

Appendix A

Design and Implementation of Follow-Up Evaluation

APPENDIX A

DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF FOLLOW-UP EVALUATION

A.1 Overview

In 1993 the New York State DSS and the New York City CWA launched the HomeRebuilders demonstration project. Initially the demonstration was to include an impact evaluation of the experiment. Funding was not available to complete the evaluation and the state agreed to become a study site for the Evaluation of Family Preservation and Reunification Programs. The purpose of the evaluation was to document the implementation of the program and its effects on percentage of case closings, average days in foster care, family functioning, and child behavior. The evaluation included follow-up interviews with a sample of workers and client families, analysis of administrative data, and interviews with administrative, supervisory, and front line staff about the implementation of the demonstration¹.

Six New York City child welfare agencies participated in the HomeRebuilders program: Harlem Dowling, Little Flower, Miracle Makers, New York Foundling, St. Christopher-Otilie, and St. Christopher-Jennie Clarkson. The sample for the demonstration was initially selected by New York State from its records of foster care cases in the selected agencies. Criteria for selection were agency specific as presented in Table A- 1. The criteria were developed to fit the particular composition of each agency's foster care population.

¹The findings from interviews with agency administrators, supervisors, and front line staff are presented in Chapter 2 and findings from the administrative data, face-to-face interviews with caretakers, and telephone interviews with caseworkers are presented in Chapter 3.

Table A- 1 Selection criteria of the children participating in **the**
HomeRebuilders Demonstration

Agency	Criteria			
	Age	Permanency Goal	Type of Placement	Time in Care
Harlem Dowling	Under 12	RTH ADP	FBH ARH	Over 90 days
Little Flower	Under 17	RTH	FBH	Over 90 days
Miracle Makers	Under 12	RTH ADP	FBH ARH	Over 90 days
New York Foundling	Under 17	RTH ADP	FBH ARH	Any child
St. Christopher-Ottilie	Under 13	RTH	FBH	Over 90 days
St. Christopher-Jennie Clarkson	Under 18	RTHADP IND. LV.	FBH ARH	Any child

Key: RTH = Return to Home; ADP = Adoption; FBH = Foster Boarding Home; ARH = Approved Relative Home; IND. LV. = Independent Living.

The experiment was originally designed with procedures for random assignment of children to either a comparison group that received the regular services offered at the agency or an experimental group that used the HomeRebuilders model. Three agencies, Harlem Dowling, Little Flower, and Miracle Makers, used random assignment procedures. Two agencies, New York Foundling and St. Christopher-C&lie, compared children in two different offices. At New York Foundling the Bronx office was considered the experimental office and followed the HomeRebuilders approach while the Queens office continued with practice as usual. St. Christopher-Qtilie also divided its caseload geographically with the experimental group at the Queens office and the comparison group served by the Brooklyn office. At St. Christopher-Jennie Clarkson, the entire foster boarding home population was selected to participate in the HomeRebuilders project.

Based on the selection criteria, the state randomly selected children for participation in both the experimental and comparison groups. To keep sibling groups together, the oldest sibling

from each group was selected. Members of the sibling group were then added to the sample. The lists of selected cases were sent to the agencies for cleaning. Agencies deleted cases that had closed or no longer met the sampling criteria. A few cases that met the criteria were added to the lists.

The evaluation began about 2 years after the demonstration began and as it was facing a precipitous ending 6 months early. Involvement in the HomeRebuilders' experiment in midstream has resulted in some design limitations. While agency caseworkers had completed structured baseline assessments of the families at the beginning of the experiment, these were incomplete and were inconsistently available across agencies. For these reasons it was decided not to use these records, and rely solely on follow-up data. As a result it has been possible to assess differences between experimental and control group cases at Time 2, but change with respect to family functioning and child behavior between Time 1 and Time 2 could not be measured. However, administrative data on foster care cases were examined. Entering the experiment at a time that a fair number of caseworkers had already left the agencies and the experiment faced termination inevitably resulted in gaps of information about the startup of the demonstration.

A.2 Sampling Strategy and Response Rates for the Follow-up Evaluation

A sample frame of cases enrolled in the demonstration was provided by the state. There were about 3000 cases in the demonstration. Analysis of the administrative data used the entire sample. For the interviews, a sample of caretakers was drawn, with the goal of conducting 500 face-to-face interviews with caretakers and 500 telephone interviews with their caseworkers. To conserve resources, it was determined that interviews would only be conducted with the experimental and control cases in agencies that randomly assigned cases to these two groups. Therefore, no interviews were conducted with New York Foundling comparison cases. St.

