

Policy Recommendations

from

A Profile of the Working Poor in DuPage County



February, 2003

DuPage Federation on Human Services Reform

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PROFILE OF THE WORKING POOR IN DUPAGE COUNTY

RECOMMENDATIONS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	i
INTRODUCTION	1
About the DuPage Federation on Human Services Reform	
About our recommendations	
Criteria for Developing Recommendations	
Low Hanging Fruit and High Impact Ideas	
A note to funders	
CHILD SUPPORT	7
EARNED INCOME	10
HOUSING	12
HEALTH CARE	16
CHILD CARE	20
FOOD ASSISTANCE	22

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Executive Summary

This document is a companion to the earlier *Profile of the Working Poor in DuPage County* (May, 2002). Together, these publications provide policymakers, funders and other decision makers with objective information and expert advice on the resources, needs and gaps affecting the estimated 50,000 working poor households in DuPage County. In each area, we have identified key indicators that tell how effectively DuPage County is supporting its vulnerable residents. Our intention is to make recommendations that will help funders and other decision makers ensure that their investments will actually help get the key indicators moving. The Federation actively seeks feedback on the usefulness of these recommendations.

About the DuPage Federation on Human Services Reform

The mission of the DuPage Federation on Human Services Reform is “to promote an efficient and effective human service system through leadership in collaboration, advocacy and planning.” The Federation is the only organization in the western suburbs doing policy analysis and advocacy to improve services for vulnerable populations.

About these Recommendations

These recommendations are the product of an extensive interactive process of research, writing, consultation with experts, revision and review by the Federation Board. We plan to issue updates as new strategies emerge. We envision these recommendations as a process more than a document, and intend their publication as the start of an ongoing community conversation on the working poor.

We believe that the solution to most of the issues of the working poor will necessarily involve a ‘mosaic approach’, with a menu of available options from which an appropriate selection can be made. There is almost never a ‘one size fits all’ solution to any of these issues. Rather, an assortment of strategies should be considered and implemented in order to provide a continuum of supports for the working poor.

In researching the Profile of the Working Poor, we found much about the current system of services that is positive. Often, the right array of services is in place; the services simply need more capacity. In other cases, new structures are needed to adequately serve the need. In most cases, the unmet need is so great that there is almost no wrong answer. An array of well designed programs with increased capacity is needed.

These recommendations reflect our understanding of best practices at the present time. It is expected that further strategies will emerge that will be included in subsequent editions of these recommendations.

Our recommendations follow a common pattern. (See box) We are finding that many of the strategies that help in one area are also applicable to other areas, so we have used the pattern (right) to organize our thinking.

In each area, there are several key recommendations, listed on the following page. See the text for more detail.

Recommendations Pattern

1. Existing programs should run optimally.
 - a. Make sure that everyone eligible becomes and remains enrolled.
 - b. Increase the program’s capacity to meet the need.
 - c. Make changes necessary to ensure that an adequate number of providers are available.
2. Develop a mosaic of programs necessary to serve the unserved.
3. Coordinate programs to make the system work most efficiently.
4. Work on long range strategies to address root causes

Key Recommendations

Child Support

- Restructure the child support enforcement program
- Reorganize the business process and information technology
- Establish legal paternity in every birth
- Increase the standard payment for 2 children to 28% of the noncustodial parent's income
- Disregard some child support when establishing cash assistance.

Earned Income

- Organizations working with low income households should inform them about Earned Income Tax Credit
- A public debate should take place in DuPage County about the need for adequate wages.

Housing

- A major effort is needed to obtain several hundred additional Housing Choice vouchers.
- The allowable rent that can be charged for subsidized units should be increased to reflect the high rental costs in DuPage.
- Special Populations such as domestic violence victims and those in self sufficiency programs should have priority access to subsidized housing.
- DuPage County's Family Self Sufficiency Program should be expanded to help more families work their way out of subsidized housing and other benefits.

Health Care

- Enroll everyone who is eligible in Medicaid and KidCare.
- Reduce red tape and other factors that make doctors reluctant to participate in Medicaid.
- Expand the circumstances under which immigrants can be eligible for Medicaid.
- Develop several Community Health Centers in DuPage.
- Expand Access DuPage.

Criteria for Developing Recommendations

1. We believe the recommended step is realistic and feasible.
2. We have some idea where the money might be obtained
3. We believe there is an existing or potential power base to partner with us.
4. We believe the recommended step reflects the best use of existing and available assets including synergies from collaboration.
5. Is there a breakthrough strategy not currently being implemented?

Child Care

- The state should increase the income eligibility ceiling for the child care subsidy program.
- Families, once eligible, should be able to remain in the subsidy program until their income approaches a self sufficiency wage.

Food Assistance

- Congregations can replicate the new "Closet Pantry" that provides food for the hungry in an efficient manner
- Many more schools should participate in the school breakfast, lunch and summer food programs
- A consolidated calendar showing when and where Food Assistance Programs are open should be developed and distributed in easily accessible format, such as the DuPage C.R.I.S. website.

PROFILE OF THE WORKING POOR IN DUPAGE COUNTY

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This document is a companion to the earlier *Profile of the Working Poor in DuPage County* (May, 2002). Together, these publications are intended to provide objective information and expert advice about the resources, needs and gaps affecting the estimated 50,000 working poor households in DuPage County.

