



DATA TRENDS: October 2000 #14

Summaries of research on mental health services for children and adolescents and their families



A Preventive Services Program Model for Preserving and Supporting Families Over Time

Source: Hess, P. M., McGowan, B. G., & Botsko, M. (2000). A preventive services program model for preserving and supporting families over time. *Child Welfare*, 79 (3), 227-265.

The current service delivery system for families in need is based on a two-tiered approach, in which services are provided from either a 'family preservation' or a 'family support' model. In the family preservation model, high risk families receive intensive, time-limited (one to six month), and comprehensive services to prevent imminent out-of-home placement of children. Typically, families who receive these services need to meet certain criteria relating to the severity of their problems and/or the imminence of out-of-home placement.

- Similarities between Center for Family Life preventive services and traditional family preservation programs:**
1. Family Focus and Orientation
 - An emphasis on meeting the needs of all family members and viewing the family as a system.
 2. Client-Centered Relationship Between Family and Worker
 - An emphasis on a voluntary, equal, and nonjudgmental relationship with the family.
 3. Day-to-Day Staff Accessibility
 - Staff is physically and emotionally accessible 24 hours a day, with fast intakes.
 4. Flexibility to Develop Individualized Service Plans
 - Staff is flexible in theoretical frameworks, meeting times, places, and frequency, etc.

In contrast, the family support system was designed to offer ongoing support and prevention services to families who identify themselves as needing assistance, but who are not in crisis. Although all families are eligible for services, the family support focus is on prevention and is unable to meet the complex needs of higher risk families.

Not represented by these two service models are families who "are not yet at serious risk of breakdown, but whose needs and problems are too complex to be adequately addressed by family support services" (p. 228). This article provides descriptive and case study information on the preventive services program of The Center for Family Life in Brooklyn, NY, which attempts to combine the long-term, open eligibility of the family support system with the

intensive focus of the family preservation system into one comprehensive, integrated program.

In a three year study, using a variety of data sources, including standardized case data, the program's management information system, and semistructured interviews with clients, service providers, and administrators, the authors found four elements that the Center's program shares with traditional family preservation services and three elements that differentiate the program from family preservation services (see text boxes for details).

The authors conclude that the Center for Family Life's preventive services program effectively addresses the limitations of the current service system for families in need. By offering a comprehensive range of family services in a convenient location that allows families to refer themselves, the Center provides, "an opportunity for shared responsibility and success in parenting and offers the field a programmatic model for preserving and supporting families over time" (p. 260).

- Characteristics That Differentiate the Center for Family Life preventive services from traditional family preservation programs:**
1. Broadly Inclusive Access
 - Services are available to all families, regardless of the referral source or types of needs.
 2. Comprehensive, Integrated within-center Services
 - A wide array of services are located within the Center, reducing barriers for families and encouraging staff support and information coordination.
 3. Flexibility in Service Duration and Continuing Accessibility to Services over Time
 - Duration of services can be short-term, long-term, and/or episodic, based on family needs.

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Funds to support this activity come from the Child, Adolescent and Family Branch, Federal Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration