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AN EXAMINATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS' KNOWLEDGE OF  
FAMILY PRESERVATION SERVICES IN CHILD WELFARE

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A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Social Work

---

by  
Kathryn Irene Turnbull

June 2004

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June 2004

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## ABSTRACT

Family Preservation Service (FPS) is a program designed to allow children, whose families come to the attention of children's services, to remain safely in their own homes. This study explored the San Bernardino County Department of Children's Services (DCS) social workers' knowledge of FPS.

The DCS social workers that agreed to participate were asked to complete a 20-question survey. The information gathered in the survey was intended to answer the following questions: (1) how knowledgeable are DCS social workers about FPS? (2) How was their knowledge obtained? (3) Is there any relationship between the dependent variable, knowledge, and the independent variables: number of years on the job, job title, and source of knowledge?

Although there was no statistical evidence of a relationship between the variables, it appeared that the social worker's that were surveyed had less than adequate knowledge of Family Preservation Services and that the knowledge they did have was obtained primarily through word-of-mouth. The results of the study may be beneficial to the Department as they plan their implementation strategy for this and other programs in the future.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Problem Statement

Studies have shown that out-of-home placement for children who come to the attention of the Department of Children's Services has the potential to do more harm than good. Separating children from their families, even temporarily, can have devastating and long lasting negative effects (Littell, 2001).

Multiple moves from placement to placement, constantly changing schools, and the lack of opportunity to make and maintain attachments may cause emotional difficulties that result in social withdrawal or anti-social behavior. Once a child begins to exhibit acting-out behaviors of any kind, he/she is no longer suitable for a foster home. The child is then warehoused in a group-home until he/she either emancipates out of the program, or goes to juvenile hall or jail.

Contrary to popular belief, most children do not enter out-of-home care as result of abuse, but rather neglect as a consequence of family poverty. As the number of families living in poverty increases, the number of children living in foster care rises. From 1972 to 1992,



the number of children below the age of six living in poverty nearly doubled from 3.4 million to 6 million. During that same period of time, the children in out-of-home placements increased from 250,000 to 500,000 (Gottesman, 2001).

The mission of the San Bernardino County Department of Children's Services is to protect endangered children and to preserve and strengthen their families. Services, as mandated by law and regulation, are to be provided in the least intrusive manner, with a family-centered focus whenever possible.

San Bernardino County DCS is a member of the Children's Policy Council Agency also known as the Children's Network. "The Children's Network concerns itself with 'children at risk' defined as minors who, because of behavior, abuse, neglect, medical needs, educational assessment, or detrimental daily living situations, are eligible for services from one or more of member agencies" (Children's Network 2002-2003 Annual Report).

The Network has established several councils in an attempt to improve outcomes for at-risk children and their families. The Family Preservation Council is a multidisciplinary team established by the Network that

meets monthly, or more often as needed in every region of the County. The Council's goal is to prevent child abuse and neglect on an individual case-by-case basis, through the creation of inter-agency service plans, mobilizing community based resources to support the child and family and to eliminate the need for out of home placement (Children's Network 2002-2003 Annual Report). In other words, they are the advisory council that links the family with Family Preservation Services.

Family Preservation Services (FPS) are intended to provide intensive in-home services as an alternative to out-of-home placement in order to avoid the trauma that children experience by being separated from their families and home.

Ideally, FPS staff will intervene with the family as soon as they come to the attention of DCS. At the initial contact, FPS staff will examine the reasons that placed the family at risk of having their children removed. They will then develop an intervention based on the individual families needs. They provide support, counseling, hard goods, and referrals. They are available 24 hours a day. FPS is designed to remove the problems from the family rather than removing the children.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine how knowledgeable the San Bernardino County Department of Children's Services (DCS) social workers were about Family Preservation Services and how their knowledge was obtained. The goal of previous studies on Family Preservation Services has been to determine if that intervention works to alleviate out-of-home placements.

The results of the previous studies provided data, such as demographics and the characteristics of the families served by the program. In this study, however, the emphasis was on the social workers' knowledge of the program rather than on measurable program outcomes.

The Family Preservation Council was introduced to DCS social workers through a flyer in their mailboxes in August 2002. To date, there has been no formal training and there does not appear to be much utilization of the service. Determining the reason for the lack of utilization of this resource would be beneficial to the department. If it is determined to be due to lack of marketing (training, etc.), then a more active informational program may need to be implemented.

## Significance of the Project for Social Work

Family Preservation Services have the potential to reduce the number of children in out-of-home placement and reduce the staggering costs of foster care by shifting the resources from out-of-home placement to in-home intensive services. This project is significant to generalist social work practice in that it was designed to assess San Bernardino County Department of Children's Services social workers' knowledge of Family Preservation Services.

According to Kirst-Ashman and Hull (2002), "The generalist approach means that virtually any problem may be analyzed and addressed from multiple levels of intervention." In the field of social work, that involves micro, mezzo, and macro systems. Micro systems are individuals, mezzo systems are small group or families, and the macro systems include organizations and communities.

This study examined the planning phase of the generalist intervention process. The planning phase is intended to decide what to do about a problem. We know that out-of-home care is often problematic. What we do not know is if all feasible alternatives are considered.

The goal of FPS on the micro level is to provide a better life for the child. A number of studies conducted

on graduates of the foster care system conclude that their future is bleak. They often grow up poorly educated, in poverty, suffering from drug and alcohol abuse, or in trouble with the law.

On the mezzo level, Family Preservation Service as an intervention has the potential to help families gain the education and skills that they need for effective parenting. Most families that come to the attention of the Department of Children's Services are angry, confused, defensive, and unwilling to cooperate with social workers or to participate in service plans.

