

Social Support Systems

Utah Citizens Counsel Social Support Systems Committee

Article 6: *All Utahns have the right to the fundamental social support systems that assist in assuring a standard of living adequate for the well-being of both the individual and families, in all their configurations, including timely assistance in case of unemployment, disability, old age, and natural or human-made disasters.*

Introduction

For the last three years, our committee has focused on the harmful impacts of poverty on children. While some of these children thrive in spite of their circumstances, many suffer damage from toxic stress, defined as “the prolonged experience of significant adversity” in their environment.¹ This stress can affect their physical and emotional health, and their prospects for leading successful lives.

Last year’s report examined the element of *housing insecurity* as a major contributor to this harmful stress, and proposed steps to expand programs providing housing for low income people. While a number of relatively low-cost housing units have been built in the last year, the ratio of available affordable units to the number of people who need them has not improved. While Salt Lake area wages increased very slightly more than rental costs between March 2017 and March 2018 (3.5% for wages compared to 3.3% for rentals), the great disparity between wages and rents remained basically the same, and tens of thousands of Utahns continue to suffer from incredible stresses caused by housing insecurity.² As the biggest single expense in a family’s budget, expensive housing makes it impossible for low income families to pay for other urgently needed items. Research over the last year has reinforced our conclusion that a meaningful increase in low income housing is the single most effective step we can take to give poor young children a better chance to thrive in the future.³

While continuing to track the Utah housing situation, our committee this year is focusing on programs that help to prevent and mitigate the toxic stress that has such a harmful impact on poor children. The effectiveness of income supplements, high-quality parent training, and early childhood daycare programs in improving poor children’s health and future prospects have been clearly demonstrated.⁴ The difficulty is in finding the resources needed to provide these programs to the thousands of Utah children who urgently need them.

A Generation at Risk

Utah’s 2017 poverty rate of 9.7% is the sixth lowest in the country,⁵ but that still leaves nearly 100,000 Utah children living in poverty.⁶ This relatively low rate means that it should be within our grasp to virtually eliminate poverty for those children. Those children would no longer suffer from the many sources of stress they now experience, including food insecurity, frequent moves, and living in overcrowded and often squalid conditions. Their parents, who are themselves frequently suffering from the scars of a deprived childhood, would reap the same benefits.

Recent research has demonstrated that the stress and anxiety caused by poverty deprivations have their biggest impact on small children. These children often suffer far more than immediate distress. The stresses of poverty have the potential to weaken their developing brain architecture, and “permanently set the body’s stress system on high alert.”⁷ Normal cognitive and emotional development is impaired, and these children are beset with a lifetime inability to focus and control impulsivity. These victims of early childhood toxic stress are much more likely to drop out of high school, have children out of wedlock, become addicted to drugs or alcohol, be unemployed, and become incarcerated. They are also much more likely to suffer from a variety of debilitating diseases, including cardiovascular, immune, and psychiatric disorders.⁸ Without early prevention and treatment of toxic stress, many of its sufferers are condemned to a life of ill health. A recent report issued by Intermountain Healthcare and SelectHealth stated that while “clinical care” comprised 10% of the contributors to people’s health status, “social and economic factors” made up 40%!⁹ This demonstrates that we must go far beyond providing medical clinics if we are going to give poor children (and their parents) an equal opportunity for a healthy life.

A Fair Chance—How to Prevent or Mitigate Early Childhood Toxic Stress

Two basic approaches can prove successful in preventing or mitigating toxic stress in early childhood. The first is to increase poor people’s incomes or (as with affordable housing programs) increase their spending power, allowing them to provide a more secure and peaceful environment for their children. Many studies have shown that even small increments in family income can make large differences in poor children’s health, well-being, and school performance.¹⁰

This option is attractive not only because it helps provide children and their parents a decent living standard; it also, in the long run, saves a great amount of public money. A recent in-depth study of the public costs of childhood poverty looked at the categories of reduced adult earnings, increased crime, increased health care costs, the costs of homeless shelters and other homeless services, costs involved in treating maltreated children, crime deterrence costs, and the increased costs of incarceration. The study estimated the total long-term public cost of child poverty to be slightly over one trillion dollars per year.¹¹

