

**Evaluation of the Maryland  
Family Preservation Programs**

*Intensive Family Services and  
Family Preservation Programs:  
FY1998 Case Outcomes*

Prepared for the  
Social Services Administration  
Maryland Department of Human Resources

By

Gordon Scott Bonham  
Bonham Research  
2316 Wineberry Terrace  
Baltimore, MD 21209  
[gbonham@megapathdsl.net](mailto:gbonham@megapathdsl.net)  
(410) 601-0111

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## Executive Summary

Two programs comprise the Social Services Administration's (SSA) family preservation efforts. The Intensive Family Services (IFS) program began in 1989 and provides short term (3 months) intensive, in-home service for families whose children are at imminent risk of out-of-home placement. The program uses a social worker and a parent associate team. A 1991 study found IFS to be very successful in preventing foster care placement. The Families Now (FN) program began in 1992 to provide more families with similar services, and with the possibility of a longer time frame (3 months for FN-I, 6 months for FN-II and 12 months for FN-III). Families starting IFS and FN services in FY1998 form the focus of this report.

This report use data from two separate systems. The Department for Human Resources maintains a Case Information System (CIS) for assignment to all of its programs, and the Social Services Administration maintains a database for its family preservation assessments, contacts, and goods and services provided. The report analyzes how families with different characteristics are affected by program processes in terms of output characteristics upon case closure, short-term need of additional family preservation services, and long-term involvement in the child welfare system. Family characteristics include contact with child welfare prior to the FY1998 case. Long-term involvement focuses on the most recent child welfare contact 2-4 years after closure of the FY1998 case. The CIS identified 1,628 families that began family preservation services between July 1997 and June 1998. Seventeen of 23 districts reported 1,201 families to the Maryland family preservation database with IFS, FN-I, FN-II and FN-III intake assessments during the fiscal year. Data from the two databases could be linked for 831 families.

Family preservation intake assessments reported that two-thirds of families had histories with the child welfare system. The CIS indicated that 73% to 88%, of families had prior experience with child welfare. Least likely to have prior experience were cases referred to IFS by sources other than Child Protective Services (CPS), yet only 23% of these families had never had a member involved with the child welfare system before FY1998.

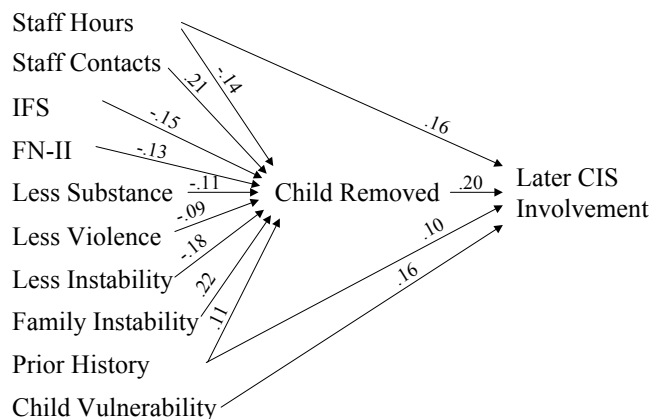
Staff invested an average of 102 hours of their time on each family during the time the family preservation case was open. Two-thirds of the contacts were directly with members of the family, and most of the rest were with collateral organizations on behalf of the family. Workers made fewer contacts for IFS than FN-III families, but invested the same overall amount of time. FN-I families received the fewest number of contacts and had the least investment of staff time.

Family preservation spent an average of \$634 per family for goods and services over an average of 4.5 months, although no program funds were spent on goods and services for 31% of the families. The program spent more money for rent assistance than any other type of good or services, helping one-fifth of the families. Family preservation referred 95% of families for psychological, counseling or mental health services, and used program funds for 9% of them.

The overall Maryland Risk Assessment Score declined by 27% (20 points) between intake and closing, as did problems in family stability, family violence, child vulnerability, and other program output measures. Families with IFS and FN-I services improved more than did families with FN-II or FN-III services on half of the output measures with no difference for the other half. The more months of goods and services, the more successful the immediate results,, but the amount of expenditures affected only family stability. The more contacts the programs had with or for the families, the less reduction occurred in family problems; or vice versa, the less change in family problems, the more times staff contacted the families. Children from 15% of the families were placed under court order between intake and closing. Workers recommended that one-third of the cases continue to receive child welfare services.

One-fourth (24%) of the cases had additional family preservation services withing 1-21 months after closure. The characteristics of the family at intake offered no prediction as to which families would need additional services and which would not. Workers' recommendations explained less than 4% of the probability that a family would received additional services, and reduction in family problems had no value in predicting future services. Cases assigned to 3-month IFS programs were the most likely to receive additional services after the closing of the FY1998 case, and cases assigned to 12-month FN-III services were the least likely. The more contacts with or for the families, the less likely the families received subsequent services, but the greater the amount of staff time per contact, the more likely future services. The amount of program funds spent for goods and services had no relationship to subsequent program services.

A child from 8% of families was in foster care 2-4 years after leaving family preservation, and 18% of the families had been reported to the Child Protective Services. Only 22% had no further contact with child welfare. Long-term outcomes differed from the short-term outcomes, and what predicted one did not predict the other. The removal of a child from the home, more investment of staff time, prior child welfare histories, and child vulnerability at intake independently predicted which families returned to the child welfare system. More investment of staff time indirectly decreased return to child welfare when it prevented children from being removed. Similarly, decreasing substance abuse, family violence and family instability reduced



the need for removing children. IFS and FN-II cases were less likely than FN-III cases to have a child removed from the home. Goods and services did not directly affect child removal or later involvement, but affected them indirectly by decreasing family violence and family instability. Maryland's family preservation programs reduced but did not eliminate long-term involvement in the child welfare system, and the primary goal should remain reducing the need to remove children from their homes.