

# *New Community Babysitting Cooperative: Combating Poverty through the Use of Time Dollars*

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**Abstract**

The New Community Babysitting Cooperative is an affordable childcare network created by the program participants at Families in Transition Transitional Housing Program. The intention of this cooperative is to allow these single parents, who are recovering from homelessness and the devastating effects thereof, the ability to secure employment, job training, and/or education by providing an affordable means of childcare, which is often a large financial obstacle to these goals. The cooperative will also provide for them a presence of community and a social outlet for their children.

The cooperative will be sustained through member cooperation, recruitment and annual dues.

Each cooperative member shares in childcare duties and Chairs are elected from the membership to administer bookkeeping, scheduling, oversight, bylaws, membership and fee collection.

The success of the program is evaluated by how many participants are involved, the growth rate of the membership, and the accessibility to employment and education-seeking opportunities afforded due to the cooperative structure.

## **Executive Summary**

One of the largest obstacles to identifying and maintaining employment and educational opportunities for low-income single parents is quality affordable reliable childcare. This obstacle is even greater for recovering homeless parents on their physical and emotional journey back into mainstream society. For many, economic self-sufficiency is an unattainable dream, particularly cases in which parents have two or more children requiring childcare. For many, sense of community, acceptance and belonging has been stripped away due to homelessness.

The New Community Babysitting Cooperative is designed to offer homeless single parents residing at Families in Transition the opportunity to acquire affordable, reliable childcare through a network of single parents. This cooperative structure also allows these parents and their children to begin societal reintegration and reconnection. Through this network, these single parents are able to identify and secure employment opportunities and/or educational opportunities regardless of the need for childcare. Each parent is responsible for caring for another's children and can expect the same in return.

## **I. Community Needs Assessment**

### **1. *Community Profile***

Manchester, New Hampshire is in the midst of a renaissance similar to those in other post-industrial New England cities such as Providence, RI, and Lowell, MA. Manchester, the Queen City, is home to 107,006 individuals, 21,397 are children ages fourteen or younger. The median age in this young city is 34.9 years of age. Of the 26,284 families who reside in Manchester, 7.7% live at or below the poverty determination. Almost 20% of families in Manchester are single female headed and almost 8% of families are single male headed (ERSys, 2000).

The occupational distribution in Manchester, NH is similar to many post-industrial cities regarding the breakdown of industry. Over 40 percent of jobs are classified in the professional and management sectors, however, over half of jobs are situated in the construction, manufacturing, retail and service industries (Census, 2000). The once abandoned mill buildings that used to provide thousands of textile jobs now house small businesses, large corporations and housing.

### **2. *Community Needs Assessment***

The aforementioned social and economic factors prove more daunting for those who are recovering from homelessness and the devastating effects of severe poverty. Homeless families account for 40% of the homeless in this nation and live at 63% of the poverty level for a family of three. Most homeless families are made up of a young, single mother and her two young children. Homeless mothers earn an average of under \$8000 per year and are typically employed in minimum wage entry-level service sector jobs. A worker earning minimum wage would have to work 97 hours a week to pay the rent of an average two-bedroom apartment and 145 hours per week to meet all the basic needs, including childcare. Lack of childcare severely limits homeless parents' employment opportunities (Better Homes Fund, 1999).

According to 2001 statistics, the city of Manchester was challenged with a reported 1700 homeless persons expecting that rate to increase by 2% in three years (NH Dept of Public Health, 2003). These figures do not capture the individuals and families who do not reside in shelters or motels, rather in cars, with family members, in parks, bus stations, and other various places on the streets.

Homelessness presents more issues than lack of housing as it is an indicator of much greater tribulations including poverty, domestic violence, mental illness, underemployment, addiction, isolation and loneliness. Over 90% of homeless women have suffered violence in their childhood or in their adult lives. Almost 80% have suffered sexual violence while homeless. Of homeless women, 59% have suffered domestic violence with one or more partners and many attribute their homelessness to this factor (Better Homes Fund, 1999).



Nearly 25 % of homeless children have witnessed acts of violence in their families, usually against their mother. They experience physical and sexual abuse at two to three times the rate of other children (Better Homes Fund, 1999).

