U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation

COMMUNITY-RELEVANT POLICY RESEARCH MEETING:

SUMMARY

November 1991

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation

The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) is the principal advisor to the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) on policy development issues, and is responsible for major activities in the areas of legislative and budget development, strategic planning, policy research and evaluation, and economic analysis.

ASPE develops or reviews issues from the viewpoint of the Secretary, providing a perspective that is broader in scope than the specific focus of the various operating agencies. ASPE also works closely with the HHS operating divisions. It assists these agencies in developing policies, and planning policy research, evaluation and data collection within broad HHS and administration initiatives. ASPE often serves a coordinating role for crosscutting policy and administrative activities.

ASPE plans and conducts evaluations and research--both in-house and through support of projects by external researchers--of current and proposed programs and topics of particular interest to the Secretary, the Administration and the Congress.

This report was prepared under contract between HHS's Office of Family, Community and Long-Term Care Policy (now the Office of Disability, Aging and Long-Term Care Policy) and Emprise Design. For additional information about this subject, you can visit the ASPE home page at http://aspe.hhs.gov. The Project Officer was Douglas Alexander.

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Summary

HHS/ASPE Division of Family and Community Policy

November 13, 1991

Prepared for
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY?

Community needs to be defined as it relates to: family, government, business/jobs, religion, values, the volunteer sector, etc.

Many factors influence communities and families, such as: values, culture, political boundaries, residential areas, socioeconomic levels, modern family structures, etc.

One aspect of a community is a sense of shared values. In a community, both positive and negative values compete to influence behavior.

WHAT IS POLICY RESEARCH?

Policy research is trying to accomplish the most good for the most people; therefore, it can't account for all the individual differences.

We want to promote the following policies:

1. policies which assist in the effective functioning of community subsystems, such as local government, neighborhood networks, churches, and businesses, to enable families to function adequately;

2. policies which inform families about the availability of programs, as well as information on how to make use of such programs;

3. policies based on family issues, rather than issues of individuals, in order to promote integration of services;

4. policies that promote family cohesion and functioning;

5. policies that promote building a recognition of community norms.

COMMENTS ON COMMUNITY CHANGE:

Technical consultants to communities state that single interventions, such as one group changing only one structure in a community, rarely helps families. Collaboration is needed!

Community change involves building or rediscovering shared norms in order to make changes in structures or infrastructures. Some examples of shared norms are: (1) children matter a great deal and are the concern of everyone; (2) schools are worth sacrificing for economically; and (3) alcohol use by teenagers is inappropriate.

COMMUNITY, FROM A CHILD'S PERSPECTIVE:

Community, from a child's perspective, may include the following elements:

1. The child can develop a sense of belonging with people outside his or her family.

2. Others, such as neighbors (informal groups) or agencies (formal groups), are identifiable and maintain a consistent relationship with the child, which has some degree of endurance. There may be a few of these "others" or many. If many, the community is much more complex, and, thus, the shared goals and values are more difficult to determine and observe. To the extent that the community has congruent goals and values, the degree of impact on community members increases. If goals and values in the community increase in their differences, it becomes increasingly more complex to determine how to influence individual and community behavior.

WAYS TO ENHANCE COMMUNITY POLICY:

1. Establish dialogue with the American family in order to get feedback about the impact of agencies.

2. Involve parents in decisions about HHS programs.

3. Build parental responsibility for their children.

4. Provide work place benefits for families, such as paternity and maternity leave.

5. Require welfare recipients to participate in job training, and put a time limit on their eligibility to receive cash benefits.

6. Expand childrens' income tax exemption.

7. Provide a mixed or total education choice in private and public schools.

8. Improve public housing, and provide tax breaks for inner city redevelopment.

9. Provide access to day-care for children before and after school.

10. Improve education/school policies as they relate to family.

11. Look at long-term effects of economic crises on families and communities.

12. Teach parents and schools how best to effectively teach about personal values.

13. Require parenting classes for parents under economic stress, such as welfare recipients, who are at high-risk to become abusers.

14. Provide employment opportunities, particularly to poor minority group members, so that they can move effectively into the business world.

15. Confront alcohol abuse and its impact on families. Also, implement policies to reduce the availability of alcohol, especially to high-risk groups, such as inner city people and minority poor.

16. Create policies to strengthen existing community structures and agencies which are providing alternatives to drugs.

17. Foster the role of empowerment of families.

18. Increase the collaboration between parents and schools,

19. Offer incentives for volunteering in community programs or primary service programs, such as college or school tuition payments.

20. Renew funding for programs based on demonstrable proof of their intended effectiveness.

21. Develop programs to prevent formation of high-risk families and communities.

22. Create a resource referral service for family and community related programs.

23. Decrease health insurance costs.

24. Make policies that can support local or family industry.

25. Empower the poor by creating a "social safety net," in which it wouldn't be to a person's disadvantage to earn an extra dollar and in which it would be better to get out of poverty.

FUTURE AREAS TO INVESTIGATE:

1. Assess different approaches to raise consciousness about the beneficial im act of communities on families.

2. Determine the array of community strengths.

3. Develop avenues for effective community and family collaboration.

4. Build a constituency of people working on family and community issues.

5. Decide where programs are needed, and where it is best for the government to stay out of family matters.

6. Protect children from family abuse.

7. Explore where conflict arises between the role of government and the role parents have with children.