



**NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER
FOR FOSTER CARE
& PERMANENCY PLANNING**

at the Hunter College
School of Social Work

INFORMATION PACKET: *Promoting Safe & Stable Families*

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MAY 2002

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Promoting Safe and Stable Families

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On January 17, 2002, Tommy G. Thompson, Secretary of the United States Department of Health and Human Services reported that President Bush signed into law the Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) Amendment of 2001, an important federal source of funding for services to support, prevent, and remedy difficulties of families with children, and eligible Indian tribes who are in crisis. The new law expands the original PSSF program through 2006, and creates a new state grant program to provide educational and training vouchers for youth who age out of the foster care system, and a mentoring program for those children with an incarcerated parent.

The Child Welfare League of America provides a historical overview of the program followed by a brief description of its various services. Initially, the program was created in 1993 as the Family Preservation and Support Services Program, geared toward community-based family preservation and support. In 1997, the program was reauthorized under the Adoption and Safe Families Act, and renamed the PSSF Program. The 1997 legislation required the provision of two additional services which were time-limited reunification services, and supportive adoption services.

Family preservation services are designed to alleviate crises that may lead children to enter the foster care system because of abuse, neglect, or parental inability. They help maintain the safety of children in their own homes, and provide support to families who reunify or adopt. Family support services provide community-based activities designed to alleviate stress, and help parents care for their children before a crisis occurs. They are voluntary, preventive activities to help families nurture their children.

Time-limited reunification services are provided within fifteen months of when a child enters the foster care system. They are designed to expedite a reunification of the child with an appropriate environment. Supportive services are pre and post adoptive services designed to encourage adoption out of the foster care system when it promotes the best interest of the child. Additionally, grants have been allocated to state courts to hasten the handling of adoption proceedings.

Secretary Thompson explains that the new amendment will add two additional components to the program. First, educational and training vouchers are authorized under the Chaffee program to extend a safety net of benefits for those youth who age out of foster care, and who are never adopted. It is designed to ease their transition into adulthood and self sufficiency by providing resources to pursue education or vocational training. Secondly, mentoring children with parents in prison is designed to prevent the behavioral, health, and educational problems that children with an incarcerated parent tend to have. It is proposed with the idea that positive role models may increase their chances of becoming well-adjusted and productive human beings.

According to the Children's Bureau, the purpose of the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program is to provide services which will prevent the unnecessary separation of

children from their families, improve their quality of care, and ensure permanency for children by reuniting them with their parents, by adoption or by another permanent living arrangement.

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Fact Sheet

General Statistics

(The following statistics have been compiled from the websites listed in the resources section).

On September 30, 1999 there were 581,000 children in foster care. (Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), *Interim FY 1999 Estimates*, 6/6/01).

On September 30, 1999 127,000 children were waiting to be adopted in the foster care system. 46,000 were adopted in the fiscal year 1999. (Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), *Interim FY 1999 Estimates*, 6/6/01).

On September 30, 1999, 42% of the 568,000 children in foster care had goals of reunification, 19% had goals of adoption, 8% had goals of custody to a relative, 7% had goals of long term foster care, 5% had goals of emancipation, and 19% had not yet established a permanency goal. (National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information, (NCANDS), *Foster Care National Statistics*, April 2001).

In 1998, an estimated 2,898,000 children were reported and referred for investigation to state and local child protection service agencies because family members, professionals, or other citizens were concerned about their safety and well-being. After follow-up assessments, officials substantiated 903,000 cases. (Children's Bureau, US Dept of Health and Human Services (2000). Child maltreatment 1998: Reports from the states to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System. Washington DC: US Government Printing Office).

In 1998, 1100 child fatalities from maltreatment were reported by the states. Maltreated children are found in all income, racial, and ethnic groups, and incidence rates are similar in urban, suburban, and rural communities. (Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Fact Sheet: Protecting the well-being of children, May 2000).

Family support programs included in a meta-analysis, which represent a broad cross-section of programs that provide family support services, had small but statistically-significant average effects in nine outcome domains. Small positive effects were found in children's cognitive development, social and emotional development, parenting attitudes and knowledge, parenting behavior, and family functioning. Statistically significant effects were found in children's physical health and development, children's safety, parents' mental health or risk behaviors, and producing change in families' economic self-sufficiency. (Administration for Children and Families, (ACF), National Evaluation of Family Support Programs, Final Report, April 2001).

Programs that used professional staff to help parents to be effective adults, and that provided opportunities for parents to meet in support groups, were more effective in producing positive outcomes for parents. (Administration for Children and Families, (ACF), National Evaluation of Family Support Programs, Final Report, April 2001).