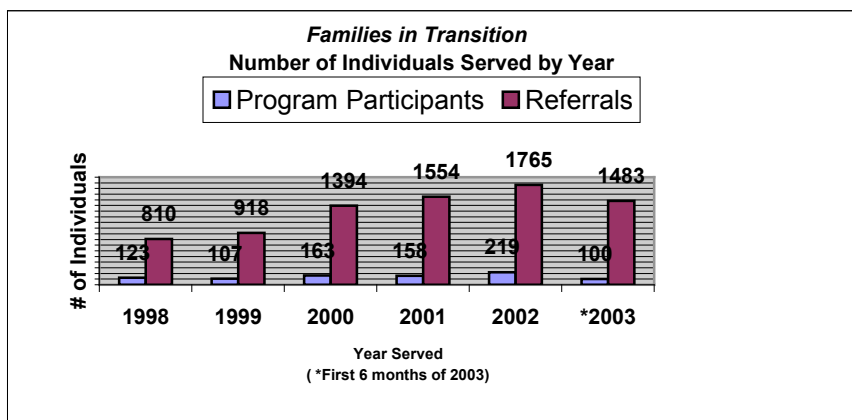
Homelessness divides the homeless and the greater community and restoring that relationship proves to be difficult and painful as many formerly homeless are shamed by society (Families in Transition, 2003).

## 2. The Problem

### 3. Problem Statement

In 2002, Families in Transition served 64 families, a total of 219 people. Almost 1800 individuals, including children, were referred for participation in Families in Transition programming in 2002.

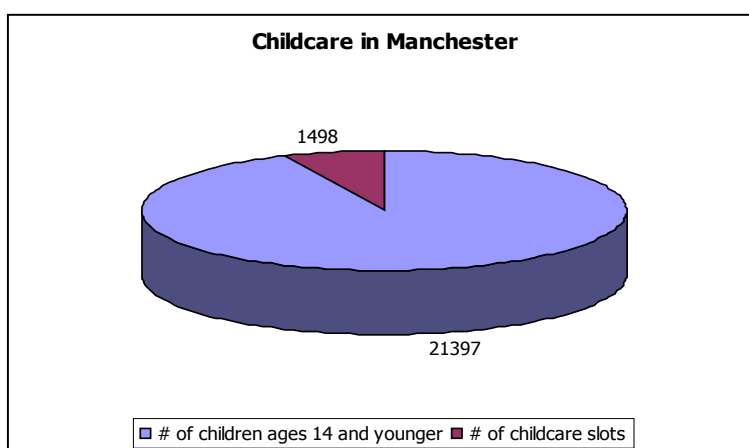
Families in Transition has witnessed an astonishing increase in referrals for homeless recovery services compared to years past confirming the dire need for housing and support services. These families usually enter Families in Transition with few belongings, without friends and family, and without a job or a future plan.



One of the largest obstacles to maintaining employment for single low-income parents is identifying adequate, affordable and reliable childcare. Though most professional occupations carry a 9-to-5 schedule, many positions within the construction, manufacturing, retail and service industries instead require a non-mainstream shift schedule.

Considering this and considering that the vast majority of childcare providers in the Manchester area do not offer services before 8:00 AM or after 6:00 PM, the conflict of employment and childcare becomes apparent (CFS, 2002).

Preserving employment and educational enrollment becomes virtually impossible when a parent cannot meet the schedule of traditional childcare centers. Manchester lacks childcare options as there are only eighty-seven childcare providers listed in the Child and Family Services Childcare Directory for the City of Manchester. Fifty-nine of these are center-based organizations and twenty-eight are in-home family childcare facilities. The total capacity for all of these providers equals 1498 children. Only 7% of children in Manchester have access to regular childcare (CFS, 2002).



Affordability continues to pose a conflict for many parents in Manchester as well. Over 34% of single mothers with children ages eighteen and younger lives in poverty and a staggering 51% of single mothers with children under age five lives in poverty (US Census, 2000). According to US Census figures, the average annual income for male workers in Manchester, NH is \$34,287, the average annual income for women is \$26,584 and the per capita income in Manchester is a mere \$21,244. Upwards of 42% of households and 30% of families in Manchester survive earning \$34,999 or less per year (US Census, 2000). Considering this and the fact that the average weekly cost of childcare in Manchester is \$185 per child, the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment is \$1200, and the rising costs of utilities and basic necessities, one can appreciate the discrepancy between cost



and affordability (Census, 2000). The following chart demonstrates the financial impossibility that a single mother with two children earning the average salary for a female in Manchester, NH encounters in order to pay for the basic necessities.

Monthly Income	\$2,215.33
Rent (2 BR)	\$1,200.00
Childcare (2)	\$1,480.00
Utilities	\$150.00
Groceries	\$150.00
<b>Remaining</b>	<b>-\$764.67</b>

Some parents are able to temporarily circumvent costly childcare by qualifying for subsidized slots at grant-funded and state-subsidized childcare centers. These slots are often time-limited and subject to funding fluctuations. When state funding is reallocated, as is the case in the current fiscal crisis in New Hampshire, many single parents find themselves in the familiar predicament of having to quit work or limit hours of work to care for their children.

#### 4. Target Community

The target community for this project comprises the single parents who reside in the Families in Transition housing program who are employable but non-working and possessing an active education seeking and/or employment seeking plan. Their children must reside in the home with them and must require childcare.

