



Promoting Self-Sufficiency for Louisiana's Citizens

A framework for strategic investments

July 28, 2009



Executive Summary

One of the most challenging and important tasks facing state policymakers is to choose wisely among a mix of strategies that address the developmental, social, and basic economic needs of our most vulnerable individuals and families. Different political, advocacy, pedagogical and other stakeholder views offer a multitude of often conflicting strategies on what can improve the quality of life for our at risk families and particularly the children's life opportunities. These varying positions have presented enormous challenges to this decision-making process.

The Department of Social Services (DSS) faces a further challenge in the midst of organizational reform and budget cuts. The department must define what outcomes it seeks in serving our citizens and communities that fit within the scope and core capacities of the department and its mission.

The department understands that key factors in a safe, healthy and thriving Louisiana are advances in workforce development, economic development and education. Each of these factors directly impact the prevalence and consequences of self-sufficiency and independence in Louisiana.

Poverty among Louisiana's citizens has historically hampered improvements in these areas which in turn has itself contributed to its long-term incidence in Louisiana. For instance, we know that:

- Poverty imposes high personal costs and inequities on individuals and families and puts children at an unfair disadvantage for future opportunities.
- The economic costs of poverty include certain public expenditures on low-income families, especially for conditions and behaviors such as poor health and crime. Further, the income that these individuals and families might have earned represents a

loss of productive capacity and output that ultimately reduces the aggregate value of our economy.

- Investments in promoting self-sufficiency may generate returns to society over time in the form of higher real gross domestic product (GDP), reduced expenditures on crime or health care problems, reduced costs borne by crime victims or those in poor health, and improvements in everyone's quality of life.

Losses due to foregone productivity, earnings, and expenditures are estimated at the equivalent of nearly 4% of GDP nationally and proportionately higher in Louisiana (\$193B total GDP for LA in 2006).

- Factors contributing to individual, family, and child poverty are varied, often interconnected and can impact the entire spectrum of child welfare.
- Key contributing factors include substance abuse, lack of education, lack of employment or underemployment, incarceration, and disability.

Just as the reasons for poverty are complex and interconnected, promoting self-sufficiency cuts across state and community agencies. Programs should be interconnected/coordinated to address both the prevention of individuals and families from slipping into poverty and supporting those living in poverty in their efforts to increase self-sufficiency.

The following brief describes the department's self-sufficiency strategies and initiatives that fall within DSS scope and expertise. However, it is imperative that through a collaborative planning process (described below), the department brings state and community partners together to assess what each organization's own knowledge and research tells them about the most effective means of addressing the causes and consequences of poverty and how each may coordinate their scope of activities with the departments.

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For instance, if in-school tutoring and career counseling for middle and high school students are activities demonstrated to be effective at

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promoting self-sufficiency, the department can work closely with the Department of Education (DoE) and its provider partners to ensure eligible and needy families DSS serves

are also afforded the opportunities that DoE offers. This planning process will allow the department, in conjunction with its partners, to target and coordinate investments at those strategies with the highest potential return on reducing poverty and increasing the well being and productivity of the citizenry.

Poverty *prevention* typically includes **targeted strategies toward children and youth** including age appropriate cognitive and health development and early education. Poverty *interventions* typically include a combination of **workforce, education and family support** strategies.

With the onset of block grant funding for many programs from the federal level, states have been given broad flexibility to design and experiment with strategies to promote self-sufficiency. With this opportunity comes great responsibility to have strategic investments with discipline, focused outcomes and redirection of funding when evidence is not found.

Funds should be managed similar to an investment portfolio, with constant attention on the gains and **reinvestment when necessary**. This will require two fundamental changes; defining and working towards stringent outcomes for all investments and the discipline to fund programs accordingly.

DSS will focus on a pathway of strategies that provides clients the appropriate supports to reach a job-ready status that may lead to a career pathway and eventual independence. This pathway matches services and clients according to client capacities/skills and labor market demands across three categories of need:

- **Job ready clients** needing *minimal support* and placement in appropriate employment (close partnership with Louisiana Workforce Commission [LWC] in effect now) will be connected to appropriate resources with the expected outcomes being: job placement; job retention; career advancement; and independence.
- *Mid-term supports* to become job-ready (coordinate or contract for supports around needs such as housing, job skills, education credentials, transportation, child care, etc.). Key to the successful preparation of the client receiving job skills, credentials, household supports, literacy/numeracy is their ability to then be **connected to meaningful employment**.
- *Long-term, intensive supports* to achieve **physical and mental stability** prior to preparing for job ready services (close partnerships with Department of Health and Hospitals (DHH), non-governmental organizations, etc).

Critical *preventive focus* is on early education supports and services that provide an indirect strategy for combating poverty in that these strategies work to mitigate the cycle of poverty among low-income families and use education as a means of providing future opportunities to these children. Key among these strategies are:

- Ensuring quality child care is available for at-risk families;
- Ensuring young children are prepared socially and intellectually for entering school (school readiness programs such as pre-k, pre-k4, head start, etc); and
- Ensuring those families and children most at risk are identified and targeted early for participation in established early childhood development/intervention programs that lead to better educational and social outcomes and children's long-term success.

Given the three key strategy options discussed (school readiness; child care; and early childhood development) for serving the department's goals, the questions become:

- Which children or families need and benefit most from which strategy?
- How many children or families that could benefit aren't currently being served?
- What's the right resource allocation balance between socialization and systematic instruction (between education and child care for instance) that will provide the best individual and social outcomes?
- What defines quality and what are reliable markers of quality in these programs?

These questions can help the department define the appropriate investment levels and "mix" of strategies by focusing on effective and quality programming (defining and measuring), targeted programming (which will likely include some level of means-testing and selection), and assessment/accountability that will help to not only provide programmatic feedback but also document returns on investments.

Working closely with partners to employ poverty prevention and intervention strategies, the department has identified key existing and new *initiatives* that can focus resources and activities on promoting self-sufficiency in the state.

These **Key Initiatives** include:

Workforce Development

- Collaborating with LWC in connecting food stamp and child care assistance recipients to work activities
- Collaborating with LWC in connecting job ready clients from across programs with work

Supports

Family Supports

- Affordable and Quality Child Care for low-income families
- Access to the Earned Income Tax Credit
- Individual Development Account and Micro-enterprise Development
- Homelessness Prevention Supports

Education Supports

- Employ Program and Jobs for America's Graduates

Education Supports (Prevention)

- LA – 4/ Child Care
- Nurse Family Partnership
- Early Childhood Supports and Services

Process Re-engineering

- Modernization of Family Support Program

Promoting Self-Sufficiency in Louisiana

Introduction

Key factors in a safe, healthy and thriving Louisiana are advances in workforce development, economic development and education. Poverty among Louisiana's citizens has historically hampered improvements in these areas which in turn has itself contributed to the long-term incidence of poverty in Louisiana. Promoting self-sufficiency is one of the greatest challenges facing Louisiana.

Poverty in Louisiana is persistent, pervasive and far-reaching in its consequences. Thus, a strategy must be multi-disciplinary and targeted. As with any social problem, a policy framework should include both the prevention of poverty and concurrent interventions for those living in poverty today.

To prioritize and coordinate core self-sufficiency promotion strategies and assess current and potential investments, the department proposes to initiate a comprehensive planning process in conjunction with other state agencies, partner organizations and technical experts.

This will allow the department to clarify its key objectives and complement/coordinate the relevant work of partner agencies and councils. The department will report the initiation and recommendations of this process to the legislature and stakeholder groups as appropriate.

The scope of the planning process is complex and will identify a range of choices and recommended decision criteria to best reduce the cycle of poverty in Louisiana. General steps in this process include:

- Defining/refining core strategies that meet primary objectives within child welfare and promoting self-sufficiency.
- Assessing cross-strategy allocations which determine the appropriate "mix" of strategies based on need, cost/benefits/capacities, etc.

