

Supportive Parents Information Network (SPIN) & Caring Council

www.caringcouncilsd.org – www.spinsandiego.org

Update on the Food Stamps Campaign

March 2011

WHAT IS IN A NAME: FOOD STAMPS CHANGES IT'S NAME – AGAIN

It was not that long ago that the federal government changed the name of Food Stamps to SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program). This change was made because this benefit is no longer provided in the form of stamps. Recipients now get an EBT (Electronic Benefits Transfer) card that can be swiped like any ATM card as long as the merchant accepts food stamps and the purchase is allowable under the food stamps regulations. California has decided to rename SNAP – now calling it CalFresh. This name is to somehow promote the eating of fresh fruits and vegetables. What is important to know is that the benefit can be and is called by all three names. No matter what it is called (Food Stamps, SNAP, or CalFresh) all names refer to the same program.

STAGE 3 OF THE CAMPAIGN MARCHES FORWARD: COUNTY CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER PRESENTS PLAN ON 69 RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE THE SAFETY NET TO THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

The last update (November 2010), outlined the three stages of our campaign to improve the safety net in San Diego County. **Stage 1** was our campaign to bring the County's Health & Human Service Agency's [HHSA] worst in the nation performance in food stamps to the public's attention and to force a public dialogue on the issue. Having succeeded at that, we moved to **Stage 2** that involved making sure that SPIN and the Caring Council were included in any discussions on how to improve the County's safety net. We achieved this stage with the establishment of the SNAP workgroup that was formed under the auspices of the Social Services Advisory Board (SSAB).¹ Supervisors Cox and Roberts called for this workgroup after representatives from SPIN and the Caring Council met with each of the Supervisors individually. We are now at **Stage 3**, "yielding influence at the table. The workgroup produced 69 recommendations for improving the food stamps program. These recommendations, with our support, went to the Board of Supervisors on December 8, 2010 where they were unanimously accepted. At that meeting the Board charged the Chief Administrative Officer to come back to the Board with plan for acting on these recommendations in 90 days. This plan was presented to and approved by, again with our support, the Board of Supervisors on Tuesday, March 15, 2011.

Where do we go from here?

SPIN and the Caring Council have provided the SSAB, HHSA and the Board of Supervisors a formal response to the plan [posted on the Caring Council website]. In our response was:

- We appreciate the effort made by HHSA to address the recommendations.
- The plan is a good start, giving direction to where resources need to be applied and how efforts might be evaluated, but it is too broad and needs much more detail to be useful.

¹ The SSAB is an official County board that has the responsibility of monitoring the performance of HHSA. It is a ten person board with each Supervisor having two appointments. Presently the SSAB has four vacancies.

- Our ***one objection to the plan*** is the use of a particular set of trainings being proposed to facilitate a change in culture in HHSA, i.e., “Bridges out of Poverty,” by Ruby Payne. Our objection is that this training does little more than reinforce the negative stereotypes of people living in poverty. This training describes people in poverty as ignorant, unwilling to act to change in their life circumstances, unable to plan for the future, promiscuous, etc. It then proceeds to teach professionals how to respond to people stuck this dysfunctional “culture of poverty.” Our objection comes from the fact that there is ***no such thing as a “culture of poverty.”*** These descriptions are not only wrong, but are offensive and insulting to people in poverty. This work is not supported by any research and, in fact, is nearly universally condemned by people who study poverty. [check the website for resources critiquing Ruby Payne and the culture of poverty]

ACTION ALERT: Stop Negative Stereotyping of people in poverty

We have asked HHSA to reconsider using the Bridges out of Poverty training and have offered to work with them to develop an alternative. While the SSAB has called for a review of how and why this training was chosen, HHSA Director Nick Machione defended the choice to the Board of Supervisors when we raised our concerns on March 15, 2011.

We may need you to write letters to the Board of Supervisors, the SSAB and HHSA Director in support of our demand to replace the Bridges out of Poverty training with a more appropriate one.

We will be in contact with you with more detailed information if we need your letters.

Remember

Members of SPIN and the Caring Council are looking for places to make presentations on issues that relate to poverty, the people living poverty, and policies that impact people in poverty. We are especially interested in doing such presentations to people who may be willing to join our network and support our efforts to improve San Diego’s safety net.

If you would like to have a presentation or know an organization that would like presentation on issues of poverty, hunger, the safety net, etc.,

please contact:

Bill Oswald, Caring Council Chair

[858] 382-5870

wtoswald@gmail.com

We would not be this far along in our campaign if it were not for the support of people like yourself – thank you & pass the word