare reform, Kenisha feels she would have been able to take a longer maternity leave. "If it was any other time I would be able to stay home with him for a little while, you know, but now I got to hurry up and get back out there."

During the interview period, the children’s father seemed to exist in the background of the family, seldom providing direct child care and often gone for days, working in his trade. With the addition of the new baby to the household, the dual demands on Kenisha – as parent and worker -- increased and she frequently seemed exhausted. These demands were complicated by logistical (e.g., transportation) and institutional challenges (e.g., lack of benefits through her employer). Such competing demands, combined with limited resources, made her tired and less available to her children, and contributed to somewhat frayed nerves in the household. When Kenisha was especially tired and emotionally unavailable, the toddlers Dacey and Olisa tended to intensify their most defiant behaviors. This had the effect of getting Kenisha’s attention and involvement. Both Dacey and Olisa, Kenisha felt, were “traumatized” by their separation from her while in foster placement, therefore requiring especially attentive parenting. Indeed, they were usually slightly out of control and not fully responsive to their mother, during the interviews. But while chaos often reigned, there was also a high degree of warmth and intensity of affection. The baby appeared to be developing well and was remarkably adaptive, it seemed, to the high-energy environment he shared with his sisters. Although Kenisha’s style was erratic and sometimes ineffective with her toddlers, she had no major problems responding to the children’s basic care and protection needs. In fact, she was remarkably attentive to details of her infant’s experience in the midst of a fairly chaotic home environment.
Shortly after she returned to her job in September 1999, Kenisha was hired permanently by the government office, and her wages increased to $14/hour. She excitedly claimed that after 6 months, her salary would double to $28/hour, and that the job provided both medical and dental benefits for herself and her children. Kenisha feels that her personal determination contributed to her achievement of this high-paying job. In addition, she attributed her success to supervisors who were sympathetic towards her, and respected her efforts to transition off welfare, to employment. In May 2000, however, Kenisha was fired from her job because she released, to a friend, a confidential document. Kenisha was told this was a violation of the code of ethics, and although she understood the decision, she felt had she needed to provide the friend with a favor.

This unfortunate decision generated new stress. The next month she found a temporary job at $9.00/hour, once again without benefits; and during the month she was without employment, she did not receive a TANF grant. She had recently bought a used car and the value of the car was great enough to disqualify her from welfare. She was very late on her rent payment that month. Losing the income from both her job and welfare for just a few weeks created a precarious situation for Kenisha and her three children. During the last interview, in June 2000, she talked of her worries, laughed nervously, and dismissed the fact that she was drinking a beer.

Efforts to contact Kenisha in May, 2001 were unsuccessful.
Glen is a 31-year-old African-American father of one 3 ½ year old daughter, Tasha. After struggling with years of drug addiction, he has stabilized his lifestyle and obtained sole custody of his daughter, who he is raising with minimal support from family or friends. Glen works as a carpenter and earns over $20/hour, however, his work is very unstable and he is frequently laid off. This situation is very stressful, as it is difficult for him to stay up-to-date on his bills. His continued recovery is a priority for him, and he remains involved with his recovery program by attending occasional 12-step meetings, as well as regularly volunteering time through his church.

Although Glen dropped out of high school during the ninth grade, he later completed his GED and has a fairly strong work history. After leaving high school, he operated a furniture moving business for approximately 6 years, and has estimated that he earned approximately $33,000/year during this period. This job ended, he said, only because the truck he used in the business was stolen from him, and he could not afford to replace it. After a short time on General Assistance, he took a position as an airport skycab. There, he earned a decent wage, he said, and felt lucky to get the job even though he occasionally had to put up with offensive, racist behavior from passengers. It was during the four years of his employment at the airport that he began using crack cocaine. As his addiction intensified, he was late for work a few too many times and consequently lost his job. At that point, he again applied for and received General Assistance, supplementing that small grant with money earned performing odd jobs. This was his economic situation for approximately two years, until he entered a recovery program.

Glen met Denisha, who would later become his wife, while both were actively using drugs. Denisha was a heavy cocaine user throughout her pregnancy with Tasha, and when Tasha was born, she tested positive for cocaine exposure. Because of this, and possibly for other, undisclosed reasons as well, Tasha was placed in foster care and remained there for approximately 4 months. When Denisha entered a residential treatment program, she received temporary custody of her daughter. Glen was
simultaneously attempting recovery, but still used drugs on occasion because at the time, he said, “I was just in there [the treatment program] for everybody else,” implying that he was not attempting sobriety for the most solid of reasons.

Eventually Glen and Denisha graduated from their recovery programs, got married, and moved in with Glen’s mother. They both relapsed after a brief period, however, and Tasha was returned to foster care. With Tasha’s reentry to foster care, Glen again attempted recovery – this time without the accompaniment of Denisha, who left their home and continued to use drugs. Glen said he could not bear to think of Tasha being raised in foster care, and this was the reason for his determination to reunify, as soon as his drug treatment was well underway. After 6 months in one treatment facility, Glen chose to be transferred to a unique inpatient program for single men with children, where he could be reunified with Tasha. Glen and Tasha remained in that program for 10 months, leaving there for an independent life. [Denisha had not attempted reunification with Tasha, failing to show up for most visits and not participating with any other required services. Although Glen thought that one day, perhaps, Tasha might know her mother, he was raising her on his own.]

Glen began collecting TANF when he regained custody of Tasha, as it provided him with a transitional source of income, until he could locate child care and begin to work. After leaving the treatment program, Glen moved with his daughter to a small house in a very low-income neighborhood, where he paid $600/month rent. He had no ongoing housing subsidy, but the child welfare services agency provided him with $600 to pay the security deposit when he moved in, along with a $350 gift certificate to K-Mart. With this cash, Glen purchased household items and began his life as a single, working father of a toddler. Tasha’s child welfare services case with her father, which was originally opened in February 1996, was closed in December 1999 after Glen had met all the case plan requirements. Reflecting on what it was like to no longer be monitored by CPS, he said:

*I guess it's like, you know, sorta like makin' the las' payment on*
your car or somethin' ... It's not really a big deal 'cause you been used to
doin' it, you know, but it sure is nice to not have to worry about it
anymore, you know. An' it's jus' a nice relief, you know. I don' know.
Maybe that wasn' even fair comparin' that with money. You know, car
payment. [laughter] But I'm sure that's a big relief not to have to make
car payments. I'm sure that's a big relief.