These recommendations are the product of an extensive interactive process of research, writing, consultation with experts, revision and review by the Federation Board. Although they reflect our recommendations at the present time, we expect they will undergo further development as new ideas and information emerge. The Profile included information on topics, such as transportation and employment, that are not addressed here because these areas are covered by other organizations. Future updates to this document will be posted on the Federation's website, www.dupagefederation.org. We encourage readers to check for updates, particularly as time passes from the publication date of this document. We invite comments and suggestions that may help improve future editions.

We believe that the solution to most of the issues of the working poor will necessarily involve a 'mosaic approach', with a menu of available options from which an appropriate selection can be made. There is almost never a 'one size fits all' solution to any of these issues. Rather, an assortment of strategies should be considered and implemented in order to provide a continuum of supports for the working poor.

In researching the Profile of the Working Poor, we found much about the current system of services that is positive. Often, the right array of services is in place; the system simply needs more capacity. In other cases, new structures are needed to adequately serve the need. In most cases, the unmet need is so great that there is almost no wrong answer. An array of well designed programs with increased capacity is needed.

About the DuPage Federation on Human Services Reform

The mission of the DuPage Federation on Human Services Reform is "to promote an efficient and effective human service system through leadership in collaboration, advocacy and planning." The Federation is the only organization in the western suburbs doing policy analysis and advocacy to improve services for vulnerable populations.

The Federation was formed in 1995 by a Governor's office initiative as one of five 'learning laboratories' whose role was to support implementation of welfare reform through collaboration between government and community. Since that time, our role has evolved far beyond those origins. The focus has appropriately shifted to developing a broad system of supports for the working poor and to improving the capacity of the human service system to meet increasingly complex needs.

The Federation's role includes leadership and management support of systems change efforts and planning for a more effective and efficient system of human services. Significantly, although the State, the County and other funders are integral partners in each of our efforts, they are often not in a position to be the conveners and collaboration managers of major change efforts. Instead, an organization that is independent yet closely linked to decision makers is most effective in this role.

Key community leaders have repeatedly told us that, if the Federation did not exist, it would need to be invented to focus

on developing an efficient and effective system of human services. The fact that we are not providers of direct services permits us to look at the big picture, addressing systemic and cross-categorical problems in human services.

About our recommendations

These recommendations reflect our understanding of best practices at the present time. Each section follows a common structure:

- **Goal:** The desired state when the problem is solved. When we have reached this point, we'll no longer have a problem in this area.
- **Baseline:** Data on the present situation in DuPage County
- **Immediate Target:** A significant, yet attainable target that can be reached in the next few years. We'll know we're moving forward when we reach this point.
- **Why is this important?** A brief narrative on why the selected topic is important, and why the indicator was selected.
- **How is DuPage County Performing?** A more detailed description of the current level of performance and the challenges in DuPage County.
- **What do we need to do to reach the goal?** A series of recommendations that, taken as a whole, can reasonably be expected to reach the goal. In each section, we've asked our expert advisors and the Federation Board the same question: "If we really did all these things, would we reach the goal?" In each case, we knew weren't done until the answer was "Yes".

Pattern for recommendations

We are finding common strategies across topics, so we have used the pattern below to organize our thinking.

1. As a first step, where there are existing efforts, government or private, to address the problem, those programs should be running optimally:
 - a. As many people as possible should be enrolled;
 - b. The program's capacity should meet the need;
 - c. An adequate number of providers should be available.

The existing programs, accordingly, are the focus of our first recommendations. Of course, the leadership of existing programs should continually ask themselves and their stakeholders: Is this the best way to address the issue? Is there a better use of human and financial resources? When existing programs no longer represent best practice, they should be transformed to reflect progress in the field.

2. Once we have considered how to ensure that

Recommendations Pattern

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 - a. Make sure that everyone eligible becomes and remains enrolled.
 - b. Increase the program's capacity to meet the need.
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2. Develop a mosaic of programs necessary to serve the unserved.
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4. Work on long range strategies to address root causes

existing programs are doing what they are designed to do, our attention turns to those who are still unserved. We advocate for development of a 'mosaic' approach where an array of service models are available to serve the unserved, either in existing or newly developed programs. We would seek to develop local programs to fill gaps where local conditions differ significantly from state or national situations, or where local leaders have focused on the issue and are able to generate a will to address issues in a different manner than the state or national governments.

3. Although we believe that an array of options should be available, it is essential that the system of services be seamless to the consumers and to the outside world. We would not want, for example, to have eleven programs all contacting doctors about serving various vulnerable populations. Instead, these coordination issues should be worked out behind the scenes.
4. While developing a logical system of services for vulnerable populations, we should join broader efforts to address the root causes of the problems.

Criteria for Developing Recommendations

In developing recommendations, we have done our best to follow five criteria:

1. We must believe the recommended step is realistic and feasible.

We have a strong, almost visceral, aversion to 'pie in the sky' recommendations that have no chance of actually being implemented. In each case, we believe that our recommendations have a reasonable chance of being implemented and, if implemented, of actually moving the indicators toward the target. Accordingly, we have omitted many otherwise good ideas that, in the current environment, don't look realistic to us.

2. We must have some idea where the money might be obtained

Again, decision makers are often impatient with costly recommendations made with no ideas on how the money may be obtained. Sometimes, we'll suggest that money spent in a particular area may reduce other expenditures. Sometimes, we'll identify ways that efficiencies can occur through collaboration. Other times, we'll identify potential sources of funding.

