

The Role of the Private Sector in Providing Food Assistance

Private Food Assistance in the Deep South: Agency Profiles and Directors' Perceptions of Needs and Opportunities Under Charitable Choice

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Emergency food providers are an important source of food assistance to low-income households in many communities. The direct providers of emergency food assistance are often private faith-based organizations, which are the focus of the charitable choice provision of 1996 welfare reform legislation. The charitable choice provision enables government agencies to fund the service programs of faith-based organizations and has the potential to significantly alter the funding possibilities available to emergency food providers.

This study examined the types of local community agencies that provide food assistance to the poor in the Alabama-Mississippi area and information about the agencies' directors. The authors collected primary data from a random sample of approximately 230 food pantry directors in Alabama and Mississippi. The survey provided information on the demographic characteristics of food pantry directors and their attitudes about poverty and food pantry use. The survey also contained questions designed to assess how knowledgeable the directors are about the charitable choice provision (that is, their familiarity with the general policy contours, specific legal provisions, and implementation status provision) and how receptive they are to receiving government funds.

The study found that about three-quarters of the surveyed food pantries are affiliated with a religious congregation. About two-fifths of faith-based food pantries are affiliated with religious congregations with fewer than 100 members, and another two-fifths are affiliated with religious congregations with 100-500 members. About 70 percent of the food pantries reported that they primarily serve rural populations. Three-fifths of the food pantry directors are White, and about 65 percent are female. Almost 80 percent have some education beyond high school, and about 40 percent reported an annual household income of \$50,000 or more. More than two-thirds reported that they attend church at least once per week.

The survey provides information on the perceptions of food pantry directors regarding pantry users and their need for food assistance. Most of the directors reported that food pantry use is related to low wages in some industries or to sickness or physical disability, and that most food pantry users who are able to work are trying to find jobs. However, almost one-third of food pantry directors believed that too many people using food pantries should be working, and almost half believed that many people getting food are not honest about their needs.

The study also gauged food pantry directors' awareness of the charitable choice provision and their openness to accepting government funding. A third of the surveyed food pantry directors reported that they do not currently receive government funds, while slightly more than half indicated that they would be willing to apply for government funds in the future. Most of the directors were generally aware of the legal responsibilities associated with receipt of government funding, but were also unsure of the general policies relating to the charitable choice provision, such as the process to apply for funds and the extent to which charitable choice has been implemented in the U.S.

The authors noted that additional research in other parts of the U.S. will help determine if there are broader regional variations or systematic rural-urban differences in the knowledge about the charitable choice provision among community-level organizations. However, the study results suggest that there is a need to educate organizations that can potentially benefit from the charitable choice provision of the 1996 welfare reform legislation so that they can make a reasoned choice about the new opportunities available to them.

Making Ends Meet: An Examination of TANF and Former TANF Food Pantry Users in Virginia

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Since passage of the 1996 welfare reform legislation, questions have been asked about whether those who have stopped using Federal cash assistance and food stamps have achieved self-sufficiency, or whether they have instead come to rely on assistance from private organizations. Nichols-Casebolt conducted a series of statewide surveys of Virginia food pantry users from 1997 to 2001. She examined the characteristics of Virginia families with children who sought assistance in food pantries and described changes over time in their receipt of cash assistance and food stamps. She also collected information on the material well-being of food pantry users, including their food security status in 2001.

The study found that demographic characteristics of food pantry users changed little between 1997 and 2001. In contrast, the share of food pantry users receiving cash assistance or food stamps fell. About 42 percent of food pantry users were also receiving food stamps at the time of the 1997 survey, while about 30 percent of food pantry users were also receiving food stamps in 2001. The author also found that over 35

percent of food pantry users who had recently left the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) indicated that they had also stopped receiving food stamps within the last 6 months. After statistically controlling for a number of other factors that influence food stamp receipt, the author found that TANF leavers are significantly less likely than TANF recipients to receive food stamps. Food pantry users who are most likely to be at economic risk—including the unemployed, single parents, parents with young children, and those with low education levels—are most likely to receive food stamps.