- Enlisting the assistance of technical experts to assess and rank current and promising initiatives that meet the objectives within each of the core strategies.
- Solidifying multi-agency collaborations to build program connections and establish unified standards within core strategies/programs.
- Presenting and receiving stakeholder feedback.
- Developing and presenting implementation plan recommendations to appropriate oversight and stakeholder bodies.

This process will allow the department, in conjunction with its partners to target investments at only those with the highest potential return on promoting self-sufficiency and increasing the well being and productivity of the citizenry.

Framework

Promoting self-sufficiency typically includes targeted strategies toward children and youth including age appropriate cognitive and health development and early education.

Poverty *interventions* typically include a combination of workforce and family support strategies. Those currently living in poverty can be divided into different strata;

1. Those citizens who are unable to transition into self-sufficiency such as the elderly, citizens with extreme disabilities and significant barriers to employment. These citizens need and will likely continue to need supports for mere survival; significant sustained investments would be needed to secure employment if it is even possible.
2. Those citizens who are able (or nearly able) to work but are not currently working. These are citizens who with some guidance, support and training, can get on the job ladder. Strategies for this group include skills development, job experience and training and education.
3. Those citizens who are working but need

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supports to make ends meet and help moving into greater self-sufficiency. These citizens are working in low-wage jobs that support the economy, and yet are one crisis away from being dependent on benefits; car repairs, a sick child, lack of child care can all bring this worker to the tipping point of being unemployed. Strategies for this group include affordable quality child care, living wages, asset development skills, and a career path into a higher paying job and financial stability.

Many strategies are utilized to target self-sufficiency with varying effectiveness. With the onset of block grant funding for many programs from the federal level, states have been given broad flexibility to design and experiment with strategies. With this opportunity comes great responsibility to have strategic investments with discipline, focused outcomes and re-direction of funding when evidence is not found.

Funds should be managed similar to an investment portfolio, with constant attention on the gains and reinvestment when necessary. Many programs will likely have good outcomes; however, a resource-depleted state like Louisiana can only afford programs with the strongest outcomes. This will require two fundamental changes; defining and working towards stringent outcomes for all poverty investments and the discipline to fund programs accordingly.

Strategies for Investment

DSS self-sufficiency promotion strategies moving forward are rooted in three core principles:

- DSS employs an outcomes-based approach to promoting self-sufficiency that targets true opportunities to move households out of poverty.
- DSS aligns services from across the DSS spectrum with best practice/outcome-based self-sufficiency strategies and focuses investments in a manner that will meet the desired outcomes of these strategies.
- DSS partners with other state agencies and community organizations to leverage

their core capabilities and services that will meet the desired outcomes of these strategies.

DSS understands that the most effective, direct strategy to move households out of poverty and away from the many resulting negative social and economic consequences requires investments in a system of *stabilization, workforce development and independence*.

These investments should emphasize actions that can achieve quick results, as well as investments for long-term gains. To combat the generational

nature of poverty in some cases and to truly work toward self-sufficiency over the long term, investments in

strategies that have an indirect impact on poverty and address the systemic roots should also be implemented. These are most effective in early childhood education services and supports.

The path to self-sufficiency is stabilization, workforce development and independence. Currently, DSS services individuals and families in each of these three phases. DSS administers a set of initiatives through the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant. *Collectively, the TANF initiatives represent a major resource for helping family to achieve self-sufficiency; and an investment that DSS can organize and allocate strategically.*

Louisiana's TANF funds are split between time-limited cash assistance and initiatives that meet one or more of the four stated goals of TANF:

1. to ensure that needy families can care for their children in their homes or in the homes of relatives;
2. to help needy families become independent of government assistance through job preparation, employment and marriage;
3. to reduce out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and

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4. to promote the formation of two-parent families.

