

CENTER FOR IMPACT RESEARCH

BACKGROUND

Founded in 1975, the Center for Impact Research (CIR) focuses its work on issues of economic and social justice. CIR traces its activist lineage to Lea Taylor's pioneering research and advocacy during the early decades of the twentieth century, which led to improved conditions for workers in sweatshops and an increase in the minimum weekly wage. Taylor Institute, the former name of the Center for Impact Research commemorated Lea Taylor's commitment to economic justice and to advocacy based on community research.

The Center continues to use and develop community-based research as a powerful tool to advocate for and achieve changes in governmental policy and programs. The core beliefs of CIR are in grassroots involvement, community building, and eliminating barriers that perpetuate inequity. The Center works collaboratively with diverse partners, who are all striving to eliminate the fundamental causes of social and economic injustice.

Bringing together and coordinating activities of project working groups whose members represent a range of interests and using community research as a tool for advocacy underpin the success of CIR's projects. In 1995, CIR's Women, Welfare and Abuse Working Group brought together professionals from the fields of domestic violence services and job training, welfare recipients and domestic violence survivors, and the Department of Public Aid to begin discussions about the complex effects of domestic violence on the lives of welfare recipients. The working group's research made an innovative contribution to our understanding of women's poverty by documenting how domestic violence—including deliberate sabotage by an intimate partner—prevents women on welfare from entering the labor force.

As a direct outcome of the Women, Welfare and Abuse Working Group and CIR research and advocacy on the connection between domestic violence and welfare receipt, the Federal Government incorporated the Family Violence Option into its welfare reform legislation, allowing States the option to exempt domestic survivors from entering the paid work force until they can do so safely. In addition, the working group designed and implemented a demonstration project at the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) involving welfare office assessment of domestic violence, and provision of new case management services to women on welfare who are domestic violence victims, to enable them to move

from welfare to work. This project, Options/Opciones had a strong focus on evaluation to determine the effective strategies in addressing the needs of abused women as they enter the labor market. CIR's findings from this project continue to inform the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the work of many state welfare departments.

CIR's research and advocacy on GED test-taking in Chicago led directly to the Illinois State Board of Education's special task force making substantial changes in the Chicago GED testing system. The number of testing sites was nearly doubled, ending long waits for the GED test, and the state launched an extensive outreach campaign to inform people where they could study for and take the GED test. In the case of the Sweatshop Project, CIR's research establishing the extent and severity of sweatshops in the Chicago metropolitan area led to the formation of the first community-government Sweatshop Taskforce, chaired by the U.S. Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division.

CIR's research at the grassroots level with a large sample of teen mothers in Chicago established the fact that many low-income teen mothers have been diverted from applying for TANF because of incorrect application of TANF provisions at IDHS offices. After briefings by CIR on Teen Mother Project findings, the IDHS has appointed and is training new teen liaisons in each office, who are responsible for assisting teens with their applications. As a result of CIR's research-based advocacy, the state is furthering its commitment to providing teen mothers with access to benefits, which will help them stay in school and be better able to care for their children.