Glen became employed as an apprentice carpenter shortly after leaving the recovery
program. Once employed, his TANF grant was cut off, although he temporarily
continued to receive approximately $10/month in food stamps. This benefit was cut off
in September 1998 as his hourly wage continued to increase, commensurate with his
work experience. In order to rise among the carpenter ranks, Glen has explained, he is
required to attend one week of unpaid class, every three months for a total of four years.
If he meets this requirement and passes various tests, his wages will increase every 6
months. Thus, although the salary for apprentice carpenters begins at $10 per hour, by
February of 2000, Glen reported that he was earning $21/hour. Along with this hourly
wage, Glen receives $2/hour vacation pay, $2/hour towards his pension and $1.75/hour
toward his health insurance premium. The vacation pay that has accrued throughout the
year is paid out in one lump sum each February. By June 1999, Glen had accrued over
$1300 in vacation pay.

Thus, as a journeyman carpenter Glen can earn a relatively high wage of
$27.89/hour --but the work is both inconsistently available, and dangerous. Like other
union members, he is frequently laid off of jobs and must put his name on a new union
list. It can often take 2 or 3 weeks to get another job, and the seasonal nature of the work
affects job availability as well. Thus there is little work in the winter months, when there
is more frequent rain. When he is not able to work for many days at a time, Glen
receives unemployment compensation at a rate of $230/week, but if Glen is able to work
even one day during a week, his gross pay is over the $230 limit and he does not qualify
for unemployment compensation, for that entire week. He hopes for jobs that last more
than a few days in a row, and for those that are less dangerous, physically taxing, and out of the weather. The impact of his uncertain income can be serious:

_There’s no guarantee that they’re (his employer) going to constantly have work, no guarantee that I’m going to be with this company. You know, there will be periods of not working... when this [series of bills] came up like it did, I just got caught off guard... It’s not like big bills, but everything that’s here is just like living, you know... living in a house where you got your water, your trash, electricity... it seemed like everything just went... Oh, the combination of everything is just like wow! [stressful]_

The combination of a large number of small bills, plus a few large expenses -- including car insurance and an $800 unpaid dental bill -- created extreme financial pressure for Glen during several months when he could not obtain consistent, full-time work. During the interview period, an attack of chicken pox kept Tasha out of child care and Glen home from work; this hurt his monthly budget and he worried about losing his place on a particular job. Construction work was not his preferred choice of vocations, but because of his criminal convictions and limited education, he felt that few alternatives were realistically available to him. His commitment to his daughter also figured into his decision, as he wanted to eventually purchase a home in the surrounding area and remodel it himself.

While Glen is at work, Tasha attends daycare that is subsidized by the CalWORKs agency. According to Glen, he takes her to a “family-oriented” childcare center that cares for 12 children between the ages of 8 months and 4 years. Glen and Tasha awaken sometimes as early as 4:30 in the morning, so that Tasha can be dropped off at daycare by 5:30 a.m. and he can get to his job. The daycare program transports Tasha to a nearby preschool between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. daily, where, Glen says, they offer “more in-depth teaching.” The cost of the daycare center is $600/month. If CalWORKs did not pay for child care, the Director of the center told Glen, he would need to pay an out-of-pocket, reduced rate of $300/month. Indeed, in late November, 1999, Glen’s income reached the
point that he was required by CalWORKs to pay a percentage of day care costs. The total amount was much less than the $300 he would have paid without assistance, but still a significant bite out of his budget: $2.50/day ($50/month). Glen struggled to pay the $50/month in childcare costs required by CalWORKs each month, making clear the profound benefits of CalWORKs’ child care subsidy, since it is unlikely he would have been able to afford to pay the entire amount, himself.

Glen seemed to have a strong sense of efficacy as a parent, and a belief that he could impact his daughter’s well-being. He said, for example, “the neighborhood could be bad as it want to be, [but] you can keep your kids out of the midst of it, you know.” Although Glen was often exhausted during interviews, he seemed to enjoy tremendously the opportunity to talk about his daughter. He described her as a “lovable” child with a “keen understanding” who is “hyperactive, hyper-drive [laughing]. She is “like about four kids in one … one of them’s a boy … and one of them is a ballerina, one of them is just really intelligent”; one is the “do-it-yourselfer,” he said. His tone was positive, and reflective of the ways he and Tasha enjoy one another. He offered a realistic assessment of what is needed to maintain his well being as a parent, and what is good for his relationship with Tasha. On one occasion he spoke of the experience of leaving her at daycare:

I was ready to go out the door and she ran after me, "Daddy, daddy, no, I wanna be wit 'chu, want go home wit 'chu". I said, "I'm not goin home, Tasha." .... .... I was tryin' to figure out a way to git past that, cuz I ... I want her to love her daddy, but I don't want her to be like, oh, boy, I can't separate ... I need a break some time, everybody need a break sometime.

Glen proved to be a caring and protective father, and likewise Tasha was an active member of their relationship, letting her father know when she was hurt, or needed help. Particularly striking was Glen’s tendency to be proactive, often anticipating his daughter’s caregiving-related needs and helping her to communicate them. He expressed himself and behaved in ways that spoke to his devotion as a father, one who is attentive
and concerned with his daughter’s health and development. “She’s really special to me…this is my only child. I see a lot of her mother in her, you know…I see a lotta me in there too.” He showed a capacity to be both affectionate and authoritative with Tasha, and in turn, Tasha appeared to be developing very well in her father’s care. During one interview, Tasha sat on the floor in front of her father while he combed and rebraided her hair. Glen discussed Tasha’s difficulty with expressive language, and his plan to enroll her in speech therapy. He also produced copies of his CPS case plan, assessments of Tasha completed shortly after their reunification, and referrals to therapy. The referrals suggested that Tasha had demonstrated indiscriminate attachment behaviors toward strangers, and that Glen and Tasha could benefit from supportive family therapy.

*She still is super friendly with people, you know ...it's not as bad as it used to be, you know, she don't just go runnin' up to people anymore. So it's improved a little bit.... I make it a policy every day I make sure that I tell her that I love her ... I had to make sure she understood that you don' jus' go up kissin' everybody or ... know, hug people.*

Glen and Tasha were playful in my presence: at the end of one interview Glen proudly talked about how Tasha could dance, and then turned on the music. Rather than dancing alone, she wanted to dance with her daddy and grabbed his hands, jumping up and down. Glen joined in and turned Tasha around in laughing circles.

After participating in fairly consistent interviews between May, 1999 and May, 2000, Glen did not respond to efforts to contact him in May, 2001. As his telephone number had been disconnected and a letter mailed to him was not returned, nothing is currently known about Glen and Tasha’s status.
Anna is a 33-year-old single African-American mother of three children, Kiera (13), Keshon (11) and Darnell (2). Throughout most of her adult life, Anna has combined welfare with work. She has held many different jobs, most of them part-time positions paying minimum wage.

Anna’s first job was with a fast food restaurant. She began working there part-time while still in high school, and then continued for three years after graduating. At age 21, she gave birth to her first child, Kiera, and quit her job to care for the baby. At that time she began receiving welfare. Two years later, she gave birth to Keshon. Shortly after his birth, she went back to work as an usher in a movie theater and kept this job for three years. Although employed more than half time, her income was not high enough to disqualify her from welfare. At age 26, Anna took a job in construction, which she kept for 4 years. It was shortly after beginning her construction job that Anna became involved in drugs – primarily crack cocaine. She said her drug use did not interfere with her work performance because "I worked first and then after I got paid, that's when I went to go use my drugs…I never used [drugs] and [then] went to work. Never."

Shortly after welfare reform’s implementation process began, Anna received information from the welfare department about the CalWORKs orientation, and attended. She felt the orientation, which provided information on creating resumes and proper business dress, was helpful. She also credited CalWORKs with helping her to find her next job, as a cafeteria worker at a large business office. But after only a few months, Anna was laid off, and shortly following her layoff Anna spent a long night out, using drugs with acquaintances. Before going out Anna had left her 6 month-old son with her mother, and when she did not return the following day, Anna’s mother – who had been left in charge of Anna’s children many times before -- called the child protection agency. Darnell was placed in non-kin foster care and Anna was informed that in order to regain custody of her son, she would need to enter a drug treatment program. Additionally, she
was ordered to attend parenting classes, anger management classes and the 12-step program offered through her recovery program. Darnell was in foster care for two weeks, and then moved to live with his mother in the residential drug treatment program. It was during her time in the residential program that Anna, who was exempt from CalWORKs’ work requirements, decided to return to school. She began taking business and general education courses at the local community college.

In spite of the apparent abrupt nature of child protective intervention in her life, Anna feels she has benefited from the agency’s involvement. "I would still be out here today on drugs…they gave me another chance in life. So I'm thankful and I thank my mother for calling on me." She claims to feel no resentment towards her mother and is appreciative of the close relationship they share.

When Anna entered recovery, her two oldest children went to live with Anna's mother, who received a TANF grant of $505/month to help her care for the children. Darnell lived with Anna in the treatment program, but because of the family cap she did not receive any TANF cash benefits for him (Darnell was born after she had already been receiving TANF for her other children). Instead, at the time of the interviews Anna received $310 in county General Assistance funds, and $137/month in food stamps. She paid $280/month to the residential treatment program to cover her primary expenses (which included room and board), thus only having $30/month cash available for other costs. In April 2000, Anna felt she was ready to leave the residential treatment environment and moved instead to her parents’ home, where she could also be with her two oldest children.

Living with her parents improved Anna's financial situation somewhat, since she no longer had to pay rent to the recovery program, and was able to keep her entire GA check of $310. More importantly, during this time, other than General Assistance, Anna received financial support from a number of sources including her mother, her fiancée, her educational institution, and CalWORKs. Anna’s mother provided her with financial support of approximately $150 each month, and her fiancée gave her approximately...
$80/month. CalWORKs financed day care for Darnell and also paid for Anna’s books, school supplies and transportation (a bus pass). Anna believed that CalWORKs would continue to pay for Darnell’s daycare “as long as I’m doing 32 hours/week,” and stated that she received an educational grant of approximately $2000/semester in addition to a tuition waiver. She anticipated finishing her business courses within a year, and then to secure a job as an administrative assistant.

In the same month that she left the residential treatment program, Anna attended a job fair at her school and was immediately hired by a shipping company that was paying wages of $9.20/hour. She began working from 11:00 p.m. -3:00 a.m. loading and unloading trucks, while continuing to attend school from 9:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. “I said oh, I could do that…I could do that and still go to school … I need a job ‘cause I can’t depend on no AFDC.” Her fiancée delivered her to work each night, picking her up at the end of her shift so she could rest at home for a few hours, before taking the city bus to school. During those hours Darnell was cared for either by Anna’s mother, or by a local child care provider (during the daytime).

Anna feels her involvement in school and work supports her recovery.

Doing nothing, I get bored. And when I get bored, then you know, I think about using [drugs] again…these past few days I've been bored but I haven't been thinking about using because I have picked up my school books, you know, studying.

Thus, it may be that her commitment to her schoolwork as well as her job with the shipping company, keep her occupied and also help to prevent a relapse. In addition, these activities have fostered improvements in her relationships with her family and her children. She feels her family is very supportive of her recovery. "I have all my family, they're on my side now. They see a big change in me, and I feel changed also." Noting that during the height of her addiction her oldest son used to refuse to call her “mom”
because of her negligent behavior, she feels that her current efforts have promoted a change in their feelings toward her.

*I get more respect out of my children now...they call me when they need help with their homework. They call me when they have a problem. You know, they makin’ me a part of their life as much as I’m making them a part of mine.*

Anna could be attentive with her youngest child, Darnell, but also showed a tendency to place emotional and physical distance between them. On a couple of occasions she was observed being quite directive, and her tone could be sharp. Several times during one interview she told the 15-month-old to go in the other room and get his bottle, demanded that he stop climbing on a nearby high chair, and then threatened to hit him with a shoe when he tested the limit. In another interview, however, she spontaneously intervened in play with his cousins to protect him from falling, as well as from hurting himself with a stick, and said with affection when he came near: “Well, I see you. Go play…”

Anna fiercely denied that she and her children would ever again face the conditions of deprivation that characterized her drug-using past. Although this was framed as positive and determined, it also seemed as if to ward off anxieties about potentially facing such challenges in the future. She revealed some uncertainty about her power to influence her son’s outcomes, for example with respect to Darnell’s potential for involvement in drugs and gangs, she said, “I was gonna tell him about it. An’ … I’m gonna let him make the decision, you know. But I hope he don’t.” Still, Anna takes pride in her recent accomplishments.

