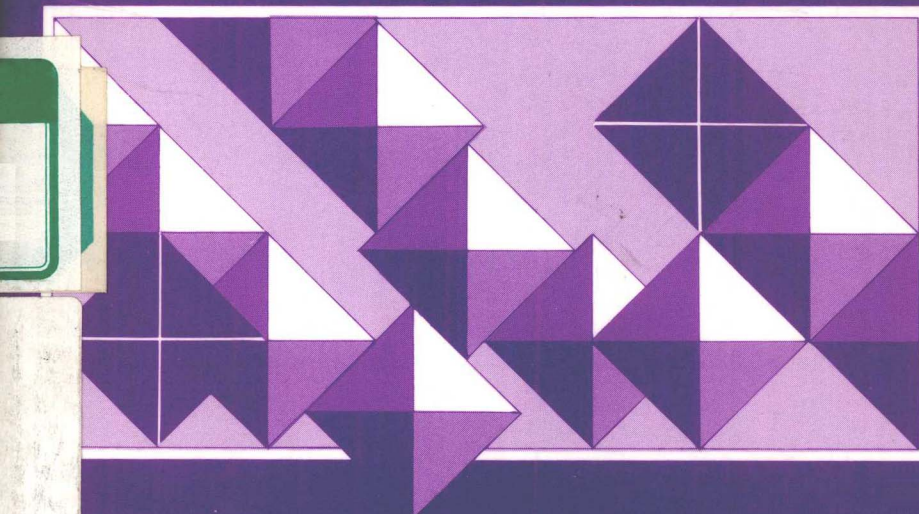


PRESERVING FAMILIES

**Evaluation Resources
for Practitioners and
Policymakers**

**Edited by
Ying-Ying T. Yuan
Michele Rivest**



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PRESERVING FAMILIES

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Foreword

CECELIA E. SUDIA

The recent development and expansion of family preservation programs is an unparalleled phenomenon. Over the past fifteen years, the number of programs has grown from a handful to several hundred, although this still falls far short of the 3,000 that would be needed to ensure that services would be available in each county in the country. The provision of home-based family-centered services to child welfare families is a novel approach and an expensive one, and it is still very far from being established as an expectation for all families at risk of having a child placed in out-of-home care or in need of specialized reunification services to assist the return home of a child already in care.

Administrators and legislators hesitate to make the needed investments of training and staff without convincing evidence that the programs are effective and cost-effective. In addition, current evaluation is frequently very limited and provides an inadequate data base from which to answer the problems asked by administrators and funding agencies. The evaluation resource that this volume represents is much needed at this critical juncture. The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation and the Center for the Support of Children are to be commended for its development, and for their felicitous choice of writers and editors.

Program managers and directors are urged to make use of this resource to document the effectiveness of their programs, using the models and techniques provided. I would particularly like to emphasize the need to develop adequate and convincing cost data. The higher costs of these services, plus the fact that the costs must be

amortized over future months, make it critical for programs to be able to provide this information in a clear and convincing manner.

In addition, it is important to provide analysis by problem category. From a family systems point of view, it does not matter whether the problem is child abuse or an out-of-control teenager—child protection agencies need assurance that the programs work for their children, and that developmentally the child is doing well when the service ends, not just that the family is still intact.

I am pleased to have had a role in the planning and review of this evaluation resource, and I am sure that its use will lead to needed development in the field of family preservation and related services.

Acknowledgments

This book originated as a project developed by the editors under the auspices of the Center for the Support of Children, Washington, D.C. We thank the Center for providing a home for this project and organizing the meeting that stimulated the discussions among the chapter authors. We especially thank Laurene McKillop, director of the Center, for her support of this project, from the very beginning when it was just an idea through the dissemination of the initial publication, titled *Evaluation Resources for Family Preservation Services*, upon which this book is based. Terri Nickel of the Center was invaluable in the preparation of the original manuscript. We are all grateful to her for her skills, humor, and patience in working with all of us. We thank Patty Durso for the preparation of the revised manuscript.

