

Keeping Families Together

Program Evaluation Overview



KEEPING KIDS SAFE

Every child deserves to live in a safe and supportive environment.

Deeply entrenched poverty, homelessness, mental illness and substance abuse are common contributors to child neglect and abuse, child welfare involvement and family separation. Children from these families are more likely to be separated from their parents and entered into the foster care system.

Consequently, children in foster care are more likely than other children to exhibit high levels of behavioral and emotional problems including substance abuse, early pregnancy, increased high school dropout rates and incarceration.

The Keeping Families Together (KFT) pilot program was designed to answer the question: “With the right supports, can these families provide a stable, healthy environment to keep their children out of, or bring them back from child welfare services?”

A SUPPORTIVE APPROACH

With the support of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) has developed the Keeping Families Together pilot program in New York City to demonstrate the impact of supportive housing on families who are child welfare-involved.

Keeping Families Together was designed to address the needs of the most vulnerable families. The model shows real promise in preventing child welfare involvement and reuniting children with their families in a safe, stable environment.

KFT’s innovative supportive housing approach combines affordable housing with customized case management services. By leveraging the collaboration of a number of city agencies, the program helps families overcome the bureaucratic hurdles that can arise when trying to navigate these services on their own.

KFT case managers meet with each family to identify services (e.g., substance abuse treatment, medication management, parenting skills training, domestic violence services, etc.), to develop intermediate and long-term service plans. Case managers provide consultation in the KFT housing units serving as a “one-stop shop” for the most vulnerable families.

By focusing on the care of the whole family, KFT helps keep children with their families in a safer, healthier, stable home.

“I didn’t like having my kids in a shelter. I could make do by myself, but since I have kids I had to do better for them. Now I don’t worry anymore... My daughter comes first now. She is a happy child and I must be doing something right to have a great child.”



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PROMISING RESULTS

Between October 2007 and July 2009, 29 New York City families participated in the KFT pilot program.

To be eligible for KFT families had to qualify as “chronically homeless families or at serious risk of becoming chronically homeless, in which the head of the household suffers from a substance abuse disorder, a disabling medical condition or HIV/AIDS.” Chronic homelessness was defined as “a family which has lived in a homeless shelter for at least 365 days of the last two years, not necessarily consecutively.” To address the goal of preventing children from being placed in foster care, CSH planned for KFT to serve families who also had child welfare involvement (i.e., had an open ACS case).

Metis Associates conducted an evaluation of the KFT pilot between September 2009 and May 2010. The evaluation was designed to assess the extent to which KFT met its objectives.

METHODOLOGY FOR PROGRAM EVALUATION

Metis Associates is an employee-owned consulting group offering a full range of research, evaluation, program development and information technology services to educational institutions, government agencies, foundations and community-based organizations. Metis began its evaluation of the Keeping Families Together pilot program in the fall of 2009 by:

- Conducting interviews/focus groups with KFT staff, city agencies and relevant stakeholders
- Analyzing existing data from the Dept. of Education, NYC Administration of Child Services, and the NYC Department of Homeless Services
- Reviewing project documents

KEY FINDINGS INCLUDE:

Safer Kids

- More than half (61.1%) of the child welfare cases that were open at the time of the move to supportive housing were favorably resolved during the families’ involvement in KFT.
- At the time of program intake, six children from KFT families had been removed from the family by ACS. All were reunited with their parents by the conclusion of the evaluation. No children were removed from the home during the KFT pilot.
- KFT families had fewer incidences of repeat maltreatment while living in supportive housing.
- For KFT families, preventive child services cases were favorably resolved an average of 10 months after the family was housed (compared to the ACS system-wide goal of 12 months for this kind of case).

Stable Families

- By the end of the pilot period 26 of the 29 families remained in supportive housing, while comparatively the 15 control group families that met KFT eligibility, but were not placed in supportive housing typically remained in homeless shelters, with an average shelter stay ranging from 15–39 months.
- Nearly all of the families that entered with a substance abuse problem were reported to be clean and sober at the end of the evaluation period.
- The school-aged children participating in the KFT program showed steady average increases in school attendance from before move-in to after move-in.

About the Corporation for Supportive Housing

The Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) helps communities create housing with services to prevent and end homelessness. Since 1991, CSH has provided high-quality advice and development expertise, by making loans and grants to supportive housing sponsors, by strengthening the supportive housing industry, and by reforming public policy to make it easier to create and operate supportive housing. In coordination with broader national efforts to end homelessness, CSH will help communities create 150,000 units of supportive housing during the next decade.

About the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation focuses on the pressing health and health care issues facing our country. As the nation’s largest philanthropy devoted exclusively to improving the health and health care of all Americans, the Foundation works with a diverse group of organizations and individuals to identify solutions and achieve comprehensive, meaningful and timely change. For more than 35 years the Foundation has brought experience, commitment, and a rigorous, balanced approach to the problems that affect the health and health care of those it serves. When it comes to helping Americans lead healthier lives and get the care they need, the Foundation expects to make a difference in your lifetime.