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**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR
A HEAD START PROGRAM**

BY

PANEL OF EXPERTS

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IMPROVING THE OPPORTUNITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE CHILDREN OF THE POOR

1. There is considerable evidence that the early years of childhood are the most critical point in the poverty cycle. During these years the creation of learning patterns, emotional development and the formation of individual expectations and aspirations take place at a very rapid pace. For the child of poverty there are clearly observable deficiencies in the processes which lay the foundation for a pattern of failure – and thus a pattern of poverty – throughout the child's entire life.
2. Within recent years there has been experimentation and research designed to improve opportunities for the child of poverty. While much of this work is not yet complete there is adequate evidence to support the view that special programs can be devised for these four and five year olds which will improve both the child's opportunities and achievements.
3. It is clear that successful programs of this type-must-be comprehensive, involving activities generally associated with the fields of health, social services, and education. Similarly it is clear that the program must focus on the problems of child and parent and that these activities need to be carefully integrated with programs for the school years. During the early stages of any programs assisted by the Office of Economic Opportunity it would be preferable to encourage comprehensive programs for fewer children than to attempt to reach vast numbers of children with limited programs. The Office of Economic Opportunity should generally avoid financing programs which do not have at least a minimum level and quality of activities from each of the three fields of effort.
4. The need for an urgency of these programs is such that they should be initiated immediately. Many programs could begin *in* the summer of 1965. These would help provide a more complete picture of national needs for use in future planning.
5. The objectives of a comprehensive program should include:
 - A. Improving the child's physical health and physical abilities.
 - B. Helping the emotional and social development of the child by encouraging self-confidence, spontaneity, curiosity, and self-discipline.
 - C. Improving the child's mental processes and skills with particular attention to conceptual and verbal skills.
 - D. Establishing patterns and expectations of success for the child which will create a climate of confidence for his future learning efforts.

- E. Increasing the child's capacity to relate positively to family members and others while at the same time strengthening the family's ability to relate positively to the child and his problems.
 - F. Developing in the child and his family a responsible attitude toward society, and fostering constructive opportunities for society to work together with the poor in solving their problems.
 - G. Increasing the sense of dignity and self-worth within the child and his family.
6. The comprehensive program should be tailored to the needs of the individual community and the individual child. It should embrace activities designed both to evaluate the child's problems and to provide remedial and developmental services

A. Evaluation of the Child

Many of these children have been totally neglected in terms of health evaluations and services since infancy. The listing below indicates highly desirable evaluation elements, but inclusion of particular elements should generally be at the option of the community. The Office of Economic Opportunity should request some common types of data as a result of evaluations for the purpose of assessing general problems among the poor.

- 1) Medical assessment
Pediatric and neurological physical measurements, assessment of nutrition, vision, hearing and speech, and selected tests for TB, anemia and kidney disease.
- 2) Dental examination.
- 3) Screening for special problems and special strengths in intellectual functioning, social and emotional development and family organization so that programs may be designed and adapted to the needs of the individual child.

It is anticipated that both professional and non-professional personnel can be mobilized to assist in the carrying out of evaluations.

B. Remedial and Developmental Health Programs should be designed to

- 1) include immunization for polio, diphtheria, tetanus, measles, and smallpox whenever necessary.
- 2) correct disorders through the use of existing health facilities in the medical, psychiatric, psychological, and dental fields. Assist the provision of required appliances such as eyeglasses and hearing aids.

- 3) establish continuity of health services to meet the child's needs.
- 4) develop family awareness of community health resources and the need for their use.
- 5) establish sound nutritional practices by providing food to program participants as well as educating families in the selection and preparation of foods in the home.
- 6) transmit pertinent health information to school systems.

C. Social service programs should be designed so as to

- 1) identify social service needs of children and their parents including such physical items as housing, clothing and food as well as emotional needs that must be met to help children and families get involved in and make appropriate use of these programs.
- 2) make known existing social service resources and encourage families to make use of them.
- 3) provide at least a minimum of individual and group counseling and advisory services for children and adults where these are not available.
- 4) insure that services are available on a continuing basis so that individuals and families can continue to get help as needed.

D. It should be recognized that children of the poor do not represent a homogeneous group. Rather these children differ greatly in the diverse patterns of strengths and weaknesses which characterize their behavior. In general, however, they have not had the kinds of experiences and opportunities, which are available to more economically, advantaged families. Consequently many of these children enter school disadvantaged in their ability to utilize the typical school setting. In order to overcome the disadvantages from which any child may suffer, it is important to identify the child's special needs. Individual children may have needs which can be dealt with in these programs such as

- 1) more adequate and varied world experiences in order to develop conceptual and language competence.
- 2) far more life experiences of success to supplant the frequent unsatisfying and unrewarding patterns of failure or the avoidance of failure.

