



Is Cutting IFPS in a Budget Crisis a Good Idea?

Intensive Family Preservation Services have been widely used, replicated, and studied for nearly three decades. There is general agreement that these services:

- have an excellent record of child safety and keeping families together,
- provide a wide array of services with emphasis on building skills,
- improve family functioning,
- free up social workers to work with families whose children are in out-of-home placements,
- report high levels of satisfaction from program participants, and
- are cost-effective when compared to out-of-home placement costs.

Research has indicated that IFPS programs are cost effective at placement prevention rates of 20% to 25%. Most IFPS programs nationwide have a placement prevention rate of 70% to 90%. Thus, IFPS programs are very cost effective.

Intensive family preservation services are an essential component of the child welfare system because they:

- provide for close monitoring of high-risk families while teaching skills to family members in order that they can safely stay together;
- prevent unnecessary placement, which frees up scarce foster and adoptive homes for children who do require temporary or permanent out-of-home placement;
- reduce caseloads and thus provide incentives to lower the turnover rate for social workers;
- allow social workers more time to work on permanent plans for children who cannot return home; and
- fulfill federal mandates requiring states to make reasonable efforts to preserve and reunify families.

IFPS programs provide an important safety valve for the highly pressurized child welfare system. Removing or weakening this valve can result in an explosion. States that have drastically reduced IFPS services have seen increased abuse and neglect in foster homes, failure to investigate serious abuse cases due to lack of staff time, high turnover of staff, and a sharp increase in the number of child deaths. Illinois, Maine, New York City, and Washington, D.C., all experienced these tragic consequences in their child welfare system. After instituting reforms aimed at reducing out-of-home placements, both Illinois and New York City saw a marked turnaround. In fact, saturation of IFPS in a region or state has consistently demonstrated improved management of child protective caseloads, reduction of child deaths in the system, and cost savings as witnessed in Alabama, Michigan, North Carolina, and Missouri.

Cutting IFPS in a budget crisis is not only a bad idea; it moves the system in exactly the wrong direction. IFPS funding should be increased during a budget crisis. Then, every family receiving IFPS will have close monitoring while learning a better way to handle problems. Every social worker will have one less family needing regular visits or an out-of-home placement. Every supervisor will have one less family requiring a permanency planning staffing. And every judge and legislator will know that the most intensive, cost-effective services that can keep a family together have been provided.