*Every day I’m doing something constructive. I’m going to school and then I’m coming home and doing my homework. And then I’m back out there again goin’ back to school. And then on the weekends I have time with my family – my other two kids....And I go to my meetings and just stay in the house, you know – catch up on my reading or spend quality time with my kids.*
In July, 2001 Anna responded to follow-up efforts, and in a brief telephone call indicated that she continues to live with her parents and holds the same job as she did a year before.
Regina, Jesus, Ramon, Fatima, Carmina, and Lela

Regina is a 30-year-old Latina mother of 5 children, Jesus (13), Ramon (11), Fatima (9), Carmina (8), and Lela (3). She did not finish high school and has very little work experience. Prior to CalWORKs involvement, she was often profoundly dissatisfied with her life in general and her children in particular, frequently describing them as “crazy” or as “brats.” Before enrolling in a CalWORKs training program, she spent most of her time watching television, unable or unwilling to plan daily activities outside of the home: “all I do is watch TV, really … I just watch anything that comes on.” In early interviews with Regina, her answers to most questions consisted of only one or two words. She showed very little emotion other than irritation, communicating, for the most part, in a slow monotone. Her three-year-old daughter, Lela, was not attending preschool and spent her days watching Nickelodeon. The other four children were often around the house during interviews, even those that occurred during school hours. Their home was often dark, with the shades drawn, and the children did not play during the interviews. The family had no known history of child welfare services involvement, however the children were known to have a variety of difficulties. These included dental problems and health problems such as chronic asthma in the youngest child, Lela; and stealing and chronic truancy by three of the older children.

When the interviews began, the relationships between Regina and her children seemed to be at best, either empty or strained. Regina seemed to view most of her children’s behaviors as efforts to annoy her, and was observed several times dismissing or ignoring their bids for attention or help. She did not appear to enjoy their company, and seemed to resent their needs. Over time, Regina revealed in a variety of ways that her children demanded more of her than she felt able to give, both economically and emotionally. She responded to this apparent sense of inadequacy with a brittle defensiveness, one that placed distance between her children and herself.

Regina began receiving AFDC in 1993 when she and her first husband separated. For two years, she was employed at a warehouse packaging fruits and vegetables, but she
said that her resulting employment income was not high enough at the time to disqualify her from AFDC. She also worked cleaning homes at various points in time, collecting cash “under the table.” Four years after her divorce Regina moved away from her home community to escape an abusive boyfriend. Having left behind most of her family, this move increased her sense of loneliness and left her with limited social support.

The year after arriving in her new community, Regina was employed at a drug store for three months, but was forced to quit, she said, because of childcare difficulties. A live-in cousin was watching the children, she said, and “they didn’t listen to her. They don’t listen to me, they don’t listen to nobody … they were getting in more trouble, they wasn’t doing their homework, they wasn’t doing nothing …. I liked being away from the house and stuff, but still I had to worry all the time …. I was getting calls [at work] five, six times a day because of them.” After leaving the drug store position, Regina did not return to work, instead depending on TANF – and the income of her boyfriend -- to meet the needs of her family. At the point in time when interviews began, Regina received a grant of $951, along with $50 child support, $324 food stamps and about $40 worth of WIC coupons. She lived with her boyfriend, Jesus, who was employed as a painter and paid for a significant amount of the household expenses. Although Jesus’ work hours and income are dependent upon the weather, some months he is able to earn more than $3000, Regina said. She also reported that Jesus was responsible for the household finances (she gives her TANF check to him), and for paying their $1100 rent each month. Before living with Jesus, she frequently had to borrow money from her sister and her mother.

Regina reports recurrent problems with her children. Her 13-year-old son has consistently cut school, a problem that Regina is aware could result in a reduced TANF grant. She does not feel that it is her responsibility to ensure that he attends school, however, and resents both her son’s behavior and the stance of the welfare department. “I send him to school. If he’s not at school then that’s his problem … not mine … it wasn’t my fault.” In exasperation over his behavior, Regina recently sent her son to live with relatives, saying that he had refused to obey her rules.
In August 1999, Regina attended a CalWORKs assessment and orientation and then began 12 weeks of training at a flower arranging school. This training opportunity had a dramatic impact on Regina and her family. Regina felt the training reduced her stress and improved her mood, contributing to a better relationship between Regina and her children. She stated that she enjoyed the school, especially appreciating the opportunity to get out of the house each day.

_I’m not stressed…I’m getting out of the house, I’m not just sitting here locked [in] all the time...When I was home, I was lazy and now I’m out...I’m not mad all day. Now I go out and do what I want to do. Go to my class, come home and then start my dinner. And the day goes by faster now._

Regina said that after spending the day in training she simply felt tired, rather than angry. With her new daily activities, there was a noticeable difference in Regina’s interview style. She became much more animated, was far more engaged in the interviews, and spoke with pleasure about flower arranging. The instructors were “nice,” she said, and the class was progressing quickly in their skills: “We’re doing our first funeral tomorrow … we’ve only been in there two weeks, and they usually don’t do them that fast … I’m learning. Taught me how to make bows. How to cut flowers, how to take care of them.” After months of insisting, “I don’t plan nothin’,” Regina obtained an appointment book with her new job and seemed to welcome further interviews, adding “when you come again, my house will be all full of flowers.” Perhaps most importantly, Regina felt that her involvement with the flower arranging school had a positive impact on her relationship with her children. Prior to attending school, she said, the children “would stay away from me. Now they go in the room with me and everything…now they stay home with me.” The children had told her that she seemed to be a happier person “now that I’m not always yelling at them.” After transitioning into work and seeing a paycheck, she commented that “I went to school and now I’m working just to make it better for my kids … trying to get them what … they want.”
Regina did not utilize any outside daycare providers while she was participating in welfare-to-work, instead leaving her youngest child with the older siblings, or with friends. She thus did not incur any cost related to child care. CalWORKs provided Regina with $45 per month to cover the cost of gas for her car, so she could get to the training each day. Regina did not feel this was enough to offset her transportation costs: she figured her gas and parking costs were actually over $100/month. Thus, although her TANF grant amount did not change and her costs actually increased, Regina seemed to appreciate the other changes the program brought.

After completing the training program in January, 2000, Regina took a job at a grocery store. Although she was hoping to get placed in the flower department of the grocery chain, she instead was sent to work stocking shelves. This was a source of tremendous displeasure for Regina, who had many complaints about her coworkers and was dissatisfied with her daily tasks. Although the managers at the grocery store told her she would eventually be placed in the flower department, she felt unwilling to wait, and was angry that she was unable to gain further experience arranging flowers. Her hourly pay at the grocery store was $7.75/hour, resulting in weekly earnings of $250. Regina did not feel this was adequate income. She hoped to soon be able to quit the grocery store, and take a job at the flower shop of a local hotel. Although this job might increase Regina’s hourly wages, perhaps more importantly it would allow her to engage in an activity that would have a positive psychological impact.