Unique to FPS is the inclusion of the family in establishing a set of relevant, agreed-upon goals from the beginning. Families who are actively engaged in the process are expected to have more positive outcomes than those who are less willing or able to participate (Fraser & Nelson, 1997).

On the macro level, although the upfront time and cash expenditure of FPS is greater than out-of-home placement for the first four to six weeks, the program is intended to save money in the long run. A 1990 evaluation of the initial three family preservation projects in California concluded that, "After only the first pilot year of the projects, the projects resulted in savings of

more than \$1 million in direct costs of placing children out of their homes" (Shapell, 1992).

Family Preservation Service, if properly implemented, may have the potential to reduce the number of out-of-home placements and thereby minimize the trauma to children whose families come to the attention of the Department of Children's Services.

#### Relevance to Child Welfare Practice

Only a small percentage of children that are removed from their homes are physically or sexually abused. The rest are generally removed for reasons of neglect stemming from either drug abuse by parents, lack of parenting-skills, or extreme poverty. Ascertaining and addressing the cause of that neglect would be a far more productive method of improving the lives of the children than removing them from their parents.

Gershenson, (1992), former chief of research and evaluation of the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is quoted as saying:

Research over the past 40 years says that if you remove the child from home, you traumatize the child more than he is already hurt. You inflict subsequent injury, especially on a young child who can't understand why he's been removed from his family. They feel they did something bad, and that it is their fault, or they view it as a kidnapping.

Even though FPS is available through the Family Preservation Council in San Bernardino County, it is not clear if it has been implemented to its fullest potential. This study is significant, therefore, in that the information gathered pertaining to social worker's knowledge of FPS may be helpful to the Department as they plan their implementation strategy for this as well as other programs designed to allow children to remain safely in their own homes.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

This literature review discusses the history of Family Preservation Services, conflicting findings from previous studies, and the theories guiding the conceptualization of this study.

#### Historical Perspective

Modern child welfare service, where family preservation was first developed, has its roots in the efforts of the charitable organization in the 19th century to rescue children from abandonment, abuse, neglect and poverty. During that era, placement in foster family homes and institutions was seen as necessary to protect children from the harsh conditions associated with urban industrial growth, including the perceived drunkenness, pauperism and promiscuity of immigrant parents (Costin, Karger, & Stoesz, 1996).

In reaction to the specter of children being raised in institutions, shipped en mass to foster farm families in the Midwest, or sent to jails where they shared cells with adult offenders, the notion of providing services to



strengthen families and thereby reduce the need for placement arose at the turn of the century.

In 1899, the first juvenile court was established in Chicago to regulate the treatment and control of dependent children. Social work, which emerged as a profession during this period, has long been concerned with services for children and families.

In 1909 President Theodore Roosevelt sponsored a conference on the welfare of children that laid the groundwork for many basic reforms. The first White House Conference on Children declared that no child should be deprived of family life for reasons of poverty alone. Roosevelt established the United States Children's Bureau that brought the Federal Government into the field of child welfare for the first time and established a public agency that reflected a new philosophy.

The new philosophy emphasized the placement of children with families rather than in institutions. It also placed added attention on reforming parents so that children could someday be returned to them. However, conflicting goals of family privacy and lack of infrastructure continued to hamper the development of a true foundation for child abuse intervention until 1974.

when the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) was signed into law (Costin, Karger, & Stoesz, 1996).

CAPTA established the National Center for Child Abuse and Neglect within the Department of Health and Human Services and provided a model for state child protection programs. In 1980 the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act was signed into law. The aims of these laws were to prevent the removal of children from their biological homes if at all possible. However, due to an absence of supportive services for families, placement in foster care remained the first choice for abused or neglected children (Costin, Karger, & Stoesz, 1996).

In the mid 1980's, the public child welfare system began experiencing an increase in child abuse reports and placements. By 1992, 2.9 million incidents of child abuse had been reported. This reflected a 100% increase since the 1980's (Danzon, 1997). Concurrently, more families than ever were living in poverty, earning power was diminished, and low-income housing was limited or unavailable. Twenty percent of the children in the United States were living in poverty and crack cocaine use was reaching epidemic levels (Berry, Cash, & Brooks, 2000).

While AIDS and violence were contributing factors to the increase in out-of-home placements, substance abuse,

often as a condition of poverty, was the most influential factor. The emergence of crack cocaine caused substance abuse to become a much more dominant factor. Crack, a smokeable drug, was cheap, highly addictive, and caused severe mood swings. It became the favored drug for many females. Since the primary parent in many single parent households was the mother, the increased drug involvement led to an increase in the number of children at risk of abuse and neglect (Danzon, 1997).

By the end of 1992, the number of foster care placements in the United States was over 500,000. In an effort to slow down the rise in foster care placements, the Family Preservation and Support Initiative (FPSI) was enacted in 1993. FPSI established a \$30 million dollar entitlement to be allocated for family preservation.

This initiative offered states a unique opportunity to reform their child welfare systems. The United States Department of Health and Human Services issued guidelines suggesting that states use the new act as a catalyst for establishing an integrated continuum of services that would be coordinated, family focused, and culturally relevant (Danzon, 1997).

Family Preservation Service has the potential to reduce unnecessary placement, multiple moves, and the

length of time that children spend living apart from their birth families. It holds out hope that families afflicted by stress, poverty, and drugs might be able, with intensive round-the-clock services and support, to return to an adequate level of functioning that will allow them to stay together safely (Wells, 1996).

Inherent in Family Preservation throughout the years has been the belief that children need permanent families, preferably their own. If it is possible, child welfare systems should help children remain with their birth families. Family Preservation has always appealed to both decision makers and practitioners. Organizing services around family's strengths and needs, in their own home, with sufficient intensity to protect children, are ideas that make sense in both theory and practice.

