



UNEMPLOYED SINGLE PARENT PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

This project was developed to assist unemployed single parents in Bullock County, Union Springs, Alabama to improve their Life Skills and obtain employment. It identified the number of children living in poverty who reside in single parent families and societal problems that these parents exhibit and must overcome before they can complete their primary education and participate in such economic opportunities as employment and Life Skills training. Such mothers often face, for example, problems of poverty, low self-esteem and lack of confidence, isolation and depression, social stigma and lack of social support. It has been shown that when families are stable and parents can provide for their children, then the overall wellness of children living in Union Springs, Bullock County would improve (VOICES, 2010). The project's main objective was to use the framework of our Head Start program and Family Services workers to bring resources to twenty unemployed single parents during their child's enrollment in Head Start. So, the children could feel safe and parents could practice healthy life skills to develop their confidence, increase awareness of life skills, and interview skills to gain stability and become economically self-reliant.

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Community Profile

According to the Organized Community Action Program, Inc. (OCAP) current Community Assessment, Union Springs, Bullock County ranks high in the need for early childcare. According to data acquired from the Alabama Children's Kids Count 2010, Bullock County, ranks 66th (67th being the worst) in the state of Alabama regarding overall child well-being. The total civilian labor force in Bullock County stands at 3,647 with the number of employed citizens at 3,005 and the number of unemployed at 642. The land area for Bullock County is 625 square miles. Statistics indicate that 33.6% of the families in Bullock County are living in poverty. Of these families, 38% are children living in poverty and 55.5% of children lived in single-parent families. As a result, 51.2% of unemployed mothers have young children. The median family income for 2010 was \$26,980.

According to data acquired from the Center for Health Statistics, of all the births in 2009, 65% were to unmarried women and 87.1% of all births were to women 10-19 years of age. The Alabama Department of Industrial Relations 2010 unemployment statistics, reported Bullock County currently has an unemployment rate of 14.2% compared to the State of Alabama's unemployment rate of 10%; one can see that this county is one of the poorest in the state. As such, it is essential that OCAP expand its early childcare services to help parents secure employment and provide financial stability to their families.

The community need survey was submitted to all Head Start parents and indicated the greatest need was to have more jobs in the communities. For the Head Start parents that are not employed, we will continue to assist by making referrals for job skills/job placement to the local State Employment Agencies, Vocational/Skills centers, and direct contact with business and industries. We will also utilize our current Head Start comprehensive program to provide early childcare services so parents can seek unemployment and assist with GED and education courses.

Based on data the availability of jobs in Bullock County is in the poultry processing plants, sod and plant nurseries. The largest industries in Bullock County are in nondurable goods (plants, farming, and timber), and poultry production and processing. Major employers in the county include Wayne Poultry, Bonnie Plant Farm, Bullock County Correctional Facility, Bullock County Board of Education, Bullock County Hospital, Dixie Electric Cooperative, and Union Springs Telephone. These industries employ a large percentage of the Hispanic/Latino population in Bullock County. Data shows that there are approximately 752 Hispanic/Latino (of any race) living in a Bullock County. Bullock County is also the fastest growing Hispanic/Latino population of all seven counties served by OCAP.

According to Alabama Kids Count 2010 Voices for Alabama's Children, Bullock County has shown a decrease in the county's population from 2000-2008. Bullock County's population of children under the age of five showed an increase from 2000-2008. The report indicated that for 2008, the county has 799 children under the age of five.

Information shows Bullock County, of the population ages 16 to 19 year olds not enrolled in school and are not high school graduates is 14.4%. The percentage of the population with less than a 9th grade education is 15.1%. 60.5% of the population is high school graduates or higher and 7.7% does have a bachelor's degree or higher degree. Macon County, the adjoining county north of Bullock, is the home of Tuskegee University with approximately 1,000 employees and 2,608 under graduate students. For the FY 2007-2008 school year, the average ACT score for Bullock County was 17.5. Bullock County's education system includes; 1 high school, 3 elementary schools, 1 vocational center, and 1 private school. According to Alabama Kids Count 2010, Bullock County has three Licensed Daycare Centers and 3 Exempt Centers. Bullock County does not have a public transportation program for the citizens in the county.

Children who grow up poor are more likely to experience negative outcomes than other children are. Approximately 947 children live in poverty in Bullock County, 55.5% of these children are in single-parent families who need assisted early childcare services. Bullock County has an unemployment rate of 14.2%, which results in the well-being of children and the financial security of their parents.

Community Needs Assessment

Statistics indicate that 34.0% of families in Bullock County are living in poverty; of these families, 37.8% are children. 55.5% of children live in single-parent homes (VOICES, 2010). In response to community surveys conducted by Organized Community Action Program, Inc. (OCAP), the results find a need to develop life skills and provide opportunity to obtain employment in order to help young mothers prepare

themselves for a chance of success. The top three community concerns were not enough jobs, cost of utilities, and affordable housing. If families are stable and parents can provide for their children, then the overall wellness of children living in Bullock County would improve (VOICES, 2010).

Interventions to address the overlapping concerns from the community surveys are summarized as developing collaborative partnerships with job skill centers, adult education programs, community action program, and other agencies to assist young adult women with life skills and early childcare, in order for them to successfully seek and obtain employment. Linking these families with Head Start, this free, comprehensive, federally funded program can offer them affordable childcare while they are employed.

Target Community for Project

Union Springs, Bullock County, Alabama is located in the Black Belt of South Central Alabama. Bullock County has a total land area of 625 square miles, of which 11 square miles is water. The county is in the prairie region, in the southeastern section of Alabama (Livingston, 2010). According to the U.S. Census (2009), the population of Bullock County is 10,917, of that number, 8,193 are African Americans; 2,668 are White and 252 are Hispanic people living in Bullock County.