After the last interview in January, 2000, Regina did not show up for two scheduled meetings and failed to return any telephone calls. Efforts to follow up with her in May, 2001 received no response.
Francesca, Tommy, Veronica, and Klarissa

Francesca is a 36-year-old Latina, the mother of Tommy, Veronica, and Klarissa (ages 10, 8, and 2, respectively). After graduating from high school and spending 6 months at a local community college, she quit school and went to work in a warehouse. There, she spent approximately one year on the assembly line and then began working at the local post office. Although she was using crack cocaine Francesca stated that her drug use, while working for the warehouse, was recreational. At the post office, a girlfriend introduced her to heroin and that's when, she said, her addiction took hold and she "began to lose everything …. I lost my job - it was because of going in late. Missing days because of drugs…”.

After being fired from her job at the post office, Francesca began prostituting to support herself. From age 20 to 25, she continued to use heroin, while alternately living at her father's house, with one of her siblings, and frequently on the street.

In 1988 her son Tommy was born and in 1990 she had a daughter, Veronica, each child with a different father. Shortly after Veronica's birth, Francesca was arrested and spent approximately two weeks in jail. Both of her children were placed in foster care during her incarceration. Once Francesca was released, she regained custody of her daughter, but her son was placed by the child welfare agency with his maternal grandmother, who receives a foster care payment for his care to this day. According to Francesca, her son is doing very well with his grandmother; "he's really smart and quiet and logical…it's like talking to a little man." Tommy’s positive development in the care of his grandmother is the major reason, Francesca says, that she has not attempted to reunify with her son.

Francesca and Veronica were homeless for much of the 1990s, along with Veronica's father, who was also addicted to illegal drugs and was employed very sporadically. He did not provide consistent monetary support for his family and often took his daughter panhandling. Francesca was receiving AFDC and food stamps during
this period, but relied on prostitution to substantially supplement the family’s income. In late 1998, Francesca gave birth to another daughter, Klarissa. Throughout most of her pregnancy, Francesca, Veronica and Manuelo (Veronica's father) lived in a van parked in a residential neighborhood.

It was me, their father and I was pregnant with Klarissa. My whole pregnancy was living in a van with Klarissa. And when I had her I said, “oh my God, she can't come in the van.” It was wintertime and it had a leak and it was raining and water was coming in, it was cold in there, you know. And I thought, “how am I going to bring a newborn baby into this van, you know? She'll die of freezing”... Well, their dad said, "when you have her we're just going to have to start hustling for motels." So that's what we did. We went to a motel and then he would watch her, and I would go make money [through prostitution].

Then in 1999, just before the birth of her second daughter, Francesca stopped using drugs and began methadone treatment. Along with methadone, she was taking medication for a chronic medical condition, as well as for clinical depression. Due to these medical conditions, Francesca was exempt from the work requirements under welfare reform during the time she received benefits through TANF. (As we will see, Francesca later applied for SSI and was approved, thereby no longer receiving TANF for herself and also no longer subject to the TANF welfare-to-work rules).

Shortly after Klarissa's birth, Francesca's relationship with Manuelo ended, and Francesca and her daughters began moving between motels and homeless shelters. In January 2000, Francesca was approved for housing assistance from Shelter Plus Care, a federal program administered by Housing and Urban Development. This aid allowed Francesca and her daughters to move into a small house where Francesca paid $37/month rent. In addition to Shelter Plus, she received WIC, MediCal and food stamps along with her monthly TANF grant of $505. Under California’s family cap, Francesca’s TANF grant did not increase with the birth of her third child. She did, however, receive an increase in her food stamps, and her baby was eligible for MediCal. Before she obtained
housing assistance, she was receiving approximately $289 per month in food stamps. Once she moved into her house, her food stamps were cut to $189, due to her low rental costs. In April 2000, Francesca was approved for SSI and in July 2000 began to receive $497/month from SSI. Once she was removed from the TANF grant, Francesca reported that the grant amount changed from $505 to a child-only grant for Veronica, of $159. These changes produced a net income increase of $151/month. [It should be noted that these figures may be somewhat inaccurate, but reflect Francesca’s recollection of her income sources and amounts at the time].

Prior to Francesca’s receipt of housing assistance, while the family was living at a motel, Veronica was molested on her way to visit a neighbor. This event prompted another episode of child protective services intervention, this time involving both Veronica and Klarissa. Both children were quickly returned to Francesca’s care, but the incident took a serious emotional toll. Veronica has since been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of "chronic transience, homelessness and witness of domestic violence and verbal abuse between her parents," according to a court report. A six-month review done by child welfare services in March 2000 stated that Veronica "is in need of consistent support and emotional attachment from her mother. [The therapist] is concerned that given the mother's high levels of anxiety and limited coping skills, she may be unable to deal with her own issues as well as [her daughter's]." Francesca's case plan for 2000 ordered that she enroll in parenting classes, maintain an adequate home, continue her sobriety, and also ensure that Veronica attends school, and that her medical and emotional needs are met. In addition, the child welfare case plan mandated Francesca’s involvement in employment activities, through CalWORKs. Francesca thought this to be unrealistic, given the other demands on her time, and the logistical challenges of ensuring that she and the children made it to their various appointments.

Beginning in 2000, Klarissa and Veronica were enrolled in daycare so that Francesca could pursue parenting classes. Although CalWORKs was responsible for payment to the daycare provider, payment was refused for several months due to a paperwork error. Fortunately, while the error was being corrected, the child welfare
agency paid for the children's care (through Francesca’s request to her favorite child welfare worker). Although it was unclear whether and how the parenting classes were of help to Francesca in her parenting, the relatively ready access to child care helped Francesca complete many of her other daily activities – such as attending her methadone clinic and psychotherapy appointments. (Since she relied on public transportation -- bus and train-- a trip to the methadone clinic could take three hours, total, and was much simpler without the children in tow). Unfortunately, the children’s behavior proved to be too difficult for the first child care provider, who requested that they leave. Francesca located another provider through a flyer in the local park, and Klarissa and Veronica attempted to adapt to this new situation, with negligible success. Veronica was frequently worried, when out of her mother’s care and company, that something terrible would happen (such as her mother being arrested), and she would be abandoned. When her fears were tapped for any reason – such as her mother being late to pick her up, for example – Veronica would become destructive, loud, and difficult for adults to control. Francesca was committed to helping her oldest daughter cope, but at the same time found her behavior exasperating and difficult to manage. Klarissa, while a temperamentally easier child than her older sister, also tended toward behaving in dangerous ways, repeatedly testing her mother’s capacities to successfully, and calmly, intervene.