Christopher-Jennie Clarkson did not have a comparison group. Caretakers served by St. Christopher-Otilie were interviewed because it was initially thought that the agency had applied random assignment procedures to selecting experimental and control cases.

The interview sample was limited to cases which, as of July 1, 1993, had at least one child under the age of 13 with a case planning goal of return home. At the time the sample was constructed it was thought that most cases would fit this description. The original intent of the demonstration was to work with cases with a goal of return home. Although some cases in the experiment had other goals, it was assumed that these were relatively few. The sample was to focus on cases fitting the original intent of the demonstration and to use resources to interview as many birth parents as possible.

Knowing that there would be changes in caretakers and intended caretakers over the three year period, agencies were asked to identify the current caretaker for the youngest child in each case. A sampling information form was completed (see Exhibit A-1). To determine the appropriate caretaker to interview, the following criteria, consistent with agency definitions and practices, were established:

1. If the focal child was currently in care, the caretaker to whom the agency intended to discharge the child.
2. If the case was on trial discharge or final discharge status had been achieved, the caretaker to whom the child had been discharged.
3. If the case was closed, the caretaker to whom the child had been discharged.
4. If a new caretaker had been designated by the agency between January 1 and June 30, 1995, the caretaker who fit criteria 1, 2, or 3, on December 31, 1994.

Criterion 4 was an attempt to obtain an assessment of the agency's efforts at achieving permanent living arrangements for the child. The caretaker selected to be interviewed was the person with whom the agency had worked most recently for a substantial period of time to achieve permanency, regardless of whether permanency had been achieved.

Exhibit A-1 Sampling Information Form

AGENCY: _____

ADDRESS: _____

1. FROM WESTAT PRINTOUT, ENTER WESTAT ID #: _____

2. AGENCY CASE ID #: _____

CHECK ONE:

a. This is a family ID #

b. This is an individual ID #

IF INDIVIDUAL ID #, ENTER ALSO FAMILY ID #: _____

3. IN TABLE BELOW, ENTER NAMES OF THE CHILDREN WHO WERE IN FOSTER CARE ON 6/1/93, AND ANY WHO ENTERED FOSTER CARE BETWEEN 6/2/93 AND 12/31/95.

Last name	First name	Middle name/initial	Date of birth	Agency case ID

4. DETERMINE CURRENT STATUS OF YOUNGEST (ONLY) CHILD IN THE CASE:

CHECK ONE BOX, AND ENTER DATE STATUS BEGAN:

- CURRENT STATUS
- A. In care
- B. Trial Discharge
- C. Final Discharge
- D. Case Closed

DATE STATUS BEGAN

____ / ____ / ____

MO DAY YR

____ / ____ / ____

MO DAY YR

____ / ____ / ____

MO DAY YR

____ / ____ / ____

MO DAY YR

5. NAME OF CARETAKER. ENTER BELOW APPLYING THE FOLLOWING RULES:

- A. IN CARE: Provide Name of Caretaker to whom Agency intends to discharge child.
- B & C. TRIAL DISCHARGE OR FINAL DISCHARGE: Provide Name of Caretaker to whom child was discharged on above date.
- D. CASE CLOSED: Provide Name of Caretaker who was in charge of child on date case closed.

IF A CARETAKER WAS NEWLY DESIGNATED BY THE AGENCY BETWEEN JANUARY 1, & JUNE 30, 1995, SELECT INSTEAD THE CARETAKER WHO FIT THE ABOVE CRITERIA (A, B & C, OR D) PRIOR TO JANUARY 1, 1995. THIS MAY BE A NATURAL PARENT. OR AN ADOPTIVE PARENT

Caretaker Name: _____
FIRST MI LAST DOB M O DAY- YR

Relationship to Child: _____

Street Address : _____

Borough: _____, NY Zip _____

Phone: _____
AC

ENTER UP TO TWO 3rd PARTIES WHO MAY KNOW WHERE CARETAKER IS CURRENTLY LIVING, SUCH AS CLOSE RELATIVES, FRIENDS OR A WORK PLACE.