3. We must believe there is an existing or potential power base that can be mobilized to partner with us.

Often, the first step toward addressing a problem is to develop the political will to solve it. In these instances, community organizing is an essential first step. Sometimes this is the step that changes a good idea from unrealistic to accomplished.

4. We must believe that the recommended step reflects the best use of existing and available assets including

Criteria for Recommendations

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5. Is there a breakthrough strategy not currently being implemented?

synergies from collaboration.

In general, the resources to address many of this community's problems already exist in our community and are often already being spent, albeit inefficiently. When existing assets are deployed in a new manner, radical and significant improvement in key indicators may be possible. Often, there are legal, policy or administrative barriers to effective collaboration, and we believe these can be overcome.

5. If 'breakthrough strategies' exist that are not currently in place, we'll identify them.

In some situations, infrastructure or programs that are available in other areas to address problems of low income workers simply do not exist in DuPage. Implementing these strategies can significantly increase the capacity of the service system.

About the Icons



Low Hanging Fruit

Some of our recommendations can be readily implemented by local decision makers without much cost. We have identified these with a distinctive icon.



High Impact Ideas

Some recommendations would have dramatic impact, even though they might be more costly or complicated to implement. We believe these ideas should be the high priority focus of collaborative efforts. These are identified with a different distinctive icon.

Thanks to our Expert Advisors and our Funders

We greatly appreciate the time and careful thought devoted by many content area experts whose guidance greatly improved and refined this document. If we've inadvertently omitted anyone we've consulted, a reminder would be appreciated.

This project is partially supported by the DuPage County Division of Human Services with Community Development Block Grant Funds, as well as by the Illinois Department of Human Services. The opinions expressed are those of the DuPage Federation. We, of course, are responsible for any errors.

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A note to funders of Human Services

One of the intentions that motivates these recommendations is the hope that funders will find them useful in making decisions about funding for human services programs. A funder considering an application for, say, a new food pantry, a health clinic or a child care program serving low income families could consult these recommendations and learn that the Federation believes that expansions of these programs are needed.

Our intention is to make recommendations that will help funders ensure that their investments will actually help get the key indicators moving. The Federation actively seeks feedback from funders on the usefulness of these recommendations.

CHILD SUPPORT

Key Recommendations

- Restructure the child support enforcement program
- Reorganize the business process and information technology
- Establish legal paternity in every birth
- Increase the standard payment for two children to 28% of the noncustodial parents' income
- Disregard some child support when establishing cash assistance amounts.

- **Goal:** 100% of the DuPage County children who are in the child support enforcement program will receive child support each fiscal year.
- **Baseline:** In FY 2001, 24% of the DuPage County children in the child support program received any child support
- **Immediate Target:** Within two years, 70% of the DuPage County children in the child support program will receive child support
- **Why is this important?** Working poor households, by definition, lack enough money to meet their basic needs. The problem is particularly severe for single parent households, who must make choices that jeopardize the safety and welfare of their children. The two principal causes of poverty are very low rates of child support collection, and low wage jobs.

A major improvement in the number of children who receive child support from noncustodial parents would significantly improve the economic situation of these most vulnerable families, and could potentially reduce government and charitable expenditures for human services.

- **How is DuPage County Performing?** The current system of child support enforcement is ineffective for large numbers of the families who needs its help. The failure of this system results in the need for more extensive welfare supports, and contributes to delinquency, school failure, homelessness, depression and other social problems.

- **What do we need to do to reach the goal?**

Maximize the effectiveness of existing programs by making sure all eligible persons are enrolled, have adequate capacity and adequate providers.



1. **Restructure the child support program:** The child support enforcement program should be restructured so that State government sets standards, provides funding and monitors compliance with standards. Actual customer service should be provided by local offices, probably county managed, who establish paternity and support orders, and enforce child support orders.
2. **Develop a more efficient business process:** It is essential that the actual business process, not just the structure of the child support program, is changed.
3. **Increase staffing:** The state child support enforcement program should have adequate staff capacity so that families who need its services will actually collect



Develop a mosaic of independent yet integrated programs that serve vulnerable populations.

Develop an integrated system for those functions that require coordination, while preserving the operational integrity of each partnering organization.

money. Increased staffing is essential.

- a. Both the State's Attorney's office and the Illinois Department of Public Aid have been operating for many years with staffing that is severely inadequate (compared to states that achieve better outcomes). Although some performance gains can be expected with increased efficiency, dramatic improvements will require additional staff.
4. **Maximize Federal Incentives:** In designing the improved child support enforcement system, particular attention should be paid to maximizing Federal incentive payments. In recent years, Illinois has narrowly avoided penalties, but a concerted effort should be made to obtain bonus payments.
5. **Parents need an easy way to seek periodic modifications of child support orders:** Parents who cannot afford lawyers should receive the help they need so the court calendar is not choked with futile actions by parents who do not understand the legal process. 
 - a. DuPage County Bar Association could conduct classes for parents seeking establishment or modification of child support orders and/or could staff a lawyer help desk for these parents.
6. **Both custodial and non-custodial parents need help to maximize their earning potential**
 - a. The Illinois Employment and Training Center should continue to provide assessment of earnings potential for non-custodial parents, job training, job placement, substance abuse screening and referral.
7. **Communicate with parents and collaborating organizations:** Parents involved with both IDHS and IDPA Child Support should get clear, timely information on child support cooperation requirements.
8. **Staff need training:** The Illinois Department of Human Services and the new DuPage County Child Support Unit should develop clear procedures for referral between CS and DHS.
 - a. Child support staff need training on requirements for cooperation for TANF, Medicaid and KidCare.
 - b. IDHS staff need training on documentation, on appropriate sanctioning and on referral to child support.
9. **Establish paternity for every birth:** The first step toward collecting child support is establishing legal parentage (paternity). Organizations working with young families should examine how they can contribute to a community wide goal of establishing paternity for each birth. 
 - a. The Health Department Family Case Management staff could provide invaluable help by helping to convey this message to the pregnant women with whom they work.
 - b. The DuPage child support planning team should determine whether improvements are needed in the existing system to establish paternity in