Thus, Francesca’s relationship with each child had a mutually intense, chaotic quality that generated a constant need for attention. Her experience of both her children was one of unremitting demands placed upon her as a caregiver. This was true, as well, of the environment in which they lived. The first six months of the interview period coincided with the longest stable housing arrangement the family had experienced, in years. The house was undoubtedly considered a home, but it was also mildewing, infested with rats, and located next door to a loosely chained pit bull, in a dangerous neighborhood. Francesca cherished the positive effect of her recovery and their home on her children, as well as herself, but she feared the fragility of it all: “I’ve got a place for them, you know, I’m actually having a life … and I don’t want to ruin it.” She experienced deep and chronic financial strain regarding the basic necessities of life: food, clothing, and shelter. She spoke of being unable (in the past) to give her children a
roof over their heads, and of her willingness to consider risking her life (while prostituting) in order to “pay the bills” and provide them with a place to stay. Her physical and emotional availability was limited as a result of the strains of daily life, and while she had reasons to be hopeful about the future she also felt constrained by the conditions of poverty in which they lived. She often felt “nervous” as a parent, and linked her anxiety to economic stress, in addition to the children’s behavior and the loneliness of single parenting: “Havin’ to do everything on my own … the bills …worryin’ if I’m gonna make it at the end of the month …”.

Francesca had few sources of positive social support, which, combined with her financial insecurity, resulted in a high degree of stress. Without friends or family members on whom she could rely, Francesca felt that she alone was responsible for ensuring that all the bills were paid and that her children received adequate care.

_I’m getting lonely and I don’t have very many friends and I don’t have too many people to talk to an’ it’s like all on me…It jus’ get too overwhelming for me, you know. I jus’ feel like it’s all loaded on my shoulders an’ I gotta do it. These kids need me, you know. An’ I can’t just flunk out. Like there’s days it takes everything I got, to get Veronica to school. I get bummed out an’ I jus’ wanna lay there._

Francesca believes the high degree of stress she is under, impacts her ability to parent her daughters. “I end up kinda takin’ it out on the kids because I get so stressed out that I’ll snap at ‘em. I don’t hit ‘em but I’ll snap at ‘em, like, ‘jus’ leave me alone, guys, God, can’ I have a break?’” After Francesca began her recovery from addiction, she rarely chose to associate with her former friends, many of whom were still actively using drugs. Francesca generally recognized the fragility of her sobriety, and expressed the feeling that if she were to reconnect with past friends, she would be jeopardizing her recovery. “It seems like when I’m around them [old friends] that feeling comes triggering back, you know, that old lifestyle…I could “slip” that easy, so I stay away from those people.” On one occasion, however, she allowed an old, actively drug using friend to live with her
for two weeks. This led to conflict with her eldest daughter, Veronica (who did not like Francesca’s friend and her behavior) and trouble with the neighbors, so Francesca insisted that the woman move out of her home. Although her prioritization of her recovery process was important, the choice left her feeling isolated, as well.

Child welfare services requirements created a great deal of stress for Francesca during this time, demanding that she be a consistent support for her daughters and attend parenting classes and therapy. As noted earlier, although she was exempt from CalWORKs participation, her child welfare case plan included work activities – something that Francesca thought to be impossible, unfortunately. Francesca hoped to someday return to work but did not feel it was something she could undertake during the interview period.

*I have so many things that I want to do…I want to go to school and I want to do this and I want to become this, I want a good job and I want to get a car. You know, I want to be part of society again. And I’ve got this other part of me that’s: “man, you’ve got too many issues right now.” I’ve got a lot of problems and a lot of hurt inside, got a lot of anger that I need to deal with.*

The absence of support from friends or a partner exacerbated Francesca’s depression, and it seemed likely that the stress of facing multiple demands on her time could threaten her sobriety as well as her physical and mental health. Further, Francesca expressed many complaints about her relationship with her child welfare worker, feeling she was not understanding. She repeatedly expressed the fear that the worker would take away her children, without giving Francesca an adequate opportunity to display her parenting abilities. “She doesn’t like me – she had me pegged from my file, without knowing me.” Thus, although Francesca is a woman who generally does not shy away from formal supports – whether agencies or individuals -- she perceived her child welfare worker as a threat to her parenting.
Finally, although the presence of the public child welfare services agency increased the number of demands on Francesca’s time, it also offered her resources that helped to decrease her financial strain. When Francesca moved into her new home, the child welfare services agency provided her with furniture such as a bed and a kitchen table, which increased her feelings of pride in her home and the motivation to maintain it. In addition, the agency assisted with transportation costs, providing her with both a bus pass and reimbursement for BART expenses for several months. Child welfare workers also offered to help her to establish a payment plan for her numerous traffic tickets, so that she would eventually be able to regain her driver’s license. (These services were time-limited, and Francesca eventually reported that she had been deemed ineligible for further supports of the kind.)

A little over a year after moving into the family home, everything changed for Francesca and her daughters. The neighbors, about whom Francesca had frequently complained as nosy and intrusive, called the child welfare agency and reported that Francesca had been physically abusive to Klarissa. Francesca explained what happened, during a follow-up interview in August, 2001.

*Klarissa had gotten into my makeup bag and got lipstick all over her. She came downstairs and had it head to toe ... so I put her in the bathtub and got the makeup off her face but couldn’t get it off her knees ... it was hot so I put her in a dress ... we were outside and (the neighbors) were there drinkin’ ... and said “look at those bruises on Klarissa!” So she (the neighbor) went and called CPS. Veronica tried telling the lady “it’s makeup,” but the neighbor didn’t believe her ... the emergency CPS worker comes in, and ... pulled Veronica out of school. The worker comes and says that ... you’re beating your kids with a belt ... I don’t even own a belt ... I showed her the makeup ... I was so angry ... I used baby oil and a cotton ball and it came off Klarissa. She goes “I’m not satisfied” ... flagged down the police. ... I was so mad, I showed all the food, said “look at my cupboards”, the house was clean...*
Once the children had been placed in foster care, Veronica reportedly told the CPS worker about a friend of Francesca’s who had stayed in their home, who had a crack pipe in her possession. Francesca insisted that Veronica had lied about this, and had been confused, that “if I knew somebody was using drugs in my house, I wouldn’t let them…” Then, one of her regular UA (urine analysis) tests came back positive for alcohol (whether at a level of .20 or .02, Francesca was not clear). She admitted having a glass of wine to deal with her emotional state after the children were removed, but insisted that she never had an alcohol problem. She missed a parenting class because of a dental appointment, saying “I got proof (of the dentist appointment),” and that “my teeth are so bad because of the methadone that I need root canals.” Francesca, who was temporarily living with her mother and oldest son while working on her case plan, said “they made it sound like I was definitely getting my kids back,” and asserted that she had done “everything required” of her, to meet the case plan. Just prior to the follow-up interview, however, she learned that the children would not be returned to her at a hearing three months after their removal. She was extremely upset, and talked of how her counselor had not written a letter on her behalf to the court:

She felt that I wasn’t using drugs but I still had my behavior of being around drug addicts ... she said, “you still seem to hang around the same people” ....I thought that was true, but I didn’t have anybody in my life, you know, I didn’t have anybody to talk to, I was always by myself with the kids. And it’s like, they popped into my life and we’d become friends, and we’d talk, and ... I’ve known Jackie since I was a little girl ... but they were sayin’ they were the wrong kind of people that I was hangin’ around because they went to the methadone clinic ...

