

Source: “Promoting Resilience: Helping Young Children and Parents Affected by Substance Abuse, Domestic Violence, and Depression in the Context of Welfare Reform,” by Jane Knitzer, is available from the National Center for Children in Poverty, the Joseph L. Mailman School of Public Health, 154 Haven Avenue, New York, NY 10032-1180, 212 304-7100, e-mail: nccp@columbia.edu or website: www.nccp.org

The National Center for Children in Poverty, in its spring, 2000 newsletter, has included a very useful summary of an earlier report on welfare reform and young children. The report, entitled “Promoting Resilience: Helping Young Children and Parents Affected by Substance Abuse, Domestic Violence, and Depression in the Context of Welfare Reform,” was authored by Jane Knitzer, a long-time leader in the children’s mental health field and now deputy director of the National Center for Children in Poverty.

The report indicates that from 16-37 percent of welfare recipients have been reported to abuse drugs or alcohol, 20 percent are likely to face domestic violence in a 12-month period, and two to three times as many low-income mothers as other mothers are likely to experience depression. This creates a group of children who are at special risk for poor health, difficulty with relationships, and insufficient learning and mastery of social competence. It also creates a special challenge to the service community.

Knitzer indicates that, “by bringing together early childhood resources, TANF agencies, and agencies dealing with substance abuse, domestic violence, and mental illness, communities can create strategies that address both generation’s needs simultaneously, more effectively, and more cost-efficiently than is often done now.” She reports that while resilience-promoting, collaborative strategies are not being adequately used now, the building blocks for two-generation support systems are present in every community. She indicates that the aim should be to weave together adult focused services addressing both employment and parenting, and child focused services including early intervention, health care, and quality early care and education. The report indicates that TANF dollars are one possible source of funds to develop targeted intensive strategies.

This brief article, and the overall report on promoting resilience, call attention to an important and often overlooked issue in welfare reform —the impact on young children. They also suggest strategies for capitalizing on welfare reform, and the dollars available through TANF, to develop collaborations that have a two-generation focus and can promote resilience in vulnerable children.