

Matters Related to Human Services

The Center for Children and Families: Family Housing Matters (FHM)¹

Prepared for the Children, Families, Health, and Human Services Interim Committee
June 2014

The Family Housing Matters Program

In 2007, the federal Administration for Children and Families (ACF) awarded The Center for Children and Families in Billings a \$2.5 million grant to operate the Family Housing Matters program (FHM) for five years. FHM's success led to ACF renewing the grant in 2012 for two more years. Of the 53 original ACF grants awarded in 2007, only eight were renewed in 2012. That the FHM grant was among those, shows the effectiveness and importance of the program's goal: Improving systems of care and outcomes for children impacted by parental substance abuse, and reducing the financial (and emotional) burdens of foster placement.

FHM provides 24-hour supervised, transitional housing for mothers & children in MT Child Protective Services (CPS) cases in which parental substance abuse has placed children at high risk for abuse/neglect related removal and placement in foster care. FHM seeks to preserve and strengthen Montana families, to alleviate the need to remove children from their families to be placed in the foster care system, to reduce time in foster placements, and to reduce recidivism in CPS (MT CFSD) & criminal justice (MT DOC) systems. Program evaluation data reveals:

- 25 kids avoided entering the foster system, avoiding Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)²
- 25,000+ days of foster care placement costs were avoided - saving taxpayers over \$350,000³
- While the average foster child (of an addicted parent) spends 28 months in foster placement, children in FHM spend an average of only 40 days, some *never* enter³
- 30% reduction in child future "re-entry" to CPS system with the FHM intervention⁴
- 41% of families served to-date have been Native American⁵
- Savings to Montana taxpayers in millions of dollars in healthcare, corrections, & education expenses by intervening early & alleviating/reducing the need for child removal & foster care placements... preserving whole families & **breaking the cycle**⁶ of addiction & neglect, resulting in less ER hospital visits, less special school services, and less recidivism/re-entry to CPS & DOC

In short, FHM saves Montana money and keeps families together⁷. It accomplishes government objectives⁸ in a cost-effective way. The expiration of grant funding has left FHM without financial resources, threatening to increase the burden on Montana administrative agencies and ultimately, the burden on Montana taxpayers.

This Committee's Role

The costs of healthcare, social services, and corrections are skyrocketing. FHM provides a stellar example of how private agencies can accomplish important goals and save the State time and money. Programs like FHM are promising investment opportunities for our government. While this committee's purview is limited, it can help sustain FHM. DPHHS and DOC both have vested interests⁸ in FHM's goals. (65% of FHM clients are on probation or parole; 90% are on TANF at entry). FHM helps keep clients out of expensive correctional facilities. They attain housing & employment and learn to safely parent their own children. This committee can and should ask DPHHS and DOC to allocate funding⁹ to sustain FHM. It should also draft legislation that will sustain FHM's funding through appropriation and allow for the opportunity to replicate the model in other Montana jurisdictions.