

February 2006

INTENSIVE FAMILY PRESERVATION PROGRAMS: PROGRAM FIDELITY INFLUENCES EFFECTIVENESS

In 2004, the Washington State Institute for Public Policy found that Family Preservation Services (excluding Washington) on average, do not significantly reduce out-of-home placements.¹ We were careful to distinguish the studies used in the analysis from Intensive Family Preservation Services (IFPS) as implemented in Washington, where the statute requires that IFPS programs adhere to many elements of the Homebuilders® model.² To date, there have been no rigorous evaluations of Washington's IFPS programs.

This report, conducted at the request of two legislators, re-examines the evaluations of IFPS, sorting programs based on their adherence to the Homebuilders® model.³

What Is Homebuilders®?

The Homebuilders® program is designed to assist families at imminent risk of removal of their child(ren). The intervention takes advantage of family crisis situations to promote change in the family with intensive, brief services. Therapists have very small caseloads of two to three families, and they are available for intake and consultation 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for a four to six week period. Families have a single therapist, with team backup.

¹ S. Aos, R. Lieb, J. Mayfield, M. Miller, & A. Pennucci (2004). *Benefits and costs of prevention and early intervention programs for youth* (Document No. 04-07-3901). Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy. <<http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/rptfiles/04-07-3901.pdf>>

² The Homebuilders® program was developed by the Institute for Family Development in Federal Way, WA. Key program elements are outlined on the Institute for Family Development website <http://www.institutefamily.org/programs_IFPS.asp>. Requirements for Intensive Family Preservation Services are outlined in RCW 74.14.

³ Representatives Ruth Kagi and Mary Lou Dickerson requested that the Institute re-examine the studies covered under "Family Preservation Services" in Aos et al., 2004.

Summary

This study reviews all rigorous evaluations of Intensive Family Preservation Services (IFPS) programs. We sorted these evaluations based on fidelity to the Homebuilders® model.

Findings

- **IFPS programs that adhere closely to the Homebuilders® model significantly reduce out-of-home placements and subsequent abuse and neglect. We estimate that such programs produce \$2.54 of benefits for each dollar of cost.**
- **Non-Homebuilders® programs produce no significant effect on either outcome.**

Research Methods

We reviewed evaluations of family preservation programs and identified evaluations of 14 sites that used rigorous experimental designs that incorporated a comparison group.⁴ The studies included were either randomized control trials or well-controlled quasi-experimental studies.

For this study, we paid close attention to the degree of fidelity to the Homebuilders® model. In earlier research, the Institute found that programs "must be consistently delivered in a competent manner that follows the program's specifications "in order to achieve the effects found in the original research."⁵

⁴ For a full description of methods used to identify rigorous studies, see: Aos et al., 2004.

⁵ R. Barnoski (2004). *Outcome evaluation of Washington State's research-based programs for juvenile offenders* (Document No. 04-01-1201). Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, p. 3. <<http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/rptfiles/04-01-1201.pdf>>

Working with Charlotte Booth, co-founder of the Institute for Family Development, which is the parent agency of the Homebuilders® program, we developed a list of 16 components essential to the Homebuilders® model. These components included all requirements for Intensive Family Preservation Services outlined in Washington State Law (RCW 74.14; see Exhibit 5). Of the 14 evaluations under review, four documented 13 or more of the components and were classified as faithful to the Homebuilders® model (see Exhibit 3). The remaining 10 evaluations documented no more than five components and were classified as non-Homebuilders® programs (see Exhibit 4). We meta-analyzed both sets of studies to estimate an average effect that family preservation programs have on out-of-home placements. Because evidence reveals that weaker research designs are likely to overestimate the true effectiveness of programs,⁶ we then discounted effects for programs with less than randomized research designs.⁷

Research Results

Results of the meta-analysis are shown in Table 1. Combining results from all 14 studies, the programs produced no significant effect on out-of-home placements. For the four programs with demonstrated fidelity to Homebuilders®, however, we found a significant reduction in out-of-home placements, with an unadjusted standard effect size of -.494. Accounting for less than random research design lowered the effect size to -.321. To put this effect size into perspective, among the families in the comparison groups, 54 percent of children were in out-of-home placements at the follow-up period. With this effect size, we estimate that intensive family preservation services faithful to the Homebuilders® model reduced out-of-home placement by 31 percent.

Homebuilders®-type programs also significantly reduced subsequent official reports of child abuse and neglect. Non-Homebuilders® programs had no significant effects on subsequent official measures of these forms of maltreatment.