An upfront investment in reducing poverty and its effects lowers the costs associated with its attendant problems. For example, one recent report suggests that childhood poverty could be reduced by 50 percent with a nation-wide investment of \$70 billion dollars. That would save approximately \$515 billion yearly in tax funds.¹² For every dollar spent in poverty reduction, the US would save over \$7 by eliminating the economic fallout from poverty. Even if we use a more conservative estimate of child poverty (by adding the value of welfare and tax transfers to families’ income), we would still save \$419 billion; for every dollar spent in poverty reduction, the US would save almost \$6.¹³

Major policy options for giving poor families an immediate increase in income would be to increase the federal and state Earned Income Tax Credits (EITC) and the Child Tax Credit. Significant increases in the EITC are a “gift that keeps on giving.” These increases improve infant and maternal health, produce better school performance and greater college enrollment, increased work and earnings in the next generation, and even increased Social Security retirement benefits.¹⁴

Another effective public policy is increasing the minimum wage. The value of a dollar has decreased 17.5% since 2009, when the minimum wage was last increased.¹⁵ Minimum wage workers working 40 hours a week would still make an income far below the poverty line.¹⁶ Decreasing regressive taxes, such as that on food, would also give a small boost to poor people's income. Longer range programs to increase income include training programs for better paying jobs. This training is particularly important for Utah women, who currently have the highest ratio of gender wage inequality in the nation, earning only 71 cents for each dollar earned by Utah men.

Although measures to increase earned income are crucial, we must not forget those who cannot join the paid labor force because they are at home taking care of aging or disabled relatives, or young children. These essential workers are just as deserving of public financial support, if needed, as those bringing home paychecks.

The second approach to giving poor children a fair chance at life is to provide high-quality care services for young children, and consistent parenting training and support for their parents. Utah has several excellent, evidence-based programs that provide these services, including the Nurse Family Partnership and the Head Start and Early Head Start programs.

The federally funded Nurse Family Partnership program sends specially trained nurses to visit new moms starting in pregnancy and continuing with regular visits during the baby's first two years. The nurse becomes a trusted resource for the new moms and helps them to take the necessary steps to ensure their baby's physical health and proper cognitive and emotional development.

The program has frequently been cited for its effectiveness and excellent cost-benefit ratio. Voices for Utah Children recently cited the positive outcomes of the Partnership program in Salt Lake County in 2012. Program outcomes included a 30% decline in expensive preterm deliveries, an 18.9% increase in employment of moms 18 and older, a 40% decrease in maternal smoking, and a 50% reduction in domestic violence during pregnancy.¹⁷ Sadly, few of the potential program beneficiaries are receiving these services. The comprehensive *Early Childhood Services Study*, published in December 2017 by the University of Utah Education Policy Center and the Workforce Services Child Care Office, concluded that only 5% of the estimated total Utah demand for nurse and other home visiting services was being met.¹⁸

High-quality Head Start and Early Head Start programs have also proven their worth in aiding low income children and their parents, despite fragmented and uneven quality nationwide¹⁹ Those sponsored by Utah Community Action, headquartered in Salt Lake City, offer comprehensive services for low income children and their parents, including health and dental screenings and treatments, and an education curriculum stressing social/emotional development, academic success, and physical development for each child. The program also offers "self-sufficiency" services to parents, connecting them to appropriate community services, teaching them techniques to promote their children's learning and development, and encouraging them to participate in classroom committees and the local policy council.²⁰

Again, however, the difficulty is that so few eligible children are enrolled in this and similar excellent programs. The *Early Childhood Services Study*, cited earlier, quoted the National Head Start Association as estimating that only 26% of eligible Utah children have access to Head Start, and only 9% of eligible children have access to Early Head Start.²¹ This has made for long waiting lists for these services. A 2016 report from the National Institute for Early Education Research stated that \$182,956,634 in additional funding would be needed to provide Head Start services to 50% of low-income 3- and 4-year-olds in Utah.²² Public resources will always be scarce. It is important to enact programs which provide the services that have the biggest impact. Supporting poor young children and their parents is clearly one of these services.