- 3) far more positive experiences with authority figures such as policemen, teachers, health and welfare workers.
- 4) a daily living environment which will help them to develop a positive concept of self and to reduce the strong feeling of alienation from groups other than their own.
- 5) a consistent warm relationship with people in many areas of their lives.
- 6) opportunity to identify with preadolescent and adolescent “models” as well as adult “models”.

Based on these needs it is clear that programs should be designed so as to

- 1) provide for activities to be carried out in small groups (e.g. four or five children) and, as seems desirable, on an individual basis.
- 2) provide a flexible schedule and program oriented to the needs of the individual child.
- 3) maximize the opportunities for the child to succeed in what he is doing.
- 4) utilize all available techniques and devices to increase the child’s knowledge of self and encourage general exploration and manipulation of the environment. Develop such imaginative techniques as role playing, doll play, puppetry and dramatic activities. Use both common materials such as sand, water and wood and devices such as records, tapes and films to carry out the program.
- 5) provide maximum variety of and opportunities for communication with special emphasis on conversation to strengthen verbal skills.
- 6) encourage the use of selected volunteer as aides and assistants in certain activities. These volunteers could be as young as ten years old and should include teenagers and college students as well as adults. There should be persons from circumstances similar to the child’s, as well as from differing socio-economic, racial and ethnic groups. Volunteers should find participation a wholesome outlet for realizing their social and ethical values.
- 7) introduce a variety of adult figures of different races and socio-economic groups, including authority figures, so that the children can learn to understand and appreciate the variety of roles in our society.
- 8) provide maximum flexibility in time scheduling so as to adapt to the circumstances of individual children and parents. Thus, some programs

may be part-day, part-week; others full day, full week. Some may concentrate activities in morning or afternoon; others disperse them throughout the day; some may use evening periods for more parent participation.

- 9) acquaint the child with aspects of the world of work and play such as parks, zoos, libraries, stores, farms and factories.

Parents should be involved both for their own and their children's benefit. Many of them have deep feelings of love and aspiration for their children which can be capitalized upon in this program. These parents

- have many of the same feelings and attitudes as their children.
- need individualized attention.
- need success experiences along with their children.

Parent participation programs should be designed so as to

- 1) assist in planning the program of the center; its hours, location, program, etc.
- 2) help in acquainting the neighborhood with the services for children offered by the center.
- 3) deepen understanding on the part of the center's professional staff of the life of the neighborhood
- 4) participate in the parent education program of the center which should, in part, help parents deal with general and specific problems of child-rearing and home-making
- 5) provide supervision for other children of parents who are assisting in the center or are visiting the center as part of a parent education program.
- 6) fill many of the non-professional, sub-professional, and semi-professional roles necessary for accomplishing the above purposes and for the general conduct of the program such as
 - a. Teacher aides for
 1. liaison with parents
 2. escorting children to and from the center
 3. conducting small groups of three to five children on trips

4. adding specialized skills like singing, playing musical instruments, painting
 5. general assistance
- b. constructing and repairing equipment, toys, etc.
 - c. maintenance
 - d. cooking and serving food
7. There are a number of substantial logistical problems which will have to be met rapidly
- A. Space must be provided which can meet standards of health and safety. Schools, churches, community rooms and settlement houses offer possibilities.
 - B. Equipment, including furniture, toys, play equipment, learning devices, and books are essential to successful programs. There is a need for the development of new types of materials adapted to the special needs of these children. Similarly there is a real need to find ways of reducing the cost of materials from their present high levels.

Complementing local programs should be a national program of research and development for the continuing development of an appropriate, well-planned educational program that involves and stimulates children with real things. An effort must be made to attach first-rate people to the initial effort of developing new materials for these programs. Research and development groups could use child development centers as laboratories for continuing study and production of new materials for pre-school teaching.

- C. Personnel recruitment and training represents perhaps the most difficult logistical need. The numbers of health, social services, and educational personnel trained to work with young children are relatively small. The numbers trained to work with disadvantaged young children are only a fraction of the total. It is apparent, therefore, that heavy reliance must be placed on specially designed training programs which can be developed and implemented by early summer. Additional programs should be developed for subsequent training. Consultant supervision should be used to further training on the job. These programs should be individually adapted to the needs of

— — professional personnel

— — volunteers

– – paid neighborhood personnel

D. Many communities do not have the technical competence necessary to develop programs. The office of Economic Opportunity* should

– – arrange for the publication of informational materials

– – arrange for universities, medical centers, and other qualified organizations to provide assistance to communities which need help

Special efforts should be made to reach out to communities which have traditionally shown the least capacity to create programs and where the need is often great.

E. Research and evaluation should be a key part of both local and national efforts. The Office of Economic Opportunity should arrange for independent assessment of local programs for purposes of identifying successful techniques and programs. Such information should be widely and quickly disseminated to help other local communities improve their programs.

*Following these recommendations, the Head Start program was incorporated into the Community Action Program of the Office of Economic Opportunity. In July 1969, the program was delegated to the Department of Health, Education and Welfare.