These single parents own and operate the babysitting cooperative, maintaining it informally in each other's homes. Each parent is required to care for other parents' children in order to maintain membership in the cooperative. These parents are not paid in cash, rather in time dollars. Through the babysitting cooperative, this struggling population of impoverished and recovering parents will begin their community building process, their children will become socially active with one another, and there is no economic threat due to childcare.

### 5. Stakeholders

- ❖ Cooperative Members - The cooperative members are the largest stakeholders in this project as it is they who own, operate and benefit from the cooperative's services.
- ❖ Employers and Educators - Employers of cooperative members have fewer instances of absenteeism due to lack of childcare, as do the instructors at educational facilities in which the members enroll.
- ❖ Social Service Agencies - Social service agencies in the Manchester area that struggle to provide subsidized childcare vouchers to low-income parents have at least ten fewer parents to whom they must provide this service.
- ❖ Department of Children, Youth and Families – DCYF may receive fewer calls for assistance due to childcare and fewer neglect reports for children left home alone for the families that are involved in this cooperative.
- ❖ Department of Welfare – Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) receives fewer calls for childcare assistance. Because of the newfound ability for single parents to identify and secure employment and education opportunities, their need for state and city financial subsidy decreases.

### 6. Project Goals in CED Terms

There are a myriad of reasons why some of the parents at Families in Transition are unable to secure employment and education, including cost, skills and security. However, one of the largest obstacles is affordable and reliable childcare. A viable Community Economic Development alternative is the creation of an informal home-based babysitting cooperative that achieves the following goals:

- ❖ Member Employment / Education – The cooperative provides members the freedom to seek employment, education and business possibilities while assuring the care of their children.

- ❖ Community Reintegration - The cooperative provides members the opportunity to build and grow a community from which they have been excluded due to homelessness.
- ❖ Socialization – The children of the cooperative are encouraged to socialize and interact with other children; activities usually impossible when homeless.

### 7. Project Objectives

Before the aforementioned goals are attained, the following measurable objectives must be met.

- ❖ Cooperative Structural Stability:
  - By December 2003, membership of 10-15 participants will be selected.
  - By January 2004, bylaws, rules and regulations will be written and agreed upon.
  - By January 2004, co-directors and secretary will be elected.
  - By January 2004, the babysitting cooperative will be operational.
- ❖ Cooperative Financial Stability:
  - By November 2004, all fundraising will be completed and seed capital for fiscal year 2004 will be obtained.
  - Members agree to pay \$15 dues at the beginning of the fiscal year (January 2005)
- ❖ Member Stability:
  - By February 2004, membership will have solidified and those who choose not be involved will have left.
  - By February 2004, all members will be attending monthly meetings.
  - By February 2004, all members will be using the childcare network.
  - By February 2004, members will begin recruiting other program participants.
  - By February 2004, children will begin socializing with one another.
  - By February 2004, at least 90% of the membership will have begun their employment/education search.

- By April 2004, at least 75% of the membership will be involved in employment/education related activities other than searching.

## II. Design

### 1. Review of the Literature

Organized childcare cooperatives have existed since the early 1900s, and informal babysitting cooperatives began sprouting rapidly in the early 1990s when mothers began heading back into the workforce soon after childbirth (Engle, 2000).

One such example is the Tewksbury Baby-sitting Cooperative located in Tewksbury, MA. This cooperative formed in 1991 in response to the lack of quality childcare and an increase in working mothers. According to Kim Ricciardi, the cooperative's co-director, all parents are screened before being accepted into the cooperative (Boston Globe, 2002). She also states that no one has to rely on a parent to whom they don't relate. The Tewksbury Babysitting Cooperative requires no fees as all payment is in the form of time points. Each member who baby-sits earns time points and those who utilize cooperative sitters spend time points (Boston Globe, 2002)

Gaithersburg, VA boasts a babysitting cooperative that has affected many single mothers in the area. Cindy Strong, a cooperative member, stated that she "earned [her] anthropology degree later in life and...couldn't have done it without [her] co-op." She also states that she saved thousands of dollars on childcare, was able to focus on her schoolwork, and gained a sense of community because of the structure and reliability of the babysitting cooperative (Washington Post, 2002).

Fascinated by the micro-economy of the babysitting cooperative that he and his wife joined, Gary Myers penned a book discussing the dynamics of babysitting cooperatives. He notes that babysitting cooperatives not only provide a sense of community and neighborly trust, they provide social and economic opportunities that might not have been attainable for single working parents (Myers, 2000).

Jacqueline Juggenheimer works as a nurse monitoring the ICU floor of Madison General Hospital in Madison, WI. Her schedule varies from first, second and third shifts, is very demanding and often requires overtime. Fortunately, childcare is never an obstacle to her employment's demanding schedule for, as a member of the Westside Babysitting Cooperative, she has access to twelve families who can take care of her children (Parenting Magazine, 2002).

