



Family Policy That Works

College of Family and Consumer Sciences
and ISU Extension to Families

*A family policy development program for decision
makers, family professionals, and citizens*

Objectives

Iowa State University Extension's Family Policy That Works program helps decision makers, family professionals, and citizens increase their knowledge of family policy and its development. Community decision makers learn how to develop action plans that address the possible outcomes of family policy, including federal welfare changes. Members of community coalitions acquire the skills to collaboratively design community service delivery systems and policies that improve outcomes for families.

Organization

Family Policy That Works is linked to the ISU Center for Family Policy. The program is supported by a network of ISU Extension campus, field, and county staff, and external partners including the Iowa Forum for Children and Families, Iowa Department of Public Health, Iowa Department of Human Services, and Drake University Center for Health Policy. The program receives partial funding from the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, USDA.

Major activities

Family Policy That Works promotes the development of public and private policies that improve the quality of life for families across the life span. The following activities support this primary goal.

Family Well-being and Fiscal Reform

ISU Extension is launching a comprehensive, baseline study of welfare reform in Iowa to monitor current welfare policies, social services, and family well-being. Policy makers, family advocates, and state departments are being interviewed about income support and health care issues related to federal welfare changes. To attain a local perspective, service providers and community leaders in seven Iowa communities are being interviewed. In addition, Extension is interviewing five families currently on welfare from each of the communities. Extension also will take part in a survey of 3,300 households.

Community Collaboration and Action Planning

ISU Extension and the Iowa Forum for Children and Families are conducting welfare reform workshops. These workshops help Iowa communities better understand the federal welfare changes and begin planning for their impact in the community. A planning guide is being developed for statewide use.

Local Extension staff join community partners around the state to increase community support for families and create family-centered, community-based, collaborative programs. Extension helps community coalitions with grant writing, needs assessment, educational programming, and volunteer and staff training. Extension is involved in Decategorization, Family Preservation and Support, Innovation Zones, and other community-based initiatives designed to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families.

Providing Family Data

Extension is a resource on children, youth, and family issues for policy makers and community coalitions. The newsletter *Children, Youth, and Family Trendletter* covers topics such as human service system reform, mother and child health, early brain development, and welfare reform and the business community. Copies are distributed to policy makers, family professionals, and Iowa citizens, and made available via the World Wide Web.

Statistics on children, youth, and families help policy makers, family professionals, and citizens develop policies and strategies to meet the needs of families. *Maternal and Child Health Profiles* and *Youth Health*

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Profiles have been created for Iowa counties by Extension, the Drake University Center for Health Policy, and the Iowa Department of Public Health. The profiles contain family, health, income, and poverty data.

Workplace Supports for Families

Policies that impact families are made not only in the public sector but also in the private employment sector. Extension presents findings from a study on workplace supports in small, midwestern businesses. Education about the role of work-family policies and programs in business profitability are made available through publications for employers and family professionals, and presentations to business groups.

Poverty Simulations

To raise awareness of policies and programs for low-income families, the ROWEL poverty simulation is being conducted in communities across Iowa. Participants assume the roles of low-income families living in poverty and must provide for basic needs.

Accomplishments

- More than 150 policy makers, family service providers, advocates, family members, and government officials have participated in welfare reform interviews at the state and local levels.
- To date, 25 Iowa communities have conducted ROWEL poverty simulations, reaching nearly 1,000 people. Evaluations show significant improvement in participants' understanding of the stresses experienced by families in poverty.
- In 1996, more than 65 percent of candidates for the state legislature planned to use information from the *Maternal and Child Health Profile* in their future work.
- Extension has helped more than 300 community coalitions design and implement plans to meet the needs of families with limited resources.
- Extension has educated more than 300 family professionals about leadership development, community collaboration, welfare reform, and grant writing.

Future plans

The findings from the Family Well-being and Fiscal Reform study will be shared with policy makers, family professionals, and citizens so they might develop policies and programs to better meet the needs of all families. Communities will better understand federal welfare changes and plan for their impact. Follow-up interviews will continue every six months with families in the seven communities to monitor changes; state and community policy makers will be reinterviewed in 1999-2000. Emerging issues will be incorporated into Extension programming.

Capacity-building strategies to strengthen community programs for children, youth, and families in at-risk environments will continue to be a priority. Outcome evaluations for community programs will be strengthened to show what is and is not working. Extension will work with community coalitions to improve their effectiveness, create action plans, and develop community leadership. Extension will follow up with groups who hold poverty simulations and help them consider policy options that improve outcomes for children, youth, and families.

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CYFAR World Wide Web Site: <http://www.reeusda.gov/new/4h/cyfar/cyfar.htm>

ISU Extension to Families Web Site: <http://www.exnet.iastate.edu/Pages/families/>

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