

The Hidden Costs of Budget Cuts to the Connecticut Children's Trust Fund
Sara Harkness and Charles M. Super

The Governor's plan to cut funding for the Connecticut Children's Trust Fund's is the most expensive "savings" plan we've seen in awhile. We can reliably predict that, without the vital support provided by home visitors in the CTF Nurturing Families Network program, many of Connecticut's most vulnerable young families will give up the fight against the challenges they face, and some will end up neglecting or abusing their children. In an op-ed piece in the Hartford Courant yesterday, we put some numbers to that calculation: cuts to this program alone will cost an estimated \$14 million in mandated new cases for the Department of Children and Families in 2010, compared to the \$7 million saved from the CTF budget line. Further expenses to the state and to society can be expected as the repercussions of a child's poor start in life roll out through the school years and beyond.

But the costs of cutting support for the Children's Trust Fund don't end there. If the Governor's plan is approved, over half of CTF's 120 home visitors will lose their jobs on or before July 1 (40 will be laid off as of April 1). Let's assume that these home visitors are not immediately rehired - a realistic prediction given the general cuts in human services in Connecticut. Their unemployment benefits (about \$290 a week, based on their average yearly salary of \$30,000), will add half a million dollars to the Connecticut budget during the next year. Furthermore, it's obvious that \$290 a week is not a living wage for an individual, much less a family. Depending on their circumstances, many unemployed home visitors will be eligible for other state and federal benefits including food stamps, Husky child health insurance, and even housing. All in all, the anticipated job losses for home visitors will add at least \$1.5 million next year to the net cost of the Governor's plan for CTF, for a total cost of \$15.5 million compared to the \$7 million "saved" in 2010.

But that's still not all. The young mothers and fathers who receive NFN home visiting services are able to get back on their feet, return to school and earn a living. According to research by the University of Hartford's Center for Social Research, almost two-thirds of NFN mothers completed high school after two years in the home visiting program (an increase from about half at entry), and the proportion of mothers employed almost doubled, to about 50%. Fathers' rates of high school completion also rose to about the same level as the mothers, and the proportion of fathers employed full-time rose dramatically, from 15% at entry into the program to 38% two years later. That is a gain of over 550 taxpayers, and even though many will be in low-paying jobs, we can estimate they add about a million dollars to the state coffers through income and sales taxes. Cut the help of the NFN's strength-based approach, and the state loses that income. The total cost of these cuts now add up to nearly \$17 million.

So let's put it this way: If someone offered you \$100 but asked for \$240 in exchange (with further requests to follow), would you consider that a good deal? Yet that is exactly what the Governor is proposing. Making "difficult choices" is the mantra of the day for Connecticut's legislators. This one is a no-brainer: Don't cut funding for the Children's Trust Fund.