

Welfare reform brings changes

Highlights of welfare reform bill

•The Federal Government would abolish Aid to Families with Dependent Children, thus ending the guarantee of cash assistance to poor families with children.

•Federal welfare funding would be distributed to the states in lump sums, or "block grants." States would be responsible for creating and operating poverty relief programs. The major thrust for North Carolina's allotment would be for the Work first program which would provide training for welfare recipients.

•States would be required to reduce welfare benefits to any family in which the head of household did not find a job within two years. North Carolina residents could appeal for an extension.

•The federal government would reduce block grant funding for states that fail to meet employment requirements.

•A family on welfare would be limited to five years of lifetime assistance.

•Unmarried teenage mothers would receive benefits only if they attended school and lived with an adult.

•States would be required to withhold cash benefits and food stamps to people convicted of drug felonies. Adults undergoing drug treatment and pregnant women would not be denied assistance.

•States would have to reduce, by at least 25 percent, welfare payments to women who fail to identify the fathers of their children.

•Federal food stamp allocations would be reduced by \$24 billion over the next six years.

•Future legal immigrants who are not American citizens would no longer be eligible for most welfare benefits. States would decide if legal aliens were allowed eligibility for Medicaid.

•The federal government would provide \$14 billion over six years to fund child care assistance for welfare recipients.

•States would have to provide one year of Medicaid coverage for families ineligible due to an increase in earnings.

•Requirements for the SSI program would be tightened, disqualifying many disabled children.

•A national registry would be created to track dead-beat parents.

•A "Rainy Day" fund would be created to subsidize state's block grant. The subsidy would cover only 20 percent of the additional cases.

•Experimental state welfare programs based on federal waivers granted before Oct. 1 can continue even if they violate reform bill.

Kids who live with dad likely to use drugs

By Laura Meckler
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Teen-agers from broken homes who live with their fathers are more likely to use drugs than those who live with their mothers, a government study indicates. Those who live with both parents are least at risk.

"These findings are one more indication that children who live with two biological or adoptive parents have a measurable advantage in dealing with the risks and temptations of adolescence," Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala said in a statement.

The study was based on

interviews of about 22,000 teen-agers during the 1991, 1992 and 1993 National Household Surveys on Drug Abuse. Previous studies have involved much smaller sample sizes, the report said.

It found that fewer than one-third of teen-agers living with both parents reported using alcohol in the past year. That

compares with 40 percent of those living with a mother and stepfather and more than half of those living with a father and stepmother.

Similar ratios were reported for marijuana use: About 7 percent with both parents used marijuana, 10 percent with mother and stepfather did and almost 17 percent

with father and stepmother used it in the past year.

This pattern held for use of other kinds of drugs and for cigarette smoking as well.

The highest levels of alcohol and marijuana use were reported among teens who lived alone with their own

See TEEN DRUGS page 14A

Up by the bootstraps

By Jeri Young
THE CHARLOTTE POST

"I think of welfare as a drug addiction," said Patsy Gordon. "Once you get on it, it is hard to get off. You go through withdrawal."

Gordon has spent much time thinking about the ramifications of welfare the last four years.

As Gordon sees it, the system hurts the very people it sets out to help.

"In talking to people, there's an ingrown fear," she said. "If you begin to get a little ahead, they take away your benefits, that puts you behind again. It is hard."

Gordon knows first hand the difficulty of living on welfare. The 34-year-old mother of three was forced onto welfare four years ago when her husband was injured in an accident at work.

She is decisively different from the stereotypes that many hold about welfare recipients. Gordon is married, had never been on welfare before, and for her, welfare was removed from reality. She was pregnant with her third child at the time and looking for a way to keep her family afloat.

"My husband and I talked," she said. "We decided to accept some aid. But we made it clear it was only temporary."

