

EVALUATION OF THE NEBRASKA FOSTER
CARE REVIEW BOARD

1987 - 1988

by

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All 1,269 children who were active anytime in 1987 and who were reviewed one or more times by the Foster Care Review Board during 1987 were selected as the reviewed sample. Some of these children had also been reviewed before 1987 and some continued to receive reviews in 1988. By December 31, 1988 when the data was analyzed 100 had been reviewed once; 188 had been reviewed twice; 243 had been reviewed three times; 178 had been reviewed four times; 145 had been reviewed five times; 130 had been reviewed six times; 107 had been reviewed seven times; 76 had been reviewed eight times; 56 had been reviewed nine times; 28 had been reviewed 10 times; 12 had been reviewed eleven times; 2 had been reviewed twelve times; and 4 had been reviewed thirteen times.

A comparison group was constructed of children who were eligible for review in 1987 but were not reviewed, either in 1987 or 1988.

A random sample of non-reviewed children was selected early in 1988, matched by age to the children who had been reviewed. By the time the data was analyzed on December 31, 1988, 338 eligible children who were not reviewed in 1987 had been reviewed in 1988 and had to be dropped from the comparison group.

Comparisons were made between the reviewed and non-reviewed groups to assure that they were similar in sex, race, agency, etc. They were found to be quite similar except for length of time in care, so that differences in outcome can 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 1,269 children active in 1987 who were reviewed by the Foster Care Review Board at least once in 1987 and the 918 similar children who were active in 1987, eligible for review, but not reviewed in either 1987 or 1988.

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, 1988.

Similar to the findings in the evaluations of 1985 and 1986, children who were reviewed were 3.5 times more likely to be in adoptive placements as children who were not reviewed. Reviewed children were also twice as likely to be placed with relatives as comparison children and were 1.8 times more likely to be in more homelike foster care settings than comparison children who were 2.6 times more likely to be in an institution. Comparison children, however, were 1.6 times more likely to be returned to parents than reviewed children. All these findings are similar to 1985 and 1986 data.

Closeness to Home

Reviewed children were more likely to be placed in their own county (52.1%) compared to the comparison group (37.8%). However, this is a decrease overall from 1986 when 57.8% of the reviewed children and 53.6% of the comparison children were placed in their own county. It is however the first time there has been a statistically significant difference between reviewed and comparison group children.

The 1985 data showed no differences in where children were placed, while the 1986 data showed reviewed children slightly more likely to be placed in their own county compared to comparison group children. In 1987 the differences were greater.

Current Plan

There were significant differences in the current plans between the two groups. The reviewed children were 4.7 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 2.2 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.

These findings may be due, in part, to the difference between the two groups in length of time in care. More of the comparison children had not been in care long enough for their plan to change from "return to parent", the typical first plan.

Plan Achievement Date

Again, the lack of a plan achievement data for many non-reviewed children (46.9%) is a concern. Additionally, some (13.6%) of the plan achievement dates were before 1987 and a few (1.1%) were after 1990 indicating lack of a clear time goal for over 60% of the comparison children.

Children who were reviewed seemed slightly more likely to have reasonable dates for achievement of their plan, although 15.7% had no targeted date, 16.4% had dates before 1987, and 12.4% had target dates after 1990 (a total of 44.5% lacking a clear time goal).

Number of Placements

There were significant differences between the groups in the number of placements the children had. Some 32.2% of the reviewed children had three or fewer placements while 52.2% of the comparison children had three or fewer. Forty-six percent (46.4%) of the reviewed children had 4 - 9 placements while 38.8% of the comparison children had 4 - 9. Twenty-one percent (21.4%) of the reviewed children had 10 or more placements and 2.8%, 36 children, had 20 or more placements. On the other hand, only 8.3% of the comparison children had 10 or more placements with only 0.3%, 3 children, having 20 or more placements. These differences are probably related to the reviewed children having been in out-of-home care longer.

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 3.3 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 4.3 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 3.9 times more likely to be relinquished for adoption by their mothers and 2.9 times more likely to be relinquished by their fathers than non-reviewed children.

Adoption Free Date

Children in the reviewed group were 6.6 times more likely to have been freed for adoption after January 1, 1987 than children who were not reviewed in 1987.