hospitals.

- c. The DuPage child support planning team should involve the Child Care Resource and Referral and other organizations that encounter young children.

- 10. **Increase the standard payment for two child families:** The General Assembly should increase the standard payment for families with two children from 25% to 28% to more accurately reflect the incremental costs of raising two children.



- 11. **Develop an effective process to address the special child support concerns of domestic violence victims.** These parents have special concerns involving child support, custody and visitation, and need special consideration so that they feel safe in establishing paternity and cooperating with child support.

- 12. **Let parents on TANF cash keep more of their child support:** To provide parents with maximum incentives to cooperate with child support, the General Assembly should consider disregarding some portion of the child support paid when calculating cash assistance (TANF).

- 13. **The DuPage Federation should perform an ongoing function of collaboration management and monitoring child support outcomes.**

Address the root causes of the problems

- 14. **Explore the wisdom of bringing all child support cases under the federal child support enforcement system:** In order to develop a true picture of the state of the child support enforcement system in Illinois, the General Assembly should consider having all child support cases participate in the federal child support collection system. This could increase federal revenues and, most importantly, provide data that would reflect the collections experience of all the children of Illinois.

EARNED INCOME


Key Recommendations

- Organizations working with low income households should inform them about Earned Income Tax Credit
- The General Assembly should reauthorize the state Earned Income Credit when it sunsets in 2003.
- A public debate should take place in DuPage County about the need for adequate wages.

- **Goal:** 100% of eligible taxpayers should claim the earned income tax credit.
- Ultimately, we would hope to see nobody earning a income low enough to be eligible for the EIC. In the short to medium term, however, we'd like to increase the number of taxpayers claiming the EIC to approximately the number eligible.
- **Baseline:** 25,281 or about 50% of potentially eligible filers are currently claiming the earned income tax credit.
- **Immediate Target:** 80% of eligible taxpayers should claim the earned income tax credit
- **Why is this important?** The Federal Earned Income Credit (EIC) is a refundable federal tax credit available to low income workers. A state EIC provides more limited assistance. Tax filers who earn up to certain income limits, based on family size, can receive refunds, an important source of income assistance for working poor households.
- **How is DuPage County performing?** If a household is earning a self sufficiency wage (also referred to as a 'living wage'), it will generally be ineligible for the EIC. Communities around the country have passed legislation requiring a living wage be paid to certain workers. This could have far reaching effects by reducing the need for government benefits and helping families live decently. There are arguments for and against living wage legislation and these should be explored in DuPage. Some supporters of living wage argue that instead of taxing the general population to pay for subsidized housing, food assistance, child care subsidy and other entitlements, it would be better to simply pay higher wages.
- **What do we need to do to reach the goal?**

Maximize the effectiveness of existing programs by making sure all eligible persons are enrolled, have adequate capacity and adequate providers.

Develop a mosaic of independent yet integrated programs that serve vulnerable populations.

1. **Expand Outreach:** Organizations working with low income families should encourage and coach them on the benefits of filing for the EIC federal tax credit 
2. **Reauthorize State EIC:** The Illinois General Assembly should reauthorize the state Earned Income Tax Credit when it sunsets in 2003.
3. **Expand awareness of Tax Credits:** Disseminate information on EIC tax benefits to local businesses, non profits, and faith based organizations. Disseminate information about Earned Income Tax Credit through state and local government offices working with low income clients.

Develop an integrated system for those functions that require coordination, while preserving the operational integrity of each partnering organization.

Address the root causes of the problems

4. **Develop more high wage jobs:** Economic development efforts in DuPage County should focus on development of higher wage jobs and on recruitment of companies with family friendly policies, including child care, employer supported housing etc. Jobs paying below a self sufficiency wage impose social costs on the communities in which they exist, and decisionmakers need to consider this in their job development efforts.
5. **Explore living wage legislation:** The DuPage Federation should lead an effort to explore the wisdom, timing and feasibility of developing Living Wage legislation in DuPage County.
 - a. We should sponsor a policy discussion on this issue and develop a position paper or resource document on Living Wage.
6. **Increase minimum wage:** An increase in the minimum wage is a logical first step toward living wage. We should support efforts on the State level to increase minimum wage, even though few jobs in DuPage pay at that level.

HOUSING

Key Recommendations

- A major effort is needed to obtain several hundred additional Housing Choice vouchers.
- The allowable rent that can be charged for subsidized units should be increased to reflect the high rental costs in DuPage.
- Special populations such as domestic violence victims and those in self sufficiency programs should have priority access to subsidized housing.
- DuPage County's Family Self Sufficiency Program should be expanded to help more families work their way out of subsidized housing and other benefits.