In his book, *Smart Mom's Baby-Sitting Co-op*, Gary Myers states the structure of the babysitting cooperative should be as simple as possible. The purpose of the cooperative, according to Myers, is to simplify the complicated lives of parents. He suggests that a co-director should represent every ten to twenty members and a secretary should maintain all records of time dollars usage, dues collection, meeting attendance and petty cash usage (Myers, 2000).

## 2. Program

A viable solution to the childcare problem with which the single parents at Families in Transition are confronting is the creation of an informal babysitting organization.

The New Community Babysitting Cooperative is an affordable childcare network created and operated by the program participants at Families in Transition Transitional. This cooperative allows program participants who are recovering from homelessness and the devastating effects thereof the ability to secure employment, job training, and/or education by providing an affordable means of childcare. The cooperative will also provide for them a genuine sense of community with whom they will rebuild and a social outlet for their children.

Rather than paying cash for a sitter or large monthly sums for childcare, the members use a time dollars system to compensate each other for childcare.

The mission of the New Community Babysitting Cooperative is to *"provide affordable reliable childcare, a sense of community and empowerment through which members will become emotionally and economically self-sufficient."*

### 3. Participants

The ideal membership size for an informal babysitting cooperative is 15 to 20 members, however, this project begins with a smaller population. Due to the trust and socialization issues with which many of the target population contend, expecting a large beginner group is foolish. More members will join as cooperative activities begin and more parents understand that this is a feasible alternative to expensive childcare or unemployment.

The starting membership for the New Community Babysitting Cooperative is 10 to 12 single unemployed or underemployed mothers and fathers who reside at Families in Transition.

### 4. Community Role

- ❖ Cooperative Members - The cooperative members are the largest stakeholders in this project as it is they who own, operate and benefit from the cooperative's services.
- ❖ Employers and Educators - Employers of cooperative members have fewer instances of absenteeism due to lack of childcare, as do the instructors at educational facilities in which the members enroll.
- ❖ Social Service Agencies - Social service agencies in the Manchester area that struggle to provide subsidized childcare vouchers to low-income parents have at least ten fewer parents to whom they must provide this service.
- ❖ Department of Children, Youth and Families – DCYF may receive fewer calls for assistance due to childcare and fewer neglect reports for children left home alone for the families that are involved in this cooperative.

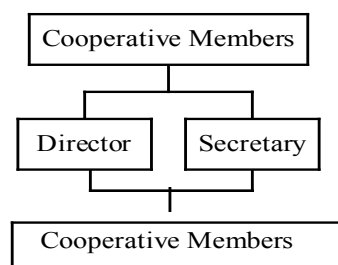
- ❖ Department of Welfare – Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) receives fewer calls for childcare assistance. Because of the newfound ability for single parents to identify and secure employment and education opportunities, their need for state and city financial subsidy decreases.

### 5. Host Organization

Families in Transition (FIT) is a community-based non-profit organization that provides transitional housing and comprehensive social services to individuals with and without children who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. FIT provides affordable housing and services for 18 – 24 months during which participants seek permanent housing and acquire skills with which to become economically and emotionally self-sufficient. FIT staff are not involved in the cooperative in any manner. The population of Families in Transition participants has been targeted due to circumstances and need. The cooperative members own and operate the cooperative therefore Families in Transition administration and staff are in no way involved.

### 6. Organizational Chart

New Community Babysitting Cooperative





### 7. Method

Families in Transition program participants have created the babysitting cooperative. Because this is an informal babysitting cooperative and there is no paid staff, the cooperative is exempt from NH childcare licensing procedures.

However, because all members will be caring for other's children, the cooperative members decided that each member must produce a background check (CORI) that is accessible by all parents should they request viewing.

Each parent shares in childcare duties and the members will elect those who provide bookkeeping, maintain phone lists, maintain bylaws, and maintain the time dollars accounts for each member.

The arrangement of babysitting schedules frees parents to secure economic activity as mentioned above while the point system will allow availability of quality dependable childcare without costly charges. This arrangement also allows socializing and community building to occur among members. This behavior encourages new members to join as well.

The New Community Babysitting Cooperative will sustain itself through annual member dues and recruitment of new members through old members.

### 8. Products, Inputs & Outputs

- ❖ Select 10 – 15 members – These members spearhead the project and play an integral role in maintaining it, recruiting new members, and building community.
- ❖ Conduct introductory meetings for members – Get-to-know-you meetings are absolutely necessary for parents to feel comfortable enough to allow any to babysit.