The methadone clinic seemed to offer both benefits and challenges, to Francesca. “I thought of this (the methadone) as being able to function,” she said, but “just being around those people at the clinic gets me in trouble.” During the follow-up interview, the phone rang. It was Francesca’s attorney, calling about a new UA test that had
turned up positive for PCP. Francesca was angry and upset, insisting that she didn’t do PCP. Instead, she said, she had accepted a ride home from the clinic, with some people who were smoking weed in the car. “I knew it smelled funny, and somebody said something about it,” so maybe, she proposed, she had picked up PCP just by being in the car. “I’m not stupid to take a hit of weed and go give a UA … and not get my kids back.”
The following commentaries identify some of the possible pathways through which welfare reform may have affected the child welfare outcomes in each case. These are not definitive and are likely not complete; in no case could a cause-effect relationship be established between aspects of a family’s welfare involvement, and their child welfare status. In addition, in every case there were undoubtedly influences that went unnoticed or unaccounted for, such as social relationships never mentioned by the parent, or private feelings about parenting, that were never spoken aloud. For these reasons, the comments below are intended to initiate discussion about potential pathways of influence, and speculation about the ways that different interventions might have altered the outcomes.

**Leticia and Dashon**

**Possible outcome 2: Decreased family income due to punitive aspects of welfare reform (family cap, sanctions, time limits) could create economic conditions that lessen the likelihood of successful reunification (and potentially increase the chances of reentry for those who reunify).**

Dashon and his sister’s reentry to foster care seemed to be, in the most immediate sense, a result of their mother’s relapse on crack cocaine. However, it is possible that Leticia’s relapse and the decline of her parenting capacities were associated with poverty-related factors that included the effects of welfare programs. Although there is limited information available about the events that occurred between the last interview (in May, 2000) and the follow-up contact (in May, 2001), several possibilities can be pieced together regarding Leticia’s circumstances.

Leticia may have reached her two-year time limit during the interim period, and she also would have been sanctioned for non-participation in welfare-to-work. Although she was employed, she was not working the required minimum of 32 hours per week. It is also highly unlikely that she could have completed the 32 hours per week community service that would have been required to keep her full TANF grant. With a sanction, her grant amount would have dropped to $319 per month. She then had a baby in October,
2000, and stopped working altogether. Because of the family cap, she would have received no additional funds for her infant. Thus, three individuals were living on an official welfare income of $319 per month. Leticia would have faced increased costs associated with the new baby, even if she were breastfeeding. The cost of diapers, alone (about $40 per month) would have accounted for 13% of her income. Thus, there is good reason to believe that in the couple of months prior to her relapse, Leticia’s economic situation was particularly precarious.

In brief, it is clear that her income would have dropped significantly in proportion to her family size, and her expenses would have gone up. This would have left her in a position of further reliance on non-TANF sources of income. Such sources could have included work, but her lack of education, lack of job skills, and additional barriers would make this a difficult option. With a new baby she would have had only 6 months in which she was not required to work. Her recovery program was already assisting her as much as was possible, in concrete terms. Reliance on the father of her child may have been problematic since it was known that she had ambivalent feelings about him, and about having another child. It is unknown why she got back in contact with her relative, but it may have been a combination of factors including the emotional birth of a child and economic factors. Finally, while Leticia had an open case with the child welfare agency, during the period when she had called for help with her rent, as of December 1999 the case had been closed. Thus, when she faced these new difficulties the child welfare agency was no longer monitoring her and was not immediately available to help her, until her children were removed.

Kenisha, Ketanya, Shaunel, Dacey, Olisa, and DeMarco

Possible outcome 12: The psychological impact of a new policy environment for low-income parents could have an unknown effect on parental stress, motivation and behavior. These effects can be thought of as separate from the concrete stipulations of welfare reform (e.g., time limits, work requirements).

Welfare reform seems to have been an important piece of the complicated set of motivations that Kenisha experienced, to stabilize her life – including both her economic
situation and her parenting. Reforms in the welfare system seemed, at least in part, to contribute a sense of fear -- as she felt that welfare would no longer provide a safety net on which she could fall back, when needed. “If I don’t work, then I can’t take care of my kids, I can’t get welfare, you know – or I’m not entitled to certain things…It’s like, you know, trapping an animal or something.” The existence of time limits, sanctions and the family cap leave her feeling forced to achieve economic self-sufficiency. She sought and found a job without any assistance from CalWORKs and appeared for many months to be a dedicated member of the workforce, taking little time away from her job even after the birth of her son. With a history of inconsistent employment and bad credit, she feels her earning potential is limited. "I feel like no matter how hard I work, I’m still going to just be able to keep my head above water. I'm not going to be able to do great things."

Without being able to depend on welfare as a supplement, Kenisha will be solely responsible for providing for her children from her earnings. This creates a high degree of stress for her, leaving her worried that she will never achieve economic security. At the same time, she repeatedly spoke of feelings that she was making up for lost time, that she was doing right by her children, and that through her job she was becoming a part of society in ways she had never before experienced.

*Now I feel like I'm back in the system in a good way. You know, [laughter] -- not in a bad way.... I feel like I'm back on the map.*

*[Laughter] Do you know what I mean? ... I'm being something and doing stuff, you know, whereas -- before, you know, it was like I was nobody and you know -- didn't nobody give a damn and now since I'm paying... taking care of my responsibilities and working and stuff... people that care for me, you know, and -- even bill collectors and when you pay your bills... they say thank you and ... then they give your name to somebody else -- you know, they -- [laughter] get you further in debt, you know, so -- it makes me – feel like I'm somebody now.*

**Glen and Tasha**

*Possible outcome 7: Services made available or accessible through the use of TANF dollars, whether specifically intended (e.g., domestic violence counseling, child*
care) or through the creative and flexible application of TANF dollars (e.g., for family preservation type services in innovative counties) could be used to prevent some families from entering child welfare services, and promote successful exits from child welfare services, for others.