#### Conflicting Findings on Family Preservation Efficacy

Most of the research on Family Preservation to date has focused on program evaluation and outcomes and the studies have resulted in mixed findings. However, that the studies have resulted in mixed findings does not imply that the concept of Family Preservation Service is not sound. What the findings do imply is that many of the

programs that have been implemented across the United States lack structure and well-defined parameters.

A 1996 study of intensive Family Preservation Service programs conducted by Heneghan, Horwitz, and Leventhal concluded that even though FPS was widespread across the United States, accurate program outcomes were methodologically difficult to ascertain because the programs followed no set guidelines.

Rates of out-of-home placements were the same among families who received FPS and those families that did not in the ten programs evaluated in their study. All of the families in these studies were supposedly at imminent risk of having their children removed.

If at 'imminent risk' was defined the same way for the children that did not receive FPS as those that did, and 'at imminent risk' of harm meant that remaining in their home was not in their best interest, then it would be assumed that most if not all of the children in the comparison group would have to be removed.

What the researchers found was that only 16-18% of the children in the comparisons groups were removed and that the same standard of 'imminent risk' did not apply. The children that received the FPS were children who were more likely to be removed without the service than the

children in the comparison group. That is what accounted for the nearly equal number of out-of-home placements in both groups, and what then appeared to be the poor outcome success rate of the programs.

According to Bath and Haapala (1994), "At imminent risk, are those families whose circumstances or problems, if not quickly addressed, will likely lead to an out-of-home placement." In a California study, the potential study population was reduced from 152 to 30 cases when this definition of imminent risk was applied. Conversely, some of the children who came to the attention of child welfare agencies and who were offered FPS, were not necessarily at risk for removal and should not therefore, have been counted as program successes (1994).

Blythe and Salley (1994) compared the outcomes of 12 studies on FPS. All of the programs studied had children who were supposedly at imminent risk of removal. Their findings were similar to Bath and Haapala. The comparison groups had nearly equal numbers of removals as the treatment group. When they compared agencies definitions of 'at imminent risk', they found that 87% of the families did not meet the programs stated definition and were not, therefore, at imminent risk.

Another conclusion from that study was that poor outcomes could be due to the extent to which the intervention was fully operationalized and reliably implemented. There was considerable variation in the service models noted by the researchers. Few studies described the training of the staff at all. In one study, where the training was clearly described, staff received only two to three days of training.

The researchers also noted that treatment integrity was compromised by the fact that the studies were evaluating new programs that may have been changing their intervention methods as they developed.

Thieman and Dail noted a related problem with implementation in their 1992 study. Although the results indicated a modest increase in family functioning as a result of FPS, a study of the first six states to incorporate FPS in their case plans, (California, Florida, Iowa, Maryland, New Jersey, and Washington) revealed that the characteristics of the families served and the nature of the problems they faced varied widely. Yet the interventions were quite similar in intensity and duration instead of being designed with the families unique needs in mind.

The researchers concluded that in order to obtain more accurate assessments of family functioning after the intervention of FPS, the initial assessment should include a more thorough measurement of the families' functioning and that should include the view of the family members themselves.

Chaffin, Bonner, and Hill conducted a study from 1996-1999 of Family Preservation and Family Support Programs. The researchers were impressed with the program's implementation and state, "On the whole, we found the programs to be well organized and implemented" (2001). However, findings regarding the overall success of the program at meeting their goal of reducing future abuse and neglect were discouraging.

The researchers, in their study, hoped to find out the reason for the poor outcomes, since it was not a problem with implementation, as other researchers had discovered.

As they examined them more closely they found that the programs did do what they said they were going to do, which was to provide social support, childhood health screening and child development knowledge. But where they fell short was at assessing for the things that put families at risk for child abuse and neglect such as



substance abuse, domestic violence, poverty and depression.

They concluded by saying, "It is our hope that this initial round of Family Preservation implementation studies, even if not entirely consistent with the hoped for results, will serve to point the field in more scientifically sound directions."

All of the above studies point to the fact that FPS programs vary greatly. They differ in population served, risk assessment, intervention method, intensity, and length of service provided. It is not clear from the above research that high quality and consistent Family Preservation Service was provided. But what is clear is that the researchers agree that Family Preservation Services has the potential to help many families avoid unnecessary out-of-home placement of children if properly implemented and that additional and more rigorous research is needed to fine-tune the programs.

Almost all of the research done so far on FPS has focused on outcomes. And almost all of the outcome studies reviewed site failure in the implementation process. What has not been studied previously is 1) how knowledgeable workers are about the program and 2) how their knowledge

was obtained. This study is intended to focus on that aspect of Family Preservation Services.

### Theories Guiding Conceptualization

The theories that motivated this study come from both the macro and micro field of social work. The study design is based on the macro concepts of organizational change and strategic planning. The philosophy of Family Preservation Services is based on the micro social work concepts of the strengths perspective and the multi-systemic model of case management.

The workplace underwent two major changes in the second half of the twentieth century. The industrial revolution produced the bureaucratic system that reigned from the 50's to the 80's. In a bureaucracy those at the top of the hierarchy of authority makes all of the decisions. The first big organizational change came in the 80's with the introduction of the 'high-performance' workplace. All workers were made members of teams and were responsible for many activities including making improvements to the workplace.

The next shift, currently underway is the 'virtual workplace' where the focus is on the environment and the customer. Products are co-designed by the customer and are

custom-manufactured based on specific needs and desire (Wheeler, 2000).

Just as openness to change and adaptation is important in organizational theories, it is also the key to working with families. Until recently DCS work tended to focus on the families problems and sought ways to 'fix' them. Alternatively, FPS focuses on positive human and community development. Punitive actions are rejected in favor of addressing root causes and building on existing assets.