- ❖ Discuss legal requirements of paperwork, registration, information, background checks, etc. – All members must submit information for a criminal background check, understand that all members of the cooperative have access to the information, and that all members have the right of refusal of a sitter.
- ❖ Write and approve the cooperative's bylaws – All members share responsibility of writing, editing and voting on the bylaws. The bylaws can be amended at any time and are subject to vote by the entire membership.
- ❖ Elect Director and Secretary – These positions will be held by all members at different times. These positions are charged with maintaining the structure and integrity of the cooperative.
- ❖ Begin babysitting – Babysitting is the most important aspect of the cooperative's function as it is the piece that will serve to allow the members to seek employment and education related activities.

### III. Implementation

#### *Project Planning*

##### 1. Implementation Plan

Implementation for this project is a relatively slow process. Other groups may be able to start up within weeks and sometimes days, however, due to the circumstances of their being in transitional housing, this group needs a longer period of growth and building.

- ❖ The first step in creating this cooperative was to invite single parents an informational meeting about the cooperative, what it is, how it works and why this might be a feasible alternative to mainstream childcare for them.
- ❖ When parents decided that this is a good opportunity for them they can attend the next meetings, which are more informal, that focused on socializing rather than business. These meetings were at dinner time and food is served. It is best to provide food at the first of these meetings and then suggest potlucks for the following. Many survivors of homelessness have trust issues stemming from trauma, thus it is vastly important for them to socialize and begin building relationships. It is as important, if not more, that the children are able to socialize with one another in a large group in view of their parents, therefore children are encouraged to come to these meetings and volunteers will provide childcare during the business meetings. The hope was that Families in Transition Participants who were not cooperative members because they have no children would be a part of the socialization and provide childcare during the monthly business meetings. There are three non-cooperative participants who volunteered to watch the children during the monthly meetings.
- ❖ After the potential members became more comfortable with each other, business meetings began. Discussed in these meetings were topics such as necessary paperwork, rules, codes of conduct, schedules and the like. Because the parents had an opportunity to get to know one another and

become more comfortable with each other, they were more apt to speak up and be heard.

- ❖ Once the initial ground rules were laid and the cooperative members solidified, the group began to work on bylaws of the cooperative. The bylaws were voted on by all members of the cooperative.
- ❖ After the bylaws were written and every member understood them, the group elected the Director and Secretary.
- ❖ After all the paperwork was sorted and the chairs were elected, the parents were prepared to begin babysitting.
- ❖ The plan was that after the members begin babysitting, evaluations would begin.

## *2. Staffing Pattern*

Because this is an informal babysitting cooperative, each member assumes a staff role and cares for others' children.

Cooperative members elect a director to maintain the cooperative bylaws and a secretary to maintain the time dollars balances, the phone list, and membership dues collection.

- ❖ *Cooperative members*
  - The members are responsible for childcare and maintaining schedules and time dollars balances. The secretary will maintain a general log, but each member should know what is in his/her account. Each member is allotted one vote regarding bylaws and any other determinations of the cooperative. Each member is eligible for election of either position and has voting rights. Though the Director and Secretary lead the cooperative throughout their elected tenure, both positions are accountable to the cooperative members as a whole.

❖ *Director*

- The Director's responsibility is to ensure that all members are participating in childcare and to make sure that the bylaws are observed. The Director will be elected in democratic fashion and will maintain his or her position for three months.

❖ *Secretary*

- The Secretary is responsible for maintenance and distribution of phone lists, maintenance of time dollars accounts for each member, and is responsible for collecting membership dues. The secretary will be elected in democratic fashion and will maintain his or her position for one month.

3. *Budget*

Start up funds equaling \$400 have been raised via grant writing. The members will begin paying membership dues in January 2005. Members have the option to pay \$20 in one lump sum, \$5 quarterly or \$1.67 per month as long as the dues are paid in full by January 2005.

Operation of the cooperative is measured using a time dollars system rather than cash payments. This bartering system alleviates economic pressure for impoverished parents struggling to make ends meet while ensuring childcare.

Sustainability will be managed through member fees. This is an issue about which members will vote, however, the initial idea is that yearly dues will cost \$20. The dues will cover all costs as described in the itemized budget.

<b>Description</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Itemized</b>	<b>Assumptions</b>
Copies of bylaws, info sheets and phone list for founding members	\$12.50	\$.05 per copy, 25 total pages	Assuming 10 founding members
Copies of bylaws, info sheets and phone list for new members	\$5.00	\$.05 per copy, 25 total pages	Assuming 1 new member per quarter
Monthly meeting expense (food, beverages etc)	\$120.00	\$10 per month/12 months	Host may request potluck rather than purchasing food
Meeting supplies	\$30.00	Paper, pens, funds for copies, etc.	Purchase annually
Reserve Funds	\$50.00	Recreation	At the discretion of cooperative members
Start up CORI expense	\$120.00	\$10 per CORI	Assuming 12 members in the first year
CORI expense	\$40.00	\$10 per CORI	Assuming 1 new member per quarter
<b>Total Project Start-up Cost</b>	<b>\$337.50</b>		
<b>Total Project Annual Cost</b>	<b>\$257.50</b>		
<b>Sustainability Plan</b>	<b>\$280.00*</b>	<b>\$20 per member</b>	<b>Paid yearly beginning January 2005</b>
			* Excess dues can be deducted from the next year's dues or can be added to reserves.