Exhibit 1
Effect Sizes for Intensive Family Preservation Services

Intensive Family Preservation Services, and the Effect on:	Number of Effect Sizes in Analysis	Results Before Adjusting Effect Sizes					Adjusted Effect Size Used in Benefit/Cost Analysis
		Fixed Effects Model			Random Effects Model		
		Weighted Mean Effect Size & p-value		Homogeneity Test	Weighted Mean Effect Size & p-value		
		ES	p-value	p-value	ES	p-value	
Out-of-Home Placement							
All IFPS programs	14	-0.001	0.975	0.000	-0.121	0.127	0.000
Homebuilders® model	4	-0.494	0.000	0.027	-0.473	0.003	-0.321
Non-Homebuilders®	10	0.077	0.023	0.038	0.031	0.566	0.000
Subsequent Maltreatment							
All IFPS programs	8	0.031	0.391	0.222	n/a	n/a	0.000
Homebuilders® model	2	-0.229	0.043	0.911	n/a	n/a	-0.161
Non-Homebuilders®	6	0.059	0.115	0.611	n/a	n/a	0.000

⁶ M.W. Lipsey (2003). Those confounded moderators in meta-analysis: Good, bad, and ugly. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 587(1): 69-81.

⁷ This discounting procedure is described in Aos et al., 2004.

Benefits and Costs

Based on these results for Homebuilders[®] programs, we estimated benefits due to reduced out-of-home placements and lowered incidence of abuse and neglect. These results are summarized in Exhibit 2. Based on an extensive review of literature on child maltreatment, we also estimated

effects on crime, high school graduation, K–12 grade repetition, test scores, and disordered use of alcohol and drugs resulting from abuse and neglect. We estimated a total benefit of \$6,794 and cost of \$2,673 per client. Thus, programs faithful to the Homebuilders[®] model produce a net benefit of \$4,121 for a benefit-cost ratio of \$2.54 in benefits per dollar of cost.

Exhibit 2
Summary of Estimated Benefits and Costs of
Family Preservation Services (Homebuilders[®] Model)

Summary	Benefit and Costs (2005 Dollars) From Two Different Perspectives			Total
	Program Participants	Non-Program Participants		
		As Taxpayers	Other Benefits	
Total Benefits	\$818	\$3,212	\$2,765	\$6,794
Total Costs	\$0	-\$2,673	\$0	-\$2,673
Net Present Value	\$818	\$539	\$2,765	\$4,121
Benefit/Cost Ratio				\$2.54
Breakout of Benefits by Outcome Measure				
Crime	\$0	\$187	\$223	\$409
High School Graduation	\$549	\$137	\$171	\$857
Test Scores	\$283	\$71	\$89	\$443
K–12 Grade Repetition	\$0	\$20	\$0	\$20
Child Abuse and Neglect	\$0	\$183	\$2,365	\$2,548
Alcohol (disordered use)	\$178	\$72	\$5	\$255
Illicit Drugs (disordered use)	\$92	\$54	\$1	\$146
Out-of-Home Placements	\$0	\$2,559	\$0	\$2,559

Conclusions

Intensive Family Preservation Services that are implemented with fidelity to the Homebuilders[®] model significantly reduce out-of-home placements and subsequent abuse and neglect. We estimate that such programs produce \$2.54 of benefits for each dollar of cost. However, non-Homebuilders[®] programs (even those claiming to be based on Homebuilders[®]) produce no significant effect on either outcome.

In previous reviews of IFPS programs, others observed various results depending on the model employed.⁸ In our analysis, elements that

distinguish Homebuilders[®] from non-Homebuilders[®] programs include the actual risk of placement, therapist caseloads, intensity of service and around-the-clock availability to families.

These results support the view that fidelity to program design can determine whether or not an individual program is effective in achieving its goals.⁹

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⁸ A.M. Heneghan, S.M. Horwitz, & J.M. Leventhal (1996). Evaluating intensive family preservation programs: A methodological review. *Pediatrics* 97(4): 535-542; C. Dagenais, J. Begin, C. Bouchard, & D. Fortin (2004). Impact of intensive family support programs: A synthesis of evaluation studies. *Children and Youth Services Review* 26: 249-263; and, R.S. Kirk, K. Reed-Ashcraft, & P.J. Pecora (2002). Implementing intensive family preservation services: A case of fidelity. *Family Preservation Journal* 6(1): 59-81.

⁹ See: Aos et al., 2004; R. Barnoski, 2004; and D.S. Elliott, & S. Mihalic (2004). Issues in disseminating and replicating effective prevention programs. *Prevention Science* 5(1): 47.

