CREATING INCENTIVES

Local successes are spurring Washington's interest in rehabilitation possibilities. Many lawmakers, conservatives and liberals alike, favor expanding welfare training programs and introducing economic incentives for employment of relief recipients. The Johnson Administration has proposed legislation to establish at least one rehabilitation project in every state and let the beneficiaries retain up to $50 a month of outside earnings without a reduction in their relief checks.

The influential House Ways and Means Committee, which is now considering these and other welfare proposals, is sympathetic. But the big obstacle is expense. Effective rehabilitation reforms require an immediate increase in spending—for training, extra family services and other aid—to achieve the hoped-for ultimate savings.

Relief rehabilitation efforts started in 1962 with Federal welfare law amendments authorizing work-training projects; since then, the antipoverty program has provided more liberal Federal support. In all, welfare experts estimate, about 130,000 relief recipients are now getting such aid, and 60,000 have gained full-time jobs as a result of training. But it's difficult to determine whether rehabilitation efforts or improved economic conditions were really responsible for putting so many welfare clients to work.

Certainly there are persistent problems: Welfare clients often need extensive aid to become self-supporting. Many are illiterate, beset by emotional problems and handicapped by police records or alcoholism. Suitable jobs may be unavailable. Some jobs may be controlled by unsympathetic unions. Employers often shy away from hiring reliefers because of notions about their shiftlessness and irresponsibility. Job-placement efforts by U.S. Employment Service offices frequently ignore welfare clients.

Shortages of skilled case workers, job counselors and other professional personnel hamper the development of effective training programs. The lack of adequate day-care facilities for children of working mothers is a major obstacle. Many of the 900,000 women heading families on relief want to work, it's said, but can't free themselves from their offspring. (Sens. Javits and Kennedy of New York are sponsoring legislation to provide $60 million for day-care centers, and the Federal Welfare Administration intends to substantially increase its support for a sort of baby-sitting service in the slums.)

Furthermore, certain features of the relief system discourage efforts toward self-sufficiency. A prime example: Local welfare agencies usually deduct any earned amounts from recipients' grants. (But job-training incentives occasionally give welfare clients unintended windfalls. Until Federal officials clarified the rules, some relief recipients in northern New York State were making as much as $800 a month by retaining their regular welfare grants along with their work payments.)

TROOPING TO WASHINGTON

Now bureaucratic battles in Washington threaten added complications. The Administration has proposed shifting control of most aspects of relief work-training programs from the Federal welfare agency to the Labor Department, in order to permit merger with other manpower projects. Local welfare leaders are trooping to Washington to support their parent organization; they claim that before taking jobs, relief recipients need prolonged preparation by case workers. Labor officials ridicule low job-placement rates in welfare projects—only about 30% compared with 70% in many Labor Department projects and propose to provide more skilled job training.

Some officials fear the fracas will lead only to continued wrangling and the dismantling of successful local training projects. "I think welfare training programs would be better off in the Post Office," protests one disgruntled combatant.

For more insight into progress and problems in welfare work training, look at Kentucky, which operates one of the nation's largest programs. In this state, 3,500 unemployed fathers are now participating at an annual cost of $12.5 million. About 90% of the men cannot read and write at a fifth-grade level, and almost half are entirely illiterate. Thus, extensive basic education must precede any serious effort to train the men for new job skills. But, after years in the coal mines, many are too old and exhausted for steady schooling.

"Labor would be better for me, for a man my age," contends Chad Haddis, a 55-year-old ex-miner who would rather be working than attending the special training class he is taking to learn the rudiments of job-seeking and holding. He is taught how to fill out a tax form, apply for a driver's license and other such simple assignments.