For 2009, the annual unemployment rate for Bullock County was 14.3%. Out of 67 counties, Bullock ranked 15th in the highest to lowest average rate of unemployment in 2009. The preliminary report for June 2010 ranks the Bullock County unemployment rate at 14.1%. The total civilian labor force stands at 3,631 with the number of employed

citizens at 3,118 and the number of unemployed at 513. This is more than double from two years ago (Livingston, 2010).

According to the U.S. Census (2009), the median family income was estimated to be \$33,763, compared to the U.S. at \$62,363. The percentage of high school graduates age 25+ is 60.5% with the percentage of individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher is 7.7. The current graduation rate is at 53.2% and 17.4% of teens are not attending school and not working.

PROBLEM ANALYSIS

Problem Statement

The basic purpose of the Organized Community Action Program (OCAP) and goal of this project is a self-help agency, which provides an opportunity for human dignity by providing decent housing, food, clothing, health assistance, counseling, referrals, education, and job placement. OCAP's goal is to seek solutions to the social and economic problems related to poverty. It is through joint efforts among our service centers in the seven counties we provide services (Livingston, 2010).

Statistics indicate that 34.0% of families in Bullock County are living in poverty; of these families, 37.8% are children. 55.5% of children live in single-parent homes (VOICES, 2010). If this trend continues, a cyclical affect will occur and the number of children living in poverty, in an unemployed single parent household will rise. Additional aspects for drug/alcohol abuse, child abuse/neglect, teenage pregnancy, and children health and safety are likely to influence this community. Results show a need to develop life skills and provide the opportunity to obtain employment in order to help young mothers prepare themselves for a chance of success. If families are stable and parents can provide for their children, then the overall wellness of children living in Bullock County would improve (VOICES, 2010).

Interventions to address the over lapping concerns from the community surveys are summarized as developing collaborative partnerships with job skill centers, adult education programs, community action program, and other agencies to assist young adult women with life skills and early childcare, in order for them to successfully seek and

obtain employment. Linking these families with Head Start, this free, comprehensive, federally funded program can offer them affordable childcare while employed.

Stakeholders

Other major players, groups, or institutions that may have a stake in this project are faith-based organizations, City Government, Head Start, Alabama Work Force Development, Department of Human Resources, Bullock County Board of Education, and Bullock County Children's Policy Council. These stakeholders are concerned with revenue increase, economic development, and county tax base. Establish a qualified, work force to attract business and industry to the area. Reduce the number of welfare recipients, child abuse/neglect occurrences, and increasing children's health and safety environments. Faith-based organizations are compassionate and teach the principles of living according to love and forgiveness.

The strengths of this project are OCAP's experienced managers, and staff who live and work in the community, reputation in the community, and the established partnerships developed with City, social services, and school system. Some identified weaknesses are continuity and sustaining federal dollars, support from stakeholders, lack of experience in providing Life skills training, and Alabama Career Center located in adjacent county. Partnerships and alliances we have or may already have, or develop, addressing community need, decrease the number of children living in poverty, develop skilled work force, and increased In-kind opportunities are some opportunities, when explored will lead to a successful project. When embarking on a new project there are threats associated that can make the project unsuccessful. The political climate in this

county is volatile. Recently in the news, Bullock County Commissioners arrested for violating Alabama Ethics Law. Our nation's current debt and deficit concerns may reduce the financial resources required for project.

Community Economic Development Aspect of the Project

Developed project goals based on 55% of children in Bullock County, Alabama who live in unemployed, single parent homes have the inability to make children feel safe, practice healthy life skills, and are unable to access job opportunities. OCAP will target unemployed, single mothers, and unemployed head start parents who lack limited life skills, job training, and job opportunities. A goal will be to help these parents obtain employment and provide a safe, stable home for their children while supporting the financial needs of the family. Project interventions focus on linking some parents with an organization(s) that assist with locating opportunities to learn life-skills, job skill training, alcohol/drug abuse counseling, etc. Once this is accomplished then OCAP would provide affordable child care and job referrals to agencies that are hiring.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Klausli and Owen (2009) used data from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development to address how cohabitation of unmarried two-parent biological families resulted in characteristics of maternal depression, conflict, and ambivalence across the child's first 2 years. The results found stably cohabiting mothers reported more depressive symptoms and were less sensitive to their child than were married mothers.

Since the passage of the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, low-income women have faced increased policy pressure to work outside the home (Raver, 2003). According to Raver (2003), research on whether the effects of welfare reform were successful in reducing caseloads and moving low-income women from reliance on public assistance into the labor market have been conducted. Other research addressed the impact of employment programs on family's psychosocial well-being and children's social, behavioral, and academic outcomes. Current research explored both the negative and positive impacts of low-wage employment on various family factors. Many low-income families are served through early educational programs that facilitate maternal employment as well as provide children with preschool experience (Raver, 2003).

Bruckman and Blanton (2003) write that newer early childhood programs are modeled on parent collaboration, rather than professional parent education programs. Parent collaboration models are based on working within the family context to empower families to overcome the challenges they face. Head Start offers comprehensive social

services for the family. This support is very important to female headed, single-parent families living in poverty. Mothers face dual roles of head of household and family breadwinner, which places a confinement of social and economic resources available to them. Bruckman and Blanton's study was conducted to capture and describe experiences of low-income single mothers with parent involvement services in Head Start programs. Parent education is a process whereby parents become more sensitive to the needs of their children while interacting with other adults that will enhance their own personal development (Bruckman and Blanton, 2003).