By identifying what works and building on it, DSS is re-aligning current investments (including but not limited to TANF) to ensure we are investing in high impact initiatives across three core strategies:

Workforce Supports

The most promising models of workforce development today involve partnerships among industry and employer groups, community colleges, state and local agencies (including workforce boards), community groups, and intermediary organizations that can bring them all together. In addition to training, other financial supports and services might also be needed by low-income workers.

All DSS workforce activities will work in close cooperation with the Louisiana Workforce Commission to optimize and streamline our parallel but disparate workforce activities currently taking place across the agency to ensure clients who are able transition through a system that provides a career pathway. Current clients include those receiving vocational rehabilitation

support through Louisiana Rehabilitation Services, TANF/FITAP participants, Food Stamp recipients, and youth in or aging out of foster care.

Services will be targeted according to client capacities/skills and labor market demands across three categories of need:

- Job ready clients needing *minimal support* and placement in appropriate employment (close partnership with Louisiana Workforce Commission in effect now) will be connected to appropriate resources with the expected outcomes being: job placement; job retention; career advancement; and financial stability.
- *Mid-term supports* to become job-ready (coordinate or contract for supports around needs such as housing, job skills, education credentials, transportation, child care, etc). Key to the successful preparation of the client receiving job skills, credentials, household supports, literacy and numeracy is their ability to then be connected to meaningful employment. Sectoral training programs that involve private-sector employers and prepare workers for specific jobs in the labor market are most effective.
- *Long-term, intensive supports* to achieve

KEY INITIATIVES

Connections to Work

Currently, 136 thousand Louisiana food stamp participants require mandatory work registration. Of these, 51 thousand are working and 85 thousand are not. Only 9 parishes currently have a training and education program for the non-working food stamp population. 15% of households receiving food stamps statewide also receive some form of public assistance (Kinship Care, Child Care Assistant, FITAP/STEP, etc). The opportunity exists to link workforce readiness efforts with the non-working food stamp population. In pursuit of this goal to link all able bodied food stamp recipients with work, an initial program has been commissioned by two executive branch agencies.

With the goal of increasing workforce participation and entry into career paths by clients currently served by DSS, we are implementing a pilot for streamlining and improving job training activities for food stamp participants, welfare to work job training, vocational rehabilitation job training, and foster care transitions into the workforce. This pilot project is a collaborative effort between the Louisiana Workforce Commission (LWC) and the Louisiana Department of Social Services (DSS) focused on the design and pilot testing of a practical operations model that would more effectively utilize available LWC and DSS resources to identify *job-ready* customers and efficiently place them into demand-sector jobs that offer a reasonable opportunity/career path. Key collaborations will be the business community, WIA Boards and employers in the greater Lafayette metropolitan area.

physical and mental stability prior to preparing for job ready services. In striving to promote work among low-income people, we must acknowledge that major personal challenges make it extremely difficult for some individuals to find or hold down full-time jobs without intensive intervention or support.

Whether temporary or permanent, such challenges range from mental or physical health problems or severe disabilities to substance abuse, domestic violence, low literacy, learning disabilities, a criminal record, or the need to care for a child with special needs. Some of these obstacles can be resolved or overcome with appropriate services; some can be accommodated with the right employment match. Before these individuals can truly enter a career pathway, they must be connected to appropriate providers of services such as addiction treatment through the Office of Addictive Disorders that will ensure the physical and mental stability required in the workplace.

Family Supports

As individuals transition from being unemployed to early employment, a career path, and long-term self-sufficiency, it is often a safety net of basic supports that allows them contin-

ued employment and the ability to move away from such supports through advancement in their career.

In addition, while the business sector needs this sector of low-income workforce to support operations and continue the economic development of the market place, it is not necessary that the same individuals continually serve this need.