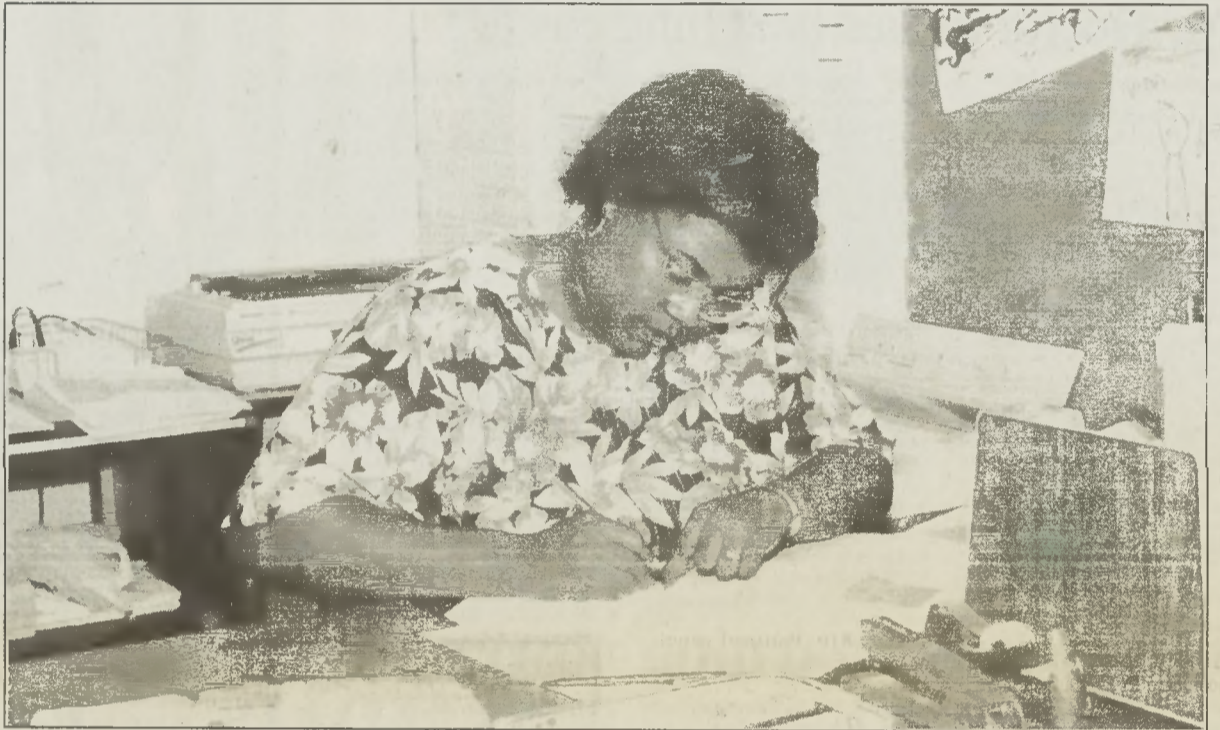
The Gordons started off with food stamps and Medicaid, then in her last trimester, the family applied for Aid for Families with Dependent Children payments to help make ends meet.

The first time Gordon used her food stamps, she asked God for strength.

"People do look at you," she said. "You can read it in their faces."

It was during this time that Gordon found out about the JOBS program, a county training program that helped women with children become self-sufficient. JOBS helps provide day care, schooling and counseling.

"I found out there was a way I could go to school," she said.



PHOTO/SUE ANN JOHNSON

Patsy Gordon found an internship at Charlotte Area Fund through the JOBS program. Now, she's working full-time as a result of the program, which is being disbanded in favor of Gov. Jim Hunt's Work First program.

Self-sufficiency isn't impossible dream with goals

"I knew I wanted to get my accounting degree."

Gordon began school, only to be the victim of a "cutoff" of benefits when her husband's disability began.

"They don't give you any warning," she said. "At the first of the month, the check is just not there."