Commendations

- The Early Childhood Utah program, administered by the state Bureau of Child Development, for securing a **five-year federal grant for \$426,600 annually for early childhood collective impact projects** in Ogden, South Salt Lake, and San Juan County.²³
- **Salt Lake Community Action, for securing federal funding to add 10 new Early Head Start classes to their program**, and to expand the contact hours to six per day, year-round. They hope to win funding again next year to continue expansion of this vital program.
- **The Utah Intergenerational Poverty Welfare Reform Commission**, for producing six years of comprehensive, insightful reports on the problem of persistent poverty. In response to this year's report, the Legislature appropriated \$1,000,000 to Workforce Services for a pilot program for counties to implement local solutions to intergenerational poverty.
- **Faculty at the U of U Medical School, IHC personnel, and others who have vigorously supported the "trauma-informed care" model for medical practitioners.**

Recommendations

- **Utah should join the 29 other states that have enacted a minimum wage above the \$7.25 federal level.**²⁴ A start would be Representative Lynn Hemingway's proposal to immediately increase the minimum wage to \$10.24 per hour, raising it to \$12.00 by 2022.²⁵ The long-range goal is to reach a living wage level for low income workers.
- The State needs to finally **pass the state Earned Income Tax Credit** at an initial rate of 10% of the federal level, which nearly passed last year.
- The State of Utah needs to significantly expand programs to help young at-risk children and their parents. **A modest start would be adoption of the Voices for Utah Children proposal for state enactment of an ongoing appropriation of \$2 million per year for the Nurse-Family Partnership**, joining 21 other states that have appropriated funds for NFP and/or home visitation.
- **Utah should join the 40 other states that contribute significantly to their Head Start and Early Head Start Programs.**

Endnotes for Article 6 (Social Support Systems)

¹ Ziba Kashef, "Toxic Exposure in Childhood Linked to Risky Behavior, Adult Disease," *Yale News*, November 19, 2015, accessed August 14, 2018, <http://www.YaleNews.com/November-19-2015-Ziba-Kashef>.

² "Salt Lake Area Economic Survey," May 30, 2018, *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*, accessed June 25, 2018, https://www.bls.gov/regions/mountain-plains/summary/blssummary_saltlakecity.pdf. Mike Gorrell, "Fast-Rising Housing Prices a Problem for Those with Low Incomes – and Could Hurt Competitiveness, According to New U. Study," *Salt Lake Tribune*, March 21, 2018, accessed June 25, 2018, <https://www.sltrib.com/news/business/2018/03/21/fast-rising-housing-prices-a-problem-for-those-with-lower-income-and-could-hurt-utahs-competitiveness-according-to-new-u-study/>.

Approximately 51% of Salt Lake City householders live in rental housing. Half of them are cost burdened, spending 30% or more of their incomes on housing, while nearly a quarter are severely cost burdened, spending over 50% of their incomes on housing. See the Dashboard at www.slc.gov/hand/programs/ and "Growing SLC: A Five Year Plan 2018-2022," "Housing Crisis," Chapter 4, adopted by the Salt Lake City Council in December 2017, published January 2, 2018, accessed July 18, 2018, www.slcdocs.com/hand/Growing_SLC_Final_Attachments.pdf. Despite the presence of 11,000 Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers, 25,000 tax credit rental units, and another 5,000 assisted units, there is a serious shortfall of rental housing in Utah. At least 75,000 renter households with incomes below the median have no rental assistance and face severe housing burdens. James Wood, et al., "What Rapidly Rising Prices Mean for Housing Affordability," *Gardner Business Review*, May 2018, accessed June 29, 2018, <http://gardner.utah.edu/wp-content/uploads/May2018HousingReport.pdf>.

³ "Why Affordable Homes Matter," *Our Homes, Our Voices Week of Action Fact Sheet*, 2018, accessed July 30, 2018, <https://www.ourhomes-ourvoices.org/> [Click on "Resources"].

