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DIMENSIONS OF IOWA WELFARE

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Does Iowa have people who are really poor? This question kept coming up during the early days of the War on Poverty and during the program on "Financing Iowa's Public Services." Welfare needs and welfare spending emerged as the government function where better understanding was most needed. An educational program on this topic was needed if Iowa State University was to fulfill President Robert Parks' commitment to "serve the needs of the citizens of the state."

The state Board of Regents agreed with Iowa State University educators that welfare would be the next discussion topic. The two other state institutions, the University of Iowa and the University of Northern Iowa, participated for the first time. Funds from the Higher Education Act helped pay expenses. An extension task force, with an eight-man governing board, started planning in 1966. Involved were extension administrators, economists, sociologists, editors, and specialists in family environment. The governing board conceived educational strategy, developed and produced materials, and organized and conducted the broad program.

Once the decision was made to conduct a state-wide program on Iowa welfare needs and welfare programs a planning team, called the "governing board," was established. It included, among others, an assistant extension director as chairman and educational operations team leader, a research team leader, a teaching materials and publications team leader, and a teaching team leader.

In reviewing the literature and data available on welfare in Iowa, four specific research needs emerged. These included:

1. The numbers and condition of dependent and disadvantaged families and individuals in Iowa.
2. An inventory of welfare programs in Iowa—both public and private.
3. The incidence of the tax and revenue burden on families and the incidence of the benefits of welfare services in Iowa.

4. The attitudes of Iowa leaders toward dependent families and welfare programs.

The extension service contracted with the Iowa State University Statistical Laboratory to conduct a household sample census survey. This provided an estimate of disadvantaged people in Iowa and rigorously defined and provided considerable detailed information about them.

An inventory of public and private welfare programs was conducted which accounted for all of the public spending on welfare and most of the spending by private welfare agencies in Iowa. A team of public finance economists did a study of the burden on families of providing for welfare services in Iowa and of the families who benefited from welfare services.

The leaders who were to participate in the workshops were identified and a sample surveyed concerning their knowledge of, and attitude toward, welfare programs.

A brief was prepared on Iowa laws which are designed to provide legal protection for a family against becoming dependent. This study included workmen's compensation, usury laws, and bankruptcy laws.

The teaching team prepared reference papers on eight areas of welfare need. These "dimensions of welfare" included old age, physical health, mental health, mental retardation, dependent children, low skills, unemployment, and crime.

These studies took about one year to complete and provided the information base for the teaching program.

THE EDUCATIONAL DELIVERY

In January of 1967 "sounding board" meetings were held in five locations in the state with professional welfare workers to acquaint them with the plans for the research and educational program we were calling Dimensions of Iowa Welfare. At these meetings welfare workers were alerted to the fact that the Board of Regents' institutions were going to conduct the program. They were given a preview of research and educational plans, a calendar of operations, and an opportunity to react and make suggestions about the program.

Just before the main educational program went to the field in the fall, President Parks invited the vice presidents and the deans in for a preview of the program so that they would be familiar with the program the university was presenting to the state.

The workshops for leaders were held in the fall and early winter of 1967 and 1968. Three teaching teams conducted workshops at 44 locations, with about 15 hours of teaching at each workshop. Workshop sessions were held the same day of the week for three consecutive weeks at each location.

In addition to the workshops, programs were presented to the governor's staff, the legislative interim committee, the Iowa Department of Social Services, and a number of other such interested groups.

While the workshops were in progress fact sheets for the self-administered discussion phase of the program were prepared. Some 30,000 persons participated in the discussion groups during the spring of 1968.

As a follow-up to these two main program efforts county staff members were trained for short presentations. Also, academic seminars were held at liberal arts colleges with social science teaching staff members to review the available data and the results of the specific Iowa research on welfare and to make available our teaching reference materials.

As a further follow-up the women of the Dubuque Archdiocese of the Catholic Church will hold 14 additional meetings this fall and will also conduct additional self-administered discussions.

EVALUATION

Evaluation, as with all public affairs educational programs, is difficult. Speculation is all that is possible.

One thing was very evident. The Dimensions of Iowa Welfare started from a very different base than Financing Iowa's Public Services. The Financing program was of keen interest to all middle-class property owners. They wanted and needed better facts and when they got them they acted. Iowa's tax system and support of public education has been revised. A system of 16 community colleges and vocational technical schools is in operation, and all school districts are part of a high school district. But with welfare it is different. People tend to be resentful that there are so many dependent families, and they have to unlearn some things if they are to use scientific knowledge for decision making. Two examples will illustrate.

For centuries in Western society dependent children have been a concern. In response religious and philanthropic organizations have built orphanages. Now scientific evidence indicates this is probably the poorest alternative if the goal is the development of the dependent

child. In one research project dependent children with “bad mothers,” with foster parents, and from orphanages were compared over time. The institutional children were a poor third and the “bad mothers” were somewhat ahead of the foster homes in raising self-sufficient, adjusted children.

Another example is how to deal with criminals. Traditionally, society was to be protected, crime discouraged, and the criminal punished by confinement in a penal institution for a time. It turns out in Iowa that at Anamosa if a young man who is married is confined as long as two years, his family will break up and he will become a confirmed criminal. Society must face this fact in deciding how to deal with first offenses such as embezzlement, bad checks, forgeries, etc.

Starting from a base of indifference and misinformation makes a real difference in the impact of a program on leaders and other citizens. On welfare we are probably just in the “awareness” stage.