The study also documented the material hardships of many households who seek services at food pantries. Over 80 percent of the families were food insecure and over 25 percent lost telephone service at some time in the past 6 months. About 15 percent had been recently forced to change their living arrangements. The author examined the factors associated with the food security status of food pantry users. The results indicate that higher household income is associated with greater food security. After household income and demographic characteristics are controlled for, the receipt of either cash assistance or food stamps has no statistically significant effect on the food security status of food pantry users.

The author concluded that private food assistance plays a strong role in meeting the food needs of some low-income families. She noted that the decrease in the Food Stamp Program (FSP) participation rate suggested that food pantries are promising locations for FSP outreach efforts. Given the strong positive relationship between household income and food security, the author suggests that policies that focus on employment and work supports are important elements to improve food security in this population.

The Arkansas Child and Adult Care Food Program: A Study of Factors Associated With Program Participation

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The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) is a Federal food assistance program that provides reimbursement for meals provided to children and adults in eligible child and adult care programs. To receive reimbursements, child care providers must sign up for CACFP and meet program eligibility criteria. Access to the CACFP program by the target population depends on the availability of child care providers and on providers' decisions to participate in the program. Two major types of child care providers are family child care homes and child care centers.⁵ In Arkansas, family child care homes are licensed to serve a maximum of 16 children at a time, while child care centers are typically licensed to serve a larger number of children. This study examines the geographic variation in child care availability in Arkansas and the factors that affect child care providers' participation in the CACFP.

The 1996 welfare reform legislation introduced a new reimbursement structure for family child care homes into the CACFP. The reimbursement rates that apply to homes in low-income areas or homes operated by low-income people are similar to those that applied before the 1996 legislation, but reimbursement rates to all other homes are at least 40 percent lower.⁶ The change in reimbursement rates may have reduced CACFP participation among family child care homes serving children from middle-income families.

⁵Other CACFP providers include infant and toddler care, school-age care, and sick care programs, which are not analyzed in this study.

⁶For these other homes, higher reimbursements remained available for meals served to individual low-income children.

The authors used 2002 State administrative data on child care licensing and CACFP participation to analyze county-level child care provision and CACFP participation in Arkansas. They also used 2000 Census data to construct measures of potential need for child care and for food assistance. In addition, they surveyed over 900 licensed child care providers in 2002 to collect information on the factors that influence their decisions to participate in the CACFP.

The study found that almost 70 percent of family day care homes in Arkansas participate in the CACFP, comprising 70 percent of CACFP providers. Child care centers make up 13 percent of CACFP providers in Arkansas. The analysis shows that the availability of child care providers, particularly those that participate in the CACFP varies significantly across regions of Arkansas. Family day care homes are concentrated in the delta region, which is located in southwest Arkansas and has the highest concentration of poverty in the State. The authors constructed a measure of child care capacity in a county, equal to the total number of children that child care providers in the county are licensed to serve. They found that child care capacity as a share of the child population (age 5 and younger) is higher in the counties of the delta region than in the counties in the rest of the State. However, because of the high rate of poverty in the region, the child care capacity of CACFP providers as a share of the population of poor children is lower in the delta region than in the rest of the State.

The authors used logit regression analysis to examine the effect of provider characteristics and perceptions on CACFP participation by providers. The results of the regression analysis indicate that family day care homes are more likely than child care centers to participate in the CACFP and that nonprofit child care providers are more likely to participate than for-profit providers. The longer the provider's hours of operation per week, the more likely it is to participate in the CACFP.

The results of the child care providers survey indicate that 90 percent of child care providers are satisfied with CACFP administration. However, about half reported that the reimbursement rates are not adequate to cover costs, and about one-fourth reported that the paperwork requirements are too high. Child care providers not participating in the CACFP were asked about the barriers to participation. Almost 40 percent reported that they do not know about the program, and

one-fourth reported that they do not know how to apply or that the application process is too difficult.

The authors concluded that many of the providers who do not participate in the CACFP are not eligible to receive large amounts of meal reimbursements because they typically serve few low-income children.

However, the survey results suggest that some potentially eligible providers do not participate because they are not familiar with the program or are overwhelmed by the application process. These findings suggest that intervention strategies may be developed to encourage greater participation by eligible non-CACFP providers.