Will Fischer, "Research Shows Housing Vouchers Reduce Hardship and Provide Platform for Long-Term Gains Among Children," *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*, October 7, 2015, accessed August 21, 2018, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/housing/research-shows-housing-vouchers-reduce-hardship-and-provide-platform-for-long-term>.

⁴ Cynthia E. Lamy, "How Preschool Fights Poverty," *Faces of Poverty*, May 2013, (Volume 70 | Number 8), 32-36.

⁵ "Talk Poverty, Utah, 2018," *Center for American Progress*, accessed June 24, 2018, <https://talkpoverty.org/state-year-report/utah-2018-report/>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ "The Impact of Early Adversity on Children's Development," *Center on the Developing Child* (2007), accessed June 24, 2018, <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbrief-the-impact-of-early-adversity-on-childrens-development/>.

⁸ "Poverty and Child Health in the United States," *Pediatrics*, (137:4), April 2016, 2.

⁹ Elizabeth Craig and Jessica Strong, "Social Determinants of Health Tools," *Intermountain Physician*, accessed July 3, 2018, https://intermountainphysician.org/intermountaincme/Documents/05A_Strong_Craig.pdf. The other determinants include 30% health behaviors, 10% genes and biology, and 10% physical environment.

¹⁰ Arloc Sherman et al., "Economic Security Programs Help Low Income Children Succeed Over Long Term, Many Studies Find," *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*, July 17, 2017, accessed July 15, 2018, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/poverty-and-inequality/economic-security-programs-help-low-income-children-succeed-over>.

¹¹ Michael McLaughlin and Mark R. Rank, "Estimating the Economic Cost of Childhood Poverty in the United States," *Social Work Research*, (42:2), June 2018, accessed April 4, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1093/swr/svy007>.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ "Chart Book: The Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit," *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*, (updated May 24, 2016), accessed August 15, 2018, <https://www.cbpp.org/...tax/chart-book-the-earned-income-tax-credit-and-child-tax-credit>.

¹⁵ "U.S. Inflation Calculator," accessed September 10, 2018, <https://www.usinflationcalculator.com/>.

¹⁶ David H. Bradley, et al., "State Minimum Wages: An Overview," *Congressional Research Service*, February 28, 2018, accessed September 11, 2018, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R43792.pdf>.

¹⁷ "Nurse Family Partnership," *Voices for Utah Children*, December 2014, accessed June 18, 2018, <https://www.utahchildren.org/images/pdfs/NFPfactsheet.pdf>.

¹⁸ “Early Childhood Services Study,” 29-30, *Utah Education Policy Center (University of Utah) and Workforce Services Office of Child Care*, December 31, 2017, accessed April 2, 2018, <https://jobs.utah.gov/occ/EarlyChildhoodServicesStudy.pdf>.

¹⁹ Claire Mantialoux, “Revisiting the Impact of Head Start,” *Institute for Research on Labor and Employment*, University of California, Berkeley, September 2016, accessed September 11, 2018, irle.berkeley.edu/revisiting-the-impact-of-head-start/.

²⁰ “What We Do,” *Salt Lake Community Action*, accessed May 15, 2018, <https://www.utahca.org/head-start/> [requires scrolling down].

²¹ “Early Childhood Services Study,” 52.

²² W. Steven Barnett and Allison H. Friedman-Krauss, “State(s) of Head Start,” *The National Institute for Early Education Research*, 20, accessed June 16, 2018, http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/HS_Full_Reduced.pdf.

²³ “Early Childhood Collective Impact Communities,” *Utah Department of Health, Bureau of Child Development*, 2018, <http://earlychildhoodutah.utah.gov/Early%20Childhood%20Collective%20Impact%20Communities.html>.

²⁴ “Consolidated Minimum Wage Table,” *United States Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division*, July 1, 2018, accessed August 22, 2018, <https://www.dol.gov/whd/minwage/america.htm>.

²⁵ Preston Cathcart, “Utah Lawmaker Brings Back Bid to Boost Minimum Wage,” *Deseret News*, January 13, 2018, accessed September 14, 2018, <https://www.deseretnews.com/article/900007565/utah-lawmaker-brings-back-bid-to-boost-minimum-wage.html>.