Exhibit 3
Evaluations Demonstrating Fidelity to Homebuilders® Model

- Blythe, B. & S. Jayaratne. (2002, March 22). *Michigan Families First effectiveness study*. <<http://www.michigan.gov/printerFriendly/0,1687,7-124--21887--,00.html>>, accessed 02/07/06.
- Feldman, L.H. (1991, December). *Assessing the effectiveness of family preservation services in New Jersey within an ecological context*. Trenton, NJ: Bureau of Research, Evaluation and Quality Assurance, Division of Youth and Family Services, Department of Human Services.
- Fraser, M.W., E. Walton, R.E. Lewis, P.J. Pecora, & W.K. Walton (1996). An experiment in family reunification: Correlates of outcomes at one-year follow-up. *Children and Youth Services Review* 18(4/5): 335-361. *Note: This program is also evaluated by E. Walton (1998).*
- Mitchell, C., P. Tovar, & J. Knitzer (1989). *The Bronx Homebuilders Program: An evaluation of the first 45 families*. New York: Bank Street College of Education.
- Walton, E. (1998). In-home family-focused reunification: A six-year follow-up of a successful experiment. *Social Work Research* 22(4): 205-214. *Note: This program is also evaluated by M.W. Fraser et al. (1996).*

Exhibit 4
Evaluations Not Demonstrating Fidelity to Homebuilders® Model

- Halper, G. & M.A. Jones (1981, February). *Serving families at risk of dissolution: Public preventive services in New York City*. New York: HRA/McMillan Library.
- Jones, Mary Ann (1985). *A second chance for families: Five years later*. New York: Child Welfare League of America.
- Lewandowski, C.A. & L. Pierce (2002). Assessing the effect of family-centered out-of-home care on reunification outcomes. *Research on Social Work Practice* 12(2): 205-221.
- Schurman, J, T. Rzepnicki & J. Littell (1994) *Putting families first: An experiment in family preservation*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Schwartz, I.M., P. AuClaire, & L.J. Harris (1991) "Family preservation services as an alternative to the out-of-home placement of adolescents: The Hennepin County experience". In *Family Preservation Services: Research and Evaluation*. Wells & Biegel, eds. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications. pp 33-46.
- Szykula, S.A. & M.J. Fleischman (1985). Reducing out of home placements of abuse children: Two controlled field studies. *Child Abuse and Neglect* 9: 277-283.
- Westat, Inc., Chapin Hall Center for Children, & James Bell Associates (2001). *Evaluation of Family Preservation and Reunification Programs: Interim Report*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <<http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/fampres94/index.htm>> accessed 02/07/06. *Note: This study evaluates three programs.*
- Yuan, Y.T., W.R. McDonald, C.E. Wheeler, D. Struckman-Johnson & M. Rivest (1990, May). *Evaluation of AB 1562 in-home care demonstration projects, Volume 1: Final report*. Sacramento, CA: Walter R. McDonald & Associates, Inc. Prepared for Office of Child Abuse Prevention, Department of Social Services.

Exhibit 5
RCW 74.14C.020: Preservation Services

- (1) Intensive family preservation services shall have all of the following characteristics: (a) Services are provided by specially trained service providers who have received at least forty hours of training from recognized intensive in-home services experts. Service providers deliver the services in the family's home, and other environments of the family, such as their neighborhood or schools; (b) Caseload size averages two families per service provider unless paraprofessional services are utilized, in which case a provider may, but is not required to, handle an average caseload of five families; (c) The services to the family are provided by a single service provider who may be assisted by paraprofessional workers, with backup providers identified to provide assistance as necessary; (d) Services are available to the family within twenty-four hours following receipt of a referral to the program; and (e) Duration of service is limited to a maximum of forty days, unless paraprofessional workers are used, in which case the duration of services is limited to a maximum of ninety days. The department may authorize an additional provision of service through an exception to policy when the department and provider agree that additional services are needed.
- (2) Family preservation services shall have all of the following characteristics: (a) Services are delivered primarily in the family home or community; (b) Services are committed to reinforcing the strengths of the family and its members and empowering the family to solve problems and become self-sufficient; (c) Services are committed to providing support to families through community organizations including but not limited to school, church, cultural, ethnic, neighborhood, and business; (d) Services are available to the family within forty-eight hours of referral unless an exception is noted in the file; (e) Duration of service is limited to a maximum of six months, unless the department requires additional follow-up on an individual case basis; and (f) Caseload size no more than ten families per service provider, which can be adjusted when paraprofessional workers are used or required by the department.
- (3) Preservation services shall include the following characteristics: (a) Services protect the child and strengthen the family; (b) Service providers have the authority and discretion to spend funds, up to a maximum amount specified by the department, to help families obtain necessary food, shelter, or clothing, or to purchase other goods or services that will enhance the effectiveness of intervention; (c) Services are available to the family twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week; (d) Services enhance parenting skills, family and personal self-sufficiency, functioning of the family, and reduce stress on families; and (e) Services help families locate and use additional assistance including, but not limited to, the development and maintenance of community support systems, counseling and treatment services, housing, child care, education, job training, emergency cash grants, state and federally funded public assistance, and other basic support services.