Poverty has been linked to a variety of socio-emotional problems in all children, regardless of ethnicity and ages; including varying degrees of depression, strained peer relations, low self-confidence, conduct disorders, and higher levels of overall social maladaptation and psychological disorder (McLoyd, 1990).

The study of Work and Mexican American two-parent families well-being was conducted by (Wheeler, Updegraff & Crouter, 2011) who examined parents' work experiences and implications for individual well-being and parent-adolescent relationships. Researchers have identified a number of specific occupational conditions; such as, self-direction and work pressure that correlate in parents' well-being and in family relationship qualities. Wheeler et al., (2011) found that workers in jobs with high levels of routine had high levels of distress. In a study of African American women in relatively low-status occupations, low levels of job autonomy were associated with role overload measured as the stress of balancing family and work roles. Whereas, Mexican Americans are overrepresented in unskilled occupations, such as farm work, construction,

and production jobs that often involve hazardous and physically demanding conditions, suggesting these dimensions of work are only considered for these families. Work pressure and psychological well-being does have a linkage (Wheeler et al., 2011).

The short-term longitudinal study conducted by Jackson, Choi, and Bentler (2009) investigated whether maternal educational attainment, maternal employment status, and family income affect African American children's behavioral and cognitive functioning over time through their impact on mother's psychological functioning and parenting efficacy. Results showed that education, working status, and earnings display a significant, negative, and indirect relationship with behavioral problems and, may mediate a link between poor and near-poor single Black mothers' depressive symptoms and their preschoolers' school adjustment (Jackson et al., 2009). Children who live in poverty in their early childhood years show that poverty and economic hardship have consistently negative effects on children's socio-emotional and cognitive functioning (Jackson et al., 2009, pg. 1340).

Conger and Conger (1992) learned that economic hard times can have severe adverse consequences for families. The risk of divorce, family dysfunction, physical abuse, and child neglect may occur. Mounting economic pressures bring financial and budgetary issues that generate feelings of frustration, anger, and discontentment. These strong emotional responses were evident during The Great Depression America experienced (Conger & Conger, 1992).

In a study by Raver (2001), examined how low-wage work would affect low-income, Head Start preschooler mothers' psychological well-being and parenting style

over time, learned that work did not influence mother's depressive symptoms and use of angry coercive parenting techniques. These findings give way to broader questions regarding whether low-wage work can reasonably be expected to have a positive or negative effect on parenting among poor families.

Keith and Shafer (1981) reported that regardless of the number of single-parent families, the life style of the single parent is often described as deviant and pathological and contributes to the psychological distress among parents and children. Economics and domestic tasks have been identified as two aspects of life that are stressful for parents. A comparison study was conducted on factors of home and work associated with depression among married women and single-parent families and investigated which deficits in the single-parent family were linked with depression. The areas examined in relation to depression were employment characteristics, psychological resources, and management of domestic activities (Keith and Shafer, 1981).

The article reviews of Downey and Coyne (1990) found depression viewed as a problem of the individual. Two decades of research revealed the interdependence between depressed people and their social context. Depression is a disorder, especially among women of childbearing age. The hypothesis most research focus attention on is that children's problems result directly from living with a depressed parent, especially a depressed mother. However, research also exist that support the hypothesis that children problems are spurious, that both are caused by preexisting conditions such as marital turmoil or family stress (Downey & Coyne, 1990).

PROJECT DESIGN / LOGIC MODEL

The Organized Community Action Program, Inc. has a Board of Directors who is fiduciary and legally responsible for the Agency. The Board of Directors hires an Executive Director, who is responsible for proposing the major thrust and direction of the community action agency in overcoming the poverty conditions in the community.

The Head Start Director reports to the Executive Director of the Agency. The Head Start Director is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the program. Responsibility in overall supervision over the Head Start Program and to develop or cause to be developed and implement operational policies and procedures in conformance with those of the Agency and regulations, policies, etc., promulgated by the funding agency.

The Family & Community Partnership Director supervises Family Service Specialists and provides direction for the Family & Community Partnerships Components for sustainability of family and community strengthening. They will engage a family, when they are ready to be engaged, and assist them in meeting their goals, and accessing resources that will make them more self-reliant. The Family & Community Partnership Director reports to the Head Start Director.

The Family Service Specialists is a center manager and family service position that performs direct and indirect services to children and families involved in the Head Start Program. Duties include managing the centers and interacting with the child/families, and assisting all component coordinators. They are required to make at

least two (2) home visits per school year to aid in assessing family status and assist families based on the family assessment.

These staff is essential in making the Single Unemployed Parent Project a success. Strengthening home environments of children is an initiative that the Office of Head Start launched in 2007. Studies repeatedly show that children who grow up in homes with strong family relationships are physically healthier, more successful academically and less likely to have behavioral problems than children raised in unstable environments. The support of the Board of Director, Executive Director and frontline staff that work on a daily basis with family will help achieve this goal.

With participation in the Unemployed single Parent Project, the outcomes over time will allow single, unemployed parents to become more economically self-sufficient leading to stronger families and a break in the cycles of poverty. At the same time, the community will experience a reduction in the demand for public assistance and social services. An improved, reliable, ready workforce and an overall improvement in the quality of life for residents will result. Single parents will learn skills to cope with obstacles that limit their ability to search, interview, and obtain a job. As a result, an increase in the economic well-being, their self-confidence, and their child's health will be seen.