The social sector has adopted operational structures from the corporate world for many years. Family Preservation Services are a product of the 'virtual workplace'. The customer, in this case the family, is included in the decisions being made on their behalf.

This paradigm shift for DCS is not without challenges. It means teaching new practices to social workers from the administrative level to the line-workers. A tremendous re-learning at all levels is required. This can be accomplished through strategic planning. Strategic planning is defined by Birnbaum, CMC (2000) as:

The process by which the guiding members of an organization envision its future and develop the necessary procedures and operations to achieve that future. The strategic plan sets the stage

for creating the marketing and the financial plan.

Organizations employ strategic planning as a way to move toward their desired future states. It is the process of developing and implementing plans to reach goals and objectives. Strategic planning, more than anything else, is what gives direction to an organization. The sociological approach of strategic planning deals primarily with human interactions and consists of the following eight steps: 1) Deciding to plan, 2) dedicating resources, 3) situation analysis, 4) mission statement, 5) objective setting, 6) developing strategy, 7) implementing strategy, and 8) measuring results.

The majority of the time spent on the strategic planning process is devoted to the implementation of the plan and that stage needs to be monitored closely. Short-term feedback should be gathered frequently to discover if the plan is being implemented according to the initial intention.

There are many reasons why strategic plans fail. Most of which happen, however, during the implementation phase: failure to develop new employee and management skills, failure to coordinate, failure to obtain senior management commitment, failure to get management involved right from

the start, and failure to obtain employee commitment (Birnbaum, 2000).

This study has been designed to explore the implementation process of family preservation services in San Bernardino County DCS and is intended to provide useful data to assist with the strategic planning process.

The more narrow, yet equally important, theories guiding this study come from the micro social work field. First, the strengths perspective, which arises from the profession of social work's commitment to social justice, the dignity of every human being, and building on people's strengths and capacities rather than focusing exclusively on their deficits and problems.

It suggests that the family has uncovered strengths, which once tapped into, may permit them to remain intact. The goal of FPS is to empower parents with skills and resources to independently address their problems and realize their strengths.

The second theory, multi-systemic case management, views individuals as being involved in a complex network of interconnected systems that encompass them and their families.

It incorporates intensive family and community-based treatment to address the multiple determinants of the

behavior that brought the family to the attention of the Department of Children's Service.

### Summary

Chapter Two included a thorough account of the history of FPS, a summary of the conflicting studies done on the impact of family preservation programs, and the theories guiding this study.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### Introduction

Chapter Three documents the steps used in carrying out the project. Specifically, this section will describe 1) the research methods that were used to explore San Bernardino County Department of Children's Services social workers' knowledge of Family Preservation Services and how their knowledge was obtained and 2) how the data was gathered and analyzed.

#### Study Design

The purpose of the study was to determine how knowledgeable DCS social workers were about FPS, how that knowledge was obtained, and if that knowledge differed by source of information, position in the agency, or years of practice. A cross-sectional survey design, which is a study based on observation at a single point in time, was utilized to conduct this study. This type of study is the one most often used to assess people's opinions or preferences in relation to a current program or proposals for future programs (Annenberg, 2003).

## Sampling

A convenience sample of 39 DCS social workers in San Bernardino County participated in the study. In order to obtain the sample, the researcher sent e-mail to all of the Supervising Social Service Practitioners at the San Bernardino E Street and Gifford offices requesting permission to attend their monthly unit meeting to distribute the surveys. Nine supervisors responded to the e-mail. Arrangements were made for the researcher to be present at the meetings, briefly describe the study, and distribute the surveys.

## Data Collection and Instruments

Due to a lack of research in this area of Family Preservation Services, an instrument was created specifically for this study. This was done under the supervision of the researcher's advisor.

The instrument used in this study consisted of three parts: The informed consent (see Appendix B), the questionnaire made up of two sections 1) demographics and 2) a "knowledge test" (see Appendix A), and the debriefing statement (see Appendix C). The entire questionnaire took social workers from 10 to 15 minutes to complete.



The workers were first asked to read the informed consent that described the nature of the study and listed foreseeable risks and benefits to participating. Participants were asked to consent by placing a mark on the line and they were told not to put their name anywhere on the survey.

Once they had given consent, they were asked to complete a questionnaire consisting of a total of 20 questions. The questionnaire began with five demographic questions: number of years on the job, age, level of education, gender, and current position with DCS (carrier, intake worker or other).

There were 13 questions on the survey designed to measure the social workers knowledge of Family Preservation Services. The questions were designed using information obtained from guidelines established for the FPS program and did have objectively correct answers. They could be answered, true, false or don't know.

In order to determine how social workers obtained their knowledge of FPS, the participants were asked to select their knowledge source from among the following: Flyer, training, supervisor, word of mouth, or other. Finally, they were asked to respond yes or no to whether or not they would like more information about FPS.

The survey was pilot-tested on students and colleagues. It was assessed for grammar, spelling and clarity. Suggestions for improvement were incorporated.

There were limitations associated with using this self-constructed survey because there was no previous information on its validity or reliability.

### Procedures

The researcher received permission from the Director of San Bernardino County's Department of Children's Services to survey social workers at their unit staff meeting. At the meeting, the researcher introduced herself as a Masters of Social Work student from the University of California, San Bernardino. The researcher further explained that the study they were being asked to participate in was for the thesis portion of the graduation requirement. The survey instrument was briefly described.

The participants were asked not to discuss the survey with one another. They were instructed to put their completed surveys in an envelope. The envelopes were collected by the supervisors and returned to the researcher after the unit meetings.

## Protection of Human Subjects

Participants were informed of potential risks and benefits in the informed consent statement. They were assured that their willingness to participate in the survey would not affect their job in any way. They were asked to consent to participate by simply placing a check mark in the designated space. They were told not to put their name anywhere on the survey.

