

1992

Effectiveness of the Iowa Family Preservation Project

Jennifer S. Werger
University of Northern Iowa

Let us know how access to this document benefits you

Copyright ©1992 Jennifer S. Werger

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Werger, Jennifer S., "Effectiveness of the Iowa Family Preservation Project" (1992). *Graduate Research Papers*. 3568.

<https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp/3568>

This Open Access Graduate Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Research Papers by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uni.edu.

Offensive Materials Statement: Materials located in UNI ScholarWorks come from a broad range of sources and time periods. Some of these materials may contain offensive stereotypes, ideas, visuals, or language.

Effectiveness of the Iowa Family Preservation Project

Abstract

In 1987 the Iowa legislature began looking at the number of foster care placements and their cost to the state (Rode, 1991). Between 1982-1987 there has been a 40% increase in foster care placements despite an 8% decline in the state's child population (Rode, 1991). Fuqua and Conger (1987) projected that the need for foster care in Iowa would continue to grow and the number of available foster care family homes would continue to decline. This increase was believed to be in part due to the lack of any formal statewide program with the capacity to intervene effectively in the kind of severe family crises that often result in out-of-home placements (The Center for the Study of Social Policy, 1988). Removing the child from the home was often seen as "in the best interest of the child" and as a quick solution to a family's problem (Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, 1985). In addition, federal laws encouraged foster care placement by providing reimbursement for foster care (Jones, 1985).

Effectiveness of the Iowa Family Preservation Project

A Research Paper

Presented to

The Department of Educational Administration
and Counseling
University of Northern Iowa

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by

Jennifer S. Werger

July 1992

This Research Paper by: Jennifer S. Werger

Entitled: EFFECTIVENESS OF THE IOWA FAMILY PRESERVATION PROJECT

has been approved as meeting the research paper requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts.

6/29/92
Date Approved

Robert T. Lembke
Adviser/Director of Research Paper

7/1/92
Date Approved

Annie M. Jones
Second Reader of Research Paper

7/1/92
Date Received

< Dale R. Jackson
Head, Department of Educational
Administration and Counseling

In 1987 the Iowa legislature began looking at the number of foster care placements and their cost to the state (Rode, 1991). Between 1982-1987 there has been a 40% increase in foster care placements despite an 8% decline in the state's child population (Rode, 1991). Fuqua and Conger (1987) projected that the need for foster care in Iowa would continue to grow and the number of available foster care family homes would continue to decline. This increase was believed to be in part due to the lack of any formal statewide program with the capacity to intervene effectively in the kind of severe family crises that often result in out-of-home placements (The Center for the Study of Social Policy, 1988). Removing the child from the home was often seen as "in the best interest of the child" and as a quick solution to a family's problem (Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, 1985). In addition, federal laws encouraged foster care placement by providing reimbursement for foster care (Jones, 1985).

In 1990 the Iowa legislature found that the cost of Iowa foster care placement averaged \$8889.50 per child in placement. That figure was based on the cost of foster care for twenty-three months, which is the average length of placement in Iowa (Thieman, Fuqua and

Linnan, 1989). The cost and the increased number of foster care placement has led the state of Iowa legislature to initiate the Family Preservation Project (FPP) (Rode, 1991). FPP services are designed to reduce out-of-home placement of children resulting in a much lower cost to the state (Frankel, 1988).

The purpose of this paper was to review the literature and determine whether FPP services are an effective cost-saving method of reducing the number of children placed in foster care. Aspects examined were: FPP Strategy, Family Characteristics, Project Cost and Project Evaluation.

FPP Strategy

Since the mid-1970's, Iowa has annually appropriated increasing sums for a set of interventions to use with families that have children at risk of placement. These interventions are collectively known as "Family Centered Services" and include office based counseling, individual, couple and family counseling (Rode, 1991). These services were designed to be as comprehensive as the family needed. For example, one family may require individual and couple counseling while another family may require parenting skills instruction or financial planning. These services were

heavily utilized, however, they were not structured to provide the intense services "to families in crisis that would avert out-of-home placements" (Bruner, 1987, p. 3).

Unfortunately between the mid 1970's, when services began, and 1987, the need for services outgrew the available funding. This resulted in the intensity of the services being lessened so that more families could receive services. For this reason in 1987, the state of Iowa established a task force to investigate intensive family preservation models to develop a program for the state.