Table 1: Project Logic Model

LONG TERM OUTCOME	Over time, single parents will become more economically self-sufficient leading to stronger families and a break in the cycles of poverty. At the same time, the community will experience a reduction in the demand on public assistance & social services, a more reliable and ready workforce, and an overall improvement in the quality of life for residents.		
INTERMEDIATE OUTCOME	Single parents will cope with obstacles that limit their ability to search, interview, and obtain a job, thus Increase economic well-being, child's health, and their self-confidence.		
SHORT TERM OUTCOMES (may be more than 3)	Increase the number of single unemployed parents obtaining their GED	Network with business and industry to share their resources	Improve knowledge around life skills for single, unemployed mothers
OUTPUTS	Focus on skills lacking in 20 parents in order to obtain GED; Provide assistance with taking the GED classes to 20 parents.	Increase access to job opportunities with business and industry for 20 parents; Develop partnership with Work Force Development and local business and industry to place parent after completing project	Increase the number of single, unemployed parents participating in counseling and training; Collaborate with Agency who will assist with life skills training and counseling to 20 parents.
ACTIVITIES	Organize resources to provide on-site tutor, classroom, supplies, and free childcare. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - secure classroom space - secure instructor(s) - develop or acquire curricula - acquire testing materials - create pre and post assessment tests - provide childcare options - sign MOU with GED assessment company - acquire supplies - create advertising - create 	OCAP staff assist with identifying business and industry referrals; weekly contact with Work Force Development Office; application/enrollment criteria <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - screen applicants - administer pre-test - follow students throughout the process - administer or send students to GED testing - administer post test - restart recruitment process 	Organize resources, format facilitators and support group, Obtain counselors and expert presenters for various topics. Conduct mock interviews.
INPUTS	GED curricular; Tutor for GED; classroom for sessions; free-child care program	Staff; community resources; Chamber of Commerce; MOU Agreements	Case managers; computers; MOU Agreements, skills assessment; facilitator and counselor; space to hold classes

The Family and Community Partnership Director, is responsible for developing and identifying community partnerships with business and industry. Conducting weekly follow-up with local Workforce Development office allows opportunity to ensure the jobs are available for parents who complete the project and collaborating with local agencies to provide training and receive referrals for counseling. The Family Services Specialists at the Union Springs Head Start center are responsible for screening and identifying parents, administering the pretest and posttest, making referrals to GED classes, tracking attendance, essentially following the parent through the process of Life Skills classes. This will increase the number of single, unemployed parents who need their GED. When parent has completed the project and is determined successful, they will contact and schedule an interview with business that we have a partnership agreement. Accomplishment of this outcome will remove obstacles and increase job opportunities with business and industry. The Head Start Director will secure space, curriculum, and/or instructor for Life skills classes. Responsibility for advertising, creating forms, childcare assistance, and reporting to Executive Director and governing Boards on the progress of project. Organizing resources to facilitate a successful transition for parents who are unemployed to gainfully employment will help us meet our goal.

METHODOLOGY AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Three of the short-term outcomes for my project are the number of single unemployed parents obtaining their General Education Diploma; networking with local business / industry to share their resources; and improve life skills and counseling around single unemployed parents. I envision a project focused on the unemployed single parent to decrease 10-15 single unemployed parents who have children enrolled in Head Start who have not obtained their General Education Diploma, who lack life skills training and counseling, and link them with local business and industry in the surrounding area who are hiring.

Project Participants and Beneficiaries

The annual budget to assist 20 parents will come from grant funds, fundraisers activities, volunteers, and donations. The Alabama Healthy Marriage Initiative is interested in collaborating with our project. They currently provide a 10-week course in counseling, job referrals, like skills training, clothing, and GED assistance for low-income parents. Expanding in Bullock County will require time and effort in locating a facility that can be a one-stop location for these sessions. The funds from the grant must be received before the project can begin. The likelihood of obtaining the majority of activities donated as in-kind is possible if the community will buy-in and believe the project is worthwhile. Donations from civic, church organizations and community members are avenues to generate additional income.

Community Role

Once, participants meet the training and GED program requirement then link these participants with local businesses and industry to provide opportunities for employment. Measuring the success of these parents will require pre and post interviews with Family Service Specialists. Measurable data is inclusive of participants' attendance, obtainment of goals, participants' willingness to engage in becoming self-resilient. Active participation in life skills training and/or counseling is another way to measure the success of the project. By using the tool SMART C+ (Nemon, 2011) these, short-term outcome can become more manageable.

Host Organization / Group

The Organized Community Action Program, Inc. has a Board of Directors who is fiduciary and legally responsible for the Agency. The Board of Directors hires an Executive Director, who is responsible for proposing the major thrust and direction of the community action agency in overcoming the poverty conditions in the community. Within the framework of these long-term goals, the director should lead the agency's programs to achieve shorter term goals on a monthly, quarterly, yearly, and multi-year basis. In formulating these objectives, the Executive Director should insure that they reflect the needs of the target groups and that they will be fully supported by the Board of Directors and staff.

OCAP is a self-help agency, which provides an opportunity for clients to have human dignity by providing decent housing, food, clothing, health assistance, counseling, referrals, education, and job placement. OCAP's goal is to seek solutions to the social

and economic problems related to poverty. Through joint efforts among seven counties OCAP can provide these services.

Project Staffing

The Head Start Director reports to the Executive Director of the Agency. The Head Start Director is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the program. Responsibility in overall supervision over the Head Start Program and to develop or cause to be developed and implement operational policies and procedures in conformance with those of the Agency and regulations, policies, etc., promulgated by the funding agency. Responsible to assure that the program is operated in a manner to provide maximum assistance to parents through offering child development services for eligible children. Further responsible to develop and implement strategies for promoting community wide support to and interest in the Head Start Program including assurance of parent volunteer and other community participation.