Court Review Results

The lack of information on court reviews is still a concern. While most of the children apparently had court reviews, only 27.6% of the reviewed children and 23.0% of the comparison children had reports of the results of their court reviews submitted to the Foster Care Review Board.

Number Terminated

Some 624 reviewed children (49.2%) and 578 comparison group children (63%) had been terminated from the system by December 31, 1988.

Reviewed children are significantly less likely to be terminated from care than children not reviewed by the foster care review process. However, much of this difference appears to be related to the fact that most of those children reviewed in 1987 had been in the system and reviewed previously but were still in non-permanent placements. These children are less likely to leave the system. Many children in the "eligible for review but not reviewed" group, tended to avoid review because they left the system soon after they become eligible and before the Foster Care Review Board could schedule a review of them.

As time has gone on, more of the children being reviewed by the Foster Care Review Board have tended to be the hard-core children with serious family problems who are unable to return home to their parent(s).

Reason Case Terminated

Thirteen percent (13.8%) of the reviewed children who were terminated from care were reported to have returned to their parents' custody while twenty-one percent (21.5%) of the non-reviewed children were reported to have returned to parents. More reviewed children (12.4%) left care through adoption or guardianship than non-reviewed children (3.6%). About the same percentage of reviewed children (9.3%) left care through emancipation (age, marriage, military) as non-reviewed children (9.6%).

These comparisons may not be valid, however, since 59% of the reviewed children who were terminated and 46.1% of the non-reviewed terminated children had no reason stated for leaving care.

Summary

Findings were very similar to the 1985 and 1986 evaluations, indicating that review by citizen review boards does have a consistent predictable impact on what happens to the children. Particularly significant is the continued difference between the two groups in adoption rates.

The fiscal impact of the adoptions and relative placements made in 1987-1988 is large. A conservative estimate of the net per year savings of the reviewed children who were adoptive or placed with relatives is \$249,480 (53 more than expected adoptions and 46 more than expected relative placements at \$210/mo. minimal foster care payment.)

Review by citizens apparently encourages the agency, the guardian ad litem and the court to work together to accomplish these very complex adoptions.

EDITOR'S NOTE

This is Dr. Coyne's third evaluation of the Foster Care Review Board. Previous evaluations were done in 1985 and 1986.

The results of these evaluations has shown the real value of foster care review. The savings during the first year were estimated at \$236,880. Second year savings were \$277,200 plus the \$236,880 from the first year since most of the children would still be in care if the adoption or relative placement had not occurred. Savings for 1988 are estimated at \$249,480 plus the \$514,080 saved because children placed for adoption or with relatives in 1985 and 1986 were not still in care in 1988. This savings can be expected to continue for at least three more years, afterwhich it should decrease since some of the children adopted in 1985 will be approaching the age of majority.

The Review Board feels that its major contribution in increasing the number of adoptions has been the "push" it gives to the agency and court to get things done. As Dr. Coyne stated, "review by citizens encourages the agency, the guardian ad litem, and the court to work together to accomplish these very complex adoptions."

On the other hand, while the Review Board strongly supports reunification, the reviews stress the successful completion of services before reunification. This may account for the lower number of reunifications of Review Board reviewed children compared to children in the comparison group. Another reason might be the Review Board reviewed children who had been in care longer and the more difficult and problematic cases. These would be children you would not expect to return to their parents as readily.

This will be the final evaluation of this type to be done. As more and more children are reviewed, it is becoming difficult to find a comparison group of children who have been in care approximately the same length of time as the reviewed children. The Review Board is reviewing the majority of children who have spent several years in care.

The Review Board has received a grant from the Developmental Disabilities Council, Department of Health, to do a study, "Identifying Systemic Delays in the Adoption of Developmentally Disabled Children in Foster Care". As a result, children with the plan of "adoption", "permanency", "guardianship", and "long term foster care" will be intentionally selected for review during the early part of 1989. This selection process can be expected to disrupt the evaluation figures as they are presently set up.

The State Board wishes to express its sincerely thanks to Dr. Coyne for the time, effort, and expertise involved in doing the evaluations.