This may be merely a transitional learning sector that allows individuals the opportunity to enter the workforce but also supports them advancing into a career path while others come up “behind” them and gain initial workplace experience. Several strategies fundamentally facilitate individuals moving away from public assistance and towards independence. These include:

- *Promote citizen access to the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child Tax Credit (CTC).* With more federal safety net programs delivered in the form of block grants to state and local governments, the EITC has emerged as a key safety net to support lower-wage workers during difficult economic times. The credit boosts household expenditures, normally to meet short to medium-term needs and boosts labor force participation among low-income single mothers. We saw nationally that more than one-half the decline in child poverty from 1993 to 1997 owed to expansion of the EITC.

KEY INITIATIVES

Promotion of state Earned Income Tax Credit

The EITC is a refundable federal tax credit for people who work and earn income below a certain threshold, and states — including Louisiana — have implemented a state credit as a percent of the federal credit. The Brookings Institution hails the EITC as the nation’s largest antipoverty program for working families, and the credit plays an important role in the economic life of America’s low-income households and communities. It increases the ability of workers in lower paying jobs to support themselves and their families. Simply put, it both rewards work and reduces poverty by returning earned income to working poor families creating a strong financial incentive to stay in the labor force.

DSS will partner with the Department of Revenue and with local NGO’s to assist eligible citizens in accessing the EITC, and further evaluate effectiveness and usage of this credit.

- *Provide quality child care assistance to low-income families and promote early education for all.* A primary focus of the child care subsidy program, where significant Child Care and Development Fund and TANF funds are allocated, is to support work for low-income families in order to promote self-sufficiency and prevent welfare dependency.

To be most effective, child care policy should have two primary, complementary goals: **work support**, to help families—particularly low-income families—afford child care so they can work or enter the workforce, and **education of young children**, to increase the likelihood that children from low-income families can succeed in school and prepare for life.

Studies have shown that for families that receive them, child care subsidies are an important employment support and these families are significantly less likely to return to welfare than families that did not receive child care subsidies. Further, low-income parents, even if they receive a subsidy, usually cannot afford what it costs to deliver child care that meets reasonable educational standards for child development and school readiness.

High-quality child care and education for low-income children can make a significant difference among low-income populations in showing dramatic long-term positive effects on school achievement and employment along with reductions in arrests for violent crimes and drug crimes.

Note that while the department has focused on child care as a means of supporting parents entering and remaining in the workforce by providing parents safe, affordable and nurturing places to leave their children (subsidizing parents who would otherwise be unable to work and therefore have to turn to other socially costly alternatives), targeted standards-based child care could help to ensure the children of these parents receive the social and cognitive boost they need as well.

KEY INITIATIVES

Affordable Quality Child Care

Currently Louisiana invests both in direct child care subsidies, as well as progressive tax credits for parents and workers in quality rating child care centers. Enrollment during the first year exceeded expectations, with 440 centers with one-star and 84 centers with 2-5 stars. To assist low-income families entering the workforce and ensure quality child care necessary for the children's educational development, we will support the protection and expansion of Child Care subsidy program through:

- Optimizing child care funding
- Expanding enrollment in Quality Start Child Care Rating System (QRS)
- Implementing automated Time and Attendance system to maximize child care expenditures
- Increasing number of children receiving quality early childhood education
- School Readiness Tax Credit—Increasing number of child care centers

Partners Include: Division of Administration, Department of Education, non-governmental organizations, child care providers.

- *Increase access to financial services encourage saving for education, homeownership and micro-enterprise development.* Savings and assets can cushion families against sudden income losses and can bolster long-term economic gains. Individual Development Account (IDA) programs are restricted savings accounts that provide matching funds at the time of withdrawal (i.e., matched savings), if savings will be used for one of several preset goals that support moving away from public assistance and towards self sufficiency (e.g., higher education, homeownership, or business start-up).
- *Coordinate investments in Homelessness across state government.* Assisting citizens in achieving and retaining permanent housing is essential in stabilizing a family. Currently, Louisiana has several government entities providing homelessness funds with an opportunity to provide much stronger coordination.