The Family & Community Partnership Director supervises Family Service Specialists and provides direction for the Family & Community Partnerships Components for sustainability of family and community strengthening. They will engage a family, when they are ready to be engaged, and assist them in meeting their goals, and accessing resources that will make them more self-reliant. The Family & Community Partnership Director reports to the Head Start Director.

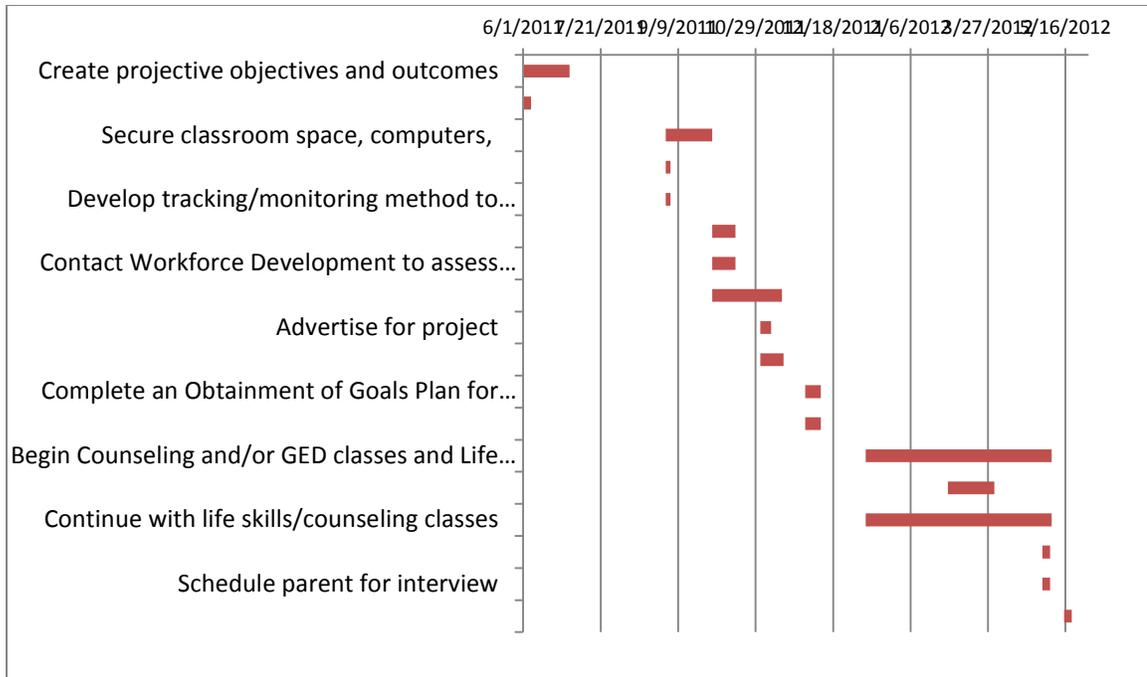
The Family Service Specialists is a center manager and family service position that performs direct and indirect services to children and families involved in the Head Start Program. Duties include managing the centers and interacting with the

child/families, and assisting all component coordinators. They are required to make at least two (2) home visits per school year to aid in assessing family status and assist families based on the family assessment.

These staff is essential in making the Single Unemployed Parent Project a success. Strengthening home environments of children is an initiative that the Office of Head Start launched in 2007. Studies repeatedly show that children who grow up in homes with strong family relationships are physically healthier, more successful academically and less likely to have behavioral problems than children raised in unstable environments. The support of the Board of Director, Executive Director and frontline staff that work on a daily basis with family will help achieve this goal. Communicating my expectations, developing a work plan with goals and timelines, and allowing staff to give their input will motivate us to help our families and find innovative ways to sustain this project for years to come.

Project Implementation – Schedule and Timeframe

The timeline for the Unemployed single Parent Project is in the Gantt chart below. In order for a project to be stay on track and accomplish goals a timeline is use to illustrate the start and finish dates. This is a great way to make sure you are taking the steps to make your project a success and assess whether or not the strategies or activities need adjusting.



Budget

The income to assist 20 parents will come from grants, donations, in-kind, and fundraisers. Our host agency has agreed to apply for a USDA grant for \$650,000 to build a new Union Springs Head Start Center where space can be used for life skills classes. The total cost for start-up is \$670,000. Discussion with the Alabama Healthy Marriage Initiative looks promising. There 10-week class is develop for low-income parents and focuses on building health relationships. Collaborating with this organization will require time, since our Head Start program does not operate in the summer months and a facility to house the class must be acquired. The likelihood of obtaining the majority of the activities donated as in-kind is possible if the community will buy-in and believe the project is worthwhile. Having several members on the Board of Directors for the

Agency, who also resides in Union Springs, Bullock County is great way to bring the community support to the project.

The \$15,000 expenses were developed on a yearly basis with the understanding most people will not give of their time and talents without some compensation. The new facility will require internet access, preferably wireless access, and telephone lines. Computers must be purchased for staff and parents to use for monitoring, case notes, and assessments. Insurance will have to be obtained for liability purposes, in the event someone is hurt on the property. Incentives for parents to participate, free childcare, possibly Head Start services if the family qualifies, and gift cards to local businesses to assist with the family's basic needs is very important. There is a contingency line item for unforeseen expenses and a food line item for water, healthy snacks, etc. while parents attend trainings.

MONITORING

The Single Unemployed Parent Project overtime will improve the community and parents economic self-sufficiency. Parents will become self-sufficient leading to stronger families and a break in the cycles of poverty. The community will experience a reduction in the demand for public assistance, social services, and increase a more reliable workforce resulting in an improvement in the quality of life for all residents living in Union Springs, Bullock County, Alabama.