- **Goal:** 100% of the residents of DuPage County should have housing they can afford.
- **Baseline:** There are currently 4,800 subsidized units in DuPage County, with a very small amount of other affordable units.
- **Immediate Target:** Increase the number of affordable units by 20%
- **Why is this important?** Housing is very expensive in DuPage County. Very little market rate housing is affordable for low income households, and there is a critical shortage of subsidized housing. Households paying an unaffordable price for rent have little money left for essentials like health care, child care, transportation etc.
- **How is DuPage County performing?** Nearly 20,000 DuPage County households are paying more than 35% of their income for rent. There is no public housing in DuPage County. Instead, there are about 4,800 subsidized 'spots', including 1,800 Housing Choice Vouchers and about 3,000 subsidized apartment units, where the rent is set at 35% of income or less. *(This is a nationally accepted benchmark for affordable housing, utilized throughout the industry.)* Of these, 2,930 are project based units that were built with financing carrying an obligation to charge affordable rents for a period of time, usually 20 or 30 years. Many of the existing projects in DuPage are at or near the end of their contractual obligation to charge affordable rents, and owners may raise rents to market rates at that time. There are some other units that were developed with subsidized financing and hence have lower costs.



There is a very long waiting list (several years) for Housing Choice Vouchers. However, landlords often are unwilling to accept Housing Choice Vouchers because they can fill their units at higher rents in the private market. Low income workers cannot simply move to a less expensive area because much of the Chicago region's job growth is in DuPage and adjacent areas. As a result, low income workers are frequently forced to spend excessive percentages of their income for rent, and/or to live in overcrowded or substandard housing.

Another issue keeping low income workers from stable housing is the inability of some to qualify for rentals because of problems with credit and criminal background. Housing managers report that as many as 80% of those on subsidized housing waiting lists can fail to qualify for housing for these reasons. Supported housing such as single room occupancy and transitional housing with service coordination responds to this need but is nonexistent or in very short supply.

One official interviewed for this report commented: “The problem in developing affordable housing is not lack of money. It’s (lack of) leadership and land.” There are multiple sources of funding available to increase the supply of housing for low income workers, including the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Illinois Housing Development Authority, DuPage County and the private sector. Tax Credits play an important role in financing affordable housing. Both DuPage County and the DuPage Housing Authority have taken many steps toward overcoming the lack of leadership, but they are the first to point out that more can be done.

➤ **What do we need to do to reach the goal?**

Maximize the effectiveness of existing programs: The existing housing subsidy programs should serve as many people as possible, should have adequate capacity and should be attractive to an adequate number of landlords.

1. **Priority Access for Special Populations:** The Housing Authority should continue its recently established practice of allowing members of special populations, such as domestic violence victims, priority access to housing vouchers. 
2. **Encourage self sufficiency:** The Housing Authority should adopt a policy to create preferences for those involved in programs that will lead to self sufficiency, such as job training, Family Self Sufficiency Program, post secondary education etc. This would increase the speed with which households leave the subsidy program by increasing their earnings and their ability to be self sufficient.
3. **Set time limit for voucher program:** After ensuring that persons with disabilities and the elderly have access to long term subsidies, the Housing Authority should take any steps it can to shorten the time any one family spends on the Housing Choice Voucher program. This will increase turnover and improve the availability of vouchers to new households.
4. **Advocate for additional Housing Choice vouchers:** The DuPage Housing Authority recently applied for several hundred new Housing Choice vouchers, but received zero. The Federation, the Continuum of Care and other interested organizations should lead or participate in a major advocacy effort to obtain additional vouchers. 
5. **Increase allowable market rents:** In order to increase the number of landlords who accept Housing Choice Vouchers, HUD should increase the allowable market rents by decoupling DuPage from the rates allowed in Chicago and Suburban Cook and continuing to set maximum rental rates (based on the 50th percentile for Fair Market Rent Calculations) that are more reflective of the actual rental costs in DuPage.
6. **Allow long term contracts with landlords:** HUD should allow five to ten year contracts(subject to appropriations) to assure landlords of continuity in the

Develop a mosaic of independent yet integrated programs that serve vulnerable populations.

subsidy program.

7. **Develop a plan to preserve existing subsidized units:** The DuPage County Community Development Commission and the DuPage Housing authority should jointly develop a plan to preserve 100% of existing affordable units even after their contractual obligations have expired. These can include renovation funds, selective purchase of these complexes for conversion to condominiums to be sold to low income residents, and other strategies.



8. **Coordinate resources to prevent homelessness:** Link affordable housing with service coordination, money management, substance abuse treatment and other resources that can address some of the reasons people are evicted.

9. **Guide selected renters toward eventual home ownership:** Some renters should be guided toward eventual home ownership with supports from programs like the Family Self Sufficiency Program and the DuPage Home Ownership Center.

10. **A single room occupancy facility with appropriate supportive services is needed in DuPage County.** This would provide critically needed housing for chronically homeless single individuals, and link them to services such as employment, mental health etc.



11. **Expand the Family Self Sufficiency Program:** The County's Family Self Sufficiency Program is one of the most effective tools at moving people to self sufficiency. Expansion of this program would help expand availability of vouchers by moving people to self sufficiency and out of the voucher program.