After completing the survey, the participants were asked to read and keep the debriefing statement. That statement reiterated the purpose of the study and furnished the participants with names and phone numbers of persons to contact should they have concerns or questions. The study was approved by the Department of Social Work Sub-Committee of the CSUSB Institutional Review Board.

## Data Analysis

The study was exploratory in nature and utilized quantitative data analysis. The questions explored in this study were: How knowledgeable are DCS social workers about Family Preservation Services and does that knowledge differ by source of information, position in the agency, or years of practice? The survey, Appendix A, was designed to determine that.

Questions one through five on the survey were the demographics of the population: gender, age, highest level of education, number of years on the job and current position with the Department of Children's Services. Question six through eight-teen were the 'knowledge test', question 19 was designed to indicate how knowledge was obtained and question 20 asked if the participants would like more information on FPS.

The analysis of the data yielded univariate and multivariate statistics. Univariate analysis was used to calculate the knowledge scores, and multivariate analysis (ANOVA) was used to examine the relationship between the dependent variable 'knowledge score', and the independent variables: source of information, years on the job, and job title.

### Summary

This chapter described the steps that the researcher used to develop the project. Included are: 1) the research method, 2) the population from which the sample was drawn, 3) how the data was collected, 4) how the data was analyzed.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

Chapter Four covers the demographic characteristics of the sample, scores on each individual knowledge question, overall knowledge scores, and the results of comparing the means on the overall knowledge score by the selected independent variables: source, type of job, and years on the job. The Chapter concludes with a summary.

#### Presentation of the Findings

##### Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The sample consisted of 39 out of a possible 134 DCS social workers from San Bernardino County working in the city of San Bernardino. Only nine (23%) of the 39 respondents were male. The age range of the sample was 26 to 60 years and the mean age of the respondents was 40.

The number of years that the respondents were employed by DCS ranged from 1 to 16 years with a mean of 4.5 years. The majority of social workers surveyed (56%) indicated that they have worked for DCS from 1-3 years. About one fifth of them (N = 8) were employed from 4-6

years; a few (N = 6) worked 7-9 years; and fewer still (N = 3) have worked from 10-16 years.

Of the 39 respondents, 13 (33%) had a Bachelor of Arts or Science degree and 26 (66%) had a Master of Arts or a Master of Social Work degree.

Over one half of the social workers surveyed (61.5%) marked carrier/case manager as their job title. One-fifth of the workers (20.5%) marked intake worker. And an almost equal number marked 'both' or 'other' (7.7 & 10.3% respectively).

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics

	NUMBER	PERCENT
GENDER		
Male	9	23.1
Female	30	76.9
TOTAL	39	100
AGE		
20-30 Years	7	18
31-40	14	36
41-50	13	33
51-60	5	13
TOTAL	39	100
YEARS EMPLOYED BY DCS		
1-3 Years	22	56
4-6	8	21
7-9	6	15
10-16	3	8
TOTAL	39	100
EDUCATION		
Bachelor of Arts/Science	13	33.3
Master of Arts/Social Work	26	66.7
TOTAL	39	100
JOB TITLE		
Carrier/Case Manager	24	61.5
Intake Worker	8	20.5
Both	3	7.7
Other	4	10.3
TOTAL	39	100

### Knowledge Scores on Individual Questions

There were 13 questions designed to test the respondent's knowledge of Family Preservation Services. Table 2 shows the number and percent of respondents who answered each question correctly arranged from the question with the highest percentage correct to the question with lowest percentage correct. The number of

correct answers ranged from 3 to 13 with the average number of correct answers being 9.46.

An analysis of the scores on the knowledge test shows that the respondents had more knowledge about the general concept of Family Preservation and less knowledge about the technical aspects. For instance, 95% of the respondents knew that the purpose of Family Preservation Services is to provide intervention services to at-risk children and families and only 56% knew that Family Preservation Services are intensive and brief.

Assuming that an adequate score on the knowledge test is 75% or better, most respondents have only a limited amount of knowledge regarding Family Preservation Services. Based on the figures in Table 2, for only four of the 13 questions did the sample reach the 75% correct mark.



Table 2. Knowledge Scores on Individual Questions

QUESTION	NUMBER CORRECT	PERCENT CORRECT
The purpose of FPS is to provide intervention services to at-risk children and families.	37	95
FPS encourages the participation of the parents.	36	92
FPS has the potential to reduce the number of out-of-home placements	33	85
FPS provides support, counseling, hard goods & referrals	30	77
FPS is the same as the Family Maintenance plan.	29	74
FPS is available only after the children have been removed from their homes.	29	74
FPS is not concerned with the reasons that place families at risk of having their children removed.	29	74
FPS is recommended for all families that come to the attention of DCS.	28	72
FPS is a resource currently available to DCS social workers.	28	72
FPS is a viable alternative to out-of-home care.	27	69
FPS services are intensive and brief	22	56
FPS case managers carry large case-loads.	21	54
FPS is a long-term program.	20	51

#### Source of Knowledge

There were five possible choices for how knowledge about Family Preservation was obtained: 1) flyer, 2) training, 3) supervisor, 4) word of mouth, and 5) other. Table 3 shows the number and percentage of respondents who claimed to have obtained their knowledge from each of the five choices.

Nearly one third of the 37 social workers that answered that question indicated that 'word of mouth' was

their primary source of information. The next two choices, 'training' and 'other' had similar responses with 25.6%, 23.1% respectively. Less common sources of information were 'flyer' and 'supervisor' each with 5.1%.

