

Revolutionary 'workfare' slated for state in 1990

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Two years ago Hugh Franklin Jr. left Ohio for California to seek "sunshine and money." Sunshine he got.

But money started to evaporate when he was laid off of his electronics job in April. His girlfriend gave birth to Hugh Franklin III in May. By June they could not afford light bulbs, Pampers or the rent on their Hayward apartment. She persuaded him to do something he had never done before — apply for welfare.

"I was brought up liking to work, not just sit around. But I had to feed my baby," Franklin said in a soft voice. "Some people on welfare don't want no job — they're afraid or lazy or something. But what I want most is to work so I can take care of my family."

Welfare recipients like Franklin will go to work — whether they choose to or not — under a revolutionary 'workfare' program being launched in California.

Many liberals who have fended off conservative workfare proposals agree that the newest compromise sidesteps the booby traps of prior plans, including California's dabble with workfare under Ronald Reagan's governorship in 1972.

Patterned after a pilot program in San Diego County, the workfare plan won overwhelming legislative approval and is soon to receive Gov. George Deukmejian's signature — despite the Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations' labeling of the plan as "slaveware."

County officials are scrambling to get the workfare program in full swing by 1990.

Recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) must participate in the program if they are "able-bodied" and have children old enough to be in school. Statewide, that's about 175,000 recipients, mostly mothers.

In Alameda County two thirds of the 72,569 AFDC recipients are children. And less than half of the adults would be required to participate in workfare.

Workfare will not automatically shuffle welfare recipients to government-created jobs. It first concentrates on increasing recipients' chances of finding jobs in the outside world. It expands job search programs that able-bodied AFDC recipients already must complete, and adds workfare at the end — what Alameda County workfare co-

ordinator Kathy Archuleta calls "the last-resort option."

Here's how California's workfare plan will work:

Eligible AFDC recipients must go through a three-week workshop on how to prepare a resume, complete job applications and dress to meet prospective employers. Next they must spend three weeks under supervision searching for work.

Those who do not find jobs could be referred to vocational schools, community colleges or English classes.

Or, if all else fails, they could be required to work. That means that for one year, they must work for the government or non-profit agencies at tasks for which they have been trained that do not displace regular workers. They will work off their benefit checks at the average California wage of \$5.07 per hour.

Those who refuse to cooperate can have their benefit checks cut off.

At the end of a year, the whole cycle starts all over again.

By 1990 workfare and child care for working parents will cost the state about \$190 million, according to legislative forecasts. Savings by weaning participants off welfare rolls is estimated at between \$110 million and \$150 million annually.

The San Diego County workfare program has produced a net savings of \$19 million since 1982, in part by moving recipients off welfare and into private jobs, and in part by apparently discouraging some from applying for AFDC once they knew they might be put to work. Said county workfare division chief Joan Zinser: "Workfare can work and we proved it."

Critics predict workfare will fall flat. They argue that the state will attempt to penalize unmotivated adults and end up punishing their children with poverty. The antidote to the welfare state, said Assemblyman Tom Bates, D-Oakland, is "more real jobs."

In Alameda County, workfare already has proved successful for some recipients of General Assistance, a county-administered aid program for poor adults without children. Take the case of Joy Mucci, who went on general assistance at age 57 after her husband died.

"I was what I call an old homebody. I didn't drive, and I was absolutely terrified because I hadn't ever been in the work place here," she said. "I didn't have much to look forward to in life, and I had spent all my savings. I hated applying for GA because I felt I was begging."

The county told Mucci she would have to work off her benefits by sorting clothes at Tri-City Volunteers. Reluctantly she agreed. Eventually she worked so well the organization hired her. Today she is self-sufficient and supervises its clothing thrift shop and is "ready to tackle anything."

"When Joy came to us I don't see how she could have walked in off the street and gotten anybody else to hire her," said Deanna Vincent at Tri-City. "Now if Tri-City folded tomorrow she'd have no trouble getting a job."

While East Bay AFDC recipients have never faced workfare, they already must complete a program of job search training that includes a three-day workshop followed by a supervised job search. "Very, very few are too lazy to want a job," said Rose Brown, who heads that program in Hayward. "We're proud that 50 percent of our participants this summer already have found work."

AFDC recipients who go through job search training often say it taught them how to land jobs. On a post-workshop questionnaire, one participant who learned about the hidden job market enthused, "It was like seeing 100 jobs in three days." Added another: "I know it works because I got a job at Payless Drugs!"

But not all recipients are so motivated. One responded he had no job objective, gained nothing from the workshop and had only one suggestion: "Shorten it." Another participant complained "Keep people who sleep out of the room — send them home."

So will adding workfare to job search training improve the attitudes of welfare recipients?

"Maybe," said AFDC jobs workshop leader Sharon Counts. "For most people, people like Hugh, workfare won't make them want to find a private job any more than they already do. But for a few, it might be just the extra push they need."