(1) Name: _____
 Relationship to Caretaker _____
 Street Address _____
 City or Town _____, State _____ Zip _____
 Phone: _____
AC

(2) Name: _____
 Relationship to Caretaker _____
 Street Address _____
 City or Town _____, State _____ Zip _____
 Phone: _____
AC

6. CURRENT OR MOST RECENT CASEWORKER:

_____ NAME

Phone: _____
AC

CHECK BOX IF CASEWORKER NO LONGER AT AGENCY * c l

Who is currently most knowledgeable about the case?

_____ NAME and TITLE or POSITION

Phone: _____
AC

Although the state provided names and addresses of last known caretakers, the agencies had to do a great deal of work to determine the current (1996) status of the case, the caretaker to be interviewed, and this person's current address. In addition, the sampling information form asked about the current or most recent caseworker still at the agency, and if that person had left, the name and telephone number of the person most knowledgeable about the case still working there.

The agencies were most helpful in providing the necessary information. They felt that they had put a great deal of work into trying to make the HomeRebuilders project a success, and viewed the evaluation as their last opportunity to ensure that all the effort they had expended was worthwhile.

While intentions were uniformly good, there was some variation between agencies in how up-to-date their records were and how readily their files could be read. Only one agency had computerized files, and while this made access very efficient, the richness of detail regarding current whereabouts of caretakers and children and other important information about cases found in paper files was not readily available.

It was soon discovered that the fastest and most accurate way to get the forms filled out was to find the worker whose case needed to be abstracted (or if the worker was no longer at the agency, the supervisor who had had responsibility for the case), and ask that person to complete the form. It was remarkable to find that several years after cases had closed workers carried in their heads exact addresses, including apartment numbers, names and relationships of family members in and outside the household, telephone numbers, and other details of the cases. Many workers filled out the forms, and only then looked at the files to check their recollections.

Table A-2 presents the number of cases determined eligible for sampling (as defined above); the number actually sampled for interviewing; the number fielded or distributed to interviewers; and response rates for caretaker and caseworker interviews. Cases sampled but not fielded resulted from insufficient information available about the caretakers or the caseworkers.

Table A-2. Disposition of study cases for caretaker and caseworker interviews

Caretakers												
	TOTAL		HD		LF		MM		OTT		JC	NYF
	C	E	C	E	C	E	C	E	C	E	E	E
Eligible sample	491	669	123	113	162	135	63	73	143	135	103	110
Sample	249	383	62	62	62	62	63	73	62	62	62	62
Sample fielded	235	361	60	58	55	53	60	71	60	56	62	61
Cases not fielded	14	22	2	4	7	9	3	2	6	0	0	1
Completed interviews	155	278	42	49	40	35	42	59	3	38	47	50
Response rate	66%	77%	70%	84%	73%	68%	70%	83%	52%	68%	76%	82%

Caseworkers												
	TOTAL		HD		LF		MM		OTT		JC	NYF
	C	E	C	E	C	E	C	E	C	E	E	E
Eligible sample	491	669	123	113	162	135	63	73	143	136	103	110
Sample	249	383	62	62	62	62	63	73	62	62	62	62
Sample fielded	226	357	50	53	57	53	62	70	57	58	62	61
Cases not fielded	23	26	12	9	5	9	1	3	5	4	0	1
Completed interviews	152	255	40	38	57	49	55	68	0	0	53	47
Response rate	67%	71%	77%	72%	100%	92%	89%	97%	NA	NA	85%	77%

Note: Response rate is calculated on number of cases distributed to interviewers

The overall response rate for caretakers was 73 percent; 77 percent for experimental cases and 66 percent for control group cases. The overall response rate for caseworker interviews was 70 percent. Cases not interviewed were mainly those that either had moved out of the state, or who could not be located after years of moving from one address to another.

A.3 Data Collection

A.3.1 Administrative Data

New York State maintains the Child Care Review Service System (CCRS) which contains foster care placement information, including dates of admission and discharge, permanency goal, and type of placement. Historical and current administrative data were obtained for all cases enrolled in the experiment through April 1997.

Administrative data from the State Central Register to measure the incidence of new reports of child abuse and neglect are not included in this report. For the period of this study, reports of abuse and neglect, foster care, and other child welfare services were recorded in separate mainframe systems without common identifiers. Linking the two systems would have required either extensive manual matching of individuals and cases in both systems or probabilistic matching software. At the time of data collection, the New York DSS was fully immersed in the implementation of its new Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS). As a result, the resources and reports necessary for a cross-match would have created an excessive burden on both the state and the city. A system integration feature has been scheduled as part of the upgraded SACWIS system. Regrettably, this is not available to the evaluation at this time.