Table 3. Source of Knowledge

SOURCE	NUMBER	PERCENT
WORD OF MOUTH	14	35.9
TRAINING	10	25.6
OTHER	9	23.1
FLYER	2	5.1
SUPERVISOR	2	5.1
TOTAL	37	

#### Knowledge Scores by Selected Independent Variables

Table 4 compares the mean number of correct answers on the knowledge test to the independent variables: source of knowledge, type of job, and years on the job.

The social workers that found out about Family Preservation Service from flyers had the most correct answers with a mean score of 12.5 (96%). The second highest knowledge scores came from those who listed 'training' as their source of knowledge with a mean of 10.7 (82%) correct answers. 'Other' and 'word of mouth' had somewhat lower mean scores of 9.66 (74%) and 9.28 (71%). The social workers that marked 'supervisor' as their source of information got the lowest scores with an average of 8.5 (65%) correct answers.

Based on those findings, and once again assuming a score of 75% or better to be adequate, flyer and training were the only two sources of information that produced adequate scores.

Table 4. Overall Knowledge Scores and by Selected Independent Variables

	MEAN	PERCENT
OVERALL KNOWLEDGE SCORE	9.46	73
BY SOURCE:		
Flyer	12.5	96
Training	10.7	82
Other	9.66	74
Word of Mouth	9.28	71
Supervisor	8.5	65
BY TYPE OF JOB:		
Other	11.5	88
Intake	10.12	78
Both	9.00	69
Carrier	8.95	69
BY YEARS ON JOB:		
10-16	11.33	87
7-9	10.66	82
4-6	9.33	72
1-3	8.45	65

A One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to evaluate the relationship between the source of knowledge and the knowledge scores. The independent variable, source of knowledge, included five categories: flyer, training, supervisor, word of mouth, and other. The dependent variable was the knowledge score. The ANOVA was

not significant,  $F = 1.098$ ,  $p = .375$ . Therefore, although there was 31% difference between scores based on source of information, the null hypothesis that the mean knowledge score is not affected by the source of the knowledge was retained.

Regarding type of job, those social workers that marked 'other' or 'intake' as their type of job were the only ones with adequate scores (75% or better) on the knowledge test. 'Other' had the most correct answers with a mean of 11.5 (88%) correct. Intake workers got an average of 10 (78%) questions correct. Those who perform both intake and case management got an average of 9 (69%) correct answers. And carrier/case managers got an average of 8.95 (69%) correct.

ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the relationship between the knowledge score and the respondent's job title. The independent variable, job title, includes four categories: carrier/case manager, intake worker, both, and other. The dependent variable was the knowledge score. The ANOVA was not significant  $F = .878$ ,  $p = .462$ . Therefore, although there was a 19% difference between scores based on type of job, the null hypothesis that job title has no affect on knowledge scores was retained.

Social workers with more years on the job had higher scores on the knowledge test. Based on the findings, only workers with seven or more years of experience with DCS had adequate (75% or better) scores. Social workers with ten to sixteen years on the job had a mean score of 11.33 (87%) correct answers. Social workers with seven to nine years on the job had mean score of 10.66 (82%). Social workers with four to six years on the job had a mean score of 9.33 (72%). Social workers with one to three years on the job had a mean score of 8.45 (65%).

ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the relationship between the independent variable years at DCS with the dependent variable 'knowledge score.' The ANOVA was not significant  $F = .596$ ,  $p = .815$ . Although there was a 22% difference between scores based on number of years of employment, there was not strong enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis that the number of years at DCS has no affect on knowledge score.

#### Summary

Chapter Four reviewed the results extracted from the project. It appeared that the social workers that were surveyed had less than adequate knowledge of Family Preservation Services and that the knowledge they did have

was obtained primarily through word-of-mouth. Even though the dependent variable, knowledge score, appeared to be affected by the different categories within the independent variables: source of information, years on the job, and type of job, there was no statistical evidence to support it.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

Included in Chapter Five is a presentation of the conclusions based on the results in Chapter Four, a discussion of the limitations of the project, and recommendations for social work practice, policy and research. The chapter concludes with a summary.

#### Discussion

Based on the results of the knowledge test, and assuming that an adequate score is 75% or better, it would appear that most of the San Bernardino County Department of Children's Services social workers have a less than adequate knowledge of Family Preservation Services (FPS). The number of correct answers on the knowledge test ranged from 3-13 with an average of 9.46 (73%) correct out 13 questions. Of the 39 social workers surveyed, 25 (64%) of them answered between 10-13 questions correctly (75% or better); three had scores between eight and nine (61-69%); and 11 answered zero to seven questions correctly (0-54%).

The questions with the most correct responses were questions about the general concepts of FPS. Many of the general concept questions apply to a number of programs

currently in use or in the process of being implemented at DCS. Therefore, it is possible that someone who had little or no knowledge of FPS at all could have answered those questions correctly. Also, aspects of the programs may have been confused resulting in high scores on the general knowledge and lower scores on the more technical aspects. It is difficult, therefore, to tell how much knowledge is specific to FPS and how much could be considered general knowledge.

The source from which the largest group of social workers got their information was 'word of mouth'. However, that group had the second lowest test scores with an average of 71% correct. A possible explanation for that may be that a number of new programs were introduced around the same time as FPS that shared many of the same concepts and philosophies. Or, that word-of-mouth was simply inaccurate.

The source from which the next largest group of social workers indicated that they obtained their knowledge was training. That group of social workers was the group with the second highest percentage of correct answers on the knowledge test. One reason for the higher scores may have been that training would provide more specific information on the program than word of mouth,



and therefore, more correct answers on the technical aspects of FPS.

Only 5% of the social workers surveyed stated that they obtained their information from flyers. However, that is the group with the highest percentage of correct answers on the knowledge test (96%). One possible explanation is the visual versus verbal aspect of instruction, visual being more effective. Also, flyers may contain more complete and accurate information specific to FPS.