Programs that targeted teenage parents with young children and combined case management with parent-child activities were more effective in protecting children from accidental injury, abuse or neglect. (Administration for Children and Families, (ACF), National Evaluation of Family Support Programs, Final Report, April 2001).

Evaluation of family preservation and reunification programs designed to assess the extent to which key goals of the program were being met in reducing foster care placement, maintaining the safety of children, and improving family functioning found no significant differences between an experimental and control group. (Westat, Inc., Evaluation of Family Preservation and Reunification Programs: Interim Report, 1/08/01).

Evaluation of family preservation programs in Kentucky, Mississippi, and New Jersey failed to achieve the objective of reducing placement of children in foster care. In none of the three states were there significant differences in placement rates over time for the samples as they were originally randomly assigned (the "primary" analysis). (Westat, Inc., Evaluation of Family Preservation and Reunification Programs: Interim Report, 1/08/01).

Although there is debate among practitioners, research suggests that family preservation programs have very modest effects on family and child functioning. Researchers have found few significant differences between program and comparison groups in levels of child and families functioning after services have been provided. (Westat Inc., A Synthesis of Research on Family Preservation and Family Reunification, May 1995).

A reality based research model traced American Indian concepts of family preservation and compared them with mainstream theories that guided services to Indian communities. Results from information gathered through surveys, talking circles, and a community review revealed that family preservation programs were ineffective, and failed to consider the importance of

Indian' values, and traditional practices. (National Indian Child Welfare Association, (NICWA), [Family Preservation](#) Concepts in American Indian Communities, December 2000).

In an exhaustive survey of the existing literature, Lindsey (1997) was able to identify 25 family preservation studies. Of these, only four met the requirements of conventional experiment design: minimum sample size, treatment and control groups, random assignment of subjects and a post sample comparison of what changes may have occurred among the two groups due to application of the experimental variable. In two of the four well designed studies, the control group actually fared better than the experimental group receiving the family preservation services. The other two studies showed a slightly, but not significantly, improved result for the experimental group. When “prevention of placement” was the outcome variable, none of the four clinical trials found a statistically significant difference in favor of family preservation. (UCLA School of Public Policy and Social Research, Child Cares, 7/10/97).

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Policies and Legislation

(The following section has been composed from the Access to Respite Care and Help (ACRH) National Resource Center, ARCH Fact Sheet, Number 37, November 1994).

August 10, 1993- President Clinton signed legislation for the “Family Preservation and Family Support Services” program to provide community-based support and preservation services for families in crisis. This new legislation was amended to the Social Security Act, Title IV-B, of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993, public law, 103-66, which established a new Subpart 2 to Title IV- B of the Social Security Act.. The new legislation intended to promote family strength and stability, enhance parental functioning, protect children and youth, resolve crises and problems, and prevent unnecessary out-of-home placement. It authorized \$930 million over five years to the states, and eligible Indian tribes for the provision of services. The legislation was administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services,

Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau.

(The following section has been composed from the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA), Summary of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997).

November 19, 1997- President Clinton renewed funding for the “Family Preservation and Family Support Services Program” under the “Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997,” public law, 105-89. Additionally, Congress renamed the program to the “Promoting Safe and Stable Families” program and mandated two additional services to be provisioned by the states, and eligible Indian tribes. In addition to family support and family preservation services, it now required time-limited reunification services and adoption services. Time-limited reunification services were services and activities given to the child and child’s family who had entered the foster care system to facilitate an expeditious child-environment reunification, specifically within fifteen months from the time the child entered foster care. Adoption services were services and activities aimed to encourage more adoption out of foster care when it was in the best interests of the child. It also promoted more timely court actions that expedited their placements in appropriate permanent settings. It authorized \$875 million through fiscal year 2001. The legislation was administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau

(The following section has been composed from the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Press Release, January 17, 2002).

November 17, 2002- President Bush signed into law the “Safe and Stable Families Amendments of 2001”, public law, 107-133. The law amended the definition of family support services in the original “Promoting Safe and Stable Families” program legislation to include the strengthening of parental relationships, and the promotion of healthy marriages. It also amended the definition of family preservation services to allow states to support infant safe haven programs. Although states could always use the funds for these services, the amendment clarified their flexibility to do so.