A.3.2 Caretaker Interviews

The goal of the caretaker interviews was to obtain follow-up information on family functioning, child behaviors, and services provided. Caretakers were to be interviewed between July and December 1996, some 3 to 3.5 years after the implementation of the experiment. A few interviews were conducted as late as January and February 1997, the result of long-drawn-out locating efforts.

The name of the caretaker to be interviewed was identified on a Case Information Form (Exhibit A-2) which was provided to the interviewers. The task of the interviewer was to find and interview the designated person. Caretakers were sent advance letters that were followed by telephone calls when there was a telephone, and appointments for the interview were made at the caretaker's convenience. In households without telephones interviewers made unannounced visits. Caretakers were assured that participation in the study was voluntary, and were asked to sign a consent form before the interview was conducted (Exhibit A-3). The letter assured

Exhibit A-2
Evaluation of Family Services Case Information Form

National Evaluation of Family Services
Case Information Form
Caseworker REUNIFICATION Interview (IVORY)

Westat ID:

Agency:

Caseworker:

Phone:

Case Status:

Date Status Began:

Caretaker:

Birthdate:

Address:

Focal Children Grid

First Name	Middle Name	Last Name	Birthdate
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Other Caseworkers/Supervisors:

Agency Phone:

Agency Case ID:

Script:

CWA1-NY

Exhibit A-3
Evaluation of Family Services Consent Form

I would like to tell you about the study sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which is being conducted by an independent research company, Westat, inc. _____
_____(AGENCY NAME) is cooperating in this study.

The study will identify the needs and problems of families and the kinds of services that should be provided to them. We will be asking you questions about services you have received, parenting, household problems, and child behavior.

Participation in this study is voluntary and will not affect any services available to you or your family. You may decide to stop at **any** time, or skip questions you prefer not to answer. The interview lasts about 45 minutes. You will be paid \$10.00 and also receive a \$5.00 gift certificate at the completion of the interview.

Information that could identify you will be held in strict confidence, will be used only for purposes of this study, and will not be disclosed or released to anyone without your consent. Westat has obtained a Special Certificate of Confidentiality for this study. Under this certificate, the Federal government pledges that Westat study personnel cannot be compelled by any person or court of law to release your name or to identify your name with any answers that you give us. Westat will employ this certificate to ensure that the information you provide will not be disclosed or released to anyone without your consent, with one exception – if we find clear evidence that a child has been abused or is endangered, we would report this to the appropriate authorities, which might result in official action in accordance with state law. Your answers will be combined in statistical summaries with those of all other participants and will not be linked with your name.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact Ronna Cook, Project Director, Westat, Inc., 1650 Research Blvd., Rockville, Maryland 20850 at 1-800-937-8281.

If you agree to participate, please sign below, signifying your consent and intent to answer truthfully to the best of your ability.

Subject Statement:

I agree to participate in the study, and in the interview that will include questions about services I have received, the care of my children, their behavior, and the conditions of my home. I understand what my participation in the study involves and that I am free to stop the interview at any time. I sign the consent form freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

SIGNATURE OF RESPONDENT // _____
DATE

WESTAT ID #

INTERVIEWER'S INITIALS

respondents of complete confidentiality, except when the interviewer believed it necessary to report child abuse or neglect. All respondent materials were produced in English and Spanish.

A total of 433 interviews were completed, which represents 89 percent of those contacted. Caretakers received \$10 in cash and a \$5 McDonald's Gift Certificate for their participation. The interviewers reported that the gift certificates were particularly welcomed.

The Caretaker Instrument. The caretaker interview covered such topics as family composition; physical condition of the home; child, caretaker, and family problems; the child's development; status of problems that occasioned the placement; whether the child has returned home, and if so, and whether any replacements have occurred. Also included Were a recent critical events inventory and a social support inventory. The interview also asked about services provided to the family, including referral to other agencies and their outcomes. For children not yet returned home, the caretaker was asked about his or her desires in this matter and what he or she believed must happen for the family to be reunited. The caretaker was also asked about visitation, events surrounding the reunification, and aftercare services. Caretaker interviews were approximately one hour long. Appendix C- 1 provides a copy of the caretaker interview.