The model developed was based on the "Home-builders" model which has been a highly successful program in the state of Washington since 1974 (Thieman, Fuqua and Linnan, 1990). In the Home-builders' program, families must meet two criteria in order to be referred for services: first, at least one family member must express the desire to keep the family together, and second, no key family member can refuse the option that the family stay together (Wells and Biegel, 1991).

In this program the family is seen by a program worker within twenty four hours of the family's

referral. After that, they are seen as often as needed. Their worker is on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to deal with emergency family problems. The workers in this program have no more than two families at a time. Services are usually provided for four weeks and meetings generally take place in the families' homes. The Home-builders model offers both concrete and therapeutic interventions. These being anything from helping a family obtain food, jobs or housing to cognitive, environmental, and interpersonal strategies. The interventions are based largely on the social learning theory, crisis intervention theory and ecological perspectives on child development (Wells and Biegel, 1991). The Home-builders staff in Washington state claimed to have avoided placement in 87% of the families one year after termination of services. The cost per family receiving services was only a fraction of the average cost of foster care placement for that state (The Center for the Study of Social Policy, 1988).

In Iowa the Family Preservation Project offers services similar to that of the Home-builders model through the Department of Human Services (DHS). FPP services are designed to reduce the number of children

placed outside the home. The services are voluntary and may be stopped at the family's request. As in the Home-builders program, FPP counselors are also on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The strategies utilized are tailored to meet the individual needs of each family. FPP counselors may assist a family in locating housing and food resources as well as provide financial assistance to the family for such basic needs by using the project's family assistance funds. FPP counselors may also provide individual, couple, and extended family counseling depending on the unique needs of the family. FPP workers can have no more than four families at one time and provide services to eligible families an average of 45 days (Rode, 1991).

Eligible families are defined as those who, in the judgement of DHS Children's Services staff, are at imminent risk of placement without an intensive intervention (The Center for the Study of Social Policy, 1988). The department will make a referral to FPP when appropriate, and services will begin within 24 to 48 hours. FPP is required to accept all referrals up to their case-load capacity (Rode, 1991).

FPP counselors are trained to assess the immediate and long term needs of the family and assist the family

in finding and using community resources needed. These may include therapy services, parent skill building, home management and linkage to other needed services. Family Preservation Project services are almost exclusively in the home. All of these strategies combined, create the intensive and effective strategies of the Iowa Family Preservation Project.

Family Characteristics

Since the initiation of the Family Preservation Project in 1987, the state of Iowa has contracted with Iowa State University to collect data on different aspects of the project. One such aspect is that of family characteristics (Thieman, Fuqua and Linnan, 1990).

In March of 1990, family characteristics were reported on the 747 families with completed files from Family Preservation Project services (Thieman, Fuqua and Linnan, 1990). Characteristics for the primary caretaker included: 68.5% were female, 49% married, 61% separated, 31% single, and 2% widowed. The average age of the primary caretaker was 36.95 years. In regards to education of the primary caretaker: 4% completed college degrees, 7% completed vocational/technical school, 60% completed high school,

25% completed eighth grade and 3% completed less than eighth grade. Slightly over 92% of the primary caretakers were White, approximately 5% were Afro-American and approximately 3% were other nationalities. Forty percent of the primary caretakers were employed full time, 17% were employed part-time, and 40% were unemployed (Thieman, Fuqua and Linnan, 1990).

Project Cost

In 1987, the Iowa legislature enacted a bill which deliberately specified case-load maximums of no more than four families per counselor, target populations of those families who have a child at immediate risk of out-of-home placement, and service duration of an average of forty-five days for the Iowa Family Preservation Project. This project was initially appropriated \$680,000 and funding has grown to an allocation of over \$5,000,000 for Fiscal Year 1992 (Rode, 1991).

As more funds were allocated each year to FPP services, studies were initiated to compare cost of FPP services to alternative options for families. It was difficult to compare the cost of foster care to the cost of Family Preservation Project services since the savings estimates needed to be based on the assumption

that all target children would have been placed in foster care without FPP intervention (Stein, 1985). Therefore, the cost of traditional Family Centered Services must be compared to the cost of FPP services since both were designed to prevent out-of-home placement (Thieman, Fuqua and Linnan, 1990).