Additionally, the bill added two services to the “Promoting Safe and Stable Families” program of 1997. The mentoring of children of prisoners is a new program aimed to provide a mentor for a child with an incarcerated parent. The program was a reaction to the number of children with a parent in prison which the Bureau of Justice Statistics reports being almost 1.5 million in 1999. Services are geared to decrease the behavioral, health and educational problems of these children, and decrease the likelihood of their becoming criminals themselves. The program authorized \$67 million for fiscal years 2002 and 2003, and such sums that are necessary for fiscal years 2004 through 2006. The bill reserved 2.5 percent of the funds for research, technical assistance and evaluation.

Secondly, the bill added education and training vouchers for youths who age out of foster care under the “Chafee Foster Care Independence Program.” The Independent Living Program enabled states to extend a safety net of benefits and services to young adults who grew up in foster care and were never adopted in order to ease their transition into adulthood and self-sufficiency. Currently, many of the 16,000 youths who annually age out of foster care are not able to pursue education or vocational training because of a lack of sufficient resources. The bill allowed vouchers to be available to youth ages 18 to 21 who have aged out of foster care, youth

adopted from foster care after attaining age 16, and youth between 21 and 23 who are enrolled in a full-time course of study and are making satisfactory progress toward completion. The bill authorized \$60 million annually for educational and training vouchers.

Finally, the amendment reauthorized mandatory funding of \$305 million and discretionary funding of \$200 million for the “Promoting Safe and Stable Families” program of 1997 from fiscal year 2002 through 2006. The amendments reauthorized mandatory funding at \$10 million annually and authorize an additional 3.3 percent of any discretionary funding for the court improvement program. The legislation will be administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau.

Safe and Stable Families

Best Practice Tips

The following are principles that have been found to be effective in the strengthening of families, family preservation and family reunification, and are excerpted from:

Strengthening America’s Families: Exemplary Parenting and Family Strategies for Delinquency Prevention; (1999) *Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Juvenile Programs, U.S. Department of Justice.*

What Works? Family Preservation and Reunification; (2000) Casey Family Programs.

Reviews suggest that there is no one single best family intervention program and that programs must be carefully selected for a specific target population.

Parenting and family interventions must be tailored to the developmental stage of the child, and specific risk factors in the families served.

Comprehensive interventions are more effective in modifying a broader range of risk or protective factors and processes in children. Interventions attending to the entire range of developmental outcomes of the child (i.e. cognitive, behavioral, social, emotional, physical, and spiritual) through improvements in all environmental domains (i.e. society/culture, community/neighborhood, school, peer group, and family/extended family) naturally demonstrate increased effectiveness on positive developmental changes in youth.

Family focused programs are more effective than child focused or parent focused programs.

Family programs should be long term and enduring. Short term interventions with high risk or in crisis families are only band aids on dysfunctions of the family. Such efforts do not result in functional changes within the family that allow long term solutions rather than a temporary reduction of the external symptoms.

Sufficient dosage or intensity is critical for effectiveness. The needier the family is in terms of number of risk factors or processes, the more time is needed to modify those family dysfunctional processes.

Tailoring the parent or family intervention to the cultural traditions of the families involved improves recruitment, retention, and outcome effectiveness.

Addressing developmentally appropriate risk and protective factors or processes at specific times of family need when participants are receptive to change is important. Tailoring the intervention to specific family needs can be done on an individual family assessment basis.

Family programs are most enduring in effectiveness if they produce changes in the ongoing family dynamics, and environment (i.e. programs that encourage family meetings weekly.)

If parents are very dysfunctional, interventions beginning early in the life cycle (i.e. prenatally or early childhood) are more effective.

Components of effective parent and family programs include addressing strategies for improving family relations, communication, and parental monitoring.

High rates of recruitment and retention are possible with families if transportation, meals or snacks, and child care are provided.

Videos of families demonstrating good and poor parenting skills helps with program effectiveness and client satisfaction.

Effectiveness of a program is highly tied with the trainer's personal efficacy and characteristics demonstrated through warmth, genuineness, empathy, sensitivity, dedication, concern, flexibility, humor, credibility, and personal experiences with children.

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Websites

(As of April 11, 2002 no known articles have been documented in journals or magazines regarding the PSSF program).

Access to Respite Care and Help (ARCH) National Resource Center

<http://www. chtop.com/archfs37>.

htm

A national resource center for the dissemination of information and relevant materials to service providers, and to support them through training, technical assistance, evaluation, and research.

They provide a historical overview and factual information about the PSSF program.

Administration for Children and Families (ACF) <http://www.acf.dhhs.gov>

A federal agency that works closely with state, local, and tribal organizations to provide child welfare and other programs related to children and families. Coordinates federal child care assistance and implementation of the PSSF program through its Children's Bureau.

Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS)

http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb/publications/afcars/june_2001.htm

Collects data on a national level on children in foster care, and children who have been adopted under the auspices of the child welfare agency. Data has been used by the Children's Bureau for the development of the PSSF program, program management, and budget projections.

Casey Family Programs <http://www.casey.org/whatworks/2000/04/resources.htm>

An agency that provides an array of services for children and youth such as adoption, guardianship, family reunification, research, advocacy, and various projects. Provides publications, resources and tips for 'what works' in family preservation and reunification.

Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) <http://www.cwla.org>

The oldest and largest national non-profit organization composed of eleven hundred member agencies that develop, promote, and advocate for policies and programs to protect America's children. Presents the nation's first comprehensive, interactive child welfare database: the National Data Analysis System (NDAS) which provides a comprehensive form of child welfare statistics including child abuse and neglect, family reunification, adoption, as well as other information about the welfare system.

Children's Bureau (CB) <http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb>

Oldest federal agency for children within the United States Department of Human Services, ACF which assists states, Indian tribes, and communities to operate a wide range of children's services including the PSSF program. Services include child protection, family preservation and support, foster care, adoption, and transitions into independent living.

Family Support America

http://www.familysupportamerica.org/content/learning_dir/about_FS.htm

A nationally recognized movement to strengthen and support families through training, education, conferences, publications; and by promoting the voice of families. Provides information about and for family support programs.

Institute for Family Development http://www.institutefamily.org/about_agency.asp

A private, non-profit agency that seeks to develop innovative, community based services and supports to deal with the growing problems of child abuse, neglect, juvenile delinquency, and family conflict. Received national acclaim for its Homebuilders program, evaluated positively in many studies to break the cycle of family dysfunction by preventing foster care, residential and other forms of out-of-home placement, and for strengthening the family.

International Information Program (IIP) <http://usinfo.state.gov>

Provided by the Bureau Administration as a reference point for state department records and information access programs under the freedom of information act amendment of 1996 (E-FOIA). Displays various briefings, and transcripts cited by legislative officials regarding the PSSF program.

National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information (NCCANDS)

<http://www.calib.com/nccanch>

The nation's largest database of child maltreatment statistics. Provides summaries and allotments of the PSSF program.

National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA) <http://www.nicwa.org>

Serves hundreds of American Indian tribes throughout the country by community development, policy analysis, information exchange, and research geared to strengthen and enhance their capacities to deliver quality welfare services to Indian children. Conducts studies on the PSSF program as well as numerous other child welfare initiatives, and their impact on Indian children.

National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice

<http://www.uiowa.edu/%7Enrcfcp/new/index.html>

Provides [technical assistance](#), [staff training](#), [research](#), and [evaluation](#) on family-based programs and issues to public and private human service agencies in states, counties, and communities across the United States. Has an [extensive library of resource materials](#) for planning, training, and evaluation of family preservation and reunification programs.

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) <http://aspe.hhs.gov>

Responsible for major activities in the areas of policy research and evaluation, policy coordination, legislation development, strategic planning, economic analysis, and advising to the United States Department of Health and Human Services on policy development. Commissioned Westat, a research corporation to perform various evaluation studies of the PSSF program.

Strengthening America's Families <http://www.strengtheningfamilies.org/index.html>

Provides the results of a 1999 search for "best practice" family strengthening programs. Summaries of family-focused programs which have been proven to be effective are divided into categories based upon the degree, quality and outcomes of research associated with them.

UCLA School of Public Policy and Social Research <http://www.research.ucla.edu/chal/31.htm>

A California University division with a staff who conduct numerous research studies in social policy, public health, and the social sciences. Faculty members have conducted studies on the PSSF program.

United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) <http://www.hhs.gov>

Principal federal agency for the allocation of grants to local, state, and tribal agencies to protect the health of all Americans. Provides 23,694 links with various information regarding the PSSF

program including reviews of the participation of various states, budget allocations for different aspects of the program, and formal press releases.

Westat Inc. <http://www.westat.com>

An employee owned research corporation serving agencies of the United States government as well as businesses, foundations, state, and local governments. Conducted studies on the PSSF program:

a) A Synthesis of Research on Family Preservation and Family Reunification Programs

<http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/cyp/fplitrev.htm>

b) Evaluation of Family Preservation and Reunification Programs: Interim Report

<http://aspe.hhs.gov/search/hsp/fampres94/index.htm>