12. **Ensure that affordable housing is maintained:** Management companies should take particular care to maintain affordable properties in good condition. Local governments should provide evenhanded code enforcement to ensure that neighborhoods do not deteriorate.

Develop an integrated system for those functions that require coordination, while preserving the operational integrity of each partnering organization.

13. **Encourage expert developers:** Developers with expertise and a track record at developing affordable housing should be consulted on their willingness and ability to expand their efforts here. Such developers should be helped to obtain financing and adequate operating subsidies.



14. **Foster small scale grass roots efforts to develop affordable housing:** Since relatively small scale community efforts to develop affordable housing are considered to have the best chance of success, DuPage County, through its Community Development Commission should consider what steps it can take to increase the number and scale of those efforts. There is substantial expertise



Address the root causes of the problems

among the County staff, and thought should be given to the best methods of preserving that expertise, or most efficiently supporting community efforts to develop affordable housing.

15. **Increase public awareness of the benefits of affordable housing:** An effort should be mounted to make elected officials, business leaders and the general population aware of the benefits of affordable housing. If, for example, no affordable housing existed in the County,
 - a. What would happen to businesses that employ the expanding population of low wage service workers?
 - b. Who would clean offices and hotels, run cash registers, mow lawns, stock store shelves, bag groceries, care for children, the elderly and the disabled?
 - c. Where will the teachers, nurses and police officers live?
 - d. Where will the young adults who grew up in DuPage raise their children?
16. **Reduce Illinois' excessive reliance on local property taxes to fund public schools.** This is one of the root causes for the reluctance of local communities to encourage affordable housing, which is seen as producing less tax revenue and more school children than other types of housing.

HEALTH CARE

Key Recommendations



- Enroll everyone who is eligible in Medicaid and KidCare.
- Reduce red tape and other factors that make doctors reluctant to participate in Medicaid.
- Develop several Community Health Centers in DuPage.
- Expand programs that provide access to primary care, such as Access DuPage.

- **Goal:** 100% of the low income population of DuPage County will have access to a primary care clinician.
- **Baseline:** 5,000 persons are being served through the uninsured access programs, and approximately 5000 Medicaid recipients received care from primary care physicians.
- **Immediate Target:** Within two years, increase the capacity of the uninsured access programs to 9,000 and the capacity of the programs serving Medicaid by 20% to 6,000.
- **Why is this important?** A great deal of recent research has focused on the disparities in health status between those with medical insurance coverage and those without it. Closer analysis of this research reveals that the crucial factor in health status disparities is not insurance coverage *per se*, but the access to regular medical care that such coverage affords. Insurance coverage is highly correlated with family income, employment, and legal status, and is not easily influenced by action at the local level. Access to medical services, on the other hand, can be much more readily influenced by local action. The logical entry point to access to a broad range of medical services is regular access to a provider of primary medical care.
- **How is DuPage County performing?** As of 1/1/2003, approximately 5,000 persons were enrolled in the Access DuPage program. Of those, approximately 3,450 persons were assigned to the DuPage Community Clinic, and 1,550 were assigned to office-based primary care physicians participating in the program. Enrollment in the Access DuPage program was being held at the 5,000 level, pending increased funding and an expansion of the participating provider network. About 350 persons are waiting to get into the program.
- The DuPage Community Clinic, a free clinic utilizing volunteer on site physicians and nurses, primarily at their main site in Wheaton, was at full capacity. Approximately 37,738 persons were enrolled in Medicaid and KidCare, including about 85% of all children eligible for KidCare. However, it is often difficult for persons with Medicaid/KidCare to find physicians willing to accept this coverage. The Central DuPage Health Community Health Clinic in Bloomingdale, which handles exclusively Medicaid patients, currently serves about 2,600 patients, but has recently expanded its capacity and can now grow to serve about 3,600 patients.
- It is difficult to realistically assess the potential number of low-income persons who are still without regular access to a primary care physician. The best estimates of the number of medically uninsured persons in DuPage County range from 45,00


to 63,000, with perhaps 2/3 of that number (30,000 to 42,000) also low-income. Some of these people have presumably found access to regular primary care through other means than the programs listed above. Often the Emergency Room of the local hospital is used for primary care needs. We can say with certainty that the number of low-income persons who lack regular access to basic medical care is significantly higher than the current available resources can accommodate.


➤ **What do we need to do to reach the goal?**

Maximize the effectiveness of existing programs by making sure all eligible persons are enrolled, have adequate capacity and adequate providers.

1. **Enroll all eligible children in KidCare and their eligible parents in Family Care:** An existing network of community organizations has been very effective at getting children enrolled. As the new Family Care (a.k.a. Family Health Plan) program (providing Medicaid to extremely low income parents of KidCare children) is implemented, the same network should work to enroll these families. 
2. **The State should make Medicaid more user friendly for doctors.** The state should reduce the red tape and 'hassle factor' involved with participating in Medicaid. Many doctors have demonstrated that they are willing to care for patients for free but they won't accept the delays, intensive reviews and other problems that come with billing for Medicaid.
3. **Increase Medicaid physician rates:** The State should increase rates for primary care and ensure that doctors and their staffs know that the rates have been increased. The recent rate cuts in Medicaid will hurt physician participation for a long time to come.
4. **If the State has to cut rates, reduce red tape at the same time:** The current state budget crisis has resulted in significant rate cuts to physicians, hospitals and other providers of services to Medicaid recipients. The state should carefully examine whether simultaneous reduction in red tape could help offset the damage from the rate cuts.
5. **Increase the number of physicians and other providers who care for low income persons in DuPage:** The number of health care professionals in DuPage County who provide primary and specialty care for Medicaid and uninsured patients needs to be significantly expanded. The state should provide help in recruiting providers, and in helping Medicaid patients find them. Professional organizations should identify ways to improve participation of their members. 
6. **Increase income limits for enrollment in Family Care:** The Federation and partner organizations should support passage of funding legislation to permit expansion of Family Care for parents of KidCare children with incomes up to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level. This would include all the parents who might be eligible under Federal law.