Gordon's removal from AFDC meant that she was no longer eligible for the JOBS program. Her education continued with the help of financial aid and a scholarship from Barclays American.

She also continued her work with Charlotte Area Fund, where she had begun an internship during her affiliation with the JOBS program.

Former counselor Diana Davis recognized Gordon's potential and allowed her to continue to intern and learn.

"I knew I needed a job skill along with my degree," Gordon said. "So I still came for my internship."

Gordon's persistence did pay off. She now serves as fiscal officer for CAF, the very job

she interned in.

Her office, a classroom at Double Oaks Elementary School, is decorated with pictures drawn by her three children, Samuel, 14, Meaco, 7 and Simon, 4.

She also has a collection of certificates marking her accomplishments over the last four years. There's an associate's degree from Central Piedmont Community College as well as a certificate of induction into Phi Theta Kappa, the highest honor society of two-year colleges.

Gordon believes in order to make welfare work, recipients need support as well as clear goals.

"A lot of people who get off welfare are doing worse than they were before," she said. "They are taken off too soon — before they have a chance to get ahead. How can you profit

if you don't even come near poverty level."

Gordon also sees a problem with the way society treats people who receive welfare benefits, from shoppers to clerks.

"They look at you differently," she said. "They question you and why you are there."

She offers the following advice to others.

•Set goals for yourself.

•Try to visualize what you will be doing in a year.

•Set a reasonable time table.

The most important thing is to believe in God, she adds. Always keep the faith.

Gordon's faith has been a plus. She plans to continue on, both in her career and schooling.

"I would like to go back and get my bachelor's" she said. "And then who knows where I will be."

"I think of welfare as a drug addiction"

Patsy Gordon

Suicide, drugs pose real threat to North Carolina teens

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

RALEIGH — Figures on alcohol and drug use and suicide among North Carolina high school students should be of grave concern to the parents of teen-agers, according to the author of a new study.

A comprehensive survey released to the State Board of Education indicates 36 percent of the students surveyed in 1995 had used marijuana, compared to 29 percent two years ago. And 20 percent of high school students had considered suicide during the past year.

"For every one of these numbers, there are real kids that are threatened every day,"

said Tom Overton, a consultant with the state Department of Public Instruction and primary author of the report.

"Even if you take something small that affects only 1 percent of the students, you are talking about hundreds of kids," he said. "More than anything, that tells me that we as a society aren't doing a very good job of reaching our children."

About 1,800 randomly selected students from 51 middle and high schools were surveyed as part of a national study conducted every two years by the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Participation was voluntary and anonymous.

The report shows how problems affect children by race and sex.

For example, 27 percent of the white females had considered suicide. The rate for white females in middle school was 30 percent.

Females also were the most likely to attempt suicide, at a rate of about 12 percent among high school and middle school students, the survey found.

And the survey indicated that school is a more hostile place for black males than for any other group.

Black males were more likely than any other group to be involved in assaults, to carry a gun, to say they were threatened or to stay away from

class out of fear.

Almost 42 percent of black male students said their property had been damaged or stolen at school in the past 12 months, compared to about one-third of all high school students.

"No group of children is immune from the breadth of risks and threats you will find in this survey," Overton said. "We tend as adults to focus on something like guns or pot, and when we do that we fail to see the larger world that our children live in."

Several categories cut across the lines of race and gender, including sexual activity and drug use.

In 1993, the finding that 62 percent of all high school stu-

dents had experienced sexual intercourse shocked many. The number for seniors was 75 percent.

The 1995 figures were not significantly lower, with 57 percent of all high school students saying they had had sex. The figure among seniors was 73 percent.

Tobacco and alcohol use remained steady, with 31 percent of high school students saying they had smoked cigarettes in the past 30 days — up slightly from 29 percent in 1993. Forty percent said they had had a drink of alcohol in the past month, down from 44 percent in 1993.

The study has a margin of error of five percentage point.