Glen is a short-term user of TANF, who did not require or use welfare-to-work services to transition off welfare. Neither TANF dollars nor child welfare services funds were used to pay for his participation in the drug treatment program. However, the initial TANF grant made his reunification with Tasha possible, and the daycare subsidy he secured through CalWORKs provided a vital ongoing form of support. Without this subsidy Glen’s financial situation would be far more precarious, given the uncertainty of his employment income and the fact that he must be able to work as many hours as possible, to meet his expenses each month. Additionally, coverage of move-in costs by the child welfare agency provided a vital support. Although Glen was relieved to have the child welfare agency out of his life, it remains an open question whether he might have benefited from ongoing or follow-up services of some kind, as time went on and he continued to adjust to single parenthood. Like other parents in this study, many of Glen’s family and friends had used drugs, and therefore were not uncomplicated sources of support for him, should his economic or other personal circumstances become too much to bear on his own.

Anna, Kiera, Keshon, and Darnell

**Possible outcome 6**: Increased employment due to welfare-to-work program involvement could increase income and positively influence parental behavior and well-being so that maltreatment and the likelihood or intensity of child welfare services interventions, could decrease for some families.

Anna’s participation in school and work activities has given her a new confidence in her abilities as a parent as well as increasing her current income. Her commitment to her education is likely improving her future employment options, as well. She now feels herself to be more of a role model for her children, actively helping them with their homework and spending time with them, reading books and playing games – and by Anna’s report, the children are responding positively to the changes in her. TANF dollars supported the older children’s care with their maternal grandmother, during Anna’s time
in the treatment program. In these ways, the welfare system indirectly supports Anna’s recovery and her relationship with her children, possibly decreasing the likelihood of future child welfare intervention, including a reentry to foster care for her children.

**Regina, Jesus, Ramon, Fatima, Carmina, and Lela**

*Possible outcome 6: Increased employment due to welfare-to-work program involvement could increase income and positively influence parental behavior and well-being, so that risk of maltreatment, and the need for child welfare services could decrease for some families.*

Although there was no known history of child welfare services involvement for this family, and no signs of maltreatment were observed, the relationships between Regina and her children were far from optimal. The family may have utilized other community services (besides child welfare services), although Regina denied this was the case: at a minimum, it was known that she had been contacted by her children’s schools regarding their truancy. Even though Regina was aware of the possibility of a financial penalty because of the children’s school non-attendance, she seemed unable or unwilling to take an active role in changing this. There are likely many reasons for the poor quality of Regina’s parenting and her relationship with her children, but her apparent depression was, no doubt, a key contributor. The change in Regina and her relationship with her children was striking, and coincided with her initial involvement in welfare-to-work activities. With the combination of a new daily routine and a feeling that she had earned the cash on hand, her self esteem and sense of control over her life appeared to improve, her mood lifted, and the children responded accordingly. Thus, welfare-to-work activities seemed to have a direct effect on the quality of the family relationships. Regina could have, but did not, take advantage of child care opportunities through CalWORKs. Depending upon the quality of child care available, such an option might be positive for the youngest child, Lela, potentially offering her a more stimulating and positive environment than being supervised at home by her older siblings.
Francesca, Tommy, Veronica, and Klarissa

Possible outcomes 5, and 7: Some families who are involved with both welfare and child welfare services may experience increased stress because of lack of effective agency coordination, thereby decreasing chances of successful child welfare outcomes. At the same time, some families may receive services through the child welfare agency that act as an economic and social buffer, leading them to avoid some negative repercussions they might have otherwise experienced under welfare reform.

Francesca has clearly faced many challenges as she attempts to successfully parent her children and exit the child welfare system. Although committed to her continuing recovery and to raising her youngest children on her own, she struggled daily to make it to appointments, to make ends meet, and to manage her children’s emotional needs and behavioral demands.

The requirements of her child welfare case plan both provided structure for Francesca, and also pushed her functional capacities to the limit, on a regular basis. Similarly, Francesca had a strongly ambivalent relationship with the child welfare system in general, and her child welfare workers in particular. She spoke fondly of at least one child welfare worker who had been emotionally supportive, early in her child welfare services career, and also spoke with bitterness about those who, she felt, misunderstood and misjudged her. The child welfare system provided her with crucial concrete supports (such as help with the costs of moving into the family’s first apartment, transportation costs, and time-limited coverage of her child care costs) and advocacy (such as setting up a payment plan for the traffic tickets).

For Francesca, her social isolation and her marginal economic conditions had serious implications. The experience of singly trying to raise her children in conditions of poverty, without relying on old means of coping (both economically, and emotionally), tested her. It seems worth questioning whether Francesca’s case plan, which focused on activities such as parenting classes, methadone maintenance, and individual psychotherapy, adequately addressed her underlying difficulties. It is also worth pondering whether, and to what extent, Francesca’s economic conditions played a role in her continuing problems. Certainly the intermittent financial assistance she received from
the child welfare agency was helpful, especially given that she was subject to the family cap and therefore received no TANF benefits for her youngest child. An increased income was a necessity, and SSI was a viable and meaningful alternative. To expect Francesca to succeed as both a recovering addict and a parent of two children, given her (pre-SSI) cash income of $505 per month, seems unrealistic. Attempting legal means of employment, however (as suggested in her child welfare case plan), seems even more unrealistic. What kinds of supports might have been provided through the welfare department, or the child welfare agency, that might have helped to prevent the children’s reentry into foster care?

The exact nature of the events that led to the children’s removal in May, 2001, remains unclear. They are difficult to assess based only on Francesca’s frank insistence that she did nothing to harm her children, that she had not relapsed into drug use, and that she is in fact a victim of a misguided CPS intervention. By Francesca’s own admission, however, she had spent time with people who were actively using drugs. She realized the riskiness of these associations, but felt trapped by her current need for regular visits to the methadone clinic, and her need for contact with friends. Perhaps the dilemmas faced by Francesca, including the effects of her precarious economic situation, are best exemplified by her decision to accept a ride home from the methadone clinic from people who she knew to be actively using drugs. This decision saved her the expense of a bus ride and a significant amount of time, and offered her a chance for social interaction with other familiar adults, but it also may have contributed to a negative outcome for Francesca and her children.