7. **Expand eligibility for Medicaid to include more low income immigrants:** Congress and the Illinois General Assembly should reconsider rules that severely limit inclusion of low income immigrants in Medicaid. Since the health care system is likely to have to care for immigrants in the emergency room, whether they are legal or not, it is much more cost effective to provide physician care that could keep them out of the emergency room. Some specific recommendations include:
 - a. Reduce the amount of time legal immigrants must wait in order to be eligible for Medicaid.
 - b. Increase the amount of time that refugees are eligible for Medicaid.
 - c. Study the cost effectiveness of allowing expanded coverage for undocumented children and other immigrants.

8. **Expand the scope and capacity of Access DuPage:** The Access DuPage Program should continue and expand to serve the uninsured who are not served under other programs.
 - a. In a very short time, Access DuPage has become a key component of the County's health care safety net. As such, it needs to have continuing capacity to accept new enrollments. 
 - b. Existing partners should continue their contributions to Access DuPage, assuming the program meets its goals, in recognition of the ongoing nature of the problem.
 - c. New partners must be recruited and encouraged to participate.
 - d. New funding sources must be identified.
 - e. Physician participation is the keystone of Access DuPage. All the Access DuPage partners, funders and the cooperating organizations should examine new ways to encourage physician participation.
 - f. The Access DuPage model (coordinating the volunteer services of health care professionals) could be readily expanded to include volunteer dentists and mental health professionals.

9. **Develop several Community Health Centers in DuPage County.** Several Federally Qualified Community Health Centers in DuPage should be established by forming an informal partnership between an organization with experience in operating Community Health Centers and key organizations in the DuPage community. The size of the medically underserved population in DuPage County could eventually justify as many as five to ten centers, so expertise in operating large scale networks of centers is important. 

10. **Find larger, affordable facilities for the DuPage Community Clinic:** The DuPage Community Clinic is an important part of the system of services to low income persons, but inadequate facilities prevent its expansion and hamper its current operations.

Develop a mosaic of independent yet integrated programs that serve vulnerable populations.

Develop an integrated system for those functions that require coordination, while preserving the operational integrity of each partnering organization.

Address the root causes of the problem

11. **Eliminate barriers to efficient collaboration:** Although we believe that several different program models are necessary to address the need, currently there are multiple administrative and statutory barriers exist that prevent efficient coordination around drug purchasing and other issues. An interagency task force should be developed to examine the feasibility of change in these barriers.



12. **Join the broader debate about health care:** The Federation and its partners should participate in advocacy efforts on the state and national levels to address the issue of universal access to health care.

CHILD CARE

Key Recommendations

- The State should increase the income eligibility ceiling for the child care subsidy program.
- Families, once eligible, should be able to remain in the subsidy program until their income approaches a self sufficiency wage

- **Goal:** 100% of the children from working poor families whose parents work will receive high quality child care.
- **Baseline:** FY 2002 monthly average: 2,500 children per month
- **Immediate Target:** A 20% increase to 3,000 in the monthly average participation in the state child care subsidy program
- **Why is this important?** High quality child care is very expensive, particularly for infants and toddlers. There is a substantial gap between the actual cost of high quality care and the amount that young families can afford. This gap forces providers to pay low wages to child care workers, which in turn is the reason for high turnover, low quality workers, etc.

Lack of money is the primary reason for most of the problems in child care, even though Illinois has already invested huge sums in child care for lower income families. Illinois is one of a few states that provides child care subsidy to low income families regardless of whether they have been on welfare, and continues it until they reach an income that, in many parts of the state, is nearly self sufficient. In DuPage, however, the income ceiling results in families leaving the child care subsidy program at an income level that is far below self sufficiency wages, leaving families in severe economic distress with no child care supports.

- **How is DuPage County Performing?** There are 4,878 low income children under 5 years of age and about 6,121 low income children in elementary schools. Of these, about 57.6% of the preschool children and 65.2% of the school aged children have both parents in the workforce.

➤ What do we need to do to reach the goal?

Maximize the effectiveness of existing programs by making sure all eligible persons are enrolled, have adequate capacity and adequate providers.



1. **Increase Income Eligibility Ceiling:** The State should reexamine the income eligibility ceiling for its child care subsidy program and increase it to reflect changes in the cost of living and of higher than average local costs in DuPage.
2. **Don't withdraw child care subsidy until income reaches a living wage:** Families, once eligible, should be able to remain in the child care subsidy program until their income approaches a self sufficiency wage, with an increasing co-payment amount.
3. **Increase rates:** In order to increase the number of providers who accept the state subsidy, the State should increase the amount the subsidy program pays to more closely approach the market rate.



