

Safe Families for Children Evidence-Based Evaluation



Safe Families for Children (SFFC) provides a safe alternative for parents in crisis, helping keep children out of the foster care system. SFFC values all parents and kids equally but believes those most at risk are most in need of our immediate help. Additionally, these children are most likely in need of immediate support such as a hosting arrangement. Decreasing daily stress for the parent can provide immediate relief, time and space to address the issues that led to the stressful situation. The average length of hosting is 19 nights, prior to returning the child to their family and 98% of children return to their families after hosting.

Purpose of Evaluation

The aim of the evaluation is to measure SFFC effectiveness in preserving children in the legal custody of their parents by developing a plan that ensures a child's safety while parents address their crisis situation. The SFFC evaluation was implemented within the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (IDCFS) in counties outside the Greater Chicago area. The plan was based on a safety assessment conducted by CPS, which evaluates whether children are at serious risk of harm and need an immediate change to ensure their safety.

The Evaluation Framework

This Framework uses evidence-building and information gathering through five phases prior to full dissemination.

Phase One:

Identification and exploration phase defines the scope and nature of the problem and outlines the change which is implemented for the desired modification.

Phase Two:

Develop and Test phase confirms the program's effectiveness during implementation and conducts an evaluation that tests whether the program outputs are trending in the desired direction. The evaluation compiled a total of 276 families and their 597 children enrolled between July 1, 2014 to January 1, 2017.

Phase Three:

Compare and Learn phase involves implementation of the evaluation to assess whether the intervention created improvements that are attributable to the intervention. The evaluation included 99 families and their 216 children enrolled in the study for the two years ending December 31, 2018. Tracked primary and secondary child welfare outcomes using public data available through June 30, 2020.

Phase Four:

Replicate and Adapt phase assesses whether similar outcomes can be reproduced by the supported interventions to different population and across various settings.

Phase Five:

Apply and Improve phase measures sustainable positive results and adaptation to changing circumstances through quality improvement (CQI) and quality service reviews (QSRs). Phases four and five will be completed in on-going replication of SFFC.

The Evidence Supports

1). SFFC is a safe and effective intervention for deflecting families from foster care.

Question

Would children involved in an investigation for maltreatment be less likely to be taken into protective custody or later moved into foster care if involved in the SFFC intervention groups compared to families who received child protective services as usual (SAU)?

Findings

78% of families that received SFFC hosting were deflected from protective custody, compared to 47% of families receiving services as usual.

2). SFFC is as safe as services as usual when a child remains in their home during a maltreatment investigation.

Question

Are children receiving services provided by SFFC more likely to experience a recurrence of mistreatment than children receiving child protective services as usual?

Findings

Children receiving services provided by SFFC were at no greater risk of reoccurring maltreatment than children receiving SAU. These results mitigate the concern that leaving the children in their homes or that reunification too quickly exposes the child to a higher risk of repeat maltreatment.

3). SFFC is an effective safe intervention for reunifying children with their parents.

Question

Will children involved in a child maltreatment investigation be more likely to stay in the custody of their parents or return to their custody within one year if allocated to the SFFC intervention group rather than the child protective services as usual comparison group?

Findings

89% of families receiving SCCF hosting services had their children in their home one year after the hosting service ended. As compared to 65% of families receiving SAU.