Monitoring Indicators

The outcome measurement model we will use to evaluate the outcomes is performance monitoring. This model will measure whether a human services program achieves its objectives by collecting and analyzing performance information such as indicators and goals. Measuring the process, outcomes, goals and actual performances of the indicators such as the number of parents, who obtained their GED, successfully completed life skills training and secured permanent employment is how performance monitoring works. Measuring and analyzing how many parents financial situation improved and the number of children who feel safe and happy. We propose to measure these indicators and goals through interviews, observation, numerical counting, and client/community surveys.

Methods, Tools, Forms

The goal of measuring outcomes is to determine if small changes in the Single Unemployed Parent Project short-term outcomes are occurring. Even if there may be too

many mitigating factors and variables that cannot be controlled. Nevertheless, our ultimate goal is to help unemployed single parents become more self-sufficient.

Team and Tasks

The evaluation team will consist of the Executive Director, Head Start Director (project manager), Family & Community Partnership Director, and Family Services Specialists. The frontline worker, FSS, will provide case management and follow-up on job referrals. They will input data into the computer based software program and keep paper documentation for analysis. The Head Start Director and Family & Community Partnership director will gather and compile the information gathered from Family Services Specialists into a statistical report. Along with the Executive Director, the information will be analyze and interpreted for reporting to stakeholders and in the overall decision-making process.

Monitoring Schedule

The monitoring schedule will consist of weekly attendance reports, notes, and parent interview to see how they are progressing toward their goals; semi-annually document review of job status and businesses' memorandum of understanding to determine if employee is performing acceptable. Quarterly document review and employer contact to determine obstacles of sustaining employment and parents' status of Life Skills classes. Annual review of parents who remained employed and are self-sufficient, no longer in need of welfare, and whose children's' overall well-being has improved.

EVALUATION

The Single Unemployed Parent Project will use participatory evaluation as the primary evaluation method where a team of two or more of the stakeholders creates an evaluation project. The questions that will be answered are does the project work, how well does it work, and are there meaningful results that can be found to answer the questions. The Board of Directors and program managers must have a reference point and reliable information in order to make informed decisions about the Single Unemployed Parent Project. From the programmatic level, if the project serves the community and does so in a cost effective manner, then consideration for expanding and/or duplicating services in other counties should be determined. On an operational level, managers will need data that is useful and designed to make program changes and improvements. Consideration from these standpoints will have implications for stakeholders, families, and the community of Bullock County and will directly affect the Organized Community Action Program, Inc. (OCAP) and support the need for an evaluation instrument that examines processes and results.

Evaluation Variables and Indicators

The Single Unemployed Parent Project overtime will improve the community and parents economic self-sufficiency. Parents will become self-sufficient leading to stronger families and a break in the cycles of poverty. The community will experience a reduction in the demand for public assistance, social services, and increase a more reliable workforce resulting in an improvement in the quality of life for all residents living in Union Springs, Bullock County, Alabama.

The evaluation of the outcomes will be performance monitoring. This model will measure whether a human services program achieves its objectives by collecting and analyzing performance information such as indicators and goals. Measuring the process, outcomes, goals and actual performances of the indicators such as the number of parents, who obtained their GED, successfully completed life skills training and secured permanent employment is how performance monitoring works. Measuring and analyzing how many parents financial situation improved and the number of children who feel safe and happy. We propose to measure these indicators and goals through interviews, observation, numerical counting, and client/community surveys.

The goal of measuring outcomes is to determine if small changes in the Single Unemployed Parent Project short-term outcomes are occurring. Even if there may be too many mitigating factors and variables that cannot be controlled. Nevertheless, our ultimate goal is to help unemployed single parents become more self-sufficient.

Data Gathering Methods, Tools, Forms

In order to determine the data needs to evaluate the program we will use our computer software program Childplus to track parents' attendance and the social services received. Other computer based tools, such as; Excel will calculate mathematical functions and track percentage of parent participation, classes' completed and aggregate data from surveys. Microsoft Word is used to develop forms and organization information that is easily accessible and administered to parents. These tools were adequate to measure the outcomes over the course of this evaluation.

Research, quantifiable and subjective information was gathered from various sources using different methods. Studies and Literature reviews were conducted and analyzed other models and theory on parent self-sufficiency, academic studies on how cohabitation of unmarried two-parent biological families resulted in characteristics of depression, conflict, and ambivalence across the child's first two years; and how low-income women have faced increased policy pressure to work outside the home. In addition, how poverty is linked to a variety of socio-emotional problems in all children regardless of ethnicity and ages. Interviews, self-report, and document reviews allowed for data manipulation and statistical analysis. Much of the data for the Single Unemployed Parent Project come from data collected from Childplus computer and paper files gathered by Family Services Workers.

Data Analysis

The data collected is not sufficient to support the long-range outcome of the Single Unemployed Parent Project. This project needs more time and study before a definite recommendation for expansion in the other seven counties where this Agency operates and request for additional funding to support the project. Currently, there is not a facility to house this project long-term.

Data available shows how the Single Unemployed Parent Project works, and that it will work well to produce, at least reasonable, positive outcomes. For instance, when a single parent completes the Life Skills training classes and hired for work at \$7.57/hr. or greater, the current program would have achieved its goal of helping an unemployed parent become self-sufficient. If this trend continues for six, twelve, and eighteen months

then the overall well-being of the child would improve. These conclusions support the need for continuation of the project and a permanent facility to house the project.