The group that indicated they obtained their knowledge from their supervisors was the group that had the lowest percentage of correct answers on the knowledge test (65%.) Yet the group 'other', which were the supervisors, had the highest percentage of correct answers (88%). Even though the supervisors appear to have a pretty good knowledge of FPS, they may not have had much opportunity to share that knowledge with their workers.

Besides supervisors, other types of jobs that participants held included: intake worker, carrier/case manager, and those that do both intake and case management. The ANOVA indicated that there was no statistical relationship between type of job and knowledge of FPS. However, those social workers that chose Intake as

their type of job had the highest percentage of correct answers (88%).

Intake workers are on the front-line. They are the ones who make the first contact with the families and the ones that would most likely be exploring alternatives to out-of-home care. They should, therefore, be the ones with the greatest knowledge of available programs and resources.

The carrier workers and those who do both carrier and intake work had an equal percentage of correct answers on the knowledge test (69%). Neither group, however, had an adequate (75% or better) knowledge of FPS. Though there is no statistical evidence of a relationship between type of job and knowledge of FPS, it would be understandable that case managers would not have quite the same amount knowledge about the programs designed to permit children to remain safely in their homes as intake workers would. That their knowledge scores, however, were considerably lower, could be due to the confusion about the difference in all of the new programs and their lack of hands-on experience.

Social workers employed by DCS the longest had the highest test scores. One possible explanation for that may be that social workers employed longer may have more time

to concentrate on new programs than newer social workers that are still concentrating on the basic functions of the job. Or possibly, as the ANOVA indicated, there is no statistical relationship between the number of years on the job and the knowledge score, and the observed difference just happened by chance.

### Limitations

The sample population was limited to San Bernardino County Department of Children's social workers in the two San Bernardino offices. Due to the sample bias, and the narrow scope of the study, there is a lack of external validity and the results cannot be generalized beyond this specific population. By including a greater number of social workers from other regions or agencies, the external validity of the study may have been greater.

A justification for the small sample size was the realistic constraint of time. However, due to that, some of the subgroups were quite small, contributing to a lack of power in statistical testing. It is possible that type II errors were made when retaining the null hypothesis. Also, those who participated may be different from those who did not. The researcher's best guess is that those who

did not participate were less interested in FPS and may have had less knowledge.

Another limitation of this study is the internal validity of the instrument used in the survey, or the degree to which the instrument actually measured the social workers knowledge of FPS. Due to the lack of research on the knowledge of FPS, no standardized measuring instrument was available. Therefore, the researcher, with the help of the advisor, designed an instrument for the purpose of this study. Even though the instrument was pre-tested and the questions on the knowledge test were clearly stated, in simple language, and fairly short, it was not possible to determine whether the knowledge test is an accurate assessment of social workers knowledge of FPS.

#### Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

This study was designed to address the implementation process of Family Preservation Services in San Bernardino County. This study did not examine outcomes of the program. Outcomes were addressed however, in the literature review. The findings of the outcome studies indicated that the FPS was sound but that the programs studied lacked structure and there were no guidelines for

implementation. The results of this study support the findings of previous studies. Social workers had a less than adequate knowledge of FPS services even though the program has been up and running now for some time.

One of the main reasons that programs fail in the implementation phase is due to the inability to obtain commitment and involvement. In order to obtain commitment, staff have to understand and believe in the goals of the program. Therefore, all staff, from line workers to management need to have a better understanding of the new direction and philosophy of child welfare. Clearly, this element was not present in the implementation of FPS.

The philosophy of this intervention requires a shift from the idea that professionals have the control over the families' destiny, to the belief that families can take control of their own lives and develop their own solutions. This family-centered, strengths-based approach to child welfare is not only the foundation of FPS but also the basis for other programs currently being implemented in San Bernardino County such as Family Group Decision Making and The Wraparound Program.

Once staff become committed to the philosophy, they will need to be encouraged to get involved. This study indicated that flyers were one of the more effective means

of getting information to social workers. And although there was no statistically significant evidence to support that finding, given the time constraints of the social worker, it may still be the most practical. Administration could utilize that method to promote the new philosophy and encourage social workers to try the new programs. However, that alone will not necessarily guarantee involvement.

Another reason that programs fail is the inability to obtain management commitment. Their knowledge scores indicated that the supervisors who participated in the survey had an adequate knowledge of FPS. What was not known, however, was their level of commitment. In fact, that they did not pass much of their knowledge on to their staff might indicate a lack of commitment. Administration should encourage supervisors, and supervisors in turn, should use every opportunity to encourage line workers to consider FPS and the many other alternatives to out-of-home care that are now available.

Word-of-mouth was another popular method of learning about new programs. However, the information communicated was not always accurate. Since the study indicated that line staff speak to one-another about new programs and policies more than they speak to management, management

might due well to appoint an 'expert' among the line workers; a peer that other line staff might turn to with questions. The 'expert' would be someone who was committed to the program, would be willing to help other staff get involved, and had a good perception of the program.

This study was initially designed to determine social workers' perception of FPS as well as their knowledge. However, it was later determined that due to the lack of knowledge about the program, perception could not be adequately determined. Once the program has been properly implemented, additional research to determine social workers perception of the program and program outcomes may be beneficial to the Department as well. Future research should also attempt to increase sample size so that the possibility of a type II error is reduced.

### Conclusions

This study was designed to determine how much knowledge San Bernardino County DCS social workers had about Family Preservation Services, how that knowledge was obtained and if the source of that knowledge, years on the job, or job title had any effect on their knowledge.

The results of the study indicated that although most of the social workers had some knowledge of FPS, their

knowledge was less than adequate and appeared to be about the general aspects of the program rather than the more technical aspects.

