

APPENDIX

EVALUATION OF THE
NEBRASKA STATE FOSTER CARE REVIEW BOARD
1986

by

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All 1,493 children who were active anytime in 1986 and who were reviewed one or more times by the Foster Care Review Board anytime between August 1, 1983 and December 31, 1986 were selected as the "reviewed" sample. Of these children 517 were reviewed once; 313 were reviewed twice; 262 were reviewed three times; 262 were reviewed three times; 211 were reviewed four times; 85 were reviewed five times; 74 were reviewed six times; 24 were reviewed seven times; 5 were reviewed eight times; and 2 were reviewed ten times.

A comparison group was constructed of children who were eligible for review in 1986 but who had not yet been reviewed as of December 31, 1986. Over 1,200 children were identified as meeting the criteria. However, this group of 1,200 was much older compared to the reviewed group, so a random sample of 610 children was drawn, stratified on age. The comparison group created, thus, is comparable in age to the reviewed group. Comparisons were then made between the two groups to assure that they were similar in sex, race, agency, etc.

The comparison group was found to be quite similar to the reviewed group in most demographic variables and thus can be used to assess if there are differences in outcome between the two groups that can only be attributed to the fact that one group had been reviewed by citizen reviewers and the other had not.

RESULTS

Comparisons were made between the 1,493 children active in 1986 who had been reviewed at least once by the Foster Care Review Board and the 610 similar children who were active in 1986, eligible for review, but not yet reviewed by December 31, 1986.

Current Placement Type

There were large significant differences between the two groups in terms of what type of placement the children were in on December 31, 1986.

Similar to the findings in the evaluation of 1985, children who were reviewed were 1.9 times more likely to be in adoptive placements as children who were not reviewed. Reviewed children were also 1.8 times more likely to be placed with relatives as comparison children and were 1.6 times more likely to be in more homelike foster care settings than the comparison children who were 1.9 times more likely to be in an institution. Comparison children, however, were 1.9 times more likely to be returned to parents than reviewed children. All these findings are similar to 1985 data.

Closeness to Home

Reviewed children appeared to be slightly more likely in 1986 to be placed in their own county (57.8%) compared to the comparison group (53.6%). These differences were not statistically significant. However, this does represent a trend compared with the 1985 data which showed no differences in where children are placed. Review may be beginning to encourage placements closer to home.

Current Plan

There were significant differences in the current plans between the two groups. The reviewed children were 3 times more likely to have adoption as their plan compared with the non-reviewed children. The reviewed children were 3.1 times more likely to have long-term foster care as their plan as well.

On the other hand, the comparison group was 1.8 times more likely to have return to parents as its plan.

The percentage of children with plans of group home or institution were nearly the same between the two groups.

Plan Achievement Date

The lack of a plan achievement date for many of the children in both groups is a concern. Some 35.0% of the reviewed children and 43.9% of the non-reviewed children had no targeted date for the achievement of the child's plan. Additionally, a considerable number of the target dates were more than two years in the future, 8.8% for reviewed and 2.9% of the non-reviewed children.

Number of Placements

There were no significant differences between the groups in the number of placements the children had. Forty nine percent (49%) of both the reviewed children and the non-reviewed children had three or fewer placements. Forty percent (40%) of the reviewed and forty five percent (45%) of the non-reviewed children had 4-9 placements and eleven percent (11%) of the reviewed and six percent (6%) of the non-reviewed children had 10 or more placements.

Parental Rights Status

There were significant differences between the two groups in terms

of the status of parental rights. Children in the reviewed group were 2.6 times more likely to have had a petition for termination filed or to have termination completed against their fathers than children in the comparison group.

Likewise, children in the reviewed group were 3.5 times more likely to have had a petition for termination filed or to have a termination completed against their mothers.

There were also differences between the groups in terms of the number of parents who voluntarily relinquished their children for adoption. Children who were reviewed were 2.7 times more likely to be relinquished for adoption by their mothers and 1.9 times more likely to be relinquished by their fathers than non-reviewed children.

Adoption Free Date

Since the implementation of the review process in August 1983, the likelihood of a child being freed for adoption is 2.1 times greater for the reviewed group than for the comparison group.

Court Review Results

The lack of information on court reviews is a concern. While most of the children apparently had court reviews, only 22.9% of the reviewed children and 20% of the comparison children had reports of the results of their court reviews submitted to the Foster Care Review Board.

Number Terminated

Some 392 reviewed children (26.3%) and 239 comparison group children (39.2%) were terminated from the system in 1986. It appears that reviewed children were less apt to be terminated from care than children not reviewed by the foster care review process. However, much of this difference may be a selection factor. Those reviewed in 1986 were primarily children who had been reviewed previously and were still in non-permanent placements. These children are less likely to leave the system.

Reason Case Terminated

Thirty six percent (36%) of the reviewed children who were terminated from care returned to their parents' custody while forty percent (40%) of the non-reviewed children returned to parents. More reviewed children (18.6%) left care through adoption or guardianship than non-reviewed children (3.3%). Also, more reviewed children (12.5%) left care through emancipation (age, marriage, military) than non-reviewed children (2.1%).

SUMMARY

Findings in 1986 were very similar to the findings in the 1985 evaluation. Particularly significant is the continued difference between the two groups in adoption rates. Foster Care Review by concerned citizens seems to have a large impact on those children who could benefit from adoption.

The reviewed children were not as likely to return home and this is a concern. Some of it can be explained by selection (most reviewed children had been in the system longer and been reviewed before), but some of this difference may be the result of reviewers suggesting certain services be provided before a child should go home. It will be interesting to see in the future if children who have been reviewed and then go home are less likely to have future difficulties and return to foster care than those who were sent home without review (and possibly without many services being provided).

The effect of foster care review appears to be primarily on the children who tend to get caught in the system because they can't go home. The review process seems to be helping them find other permanent placements.

The fiscal impact of the adoptions and relative placements made in 1986 is very large and will continue for six or seven years, since the average age of the adopted children was about 12. A conservative estimate of the net per year savings of the reviewed children whose adoption or guardianship became final in 1986 (over and above the normally expected number) is \$277,200. This is in addition to the \$236,880 saved in 1986 because the extra children placed for adoption in 1985 (due to citizen review) were not in the system in 1986.