

Strengthening Families Program and Family Reunification

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Based on analysis of child welfare outcomes conducted by McDonald, Brook and Yueqi (2011) at the University of Kansas, School of Social Welfare

Program Overview

- Research-based parenting program designed specifically for families who struggle with substance abuse.
- Skills based training curriculum designed by Karol L. Kumfer, Ph.D. Includes Parenting Skills, Children's Life Skills and Family Skills.
- Sessions meet once a week for fourteen weeks.
- A typical SFP class meeting begins with a family-style meal, followed by separate parent and child break-out sessions and concludes with a family session.
- Sessions are hosted by staff trained in the SFP curriculum.

Project Background

- KS child welfare services are privatized;
- SFP is being implemented statewide as part of the Kansas Serves Substance Affected Families Project (Regional Partnership Grantee);
- 5 year grant, began October 2007;
- Each area has SFP;
- 6 child welfare sites + one addiction treatment site;
- Beginning in February 2008 training conducted for all sites-through Lutra Group (developers of SFP);
- Yearly training, advanced training, fidelity support and site visits;
- Lutra group conducts the participant outcomes evaluation and fidelity evaluation;
- University of Kansas provides data uploading, analysis of child welfare outcomes, training coordination.

Criteria for Eligibility

- Family must be receiving services through child welfare contracts.
- Family must have a case plan goal of reunification.
- Family must have drug or alcohol abuse as a factor in the case.
- Family must have a child between the ages of 6 to 11 who will participate in the program on a regular basis.
- Family must commit to attend all fourteen weeks of the Strengthening Families Program.

Children's Life Skills

- Listening skills
- Effective communication
- Saying "no" to stay out of trouble
- Alcohol, tobacco, drugs and kids
- Problem solving
- Recognizing feelings
- Dealing with criticism
- Coping with anger

Parenting Topics

- Stress management
- Rewards
- Noticing and ignoring
- Effective communication
- Alcohol, tobacco, drugs and families
- Solving problems and giving direction
- Setting appropriate limits
- Building and using behavior programs
- Getting and keeping good behavior

Implementing SFP: Practicalities and Lessons Learned

"This program has really helped our family. The girls and I have learned a lot and will really miss our Tuesday night classes!

Thank you for all you have done for us."

Mother of two girls - completed program

"I learned a lot from this class. Not just how to deal with (*participating child's*) behaviors, but also how to work with my younger children. Thank you for everything."

Mother of three - completed program

Evaluation of SFP and Family Reunification in Kansas

Data Information:

- Data are from the time period February 2008 through September 2010;
- December 15 Federal upload;
- 214 SFP participants and 423 matched non participants to serve as a comparison group

The Comparison Group Construction...

- The comparison group consists of matched families with children in out of home care, removal reasons included parental substance abuse, reunification was a goal, not SFP participants;
- All who were reunified prior to the start date for the RPG program were excluded;
- Those who were discharged due to emancipation were excluded;
- Consistent with SFP children, only those who were removed later than January 1, 2002 and were younger than 15 at removal and younger than 17 on April 22, 2010 were included;
- Resulted in a pool of 9,340 children for matching

Used Propensity Score Nearest Neighbor Matching Procedure:

- Time in placement
- Child's DOB
- Child's gender
- Race & ethnicity: Caucasian, African American, Hispanic
- Conducted in each SRS region
- Excluded any that reunified prior to SFP start date
- 2 cases dropped

After Several Iterations of Matching....

- Bivariate analyses examined group differences on the covariates;
- No significant differences between SFP treatment and matched comparison group on any of the above mentioned covariates.

Data Analyses

- Survival Analysis was used;
- In this study, time was measured from two points:
 - Time from removal to reunification
 - Time from SFP start to reunification
- For censored cases, that is—those NOT reunified, time is measured as the time period the case is observed through the last day of observation (in this case, 9/30/10—our cutoff date for the upload).

Findings

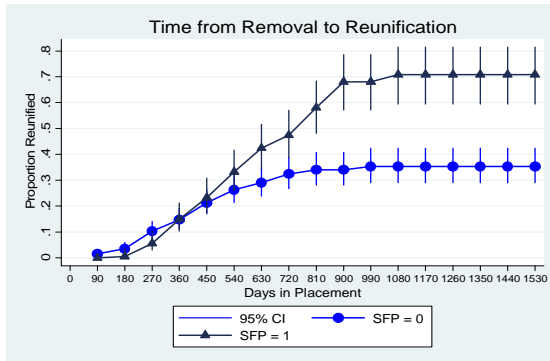
From Removal to Reunification:

*Time-in-Placement for SFP and Non-SFP Group –
Percent Reunified Days from Removal to Reunification*

Group	N	90 days	180 days	360 days	540 days	720 days	900 days
SFP	214	0%	1%	15%	33%	47%	71%
Non-SFP	423	2%	4%	15%	26%	32%	35%

Note. Log-rank test for equality of survivor functions: $\chi^2 (1) = 10.21, P = 0.0014$

Another way of viewing findings:



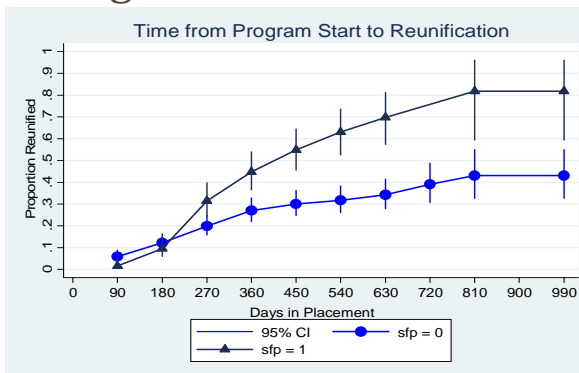
From SFP Start to Reunification:

Time-in-Placement from Program start for SFP and Non-SFP Group – Percent Reunified Days from Treatment Start to Reunification

Group	N	90 days	180 days	360 days	540 days	720 days	810 days
SFP	214	2%	10%	45%	63%	69%	82%
Non-SFP	423	6%	12%	27%	32%	39%	43%

Note. Log-rank test for equality of survivor functions: $\chi^2(1) = 17.00, P < 0.001$

Another way of viewing findings:



Discussion

- Participation in SFP led to higher rates of reunification;
- Parenting skills, child skills, family bonding, and attachment are emphasized in the intervention;
- There is existing evidence that substance abuse leads to reduced parental capacity, reduced availability to supervise children, reduced impulse control and emotion management for parents, reduced ability to understand child development and emotional queuing of children, and exacerbation of behavioral problems among children—SFP addresses these factors.

- Just as we do not fully understand how substance abuse leads to child abuse and neglect; we also do not understand how service delivery strategies impact the likelihood of reunification or future maltreatment risk;
- In an earlier work, Brook and McDonald found that more intensive services did not automatically lead to better outcomes;
- We will be examining re-entry in the future

From the Field: Benefits of the Program

- Parents who complete SFP experience better parenting skills, better marital communication, less negative acting-out by children, less family conflict and less stress, depression and substance abuse.
- Children who participate in SFP experience better social skills, better cooperation, better school performance, less depression, misconduct and aggression, and less tobacco, alcohol and drug abuse.
- Families who participate in SFP experience better family cohesion and improved family planning/organization.

Limitations:

- Random assignment more desirable;
- There was a significant time in out of home placement for many families prior to the start of the intervention;
- Cannot rule out that SFP was implemented in some way that was influenced by selection bias;
- SFP was a stated reason for removal for the comparison pool—but did not have to be for the participants;
- Ideally, SFP will be tested in multiple child welfare settings and through randomized trials in child welfare.