Evaluation Team and Tasks

The evaluation team will consist of the Executive Director, Head Start Director (project manager), Family & Community Partnership Director, and Family Services Specialists. The frontline worker, FSS, will provide case management and follow-up on job referrals. They will input data into the computer based software program and keep paper documentation for analysis. The Head Start Director and Family & Community Partnership director will gather and compile the information gathered from Family Services Specialists into a statistical report. Along with the Executive Director, the information will be analyze and interpreted for reporting to stakeholders and in the overall decision-making process.

Evaluation Schedule

The evaluation schedule will consist of weekly attendance reports, notes, and parent interview to see how they are progressing toward their goals; semi-annually document review of job status and businesses' memorandum of understanding to determine if employee is performing acceptable. Quarterly document review and employer contact to determine obstacles of sustaining employment and parents' status of Life Skills classes. Annual review of parents who remained employed and are self-sufficient, no longer in need of welfare, and whose children's' overall well-being has improved.

SUSTAINABILITY

The Organized Community Action Program, Inc. (OCAP) is the agency that has administered the Head Start Program in Union Springs, Bullock County for the past 45 years. OCAP is a self-help agency, which provides opportunity for human dignity by providing decent housing, food, clothing, health assistance, counseling, referrals, education, and job placement. OCAP's goal is to seek solutions to the social and economic problems related to poverty through joint efforts among the seven counties they serve.

The Single Unemployed Parent Project is an important effort for helping parents in Union Springs, Alabama become more self-reliant thereby providing a more stable environment for children to thrive, leading to stronger families and a break in the cycles of poverty. Local and civic officials, school employees, and area businesses will have the opportunity to build relationships with our staff so that efforts are coordinated to assist each parent with life skills training, education and job opportunities, and counseling.

The Single Unemployed Parent Project is sustainable because of OCAP's 45 years of experience in assisting and administering programs that help people change lives. Staff currently employed has more than 40 years of combined service to Head Start and the skills necessary to help a parent become more self-reliant. In 2009, OCAP spent more than \$1,242,687 in Bullock County helping more than 1,000 children and families with various services. The government funding received from Community Services Block Grant, and Health & Human Services are critical and influence the sustainability of this project. However, if services are wrapped around existing programs administered by

OCAP then pooled resources will help this project remain viable and expand in the other counties we serve.

The Single Unemployed Parent Project vision is to help parents become more self-reliant. This approach is being undertaken because of the many years of experience OCAP has in administering programs that help families change their lives by taking advantage of the opportunities available to them. This framework can be replicated in the other counties OCAP provides services and administers the Head Start program. Existing staff, community support, including members who sit on the Board of Directors, are already established. Documenting the success of the project, raising the awareness of the number of children benefiting from this approach, and informing other agencies are ways to attract more agencies and businesses so this project can be replicated outside of the community.

RESULTS

The Single Unemployed Parent Project was proposed as a way to help Head Start families in Union Springs, Bullock County, Alabama improve their quality of life. With enthusiasm, commitment, and a positive outlook, the project was introduced to staff in the summer of 2011. Reminding everyone of the long history of community service that OCAP, Inc. has provided to clients; and the number of families in Union Springs that have been served over the past 45 years the project was embraced by the Executive Director and staff.

Although the project has experienced setbacks and delays with locating a life skills partner, and facility to provide the training, our effort to secure funding through the United States Department of Agriculture low-interest loan program was a step in the right direction. The implementation of this project has been conducted for less than 10-months, but success will eventually be realized. Discussion with T.O.P.S. to provide life skills training fell through in July 2011. Our Agency joined the chamber and Children's Policy council in August 2011. Staff and Family Services Specialists were identified to work with parents on the project in September 2011. Case management began with identifying goals and making referrals to outside resources in October 2011. Partnerships Agreements were developed and signed with local agencies to make referrals, share resources, and provide training in November 2011. Alabama Workforce Development Office assisted in determining jobs needed in November 2011. In January and February 2012, OCAP decided to seek USDA funding to build a new facility. The application was submitted in April 2012. In March 2012, advertising material to promote the project was

delayed until a later date. PowerPoint presentation to the Board of Directors and the Executive Committee of the Policy Council was postponed to July 2012, due to ACF requirements for School Readiness and our agency's CLASS Implementation Plan that needed their approval.

The research from various sources showed a need for helping parents improve their life skills and self-sufficiency; thereby helping improve the overall quality of life for children. The project was designed to assist 20 single parents with life skills training, GED classes, and job opportunities that would lead to permanent employment. Life skills classes have not begun. The facility to conduct classes has been delayed, other ideas such as current staff providing the training or working with Alabama Healthy Marriage Initiative to provide classes for 10-weeks to parents are being explored.

The Head Start Program in Union Springs serves 75 children. When school began this year, four parents were identified as having some college courses, twenty parents had a high school diploma, and twenty-five parents were identified as not having a GED. Staff was able to assist three of the 25 parents with enrolling in a GED program, with one parent successfully completing the class. Alabama Workforce Development Office assisted in identifying the production industry that is hiring in the county. Unless parents have a higher skill set, or are willing to leave Bullock County this will limit their job opportunities based on their current educational level. Staff is able to provide case management for parents, and assist with attainment of goals by referrals to outside agencies; however, the major aspect of providing this training was designed to be in-house.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

By developing, the project and making life skills classes available to single unemployed parents, we are helping parents cope with obstacles that limit them from obtaining a job. Current project data indicates that 33% of the participants have made the commitment and demonstrated efforts to increase the economic well-being of their family, and a strong effort to move from poverty by increasing their basic education and life skills. As long as they continue to see small successes, and are able to remain in the program at no cost, it is highly likely that obstacles that limit their ability to search, interview, and obtain a job will become a reality. Creating an increase in the economic well-being of the parent, child's health, and their self-confidence in this community has always been the goal.

