



Strengthening Connecticut's Families

Testimony before the Appropriations Committee
February 22, 2013
Safety Net Services Network and Prevention Services

I am testifying today about the Safety Net Services Network and Prevention Services known as The Empowering People for Success Program (EPS) administered on a statewide basis by the CT Council of Family Service Agencies and funded by the Department of Social Services. It is ironic that at a time when we are all concerned about protecting the Safety Net of Human Services, we are talking about possible cuts to the one state contract that is called "The Safety Net Program."

In response to major welfare reform changes in 1997, the Safety Net Program was initiated with the goal of reducing the harm that may occur to children whose families have significant barriers to employment and lose eligibility for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits. The program has three components, intervention for families that have no source of income due to loss of cash benefits (Safety Net), and two other components for families at risk of losing cash benefits; the Employment Success Program (ESP) and Individual Performance Contract (IPC). Since its inception the Safety Net program has served over 18,513 families and reduced the possibility of harm/injury occurring to approximately 40,700 children by providing parents with tools to reduce stressors, manage and reduce barriers to employment and improve parenting skills. In 2012, the program prevented eviction for 1086 families through rental assistance or mediation with landlords.

The Safety Net Program provides home-based case management and clinical services that reduce barriers to employment and empower families to become self sufficient by identifying and building on their strengths. This program teaches all families to develop budgets, seek out and utilize community resources, find and keep employment and to advocate for themselves. Major barriers for these families include physical limitations, mental health, substances use/abuse, domestic violence, cognitive disabilities, child-care, language barriers, transportation, little or no work history and low educational attainment. As demonstrated by the chart included, 96% of our clients face multiple barriers to employability and ability to function well in some environments. The program also assists prior TFA families with no income by providing Basic Needs payments for housing, utilities, diapers and food directly to landlords and utility companies. In extreme cases, if necessary, families in immediate crisis are referred to The Department of Children and Families (DCF) or family counseling for more intensive services. A reduction in funding will directly impact these families and create added risk for their children.

The loss of TANF for families who are not employed increases the risk of children for abuse, neglect, homelessness and trauma. Multiple studies have demonstrated that children living in families in high-stress situations may be more apt to experience physical and or mental harm. Without full funding for the Safety Net Services Network, the risks of serious harm to these families and children are even greater today than before. Reduction in funding would result in a decline in basic needs payments, increased worker caseloads and a decrease in clinical and case management services for these most vulnerable families. The most devastating results would be homelessness, loss of heating assistance, hunger and the likelihood of increased mental health and stress issues for adults, which could result in unsafe circumstances for the children.

Carol Huckaby, MACP
 Director of Programs

SAFETY NET STORY

HOW MUCH DID WE DO?

Ms. Small is a single mother of one that was originally referred to the Empowering People for Success (EPS) for additional assistance with job search. While in the program, Ms. Small reengaged with her Jobs First Employability Services (JFES) worker and Primary Service Manager (PSM) weekly. Ms. Small also enrolled in a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) program that she completed. However after becoming a CNA, Ms. Small had difficulty finding employment right away and her cash with Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) ended resulting in her referral to the Safety Net.

HOW WELL DID WE DO IT?

When Ms. Small was receiving cash, she used that money to pay her rent; however with no income she was in jeopardy of losing her apartment and becoming homeless. The Safety Net Program provided rental assistance to stabilize the family's housing situation and continued to work with Ms. Small on finding employment. The program worked with Ms. Small to create a resume and cover letter and to aggressively search for employment with various healthcare agencies on a daily basis. During the course of seeking employment, Ms. Small was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis and though she may have qualified for a medical exemption for the TFA program, she was determined to find employment, become financially stable and build a better life for her family.

WHO IS BETTER OFF?

Ms. Small finally found part-time employment with a healthcare agency, and after several months of working part time, a full time position became available. She is now employed 35 hours per week at the rate of \$11.00 per hour, which puts her above the Federal Poverty Level. She continues to remain employed, has moved to a larger apartment, developed a budget to pay her rent and utilities and is now self-sufficient. Ms. Small was chosen as a recipient of Bridgeport based FSW's Brighter Futures Award for 2012.

Common Barriers to Employment for Safety Net Families

