Statement of Purpose

The primary purpose of *The Future of Children* is to disseminate timely information on major issues related to children’s well-being, with special emphasis on providing objective analysis and evaluation, translating existing knowledge into effective programs and policies, and promoting constructive institutional change. In attempting to achieve these objectives, we are targeting a multidisciplinary audience of national leaders, including policymakers, practitioners, legislators, executives, and professionals in the public and private sectors. This publication is intended to complement, not duplicate, the kind of technical analysis found in academic journals and in the general coverage of children’s issues by the popular press and special interest groups.

This issue of the journal focuses on how children will fare as their mothers make the transition from welfare to work. Two-thirds of the nation’s welfare recipients are children. Even so, little objective information exists to guide predictions about how children will be affected when their mothers are required to leave welfare and accept employment. Available research and common sense point to a number of factors that may increase the chance of benefit and reduce the risk of harm. The higher the wages mothers earn, and the more stable their employment, the better off the children will be. Access to affordable, high-quality child care is critical to protect children while their mothers work; and appropriate affordable health care matters to children and mothers with medical problems. These employment-related supports increase the odds that the transition to work will be successful, from the point of view of children.

Not all welfare recipients will move easily into the labor force, however. Some parents may need temporary help supporting their families while they receive job training or cope with unemployment. Others may reach time limits without finding work, and the risks to their children will be grave indeed. Different policies are needed to protect children whose parents have differing success moving from welfare to work.

Evaluations of how welfare reform policies influence children should consider both positive and negative effects, documenting such outcomes as the rates of reported abuse and neglect, foster care placement, delinquency, and school drop-out. Ultimately, the success or failure of the changes in welfare policy should be judged by the degree to which we have improved or decreased the likelihood that these children will become well-adjusted, contributing citizens in our society.

The articles presented here summarize knowledge and experience in selected areas that we believe are relevant to improving public policies in the United States that have an impact on making the transition from welfare to work. We hope the information and analyses these articles contain will further understanding of the important issues and thus contribute to reasonable changes in policies which will benefit children.

We invite your comments and suggestions regarding this issue of *The Future of Children*. Our intention is to encourage informed debate about the transition from welfare to work. To this end we invite correspondence to the Editor. We would also appreciate your comments about the approach we have taken in presenting the focus topic and welcome your suggestions for future topics.

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Editor