According to the Iowa Department of Human Services, 67% of the families in Family Centered Services avoided placement during 1990. The average length of services was eight months and the average cost was \$3112 per family. Although FPP's avoidance of placement is only slightly higher than Family Centered services, not all families referred to Family Centered services are at risk of out-of-home placement as are all of FPP families (Thieman, Fuqua and Linnan, 1990). FPP services avoided placement in 69% of the families in 1990. The average length of its services was forty-five days, and the average cost was \$2238 per family, a savings of \$874 per family. Thus, even though the population served by FPP is assumed to have more serious problems, this project still maintains a slightly better record than the less intense, more costly, traditional Family Centered Service.

Project Evaluation

The method of evaluating the Family Preservation Project Services was to investigate its beneficial effect on the persons served (Wells and Biegel, 1991). Examination of the data of the FPP's effectiveness focused on the avoidance of out-of-home placement as a benefit to the persons served since the goal of FPP services was to assist the family in maintaining the child in the home.

Fuqua (1988) conducted a variety of bivariate and multivariate analyses to describe the program structure and outcomes. Comparisons were made with three other state family preservation projects using three dimensions; treatment model and services, program structure and program outcomes. The three state programs were the Home-builders program in Washington state, the Utah Family preservation Program and the Hennepin County program in Minnesota. Since all three programs specified their purpose was to prevent placement of children who were at imminent risk of placement outside their homes by providing highly intensive services to improve the functioning of children and families, this paper focused on the

evaluation of the number of children who avoided placement with the assistance of FPP services.

It was noted that at the termination of family preservation services, Iowa reported a 62% success rate of maintaining the child in the home and avoiding placement. Washington state reported a 82.3% success rate, Utah a 71.2% success rate and Minnesota did not calculate a comparable rate (Fuqua, 1988). These results were calculated with the knowledge that Iowa's program had been in effect for eight months while the other state's programs had been operating at least one year.

In 1989, Thieman, Fuqua and Linnan (1989) evaluated placement in several different ways. First, the evaluation of placement of the child at the end of FPP services revealed that approximately 30% of the families served had at least one child in some type of substitute care. Thus, placement was avoided in 70% of the families utilizing FPP service. Second, the evaluation of placement may be based on the number of children in the family being served by FPP services. Thus, they also found that 85% of the children in the family avoided placement. Third, consideration may be limited only to the child in the family labeled "at-

risk" by the DHS case worker. In this evaluation it was reported that 77% of the children avoided placement at the end of FPP services.

These evaluations appear to suggest that at least on a short term basis FPP does assist in avoiding out-of-home placements in families. However, Fuqua (1988) reported that it was difficult to draw any firm conclusions about the success of FPP services since they had been operating only eight months. One thing to remember when interpreting this data is that a child who leaves the home to go and live with a relative (e.g. a non-custodial parent or a grandparent), is not considered a child in out-of-home placement.

In 1990 after thirty months of service, Iowa's Family Preservation Project had completed data on 747 families. Thieman, Fuqua and Linnan (1990) again reviewed and evaluated the data. On these completed files the data showed that 79% of the at-risk children avoided out-of-home placement at the completion of FPP services. Frankel (1988) and Jones (1985) reported similar results in comparison to other states' programs in which placement was avoided 77%-97% of the time with the utilization of FPP services. Thieman, Fuqua and Linnan (1990) also evaluated the families one year

after the completion of FPP services. Here they found that 66% of the families remained in tact with 82% of the children in the home avoiding out-of-home placements.

FPP counselors complete a family risk scale at the beginning of FPP services and at the termination of services. This scale is used to evaluate the functioning of the family. Frankel (1988) reported that few programs examined the affect that FPP services had on the functioning of the family and the relationship between family functioning and placement. Thieman, Fuqua and Linnan (1990) did evaluate these aspects in the Iowa program. They reported that improvement in the functioning of the family is linked to maintaining the child in the home.

One problem with evaluating these outcomes was presented by Wells and Biegel (1991). They have stated that the concern with placement arises from the belief that substitute care is damaging to the child and that it is better for the child to grow up in its birth family. One premise that Family Preservation Programs have is that abusing and neglectful parents can become adequate caretakers so that the birth families can be preserved. The problem is that some birth families

cannot be made safe for the children. With the presented evaluation of FPP services, success of the program is determined by the avoidance of out-of-home placement or improvement in the functioning of the family which in reality may not be possible due to limitations in the parameters of working with families.