<b>Duties</b>	<b>Time Dollars</b>	<b>Restrictions</b>
Beginning Time Dollars balance for all new members	\$25.00	None
Points allowed in overdraft for all members	\$20.00	Emergency use only
Child babysat per hour	\$1.00	Per hour, per child (incl.infants)
Board duties (Chair position)	\$5.00	Each election
Volunteering duties	\$2.00	None
Transporting children	\$2.00	Must obtain permission

### *Project Implementation*

#### *4. Project Implementation Report*

The project has not been implemented as planned. Members were recruited, selected and educated about babysitting cooperatives, their purpose and structure, benefits, and drawbacks. Each attendee was invited to return, and the membership was selected. The members enjoyed introduction dinners and meetings and after these felt comfortable enough to begin business meetings during which they would draft bylaws and rules. Bylaws and rules were successfully drafted with few disagreements. Each member voted on the bylaws and enacted them as New Community Babysitting Cooperative law. The next step





## **IV. Monitoring and Evaluation**

### *Monitoring*

#### *1. Management Information Systems*

The information needed to begin this project was gathered through community needs assessments, focus groups, surveys and informational sessions.

A core concern for the participants was maintaining enough members to keep the cooperative operational. Another was ensuring that their children would remain safe under the watch of another parent. These concerns were based largely on their own insecurities and trust issues and they were transferring and counter-transferring them to other members. Because this type of behavior was so prevalent, many "get-to-know-you" meetings were planned. Before any babysitting could occur, these parents needed to feel comfortable with one another.

During each meeting, parents were asked if they were feeling more comfortable than before. The parents that continued to show up stated that they were.

At the last informational meeting, the pioneer cooperative membership was selected and the business meetings began.

All records and minutes from focus groups, interviews and member meetings are kept in MSWord and MExcel files.

## 2. Summary Monitoring Table

<b>Goals</b>	<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Monitoring</b>	<b>Planned timeline</b>	<b>Actual timeline</b>
Member Employment and Education Identification	10 to 15 members selected	Number of parents agreed to membership	December 2003	December 2003
	Fundraising complete	Grant writing, interviews	November 2003	November 2003
	Bylaws written, Chairs elected, Due schedule determined, recruiting methods determined	Observe and assist with authorship	January 2004	January 2004
	Babysitting begins	Request feedback from members	February 2004	N/A
	Employment and/or education search begins	Request feedback from members including number of applications submitted, interviews attended.	February 2004	N/A
	Employment and/or education secured	Request feedback from members including wage, schedule, start date	April 2004	N/A
	Employment and/or education maintained	Request feedback from members regarding schedule maintenance	After April 2004	N/A
Community Reintegration	Parents attend informational and social meetings	Observe attendees	September to December 2003	September to December 2003
	Members communicate with each other	Observe attendees	November to December 2003	November to December 2003
	Members able to construct bylaws, elect Chairs and vote	Observe and assist attendees	January 2004	January 2004
	Members begin babysitting, broaden network	Request feedback from members regarding sitter choices	February 2004	February 2004
	Members able to recruit new members	Request feedback from members regarding recruitment	April and on	N/A
Socialization	Children are introduced	Observation at meetings	November to December 2003	November to December 2003
	Babysitting begins,	Feedback from	February 2004	N/A

	children interact	children and parents through surveys and interviews		
	Children's social skills build	Feedback from children and parents through surveys and interviews	February and on	N/A

### *Evaluation*

#### *3. Performance Indicators*

The project would be considered successful if the members are able to obtain employment and/or educational opportunities that ultimately lead to economic self-sufficiency. Other indicators of success include social reintegration through the cooperative and ultimately the greater community.

The first set of indicators includes members using the cooperative regularly, attending meetings regularly, voting, voicing opinions, and changing the bylaws as the cooperative grows and learns. One of the biggest challenges to this group will be maintaining a democratic structure within the group.

The second set of indicators includes the number of cooperative members who have identified and secured employment or educational opportunities, the number of members who, because of employment, are no longer in need of TANF assistance, and the number of members who have become economically self-sufficient due to the cooperative structure.

The third set of indicators includes social integration not only of the parents but also of their children. These indicators speak to comfort levels, tolerance levels, trust and compassion.

