

**Evaluation of the Maryland
Family Preservation Programs**

*Intensive Family Services and
Family Preservation Programs:
Annual Report, FY-1998*

Prepared for the
Social Services Administration
Department of Human Resources

By

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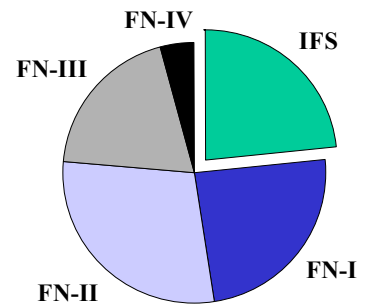
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Towson University
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Executive Summary

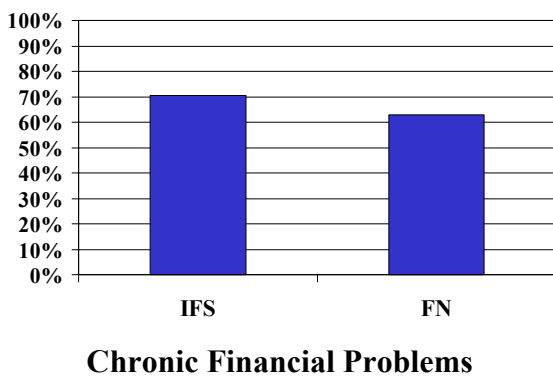
Two programs have been central to the Maryland Social Services Administration's family preservation efforts that began ten years ago. The Intensive Family Services (IFS) program began in 1989 and provides a short term, intensive, in-home service for families in crisis whose children are at imminent risk of out-of-home placement. The Families Now (FN) program began in 1992 to provide more comprehensive counseling and support services to families at risk. FN includes four levels of services: I) intensive family services, II) services to families for up to 6 months, III) protective services to children for up to 12 months, and IV) reunification services. This report analyzes FY1998 data sent to the Social Services Administration by local programs. The accuracy and completeness of the data was not independently verified.

According to this information, social services in Maryland conducted 1,384 intake assessments during FY1998. The largest number of assessments (401) were for the FN-II program, and the least (58) for the FN-IV program. Families entering IFS and FN services during FY1998 averaged 2.4 children. An average of 178 cases received IFS each month of FY1998, 92 cases received FN-I levels of services, 198 cases received FN-II, 216 cases received FN-III, and 101 received FN-IV level of services.



Anne Arundel County and Baltimore City reported the greatest number of intakes for IFS and FN services. However, Anne Arundel County reported few of its families as receiving IFS program services while Baltimore City reported one-third of its families as receiving IFS program services.

One-third (37%) of the families entered services following investigation by child protective services which did not involve the courts. One-third (30%) of families had no history with the social service or court systems at all. One-third (33%) of families had involvement with the social service system other than child protective services, or had court involvement.

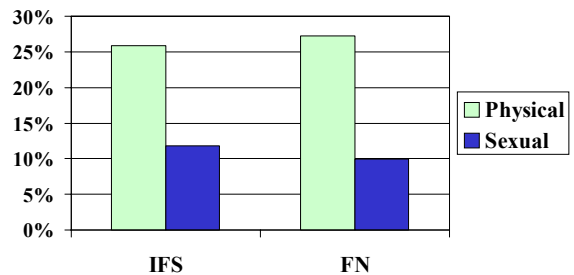


Two-thirds to three-fourths of the caregivers (72% IFS and 61% FN) had not been steadily employed during the year prior to intake and had chronic financial problems (71% IFS and 63% FN). A third to half of the families had moved during the year before intake (51% IFS and 39% FN), but most of the homes were clean and safe (59% IFS and 71% FN). Two-thirds (62% IFS and 67% FN) provided age-appropriate supervision of children and had no known domestic violence (69% IFS and 67% FN). Closing assessments of these family characteristics

were slightly more positive than the intake assessments.