Of the five choices on how knowledge was obtained: word of mouth, training, flyer, supervisor, or other, the majority of the social workers indicated that they obtained their knowledge about FPS through either word of mouth or through training. However, neither source provided enough information to guarantee adequate scores on the knowledge test.

The statistical test, ANOVA, indicated that even though there was considerable observable difference between the independent variables: source of knowledge, years on the job, and type of job, and the dependent variable, knowledge score, it cannot be considered anything but coincidence. However, it is possible that with a larger sample size, these differences might be statistically significant.

Family Preservation Service is a viable alternative to out-of-home placement for children if properly implemented. Proper implementation depends on commitment and involvement of staff at all levels. In order for FPS or any of the other new program to succeed, and for staff to become committed and involved, they must first



understand that child welfare in this County is headed in a new direction. The focus is no longer based on the deficit model but rather on families' strengths and community support. Once staff are on board with that notion, they will welcome the implementation of the new programs that are designed to assist them in reaching their goals.

APPENDIX A  
QUESTIONNAIRE

## Survey

1. Gender: Male ☐ Female ☐
2. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Highest level of education completed:  
(Please check only one)
  - ☐ High School Diploma
  - ☐ AA/AS Degree
  - ☐ BA/BS Degree
  - ☐ MA/MS/MSW Degree
4. Please indicate how long you have worked for DCS: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Please indicate your current position with DCS:  
Carrier/Case manager
  - ☐ Intake
  - ☐ Both
  - ☐ Other

**The following 15 questions are designed to assess your knowledge of Family Preservation Services (FPS).**

6. FPS is a resource currently available to DCS social workers.
  - ☐ True
  - ☐ False
  - ☐ Don't know
7. The purpose of FPS is to provide intervention services to at-risk children and their families.
  - ☐ True
  - ☐ False
  - ☐ Don't know
8. FPS is the same as the Family Maintenance Plan.
  - ☐ True
  - ☐ False
  - ☐ Don't know
9. FPS is a viable alternative to out-of-home placement.
  - ☐ True
  - ☐ False
  - ☐ Don't know

10. FPS services are intensive and brief.
- ☐ True
  - ☐ False
  - ☐ Don't know
11. FPS encourages the participation of parents.
- ☐ True
  - ☐ False
  - ☐ Don't know
12. FPS is available only after the children have been removed from their home.
- ☐ True
  - ☐ False
  - ☐ Don't know
13. FPS provides support, counseling, hard-goods and referrals.
- ☐ True
  - ☐ False
  - ☐ Don't know
14. FPS caseworkers carry large caseloads.
- ☐ True
  - ☐ False
  - ☐ Don't know
15. FPS is not concerned with the reasons that place families at risk of having their children removed.
- ☐ True
  - ☐ False
  - ☐ Don't know
16. FPS is a long-term program.
- ☐ True
  - ☐ False
  - ☐ Don't know
17. FPS has the potential to reduce the number of out-of-home placements.
- ☐ True
  - ☐ False
  - ☐ Don't know

18. FPS is recommended for all families that come to the attention of DCS.
- ☐ True
  - ☐ False
  - ☐ Don't know
19. My current knowledge of FPS was obtained through:
- ☐ Flyer
  - ☐ Training
  - ☐ Supervisor
  - ☐ Word of mouth
  - ☐ Other
20. I would like to know more about FPS.
- ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No

### Family Preservation Service (FPS)

The purpose of FPS is to provide intensive in-home services as an alternative to out-of-home placement in order to avoid the trauma that children experience by being separated from their families and homes.

FPS will intervene with the family as soon they come to the attention of DCS. They will examine the reasons that placed the family at risk of having their children removed. They will provide support, counseling, hard goods, and referrals.

They are available 24 hours a day and they will report the families' progress to the Court. FPS is designed to remove the problems from the family rather than removing the children.

This program is similar to Family Maintenance in that it allows the children to remain in the home while DCS supervises. It is different in that the services provided and supervision is much more intensive. A worker may carry a caseload of 10-15 cases and spend from 2-15 hours a week with the family.

APPENDIX B  
INFORMED CONSENT

## **Informed Consent**

The study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to evaluate your knowledge and attitude regarding out of home placements. This study is being conducted by Kathy Miller under the supervision of Professor Laurie Smith and has been approved by the Department of Social Work Sub-committee of the Institutional Review Board of California State University San Bernardino.

In this study you will be asked to complete a questionnaire consisting of 20 questions, read a brief vignette, and then complete a worker's response scale consisting of ten questions. The entire study should take you approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

The confidentiality of your responses will be closely guarded. All data will be reported in group form only. There are no foreseeable risks to you as a participant in this study. Your participation in this research is voluntary.

Whether or not you chose to participate will not effect your position with the Department of Children's Services.

You are free to withdraw from this study at any time, without penalty. In order to ensure the validity of the study, we ask you not to discuss this study with others.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact Professor Laurie Smith (909) 880-5000 extension #3837.

By placing a mark in the space provided below, I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and understand the nature and purpose of this study, and I freely consent to participate. By this mark I further acknowledge that I am at least 18 years of age.

**Give your consent to participate by marking a check or 'X' mark here:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Today's date is:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Do not put your name anywhere on the consent or the survey.**



APPENDIX C  
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

### **Debriefing Statement**

The survey that you have just completed was designed to explore your knowledge and attitude of out-of-home placements. The researcher, Kathy Turnbull, created the survey used for this study. The Department of Social Work Sub-committee of the Institutional Review Board at California State University San Bernardino approved the study.

A brief description of Family Preservation Services is attached for you to read and keep. Regional Family Preservation Council, through Children's Network, is currently offering Family Preservation Services.

Thank-you for your participation in the study. If you have any questions or concerns about the study please feel free to contact Professor Laurie Smith at (909) 880-5000 extension #3837. Results of the study will be available at the University after June 2004.

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