

Family Builders Program (Report Highlights)

November 2001

The Family Builders Program is a community-based program administered by the Department of Economic Security (Department). It was established in 1997 to address a backlog of uninvestigated child abuse and neglect reports and to fill a need for early intervention services. Based on the premise that families with different risk levels for child abuse require different responses, potential- and low-risk child abuse and neglect reports are referred to Family Builders for treatment and immediate services rather than an investigation by Child Protective Services (CPS). In May 2001, Family Builders received national recognition as an innovative approach for addressing child abuse.

Our Conclusions:

The Family Builders program and CPS produce similar outcomes. A family completing the Family Builders program and a family investigated by CPS have the same likelihood of having another CPS report. However, a family completing the program is less likely to have another CPS report than a family that does not complete the program. Finally, while the program has taken steps to improve monitoring and oversight, it still needs more reliable and accurate information about the types and costs of services received by families in the program.

Program Operation

Family Builders currently operates in 10 of Arizona's 15 counties. When CPS receives a report of potential- or low-risk abuse/neglect in an area served by Family Builders, the case is referred to a Family Builders contractor, and CPS closes its case. In the 5 counties without the program, CPS investigates all of the child abuse and neglect reports.

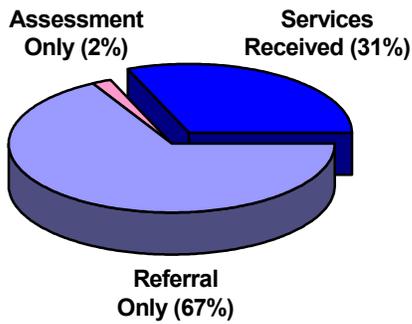
When Family Builders receives a referral, a caseworker visits the family's home and offers a variety of voluntary services through community-based organizations. Services include parent counseling, child daycare, transportation, and emergency services such

as food, clothing, and rent assistance. Family Builders cases typically follow one of three paths:

- If the family cannot be contacted or declines services, the case is closed.
- If the family accepts services, an assessment is completed. Depending on the results, a service plan is developed and the services chosen by the family are provided.
- If there are signs of abuse or neglect, the case is referred back to CPS.

From August 1, 1999 through April 30, 2001, Family Builders received over 14,000 referrals. Just under one-third of those referrals (4,397) accepted and received services.

Percentage of Families Receiving Services



Subsequent Child Abuse/Neglect Reports

	Substantiated Reports	Total Reports
Family Builders Completers	6.6%	35.6%
Family Builders Noncompleters	12.3%	46.3%
CPS Families	8.4%	34.8%

Services Differ but Outcomes Similar

Family Builders and CPS families have essentially the same rates of subsequent CPS reports. However, positive differences exist among program participants.

No differences in new CPS reports—

Although the program offers a different type of intervention than CPS, we found there was no statistically significant difference in the rate of new child abuse and neglect reports received by the two groups. This finding is similar to a previous evaluation, (Auditor General Report No. 00-4).

Positive differences among program participants—

Although the program had similar outcomes to CPS, families completing the program had fewer new CPS reports than families who accepted services but did not complete the program. These differences were statistically significant. Program participants also experienced a reduction in their risk for child abuse or neglect, as measured by the Family Risk Scale.

Limited Progress in Monitoring and Oversight

Although the Department has made an effort to address previously identified monitoring and oversight problems, additional steps are needed. Our previous evaluation found that:

- The Department appeared to be paying providers \$1,500 to \$1,800 more than services cost, and
- Forty-two percent of the services identified in the family assessments were not provided.

However, the poor quality of Family Builders’ data limited the Department’s ability to make informed judgments about whether payment rates and service levels were appropriate.

The Department has taken steps—Since our 2000 report, the Department has:

- Sought to improve cost data by revising cost categories and program definitions;
- Begun reviewing contractors’ costs quarterly; and
- Modified its reimbursement rates.

Data problems still exist—Despite the improvements, there are still sufficient problems with Family Builders’ data that limited the ability to review and report on costs and services provided. In a random sample of 100 cases, some costs were not recorded, while other costs were often recorded inaccurately.

We also found other data problems, such as:

- Missing demographic and risk assessment data; and
- Duplicate records.

Several factors may explain these continued data problems:

- The database has many design flaws—for example, data entry screens can be confusing.
- There is no database users’ manual.
- Training on the database is inadequate.
- System monitoring and technical support is inadequate.

The Department has made an effort to address these problems by hiring a full-time consultant to improve the database. However, the Department should take some additional steps.

The Department should:

- ✓ Develop a data quality assurance plan to ensure data is complete and accurate when entered;
- ✓ Conduct a system-wide review of the database to eliminate problems, such as duplicate entries; and
- ✓ Create a database users’ manual and provide regular training.

To Obtain More Information

- A copy of the full report can be obtained by calling (602) 553-0333 or by visiting our Web site at:

www.auditorgen.state.az.us

- The contact person for this report is *Carol Cullen*.