



[The Welfare State: does it develop dependency?](#)

by David Wenham

The road to hell they say is paved with good intentions. State welfare was introduced to help prevent starvation, disease and misery within the poor of the land. It has worked very well, but perhaps too well. We should be proud of the way we look after the vulnerable in this country. There are many cases where our fellow citizens would be in misery if we did not help them and I am very happy to help them through paying my taxes.

But we now have a situation where it is preferable for a significant minority to live on welfare than to work. Welfare has not just eased the lot of the poor and unfortunate but has created a welfare class who have characteristics detrimental to themselves and to society as a whole. Not only that, it has created a schism between those who give and those who receive.

Until the 1800's there was no national state involvement in the welfare of the poor. This was mostly supplied by the local church, friendly societies and mutually owned organisations. Local provision to local recipients. Back even further, rules within a group afforded some welfare e.g. the brother of a dead man took on familial responsibilities. There were probably other mechanisms or expectations of behaviour within the group to give 'welfare' to unfortunates. This will have occurred within small groups, the beneficiaries being well known by the benefactors.

State welfare came in gradually during the 1900's, but the 1942 Beveridge Report laid the groundwork for the acts that were passed shortly after the 2nd world war, in the 1940's. It is these acts which set up the welfare state that we know today.

So, from a system where welfare support was gathered locally by taxes and charities and delivered locally by people within the local communities, it became a system where nationally appointed officials gave out welfare according to a formula determined by central government. This has led to a change in attitude towards the welfare of the poor. The donor has become more detached from the recipient and a large impersonal state mechanism has been created.

What were the implicit goals within the original system? We can guess that they included provision of an environment where children could flourish, physically and mentally and to provide support to families on a temporary basis until they could be financially self sufficient. So how are we doing? In many ways the welfare system has been a big success, the physical welfare for the poor has greatly improved. But what of the mental welfare?