The Field Interviewing Staff. Ten experienced interviewers, selected to reflect the characteristics of the study population, were trained to conduct the interviews. Half the interviewers were bilingual in English and Spanish, as was their supervisor, and half were of African American background. Two were of both Hispanic and African American descent, and two had themselves previously been caseworkers.

Field interviewer Training. On June 5 and 6, 1996, the interviewers participated in two days of training. They were presented with an overview of the study and its goals, a question-by-question review of the instruments in conjunction with the specifications, and practice with prepared scripts in the use of the instruments. Interviewers practiced using the instrument by interviewing the trainer, and when sufficiently acquainted with the design of the questionnaire, practiced interviewing each other using prepared scripts.

Considerable attention was paid to a discussion of locating techniques, as locating problems were anticipated in a sample drawn approximately three years before data collection began. At the conclusion of day two, the field supervisor reviewed the administrative procedures related to interviewers' editing of their own work, weekly reporting on the status of cases, and mailing and payment procedures.

An important part of training was instruction on the social background of the study population, how to approach respondents in a nonthreatening manner so as not to frighten them into thinking that the child might again be removed, and how to ask sensitive questions in general. Interviewers were also instructed on how to report current suspected abuse and neglect in accordance with New York State guidelines, however no such incidents came to light.

As is common practice at Westat, each interviewer was required to complete two cases that were intensively scrutinized by the field supervisor. Immediate feedback was provided on errors or omissions, before work on additional cases was authorized.

A.33 Caseworker Interviews

The purpose of the caseworker interview was (1) to obtain information about cases from a professional perspective and (2) as insurance to provide a source of information about the case, in the event that a caretaker could not be located.

Caseworkers were sent a letter that identified the cases about which they were to be interviewed. They were also sent a listing of the types of questions that would be asked, and were told that a Westat interviewer would call to make an appointment to conduct the interview. If a worker had more than one interview to complete, arrangements were made to accommodate his or her schedule. For example, the worker might want to schedule only one interview a week or two during the same telephone call. Workers were told to have the case record available so as to refer to it during the interview as necessary.

Caseworker interviews sought information on household composition (of the household to which the child had been returned or was intended to return); the physical condition of the home; child, family, and caretaker problems; level of parenting skills and performance; the child's development; status of problems that had occasioned the placement; abuse and neglect allegations since entry into the experiment; and whether the child had returned home, and if so, whether any replacement had occurred. The interview also included information on services provided to the family, visitation by the caseworker, and involvement of the foster parent in the service plan. Finally, the interviewer determined the legal status of the case, extant court orders, and if the child had not been reunified, the current permanency plan. Appendix C-2 is a copy of the caseworker instrument.

Caseworkers who had provided services to the families were interviewed concurrently with caretakers between July and December 1996. Normal worker turnover, as well as the terminations mentioned earlier were a serious problem in a retrospective study such as this. The intent had been to interview a worker who had direct responsibility for and familiarity with the case. In the absence of such a worker the supervisor in charge of the case was asked to be the respondent. When no one at an agency had direct or indirect responsibility for a case, a current supervisor was asked to review the case record and respond based on the written record alone.

When a supervisor had a number of cases to complete, an interviewer was sent to the agency to conduct the interviews in person. One interviewer spent two successive Saturdays at an agency interviewing a supervisor who responded for ten cases based entirely on a review of case records.

One agency declined to complete any caseworker interviews, having experienced 100 percent worker turnover in the past 2 years. The agency felt that no one could provide adequate information. Overall, interviewing caseworkers proved to be much more difficult than interviewing the caretakers. Even when a caseworker was still at an agency, it took many telephone calls to arrange an appointment at the worker's convenience.

The Telephone Interviewing Staff. Caseworker interviews were conducted by telephone from Westat's Telephone Center in Rockville, Maryland. Both the Telephone Center supervisor and the interviewers working on the study had previous experience working on child welfare studies. This is important because interviewers contacting agencies by telephone need a thorough understanding of the administrative functioning of an agency and the bureaucratic terminology they will hear as they are forwarded from office to office within the agency.

Telephone Interviewer Training. In many respects the telephone interviewers training session mirrored that of the field interviewers. The telephone interviewers attended a 2-day training session at which the purpose of the study was presented and a question-by-question review of the instruments conducted. Mock interviewing scripts in which the trainer was the respondent were used to explain instrument issues and highlight potential difficulties that might arise during the interview.

In all, caseworker interviews were completed on 407 cases which represents 87 percent of those cases on which we sought an interview.