Chapter 8 What Works, What Needs to Change: Respondents Make Recommendations to Adult and Family Services

At the end of the second telephone survey the 756 respondents were asked “Given your experiences with various public assistance programs, please tell me briefly, what two main changes you believe would help serve families like yours better?” Of the 1,100 responses we coded to this question, 990 were recommendations for changes, 82 were responses that indicated no need for change or satisfaction with existing supports, and 28 respondents said they did not know. Not all respondents gave two recommendations for changes, some gave no recommendations and a few (very few) gave more than two. All were coded.

The largest single category of recommended changes have to do with AFS agency related changes. Within this group of 239 recommendations the most frequently mentioned had to do with improving AFS staff attitudes/decreasing the climate of shame/having more caring workers (51). Other frequently mentioned changes were for more individual attention/consideration of individual circumstances (38), more or better skilled caseworkers (29), the need for greater client access to caseworkers (28), and concerns about paperwork and record-keeping (28).

The second largest category of recommendations (206) concerned program eligibility, specifically increasing the eligibility limits for safety net programs and changing regulations so that benefits decrease more gradually when people are working. These were coded by program and included responses that did not specify particular programs but clearly stated that income limits for programs excluded many needy families and/or recommended changing the federal poverty level to include more families by setting the poverty level more realistically. We included the recommendations for increased eligibility in both the program eligibility responses, where we included the count in the overall total for that category, and as part of the recommendations for change in specific programs, where we did not count these in the total of responses for that program.

Respondents recommended specific changes in all of the main AFS programs, with the largest group of responses targeting changes in the JOBS program (88), followed by changes recommended for child care assistance/ERDC (77), OHP (64), Food Stamps (44), TANF (26) and Emergency Assistance (13). Within each program recommended changes followed the pattern of suggesting the need for more assistance, broader program coverage, and easier access. For the JOBS program two common suggestions included shifting the emphasis to helping respondents find higher wage/better jobs and the need for more and better job training opportunities.

The next most frequently mentioned recommendations concerned increased access to educational opportunity (69). These included recommendations about increased opportunities
for education, particularly higher education, and suggestions that those in school should be eligible to receive needed supports for child care, Food Stamps, OHP and TANF.

Other recommendations included concerns about child support enforcement, the need for more help with transportation and housing, and a host of miscellaneous changes.

Of the 756 sample, 110 respondents did not make recommendations for change. The largest group of these indicated that they were satisfied with current programs and services (57) and saw no need for changes, 24 just said no changes were needed, and 28 said they did not know.

These data should not be interpreted as suggesting that only the number of people listed by each recommendation actually support that particular change. Rather, these data are the number of people who chose to mention these changes as one of the one or two they spontaneously recommended.

**Recommendations for changes from respondents in second telephone survey, November-December 1999**

**No changes needed with AFS/current programs** (82)

- Satisfied with existing supports (57)
- No changes needed (24)
- Things have improved with reform (1)
- Don’t know (28)

**AFS Agency-related changes--general comments** (239)

- Improve staff attitudes, decrease climate of shame, more caring/cooperative workers (51)
- Individual attention/individual circumstances considered (38)
- More caseworkers/better skilled (29)
- More access to caseworkers (responsive to phone calls, shorter wait for appointments, more consistent communication) (28)
- Decrease/improve paperwork/record-keeping (28)
- Improve information about what help exists/about AFS policy (15)
- More quality services (specified) (12)
- Make hours more convenient/expanded (9)
- Less wait for the onset of benefits (6)
- More follow-up with clients (5)
- Increase access to translators (4)
- More support for domestic violence survivors (3)
- Less caseworker turnover (3)
- More AFS consideration of health issues (2)
- Increase caseworker accountability (2)
Program requirements are a problem (unspecified) (2)
Change sexist attitudes (1)
Privacy booths to ensure confidentiality during interviews (1)

Program eligibility and accessibility (206)
Increase eligibility for programs: (145)
Increase eligibility for OHP (61)
Increase eligibility by increasing income limits for programs (41) (program unspecified, includes raising the federal poverty level)
Increase eligibility for Food Stamps (31)
Increase eligibility for cash assistance (6)
Increase eligibility for ERDC (6)
Benefits should decrease more gradually when working (32)
Calculate eligibility by net income (19)
Take living expenses more into account when determine eligibility (10)

Specific program recommendations by program

JOBS Program (88)
More access to job training (24)
Need better jobs training (transferable job skills)/classes (24)
Emphasis should be finding higher wage jobs/ “better” jobs (22)
More help finding a job (9)
Job search activities should be more realistic re: individual needs (3)
Transportation problems with meeting JOBS program requirements (2)
Need more support for those with health/disability issues (2)
More support for self-employment options (1)
Recognize need for job to be closer to area of residence (1)

Child care assistance/ERDC (77)
More (37) (does not specify eligibility or coverage, but refers to additional need)
More help finding quality child care (11)
Lower co-payments (8)
Mother should have option to stay at home (count as work) (7)
Increase eligibility for child care (6) (not included in count in this category)
Make ERDC payments timely (4)
More help with child care outside 8-5 work schedules (3)
Easier access to child care (3)
Childcare workers’ pay should be higher to increase quality (3)
Should have paid maternity leave (1)

OHP/Medical (64)
Income eligibility should be raised (61) (not included in count in this category)
Broader coverage/coverage inadequate (23)
More (17) (does not specify eligibility or coverage, but refers to additional need)
Easier process to access resources (10)
More coverage for children (7)
OHP premiums are a problem (3)
Accessible care – geographic and number of providers (3)
OHP should cover more alternative medicine (1)
Increase eligibility with broader standards/higher income limits (32)
(not included in count in this category)
More Food Stamps and larger allotments (18)
Policies concerning car values need change re: eligibility (13)
Easier access and re-certification (9)
Need to be able to buy household items/paper products (4)

Cash assistance (TANF) (26)
More cash assistance (16) (more assistance, larger allotments)
Fewer hoops and shorter wait to qualify (10)
Increase eligibility for cash support (6) (not included in count in this category)

Unspecified need for more assistance (26)
Emergency assistance (13)
Increase resources available (7)
Qualifications (easier to get) (4)
Decrease turn around time on applications/takes too long (2)

Education (69)
Want to be able to pursue educational opportunities (41)
Those in school should receive support (i.e., child care assistance, Food Stamps, OHP, cash assistance) (28)

Child Support (33)
More effective enforcement/better communication around needs (27)
Allow child support payments to go directly to families (3)
Don’t include child support as earned income (3)

Transportation (26)
More help with transportation (including car repairs, bus passes, help with insurance, help with gas money) (26)

Housing (23)
More help with housing
(including low income housing, housing subsidies, rent support) (23)
Other (66)
Track down welfare abusers/welfare fraud (19)
Heating/electricity assistance (7)
Comments on deserving and undeserving immigrants/minorities (5)
Need more mental health and drug treatment services (4)
Increase minimum wage (3)
Training to manage personal finances/life-skills (3)
More funds for pregnant youth (3)
Child care at AFS office (3)
Help with clothing (3)
Help (not penalization) creating savings/planning for better/stable future (2)
Don’t count parent’s income if over 18 and living there (2)
One-time cash rather than monthly budget (2)
More federal money spent in rural areas (2)
Compensation for foster/elder care (1)
After-school program for teenagers (1)
Change 5 years in life law (1)
Help with business (1)
Mandatory counseling (1)
Oregon should pass sales tax (1)
No 30-day notice on low-cost housing (1)
Change worker’s compensation program (1)