KEY INITIATIVES

IDA and Microenterprise Development

Asset development in Louisiana is currently funded through TANF. To improve low-income families' ability to develop assets through savings and financial literacy, the following initiatives are highlighted:

- Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) assist with asset development of home ownership. From January 2007 through March 2009, Louisiana's statewide IDA initiative trained 538 participants in financial literacy and helped 118 families buy their first home. This program follows best practices promoted by CFED (national IDA advocacy organization) and Washington University Center for Social Development (originators of the IDA concept). The IDA program is currently managed by the Southern University Center for Social Research through a statewide network of local provider agencies.
- Microenterprise Development provides citizens with personal finance and entrepreneurship skills. Disadvantaged communities benefit from increased business activity, and through this program the state has launched a viable economic development strategy for historically underserved populations. DSS/OFS contract is with Louisiana Economic Development, which administers the program through five local / regional microbusiness training providers throughout the state.

Consolidation of Homeless Prevention Investments

To ensure coordinated and strategic investments of federal and state funding, Louisiana is consolidating homelessness prevention efforts into one entity. This initiative will coordinate all homeless prevention investments currently across 4 government entities including the Office of Women's Policy, and with DSS, the Office of Family Support, Office of Community Services, and Office of the Secretary. In this era of fiscal restraint, every homeless investment must be deliberate and non-duplicative.

Educational Supports

Many Louisiana workers are in low-income families with limited earnings. Some suffer from very poor basic skills and/or no high school diploma; among the latter, some have GED degrees, which only partly compensate for their lack of a real high school diploma. But, even among those with a minimal level of basic skills and a GED or real diploma, a lack of any serious postsecondary education or training often causes major labor market difficulties.

A large percentage of low-income parents have no postsecondary education or training. Lacking this type of training or productive early work experience, many low-income adults lack access to jobs that pay wages above the poverty level.

We know that worker earnings generally reflect their productivity in the labor market; thus, the

low earnings of the poor directly reflect dollars of lost productivity to our economy. DSS is partnering with LWC and education partners such as the DoE and Louisiana Community and Technical Colleges to directly address this aspect of poverty through key supports such as:

- Connecting disadvantaged and disconnected youth in foster care (or those who have recently aged out of care) with school and work to prepare them for employment.
- Supporting students' work toward obtaining a GED and a marketable skill for employment through basic skills training toward GED, soft skills training towards a Work Ready Certificate, dual enrollment in Technical College and/or Industry Based Certification training, work based learning and adult mentoring.
- *Early childhood development and school readiness supports* provide an indirect (generational) strategy for promoting self-sufficiency strategies work to mitigate the

cycle of poverty among low-income families and use education as a means of providing future opportunities to these children.

- Early childhood investments that have shown to have perhaps the most effective, long-term positive impacts are intensive infant, toddler and family supports for highly targeted, at risk populations. More than child care itself, *high quality* early childhood development (ECD) programs such as these have substantial payoffs. At its core, participation in established early childhood intervention programs for low-income children is connected to better educational and social outcomes and children's long-term success. These programs typically offer some level of access to basic medical care for pregnant women and children to help prevent threats to healthy development as well as provide early diagnosis and appropriate management when problems emerge. Further, for young children experiencing toxic stress from recurrent child abuse or neglect, severe maternal depression, parental substance abuse, or family violence, interventions that provide intensive services matched to the problems they are designed to address can prevent the disruption of brain architecture and promote better developmental outcomes.

No single program approach or mode of service delivery has been shown to be a magic bullet. The key is to select strategies that have documented effectiveness, assure that they are implemented well, and recognize the critical importance of a strong commitment to continuous program improvement.

There is a rich body of knowledge available to guide informed early childhood policies and practices in child well-being. This knowledge points to four key challenges that are worthy of sustained attention:

1. matching supports and services to the needs and strengths of the children and families to be served;
2. paying careful attention to the quality of implementation when effective or evi-

KEY INITIATIVES

Employ Program and Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG)

The Employ Program and Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) aim to keep in school those students at risk of failing in school, to capture out-of-school youth in need of a high school education, to provide an avenue for achieving academically and to assist students in ultimately earning recognized credentials that will make it possible for them to exit school and enter post-secondary education and/or the workforce.