Several experts in the child welfare and mental health fields helped us in the early designing of the resource manual and in sharpening our thinking through their review of early drafts. We thank Philip AuClaire, Frank Farrow, Peter Forsythe, David Haapala, Jane Knitzer, Walter McDonald, Susan Notkin, and Cecilia Sudia for their insights and encouragement. We have learned much from each of them and acknowledge their distinct contributions to bettering the lives of children in this country.

Finally, we extend our appreciation for the support of our initial project to the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, New York. Peter Forsythe, Vice President of the Clark Foundation, stimulated our early thinking and has continued to challenge us to ask questions and seek solutions that may be useful to practitioners and policy-makers in the field and in turn may assist the children and families served by human service agencies.

Ying-Ying T. Yuan
Michele Rivest

Introduction

YING-YING T. YUAN
MICHELE RIVEST

This volume has been written primarily for evaluators and administrators who are involved in analyzing family services. An evaluator may play one or more roles, including reviewer of program accountability, provider of objective data to program managers, information gatherer for policymakers, consultant to consumers and stakeholders, and independent researcher. To assist evaluators and administrators, this book discusses the key issues in family services—with special attention to family preservation services—that policymakers consider when deciding to implement, maintain, or expand such programs. Policy issues are an inherent part of the evaluation process. Given the critical role that policymakers—from state and county agency officials to state and federal legislators—play in requiring program evaluation and establishing state and local family services programs, we present issues of concern that will assist policymakers in their decision-making roles.

We use family preservation services as our primary case example in discussing and evaluating family services throughout this volume. Family preservation services are defined as intensive in-home family-based services that are provided to prevent the removal of one or more children from a family. These services have emerged as one of the most strategic program options for child welfare,

mental health, and juvenile justice systems. The early pilot programs reported considerable success both in preventing placement and in cost savings. Consequently, these programs have attracted a great deal of interest from many sectors during the past several years.

Family preservation services have received national and state-level attention for several reasons:

- From a policy perspective, these programs have demonstrated their effectiveness in providing preplacement services and in diverting children from substitute care—core mandates of P.L. 96-272, the Child Welfare and Adoption Assistance Act of 1980.
- From a programmatic perspective, many practitioners are supporting a new service philosophy that emphasizes providing services to the family as a whole rather than focusing on the parents or the child as individuals, each served by different programs.
- From a funding perspective, public and private dollars have provided an impetus for realigning program budgets toward prevention and away from out-of-home placement.
- From a national perspective, several research and demonstration efforts have stimulated the creation of these programs by providing information and technical assistance. Throughout the country, family preservation services are being considered by both public and private providers.

Family preservation programs focus on the goal of strengthening the family's ability to care for its children and thereby prevent unnecessary out-of-home placement. These programs typically share the following set of essential characteristics:

- Services are provided to the family as the client, although specific activities may be undertaken to meet the needs of particular family members.
- Services are targeted to those families at imminent risk of having children placed out of the home.
- Services are intensive, which is achieved through low caseloads of 2-6 families per worker at any given time. In many programs,

caseworkers may provide 15-20 hours of service per week to a family.

- Services are time limited (ranging from four to six weeks to less than six months) and flexible in both location and scheduling, to meet the family's needs.
- Services include a mix of clinical, therapeutic intervention, and concrete assistance involving child care, housing, transportation, and other basic supports.

Given the newness of these programs, the range of service methodologies, and the high interest in promoting and expanding these services, evaluators are increasingly being called upon to provide both program and cost analyses of such programs. As these programs come under greater scrutiny, evaluators are playing a major role in assessing family preservation services and other family services, and are thereby participating in the development and expansion of these programs.

The basic issues presented in this volume are applicable in evaluating a variety of ongoing programs as well as demonstration programs in the human services field. Program features of importance for conducting an evaluation are discussed in depth, including program descriptions, target populations, services, client outcomes, cost analysis, and evaluation design. Together, analyses of these six features ensure a comprehensive analysis of the particular program under consideration for evaluation.

Evaluation is now commonly accepted as a critical part of demonstration services and is seen both as a measurement of effectiveness and as a means of learning more about social services delivery on the whole. Program evaluation is in a critical position to improve and reform the quality of family and child services. Seldom will evaluation be the sole determinant of public policy, but it is an important contributor and can provide a clearer assessment of the efficiency and effectiveness of service options.