Because the cooperative was never able to mature, no data regarding these indicators has been retrieved. Appendix 1 demonstrates the tool used to assess the needs of the members and their goals. Appendix 2 demonstrates the evaluation form that would have been used to acquire information pertaining to the performance indicators.

#### 4. Summary Evaluation Table

<b>Goals</b>	<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Planned timeline</b>	<b>Actual timeline</b>
Member Employment and Education Identification	10 to 15 members selected	December 2003	December 2003
	Fundraising complete	November 2003	November 2003
	Bylaws written, Chairs elected, Due schedule and recruiting methods determined	January 2004	January 2004
	Babysitting begins	February 2004	N/A
	Employment and/or education search begins	February 2004	N/A
	Employment and/or education secured	April 2004	N/A
	Employment and/or education maintained	After April 2004	N/A
Community Reintegration	Parents attend informational and social meetings	September to December 2003	September to December 2003
	Members communicate with each other	November to December 2003	November to December 2003
	Members able to construct bylaws, elect Chairs and vote	January 2004	January 2004
	Members begin babysitting, broaden network	February 2004	February 2004
	Members able to recruit new members	April and on	N/A
Socialization	Children are introduced	November to December 2003	November to December 2003
	Babysitting begins,	February 2004	N/A

	children interact		
	Children's social skills build	February and on	N/A

## *Sustainability*

### *1. Sustainability Elements*

The project's sustainability is dependent upon the current members to recruit and sustain new membership. This may seem not to be a challenge, however, for many survivors of homelessness, trust and openness do not come easily. Allowing someone to be alone with a child is a difficult choice, particularly if that child suffered abuse. The cost of the cooperative membership is inexpensive, more so if more than twelve members join in the first year. The Families in Transition participants learn budgeting skills as part of the therapy, thus budgeting for \$20 a year should not be difficult. It is important to remember that the cooperative members may choose to lower the yearly fee and use alternate methods of communication and meeting planning.

### *2. Sustainability Plan*

The New Community Babysitting Cooperative can convene anywhere the members wish. When a participant graduates the FIT program and he/she still wishes to be a part of the cooperative, he/she may, as babysitting takes place wherever their home is. This structure allows for increased membership and a sustained relationship with the group.

### *3. Institutional Plan*

Ideally the cooperative will be institutionalized by the members. Though members will graduate the program and move out of the Families in Transition apartments, they may remain cooperative members. The new participants that move into the apartments will have the opportunity to join the cooperative and begin their social healing. The cooperative can become a continuous program if this method is followed. This requires, however, that the current members invite new participants to become members.

## **Evaluation and Recommendations**

### *Evaluation:*

The goals and objectives of the project never changed during the course of research and implementation. The site of the project and the structure of the project changed many times, however, and unfortunately, the project as written was not successfully implemented.

This project was originally created to serve the low-income population in the impoverished and depressed Whitman Street and Arlington sections of Lawrence, MA. The arrest of the three pioneering single mothers in Lawrence, MA for drug trafficking was a sharp and painful reality check. Regardless of how one views the rationale behind drug dealing, these impoverished single mothers maintained their need to feed, clothe and house their children forced them to do what was necessary to earn income. Due to their lack of education and training, the depressed job market and a sense of desperation, they turned to the simplest money making opportunity available; heroine trafficking. The devastating consequences of their decision include ten to fifteen years incarceration in a federal penitentiary, the removal of their children and possible permanent placement into state administered foster care, and the loss of dignity.

Though the babysitting cooperative was created to provide these exact parents with time and opportunity to identify and secure employment and education so that they could become economically self-reliant, for these women it was too little too late.

Our society is a litigious one, intended to protect and preserve our basic civil and human rights. Unfortunately, some agencies and organizations view litigation as a money making opportunity employed by some members of their client population. Though many social servants and CED practitioners might argue that this is a gross generalization of a marginalized and distrusted population, and perhaps it is,

the reality is that social service agencies are sued, legitimately or not, by their clientele on a regular basis thereby causing many agencies to be hypersensitive to liability and legal vulnerability. However, because of their social missions, most agencies continue to provide services to client populations regardless of this risk, and, as best as possible, protect themselves from liability using insurance and other methods. Some agencies, however, limit the services offered to client populations due to this fear of litigation.

Implementation of this project succeeded until the point at which babysitting was to commence. Though in July 2003 the project had been approved by the executive administration of Families in Transition (FIT), by December they considered the legal liability of an informal babysitting cooperative operated and facilitated by formerly homeless parents residing in their housing program to be too high. The concern was that in the event a cooperative member abused the child of another member, the agency would be sued for neglect. This is a valid concern, however, regardless of attempts to shield FIT from legal liability as directed by the agency's attorney, or to protect the agency's interests through insurance, the project was considered high risk and was cancelled at this site by the executive administration.

