

January 1994

Lives of Promise, Lives of Pain Young Mothers After New Chance

Janet Quint, Judith s. Musick
with Joyce A. Ladner

This monograph reports the findings of a study based on interviews with 50 young mothers who participated in a national research and demonstration program called New Chance. New Chance aims to increase the employment, economic self-sufficiency, and general well-being of young women on AFDC who are high school dropouts, and to enhance the learning and development of their children as well. These young families constitute a segment of the welfare population that is at especially high risk of long-term poverty and receipt of public assistance. During the program's demonstration phase, which began in 1989 and concluded in 1992, New Chance was operated by community-based organizations, schools, a community college, and municipal agencies at 16 locations (or "sites") in 10 states across the country, and enrolled over 1,550 young women.

New Chance offers a much wider spectrum of services and a more supportive environment than the majority of adult education, training, or other welfare-to-work programs for AFDC recipients; and unlike such programs, it focuses on participants' roles as mothers as well as potential workers. The employment thrust of the intervention and the comprehensiveness, intensity, and duration of its services also differentiate New Chance from many previous programs for young mothers and high school dropouts.

The effectiveness of the New Chance treatment is being assessed through a large random assignment evaluation of the program's impacts, costs, and benefits. This monograph is a complementary effort, relying on close examination of a small group of participants to provide insight into their behavior. The findings of this small, primarily qualitative study will be used to help interpret the results of the impact analysis when these become available.