Nurse Family Partnership

Provides nurses or other personnel from the office of Public Health who visit at-risk families before a child is born and continuing up to the child's 2nd birthday. Mothers' prenatal health and parenting are significantly improved by home visiting programs, as well as overall child well-being. Louisiana mothers served by NFP who had not completed high school experienced increased educational attainment by the end of the program. 40% completed high school, 11% continued education beyond high school or GED and 21% were still working on their diploma/GED at end of the program. Work participation increased from 8% to 39% for mothers in the program. Strategic efforts include continued efforts to receive approval from CMS for NFP expansion statewide, as well as additional TANF funding being provided to support NFP. Additional revenue sources are being sought.

denced-based model programs are taken to scale;

3. developing new intervention strategies for children and families for whom conventional approaches appear to have minimal impact; and
4. providing an environment that supports ongoing, constructive evaluation and continuous program improvement.

KEY INITIATIVES

Early Childhood Program investments will focus on effective, coordinated curriculum employed in settings that meet key quality and process standards. The department will support a mix of early childhood programs such as LA 4, Head Start, and center-based pre-K. DSS will insist upon rigorous assessment of these programs that will help to drive quality in the options available to families. This will include supporting a diverse delivery system that provides early childhood education to certain four-year-olds in non-public schools and collaborating child care centers. Investments in pre-k and early childhood programs demonstrate strong returns; however, Louisiana must look closely at how to optimize these returns in our programs.

Early Childhood Supports provides 1) a “supports” arm, a case management program which broadly evaluates family risk and engages a multi-agency network to provide family support; 2) a “services” arm which provides clinical assessment of children and child-caregiver relationships and intervention to address behavioral, developmental or mental health concerns.

Improving Efficiencies at DSS

As part of a larger organizational restructuring, the department is working to understand how to best re-engineer and coordinate its various service delivery models to not only reduce costs and improve efficiencies but most importantly to assure that the clients we serve are the core focus of service delivery.

DSS is reviewing and modernizing not only its business practices and tools to better support the individuals the department serves, but also the means testing and requirement options to ensure eligibility and requirement policies are aligned with the desired outcomes of means-tested programs.

For instance, in order to realize a more efficient administration of programs and improve client access to work supports such as child

care assistance and food stamps, DSS is working with DoA to secure a vendor that will design and build a more efficient information system and automated customer service center while at the same time reviewing business practices and re-engineering the potentially duplicative or inefficient processes of intake, eligibility screening and referrals among programs.

Many low-income working families participate in multiple social service programs, including TANF, food stamps, and Medicaid. If these programs and customer access within these are not coordinated, low-income working parents can face duplicative reporting requirements, and agencies can have inefficient and duplicative administrative processes. Strategies that link systems and that appear to reduce parent burden also increase program efficiency.

Conclusion

Investments in the well-being of children, beginning during critical years of brain development, are essential to outcomes resulting in long-term success. Continued focus on child safety, quality child care, school readiness, and early childhood development remains a priority strategy for the department.

At the same time, requests for services that provide stabilization, workforce supports and tools for independence are growing, while the resources to provide such services are limited. Government and community organizations must align their resources and invest in what is proven to promote self-sufficiency for individuals and families.

As DSS continues to refine its investments around self-sufficiency, we will engage local communities in the same strategic, outcomes driven process that will allow them to propose practical, manageable solutions in which DSS may invest that will directly impact local needs while being held accountable to the desired outcomes. DSS will work in partnership to address complex and interconnected strategies, will closely monitor outcomes and re-align investments as necessary.

Making disciplined, strategic investments to promote self-sufficiency has the potential to achieve the highest return on investment and create real opportunities for Louisiana residents. It is intended that this document provide a framework for that discussion.