This book presumes a basic knowledge of evaluation theory and practice. More specifically, it assumes that the evaluator and program administrator have decided upon the overarching goals of the

evaluation and a general approach. Each chapter raises a particular issue pertinent to the design of a comprehensive or special-focus study. We have not undertaken a how-to manual; rather, we have sought to discuss the issues that are related to describing and evaluating programs. We include a lengthy discussion of program description components because many of these components may become variables in understanding the effectiveness of different program models. By understanding a program from the perspectives of families, providers, administrators, and the general public, an evaluator can be more responsive to the many demands that may be put upon him or her. We have tried to keep our comments grounded in the basic everyday experiences of public and private agencies undertaking evaluation activities and in the needs of policymakers and other advocates for children.

Each chapter addresses a critical program issue. In Chapter 2, Leonard Feldman concentrates on issues involved in defining the target population. Clear definition of the target population and explicit, measurable screening criteria are critical to successful program evaluation. The definition of target clients is a strategic decision that affects all elements of a program's design. With the emphasis on preventing out-of-home placement as a primary goal of family preservation programs, target population issues such as what families are at risk of placement, how these assessments are made, who makes these determinations, and what type of referral and acceptance criteria are used are key questions for program evaluators.

Chapter 3, by Kristine E. Nelson, presents a detailed overview of the context of family preservation services and the service delivery structure. It offers guidance to the evaluator on describing these services on many different dimensions, including program history and context and program operations involving service model, staffing, client flow, and accountability.

In Chapter 4, Carol L. Pearson presents and discusses a service delivery taxonomy, various measurement and data collection methods, and options for analyzing service delivery strategies. This chapter assists the evaluator in distinguishing the rich variety of

services that family preservation programs provide, from clinical and therapeutic interventions, to concrete services such as child care and transportation, to case management functions.

Chapter 5, by Mark Fraser, discusses program outcomes and methods for capturing the clinical and service goals of the program. This chapter focuses on the impact of family preservation services and provides the evaluator with strategies for measuring change in children, parents, and families as a means of documenting program effectiveness. Further, out-of-home placement, which is a critical outcome measure from the standpoint of public policy, is discussed in its many different facets.

Chapter 6, by Ying-Ying T. Yuan, examines the central issues involved in analyzing service delivery costs. It includes discussion of the issues to be taken into account in comparing costs among different programs and between family preservation programs and alternative programs. There are many complex fiscal issues involved in how to finance these programs—from expanding the use of federal dollars to realigning state budgets by shifting costs from foster care to family preservation—and this chapter informs the evaluator of the intricacies involved in conducting cost analyses of these programs.

Finally, in Chapter 7, Leonard Bickman provides statistical guidelines for the construction of evaluation designs using control groups, for those evaluators who are addressing program impact. The chapter shows how researchers can increase the ability of an evaluation to detect meaningful program effects and how they can attribute these effects more clearly to the operation of the program.

Target Population Definition

LEONARD FELDMAN

Clear definition of the target population and explicit, measurable screening criteria are critical to successful program evaluation. The definition of the target clients is a strategic decision that affects the evaluator's ability (a) to determine if the program is reaching the families to which it is addressed, (b) to develop a client typology of families most likely to benefit from the program, and (c) to conduct comparisons with other service approaches. The determination of imminence of risk of placement is a key screening criterion for family preservation programs. Risk assessment should be based on a protocol that measures child, parent, and family behavior and functioning within the context of the family's environment. It is also important to set standards for exclusion of clients the program is not equipped to serve. The quality and consistency of program referrals is affected by such factors as community education, training and designation of screeners, use of protocols, and restriction of referral sources.

One of the most critical aspects of both program design and program evaluation is the definition of the target population to be served by the program and followed in an evaluation. Rossi, Freeman, and Wright (1979) define the target population as "persons, households, organizations, communities, or other identifiable units to which interventions are directed in social programs" (p. 17). To be able to test a program model in a meaningful manner, one must