Upon evaluating the failure of this project while considering the successes of other babysitting cooperatives, the population forming and controlling the entity had to be considered. There were no cooperatives formed by formerly homeless single parents residing in transitional housing, nor were there any formed by a network of relative strangers. None of the cooperatives researched were developed through or by a social service agency or any other bureaucratic agent.

The purpose of any babysitting cooperative is to provide childcare services at low cost and low maintenance, but most importantly at the direction of the parents. I don't believe that the many social service agencies are prepared or are willing to

surrender control of an issue as large as childcare to their client parents without instituting some form of bureaucratic structure. This type of bureaucratic structure defeats the purpose of a babysitting cooperative, however.

Though the babysitting cooperative failed to be implemented successfully at Families in Transition, it was successfully implemented in the community. One of the initial members of the cooperative took the idea of time dollars and babysitting to a group of mothers at her church. She successfully implemented a babysitting cooperative with fourteen other mothers using time dollars.

*Recommendations:*

Babysitting cooperatives are operating successfully all over the country because the model works. To implement a successful cooperative, the parents must be in control of it and understand that you, the observer, are not. When working with a population of abused, victimized and marginalized individuals, this can be quite difficult. The best babysitting cooperatives are those that are created by the parents.

Before attempting to assist parents in the creation of a cooperative, make sure that all parties involved, including any organizations, are in agreement with the proposal and its informal structure. An informal babysitting cooperative will not operate effectively under stringent structure.

Finally, if the population is similar to the aforementioned, understand that some of the potential members will not be successful in their attempt to build the cooperative. The negative variables are very real, but should serve as motivation to continue with the effort rather than a discouragement.



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**Appendix 1****Assessment of Cooperative Candidate***General*

1. Name
2. Are you a FIT participant? Y / N
3. How many children do you have?

*Work/Education*

4. Are you currently working? Y / N
5. What is your employment plan?
6. What is your education plan?
7. What are your career goals?

*Financial*

8. Are you currently receiving TANF? Y / N
9. Are you currently receiving food stamps? Y / N
10. Are you currently receiving SSI benefits for you or your children? Y / N

*Background (For informational purposes only. This information will remain confidential)*

11. Do you have custody of your children?
12. Have you ever lost custody of your children due to homelessness?
13. How often have you been homeless?
14. For how long were you homeless?
15. Please describe your homeless situation (brief)
16. Have you ever been a victim of violence?
17. Have you ever witnessed violence?
18. Have your children ever witnessed violence?

*Personal*

19. Are you comfortable in groups?
20. Do you allow your children to play with other children in the building?
21. If not, why not?
22. Do you socialize with other participants in the building?
23. If not, why not?
24. Do you socialize with people outside of the building?
25. If not, why not?
26. Is your child currently in daycare/after school programs, etc?
27. How much does the childcare/after school program, etc cost you?
28. Do you receive assistance to pay for this?
29. If your child does not attend childcare or after school programs, what do they do?
30. Have you ever lost or not gotten a job because of childcare issues?
31. Have you ever missed work because of childcare issues?
32. How much can you afford to pay for childcare on a monthly basis?

**Appendix 2****Evaluation Form for New Community Babysitting Cooperative***General*

1. What is your name?
2. When did you join the NCBC?
3. Do you find the NCBC helpful?
4. How often do you use the cooperative?

*Cooperative Use*

5. How many points have you earned in the past month?
6. How many points have you spent in the past month?
7. Have you missed any monthly meetings?
8. If you have missed some meetings, please explain why.
9. Are you currently or have you been an elected Chair?
10. If so, which one?
11. Briefly describe your duties.

*Education/Employment*

12. Are you currently working?
13. Have you changed jobs since you became a member of the NCBC?
14. If yes, please explain.
15. Has your work schedule changed since you became a member of the NCBC?
16. If yes, please explain.
17. If your plan included education, have you enrolled in classes?
18. If yes, where and what is the schedule?

*Financial*

19. Prior to joining the cooperative, were you receiving TANF? Y / N

20. Are you currently receiving TANF?

21. Prior to joining the cooperative, were you receiving food stamps? Y / N

22. Are you receiving rental assistance (Section 8)? Y / N

23. Since joining the cooperative, do you feel more financially secure?

24. Are you earning more money now that you have joined the cooperative?

*Personal*

25. Are there any parents whom you do not allow to babysit your child(ren)?

26. If so, why?

27. Are there any parents for whom you will not babysit?

28. If so, why?

29. Are you social with the other FIT participants?

30. Are you social outside of FIT?

31. Are you social with the people from work/school/class?

32. Do you allow your children to play with other children living at FIT?

33. Do you feel more social because of the cooperative?