



Book review

Michael J. Austin, *Changing Welfare Services: Case Studies of Local Welfare Reform Programs*, The Haworth Social Work Practice Press, New York, 2004, ISBN: 0-7890-2314-8, 417 pp.

In *Changing Welfare Services: Case Studies of Local Welfare Reform Programs*, Michael Austin and his associates present twenty-one case studies describing community programming efforts that have been undertaken in selected California counties since passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). While the scope of the programs covered is broad, they share the common feature of targeting those affected by PRWORA's welfare reform provisions. Further, the book focuses on detailing the local collaborative efforts critical to program development, as well as on identifying organizational challenges that make successful interagency partnerships difficult.

The topics included in the case studies were selected by county social service directors involved in the twelve-county Bay Area Social Services Consortium, which is described as a collaborative venture involving social service agencies, universities, and private foundations. The case studies were intended to meet at least one of the following criteria: "(1) a new approach to delivering social services, (2) practices that enhance public/private community partnerships, and/or (3) a unique administrative process or change" (p. 28). The book in turn is organized into three sections that correspond closely to these criteria. The case studies are viewed as "reflecting the most promising programs and practices emerging out of welfare reform implementation in the San Francisco Bay area" (p. xxvii). Hence, readers should not expect a broader assessment of welfare reform implementation efforts, and should be careful in demarcating the context from which these program examples are drawn.

The presentation of the case examples is preceded by introductory chapters that describe important considerations in the implementation of welfare reform programs. This overview material is useful in setting the broader context in which to interpret the case studies. In particular, the authors discuss the difficult task of fundamentally changing the culture of welfare offices to correspond with new PRWORA goals and objectives. This involves not only convincing workers of the desirability of broad program changes, but of reorienting work roles and providing sufficient training and resources to make successful role redefinition feasible. Attention also is given to the necessity for agency managers to improve internal relationship-building and networking, and to emphasize partnering with other community agencies to provide a range of supports for those transitioning off welfare. Austin discusses such approaches more generally as "managing out", and

provides a useful organization theory discussion to illustrate the components of this philosophy in a concluding chapter.

The book's overview presentations do suffer from a rather uncritical acceptance of the most optimistic visions of welfare reform. For example, in discussing the work-first philosophy that has commonly guided local welfare reform programming, the authors state that "With a job, participants are then encouraged to advance themselves by assuming increased job responsibilities as well as seeking additional training and education" (p. xviii). This perhaps is true in some program venues, but welfare reform also has been criticized for its lack of attention to exactly these issues—job advancement and education. Similar rosy scenarios are offered in describing community outreach and collaboration efforts, as well as in arguing that welfare reform philosophy constitutes a social development approach. While these all are laudable goals, no empirical evidence is presented to support the extent to which any of them has occurred, and the authors are not careful enough in establishing the basis for their optimism.

The case studies follow a fairly consistent format of presenting a brief literature review related to the program described, some historical program development context, reasonably detailed descriptions of how the program was created and implemented, and assessments of program successes, challenges, and lessons learned. The first section contains ten case studies that focus upon either removing barriers to workforce participation or creating related support services to assist those with low-income. The programs designed to remove work barriers provide useful ideas on three of the issues that welfare reform research has identified as particularly problematic for TANF recipients: transportation, child care, and substance abuse and mental health issues. An interesting mix of support services initiatives is described, including Individual Development Account and family loan initiatives and programs to enhance both material and emotional supports to struggling families.

The second and third sections of the book focus more upon organizational challenges associated with the development of new service initiatives and models. The second section emphasizes the development of neighborhood and broader community partnerships involving multiple agencies. Both the enriched service possibilities and organizational difficulties associated with implementing such initiatives are described. Several of the case examples illustrate the establishment of quite complex organizational relationships to enhance services in areas such as homelessness, health and mental health care, and the training of human services workers. Issues such as difficulties in meshing different funding streams, defining common goals and overcoming agency turf issues, leadership negotiations, and assessing capabilities of potential partners all are illuminated in one or more of these case examples.

The third section focuses more specifically on agency redesign within the public agencies responsible for serving TANF recipients and their families. This involves both restructuring within a single agency to meet changing program objectives, the training of workers for new roles, the merging of agencies, and the establishment of interagency agreements to enhance services. The chapter focusing on the establishment of a family development credential for human service workers based on a strength-based service approach may be especially interesting to readers (Chapter 20). Another chapter nicely elaborates possible collaborations between child welfare and TANF agencies through

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