

One Million Dollars a Month



First In A Series:
Welfare In Tarrant County

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(Ed. Note: This is the first in a series of articles dealing with welfare in Tarrant County — its structure, purpose, effect and shortcomings. This article will deal with certain welfare myths and outline the structure and functions of the Department of Public Welfare in Tarrant County. Following articles will deal with county welfare and private agencies and the reaction of administrators, caseworkers and recipients to the welfare establishment. The final article will deal with poverty in Arlington, a mile from this campus.)

The present welfare system has become a monstrous outrage.

—Richard M. Nixon, January 1971

Like anything "monstrous," the welfare system has accumulated certain myths. It would be best to treat these myths before attempting to sketch a clear picture of the welfare structure.

Perhaps most prevalent is the myth that the average welfare recipient could work and he is simply too lazy to do so.

The Senate Interim Committee on Welfare Reform, in its report to the Texas Legislature, states that only 2 per cent of all welfare recipients would profit from work-training if child day-care, transportation and medical assistance could be provided.

The report states that 88 per cent of the recipients

are too old, too young or too handicapped to work more than they are.

Of the total recipients, almost 5 per cent are working. Of all the mothers who receive Aid For Dependent Children (AFDC), 14 per cent are working.

THESE RECIPIENTS with "virtually no skills or little education" comprise another 2 per cent of the recipient population. Still another 2 per cent would be physically or mentally unsuited to work-training.

Another popular myth presents a pregnant woman in a Cadillac filled with illegitimate children, with the state footing the bill for the car through the children.

The average number of children in an AFDC family is three. Average payment to an AFDC family is \$119 per month.

In addition, the committee reports that the AFDC rolls are growing not because of numerous new-born children but because "... daily there are more children becoming financially or medically needy and dependent."

A third complaint often heard concerns the "welfare chiseler" — the recipient who does not report all his income to the welfare department.

It is certain that some cheating goes on; however, neither social workers nor recipients can agree on how widespread the practice is. Most feel it is minimal.

Two things should be kept in mind when considering

welfare cheating, however minimal it may or may not be.

First, to be considered poor in Texas one must be considerably below the national standard for poverty.

In other words, a man could be living in poverty by national standards and be ineligible for welfare in Tarrant County, Tex.

Second, most welfare cheating usually amounts to very little per recipient — certainly not enough to finance a Cadillac.

A curious comparison may be made between welfare cheating and income tax cheating. The former may be roundly condemned; the latter is either accepted by the public or, at the worse, mildly censured.

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THE LARGEST SINGLE distributor of welfare payments and services in Tarrant County is the State Department of Public Welfare (DPW).

The DPW has two major divisions, one which handles payments and the other social services.

There are four categories of direct financial aid: 1) Old Age Assistance (OAA); 2) Aid To Families with Dependent Children (AFDC); 3) Aid to the Permanently and Totally Disabled (APTD); 4) Aid to the Blind (AB).

As of Sept. 1, 1970, there were 9,158 persons receiving OAA in Tarrant County. The amount of OAA as-

sistance varies considerably, depending on whether the recipient receives Social Security payments and the amount of the payments.

The average OAA grant in 1970 was \$63.42. Total outlay per month was \$580,000 in Tarrant County.

AFDC is the next largest and fastest growing category. In September, 1969 there were 1,724 families on the AFDC rolls; one year later that number had more than doubled to 4,016 families.

Average monthly payments was \$119.64 for a family with three children. Total cost to the state per month: \$423,769.

Today, said J. W. Keith, regional administrator for the DPW in Tarrant County, there are approximately 4,300 families in the county receiving AFDC, representing some 12,000 children.

APTD payments in September 1970 totaled \$76,864. More than 1,000 persons received this aid; the average grant amounted to \$70.78.

AB, which is funded at 95 per cent of need, was given to 185 persons as of September 1970. Total outlay was \$15,773; average grant was \$85.26.

ALL TOLD, AS OF September, 1970, the DPW was making monthly payments of \$1,097,183 in Tarrant County alone.

The social services division of the DPW is also divided into four sections: Foster home care, care for de-

pendent and neglected children in their own home, AFDC and licensing.

In the case of a child who is dependent or neglected, DPW workers will first attempt to aid the child in his own home by counseling with the family and acquiring for them needed help, if possible.

In some cases, such as child abuse, the child is unable to remain in the home. DPW workers will then locate a home for the child. This is usually temporary; every effort is made to return the child to his home as soon as possible.

There are presently about 175 children in foster homes in Tarrant County.

Social services to AFDC families are usually concerned with providing the children with school, medical aid and money management.

The DPW's social services division is also responsible for the licensing of such public service institutions as the Edna Gladney Home, Lena Pope Home and day-care facilities.

Every person receiving financial assistance in one of the four previously mentioned categories is also covered by medical insurance — Medicaid.

In the case of OAA recipients, Medicaid covers those expenses not covered by Medicare. Medicaid does not pay for medicine.

(NEXT: County welfare and private institutions).