Using a family functioning check list, workers recorded that children in 42% of IFS and 29% of FN families had no self-help skills, but they generally behaved in age-appropriate ways (64% IFS and 58% FN). One-fifth (23% IFS and 19% FN) of the families had children with illnesses or disabilities and two-fifths (40% IFS and 36% FN) had some difficulties learning. The children in IFS families and FN-I families differed little in terms of their physical conditions, learning abilities, mental health or substance abuse. Characteristics of children differed little on intake and closing assessments.

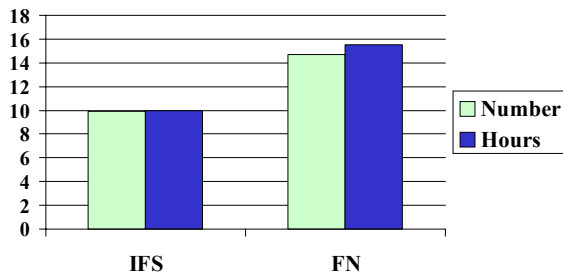
Parents in one-fourth (26% IFS and 27% FN) of the families had physically harmed their children in the past year, and sexually abused their children in one-tenth of the families (12% IFS and 10% FN). The abusive parent or other perpetrator still had access to the children in one-fifth of the families (20% IFS and 18% FN) at time of intake, complicating the goals of both preserving families and protecting children. Children expressed fear of their homes in 25% of IFS and 16% of FN cases. Closing assessments found children better off, but workers closed some cases with referrals to child protective services or foster care when the threat of abuse was still present and children were fearful.



Abuse in Past Year

Caretakers lacked local support networks of family and friends in 52% of IFS and 48% of FN families at the time of intake. One-fourth (21% IFS and 27% FN) of the caretakers at intake were actively working to resolve the problems in the opinion of the social workers, but most of the rest were willing to work on their problems with social service support. Two-fifths (43% IFS and 40% FN) of the caretakers showed emotional instability, and two-fifths (45% IFS and 41% FN) were suspected of substance abuse. Closing assessments showed more local support and active problem resolution than intake assessments.

The IFS staff reported 21 thousand contacts and invested 31 thousand hours in families during FY1998. The average IFS family benefitted from 10 staff contacts and 14 hours of staff time per month. The FN staff reported 107 thousand contacts and invested 113 thousand hours in families during FY1998. The average FN family benefitted from 15 contacts and 15 hours of staff time per month. IFS staff spent more time than FN staff during an average contact with or for the family, but did not spend more time with the family overall. Tentative data on the length of time the case was open suggest IFS families received services for about the same length of time as FN



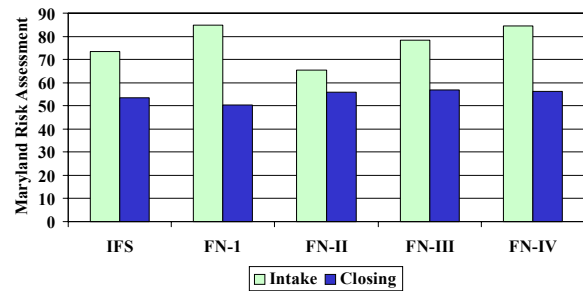
Average Monthly Contacts per Family

families, and thus received about 36% fewer contacts and 10% less staff time than FN families.

One-third of the contacts (39% IFS and 34% FN), and two-thirds of the time (65% IFS and 60% FN), were with the families in their homes. About half of IFS face-to-face contact hours involved social workers and associates meeting together with families, compared to about one-third of FN face-to-face contact hours.

One-third of the closing assessments (42% IFS and 33% FN) recommended the family receive additional services, including 10% referred to child protective services. About one-fifth of the families (16% IFS and 21% FN) had children placed outside the home under court order between intake and closing.

Children in FN-I families had the highest risk of abuse or neglect, and FN-II families had the lowest risk as measured by the Maryland Risk Assessment at intake. The greatest decrease in child risks occurred among FN-I families and the least change among FN-II families, resulting in little difference among the programs in the risks at closing. Children were placed under court order while receiving services in 13% of IFS families, 17% of FN-I families, 20% of FN-II families and 45% of FN-III families.



Average Maryland Risk Assessment Score at Intake and Closing, by Program Type