Summary

When reviewing the literature and investigating the cost and the effect of reducing the number of children in out-of-home placements, FPP services does appear to live up to its design. The literature has shown that in Iowa with the project's current strategy of strict guidelines for referrals, case-load numbers, and time constraints does appear to be cost effective compared to any form of out-of-home placement. FPP counselors work with families of different cultural, economic and family dynamic backgrounds has allowed the implementation of their unique services that are tailored to meet each family's needs specifically. The evaluation of the services has shown that the utilization of FPP services does assist in avoiding placements in more families than not. However, there are some problems with FPP services evaluation that need to be addressed.

First, when evaluating the cost of FPP services, the sum is based on FPP services being provided to a family only once. There is no data available that presents the frequency of a family being re-referred to the Iowa FPP program or the cost added to that family's total for FPP use. As FPP services become more frequently used, the state will need to allocate more funds for the program. Will there eventually need to be guidelines for the number of times a family can use FPP services before the result is out-of-home placement and what will this end up costing? I feel these are questions that will need to be addressed in the future as FPP services continue to be utilized and funded by the state of Iowa legislature.

As for the effectiveness of the FPP services, Thieman, Fuqua and Linnan (1990) reported that the lack of a comparable group to determine how many children might have entered out-of-home placement without services has created serious problems in evaluating the services. The only comparison offered is between new foster care cases in FPP and non-FPP districts. This difference was not dramatic but did show there was less of an increase in foster care in FPP districts.

With the current contract with Iowa State University, FPP services will continue to be evaluated to determine its contribution to the avoidance of out-of-home placement as well as to investigate its cost as a savings to the state. Presently FPP services are continuing to be utilized as an effective cost-saving method of reducing the number of children placed in foster care.

References

- Bruner, C. (1987). Family Preservation Services in Iowa: A Legislature's Perspective on Key Issues. (Working Paper Series, FP-5). Washington, D.C.: The Center for the Study of Social Policy.
- Bryant, J. (1988). A Public-Private Partnership Builds Support for Family Preservation Services. Children-Today, 17(1), 25-27.
- Edna McConnell Clark Foundation. (1985). Keeping Families Together: The case for Family Preservation. Washington, D.C.
- Frankel, H. (1988). Family-Centered, Home-Based Services in Child Protection: A Review of the Research. Social Service Review, March, 137-157.
- Fuqua, R. (1988). Iowa Family Preservation Project Evaluation Report. Unpublished manuscript, Iowa State University, Child Welfare Research and Training Project, Ames, IA.
- Fuqua, R. W. & Conger, R. (1987). Foster Care in Iowa: Monitoring and Predicting Case-loads. Unpublished manuscript. Iowa State University, Ames, IA.
- Jones, M. A. (1985). A second chance for families: Five years later. Washington, D.C.: Child Welfare League of America.

Moore, R. (1988). State Family Preservation Programs: A Description of Six States' Progress in Developing Services to Keep Families Together. Unpublished manuscript.

Rode, P. (1991). The Family Preservation Program in Iowa. Unpublished manuscript, Iowa Department of Human Services, Des Moines, IA.

Stein, T. (1985). Projects to Prevent Out-of-Home Placement. Children and Youth Services Review, 7, 109, 121.

The Center for the Study of Social Policy (1988). State Family Preservation Programs: A Description of Six States' Progress in Developing Services to Keep Families Together. (Working Paper Series, FP-3). Washington, D.C.

Thieman, A., Fuqua, R. & Linnan, K. (1989). Family Preservation Pilot Project Evaluation Component. Year Two Progress Report to Iowa Department of Human Services. Unpublished manuscript. Iowa State University, Child Welfare Research and Training Project, Ames, IA.

- Thieman, A. A., Fuqua, R. & Linnan, K. (1990). Iowa Family Preservation Three Year Pilot Project: Final Evaluation Report. Unpublished manuscript, Iowa State University, Child Welfare Research and Training Project, Ames, IA.
- Wells, K. & Biegel, D. E. (1991). Family Preservation Services. California: Newberry Park.
- Woods, L. J. (1988). Home-based Family Therapy. Social Work, 33(3), 211-214.