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4. **Child Care rates should reflect higher market rates in DuPage:** In calculating market rates, DuPage County should be de-coupled from surrounding counties whose child care market rates are much lower. This would permit the state to pay rates that reflect the higher market rates in DuPage. 
5. **Continue and Expand State and County Child Care Subsidy Programs:** In recognition of the differing economic circumstances facing families in DuPage County, the County has funded a program that helps low income families cover the costs of child care beyond that provided by the State Program. Both the state subsidy and county supplement programs should be continued and, as funding permits, expanded.
6. **Expand after school care:** A much larger network of after school programs for elementary and middle school aged children is needed.
7. **Expand awareness of tax benefits for parents:** Employers should help make low income workers aware of the benefits of the child tax credit, the child care tax credit and the earned in come tax credit.
8. **Increase targeted outreach:**
 - a. Programs with similar eligibility criteria should inform families that they may also be eligible for the child care subsidy.
 - b. Employers of low wage workers should distribute information about the subsidy program to potentially eligible employees. 
9. **Public attitudes toward child care:** There is a strong ambivalence in public support for child care, reflecting popular unease about working mothers and out of home care for young children. This conflict is reflected in inconsistent public policy. Increased public awareness of the benefits of early childhood education would help.

FOOD ASSISTANCE

Key Recommendations

- Congregations can replicate the new “Closet Pantry” that provides food for the hungry in an efficient manner
- Many more schools should participate in the school breakfast, lunch and summer food programs
- A consolidated calendar showing when and where Food Assistance Programs are open should be developed and distributed in easily accessible format, such as the DuPage C.R.I.S. website.

- **Goal:** 100% of the residents of DuPage County should have enough to eat.
- **Baseline:** The need for food assistance is increasing rapidly, from 2,831 DuPage households served in Northern Illinois Food Bank programs in July, 2001 to 5,401 in October, 2002.
- **Immediate Target:** 90% of eligible low income households will receive food assistance from Food Stamps, Food Pantries or other food assistance programs; Increase participation in each program by 15% each year.
- **Why is this important?** Food assistance is often the first and last support used by households under economic stress. Many organizations working in this area believe that eligibility requirements for using Food Assistance Programs should be fairly loose, in the belief that if someone comes to a food pantry they probably need it, even if their definition of need may be unconventional. We tend to agree with this viewpoint.

There is far more free or low cost food available through the network of food depositories than there is distribution capacity to get the food to hungry people. In DuPage County, many school districts do not provide school lunches to some or all of their students. There are many other nutrition programs that are under utilized, including summer food programs and after school snack and supper programs.

- **How is DuPage County Performing?**

Food Stamps:	5,666 DuPage households received Food Stamps in January 2003
State Food Program:	7 households participated in the State Food Program in January 2003
School Lunch Program:	23 of 43 School Districts in DuPage County are participating in FY 2003
Food Assistance:	5,401 DuPage households received Food Assistance Programs in October, 2002

➤ **What do we need to do to reach the goal?**

Maximize the effectiveness of existing programs by making sure all eligible persons are enrolled, have adequate capacity and adequate

1. **Expand Outreach:** Outreach efforts should be expanded to help assure that all eligible families apply for Food Stamps and other programs.
 - a. IDHS, in partnership with Peoples' Resource Center, has begun a pilot program to identify food pantry participants who may be eligible for food stamps. Although this has not yielded as many eligibles as had been hoped, it is a concept worthy of further exploration.

providers.

b. Outreach to those with limited English proficiency should be expanded; materials should be available in multiple languages.

2. **Many more schools should participate in the school breakfast, lunch and summer food programs:**

Given the increasing levels of poverty and of working parents in DuPage, schools should ensure that every school child has at least a lunch available, with breakfast and snacks where needed. Although state law requires that schools that operate lunch programs provide free and reduced price lunch to eligible children, too many schools don't offer lunch at all, much less after school snacks and supper.



Develop a mosaic of independent yet integrated programs that serve vulnerable populations.

3. **Expand the distribution capacity of local food assistance programs:**

Additional state and Federal funding and efforts by community organizations such as churches and other non profits will be required. Community organizations that operate food assistance programs and other food distribution services need to carefully examine their policies on frequency of use to ensure that they do not discourage hungry people from using the service.



4. **Donations to local food assistance programs should focus on cash rather than food drives.** It is much more efficient for a food pantry to order food from the Northern Illinois Food Bank at 12¢ --25¢ per pound than it is for donors to purchase food at retail, pay sales tax, then donate the items.

Develop an integrated system for those functions that require coordination, while preserving the operational integrity of each partnering organization.

5. **Congregations can replicate the new "Closet Pantry"** being demonstrated in Westmont. The food is stored on rolling shelves that can be stored in a large closet and rolled out into a large room when the pantry is open. Visitors can then select food preferred by the family



6. **A guide to means tested benefits should be developed by the DuPage Federation** that will help other human services organizations identify those who should be encouraged to apply for food stamps and other programs.



7. **A consolidated calendar showing when and where Food Assistance Programs** are open could make it easier to access these services. This could be undertaken within existing staffing. DuPage C.R.I.S. could put such a calendar on its website.



Address the root causes of the problems

8. **The root cause of hunger is inadequate income.** Steps to increase income of working poor households (Living wage, Earned Income Tax Credit, job training, post secondary education) will directly reduce hunger.