One important point was under estimating the facility to house the life skills classes. I had not factored in the cost associated with having to pay an agency to conduct the trainings, nor the time it would take for the preliminary architect drawings to be finalized, board input and approval, and submission to the United States Department of Agriculture regional office. Realizing that we had to scale back on the original architect plans due to our agency's ability to leverage money caused the project to be delayed. Although the entire project was not realized during the past 10 months, we were able to assist three parents with taking the GED and linking them to other resources.

Another lesson learned was networking and partnerships are very important. Making sure to use existing resources on the local and state level is smart when your project is located in a rural county. Assessing the skill set of current staff that has a

wealth of information and can provide guidance on how to assist the parents and make the project a success is another way to strengthen the project. Collaborating with agencies that will accept referrals, who can provide training, and who has additional contacts they will share with you is a winner. More importantly, is locating an agency that is currently administering a project like yours and is willing to help mentor you, answer questions, offer advice, and suggestions to make the project a success would be invaluable.

A factor that was not considered, until I experienced delays was time. I thought I had sufficient time to complete a task, but something unexpectedly would arise that eventually caused you to get off track. Our program year for Head Start is seven months, including holidays. Trying to identify parents, move them through a process that will help them become more self-sufficient, and obtain results in this length of time is fast paced and tiring. Remember to plan for unexpected delays, which allow you to stay ahead of the timeline and not throw you off course. This extra planning will result in success of your project.

A lesson to remember is you cannot do this project alone. Forming a committee of like-minded individuals with the support of Board members and senior level administrators will help the project move forward smoothly. Developing a team in your office, with assigned tasks, can offset you becoming burn out and help the project run smoothly. Having people to help you follow-up and track progress, attend meetings, create reports to give to stakeholders, and brainstorm when problems arise is helpful to you and the overall well-being of the staff who work with you on a daily basis.

Prospects of Attaining Intermediate and Long-Term Outcomes

Long-term outcomes that show a decrease in public assistance, improved community support, children overall quality of life improved, and parent improved knowledge around life skills for single, unemployed mothers will not be realized until late 2012 or early 2013. Barring any major problems with our USDA grant application, I do not foresee any problems with having a permanent facility to house the project or with helping twenty unemployed single parents become more self-sufficient.

Personal Thoughts

The most important lessons learned from this project and over the past 10 months can be sum up in clichés I have heard all of my life and finally have an appreciation for. Prepare for disappointments, plan for success. Never take anything for granted. Learn to work smarter, not harder. Time waits for no one, so do not procrastinate. You can accomplish more with a team, then trying to do everything alone. Know thy self, and be true. Never give up, keep moving forward toward your goals.

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APPENDIX

Monitoring Reports

Parent Assessment Focus

This questionnaire is intended to help plan like skills training and services that are responsive to your needs.

Parent's Name _____ **Date:** _____

Child's Name _____ **Number in Family** _____

1. Are you a high school graduate? ___ If no, what grade did you complete _____
2. Are you currently working? _____
3. Do you have transportation? _____
4. Does your family receive public assistance? _____
5. Do you have medical problems that prevent you from performing certain jobs? If so, list _____
6. Are you receiving counseling from a licensed counselor or agency? _____ If yes, what type: _____
7. List your goal(s): _____

8. List any skills you have (i.e. computer, typing, etc.) _____

Parent Interest Questionnaire

The single Unemployed Parent Project is here to help you become self-sufficient. We will provide trainings to help you meet your goals. In order for us to assist you, please check the areas you would like to learn more about.

EDUCATION:

- GED (High School/Equivalency)
- College
- Parenting (Discipline)
- Other

Parent Name: _____

Date of Interview: _____

HEALTH:

- Drugs and Alcohol Use
- Child Abuse & Neglect
- Dental Health
- Children and Medicines
- Childhood Disease (obesity)
- Other

Notes: _____

NUTRITION:

- Food Stamps
- Cooking low cost, healthy meals
- Other

PERSONAL:

- Appropriate clothes for work
- Housing Needs
- Legal Aid
- Budgeting and Money Management
- Employment/Interview Skills
- Completing a Job Application
- Job Interviewing Techniques
- Resume Writing
- Other

PARENT INVOLVEMENT:

- Parenting classes
- Information for Parents of children with Disabilities
- Other

SOCIAL SERVICES:

- Spousal Abuse
- Counseling (individual/family)
- Other

**Single Parent Unemployed Project
Weekly Attendance Report**

Name of Parent: _____

Week	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
5/5/12 - 5/9/12					

Attendance
Record

Days Present _____

Days Absent _____

Reason:

A = No Transportation

B = Sick

C = No reason

**Single Unemployed Parent Project
Tracking Form**

Parent Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Life Skills Classes Completed:

_____ Money/Budgeting

_____ Work and Family

_____ Home and Family Responsibilities

_____ Substance Abuse/Other Addictions

_____ Mental Health Problems

_____ Domestic Violence

_____ Job interviewing techniques

_____ Wearing Appropriate Clothes/Work

_____ Resume Writing

GED: (circle one)

Passed or Failed

No. of Job Interviews _____

No. of Job Offers _____

No. of Resumes submitted _____

Name of Business(es): _____

Interview Information:

Contact Name: _____ Telephone Number: _____

Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____

Directions: _____

Date of Interview: _____ Time: _____

Job Interviewing For:

Follow-up Documentation:

Staff's Name: _____ Date of Follow-up: _____

Was parent appropriately dressed? _____ Was Interview held _____

Was a job offered made _____. If not, why _____

Did parent accept job offer? _____. If not, reason given _____
