

# Family Preservation Services

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## OVERVIEW

### *What is it?*

The program provides intensive, in-home services to prevent children from being removed from their homes, and also provides less-intensive family preservation services to children and families at crisis.

### *Who is it for?*

The services are available to families with children who are at imminent risk of out-of-home placement into social services, mental health, developmental disabilities or substance abuse services, or the juvenile justice system. It is also available to families with children who need less intensive services.

### *Where are applications taken?*

There are no applications for the program. Referrals into the program come primarily from Departments of Social Services, Area Mental Health, Developmental Disability and Substance Abuse agencies, and juvenile justice agencies (such as the courts). Parents may also self-refer into the program if there is immediate risk of out-of-home placement or the child is facing a crisis.

## INTRODUCTION

The North Carolina General Assembly established the Family Preservation Services Program in 1991, in order to prevent unnecessary placement of children away from the families. The services are intended to create positive long term changes by helping families alleviate immediate crises; defuse the potential for physical, sexual, emotional or verbal violence (thereby helping to keep the child, family and community safe); and improve functioning so that the family's quality of life is improved.

There are two levels of family preservation services—one which is more intensive, and one which is less intensive. To be eligible for the more intensive Family Preservation services, families must be screened and the children identified as having an imminent risk of out-of-home place. The less intensive Family Preservation services are available to families in crisis, but not those at imminent risk of an out-of-home placement.

The Family Preservation program is part of a continuum of family-centered placement prevention services, including Family Resource Centers and family support programs (such as the Adolescent Parenting Program or Support Our Students). These programs all differ in program design (such as target population, client eligibility, caseload size, intensity and duration of services, and practice methods), but are all aimed at keeping families together when possible. The Family Preservation program is the most intensive, crisis-oriented within this continuum of services. However, these services are not available in every county of the state.

## **BENEFITS/ SERVICES**

Participating families are entitled to a comprehensive array of services that are tailored to the specific needs of the family. The family is treated as a whole, rather than focus on specific individuals within the family. The types of available services include:

- *Case management*—caseworkers have responsibility for assuring that the needs of the family as a whole are assessed, that service plans are created with the family that reflect the family's goals and priorities, and that all other agencies working with the family are interacting in a coordinated manner and directed towards common goals.
- *Family assessment*—the family preservation caseworker will work with a family to identify the family's strengths, needs and problems; establish goals that are measurable, realistic and achievable; and develop strategies to achieve these goals. Specialized assessments may also be provided, depending on the family's needs. These specialized assessments include neurological, nutritional, speech and language, psychological, drug or vocational evaluations.
- *Intensive family and individual counseling*—counseling services may include individual, couple, family or group counseling, and are intended to help family members focus on problem solving and skills building.
- *Client advocacy*—family preservation caseworkers advocate for families by informing them about available services, helping them obtain needed services and helping families learn to advocate for themselves.
- *Development and enhancement of parenting skills*—family preservation caseworkers help families develop parenting skills identified as a deficiency in the assessment, counseling or case management process. For example, caseworkers can help family members develop skills in such areas as: nurturing, age appropriate expectations, supervision, discipline, behavior management, communication or anger control.
- *Cash assistance*—the caseworker may also be able to help the family with small amounts of money needed to alleviate an immediate crisis, for example, to repair a car or needed appliance, or to restore utilities.

While the types of services provided to families are similar in both the intensive and less intensive Family Preservation programs, the intensity of services and the length of time that services are provided differ. In the intensive Family Preservation programs, families receive assistance for an average of four, but not more than six, weeks. At least one-half of an intensive Family Preservation caseworker's time must be spent in the family's home and community, and caseworkers must be available to each eligible family by telephone or on-call for visits 24 hours a day, seven days a week. To ensure that this level of service can be provided, each caseworker is allowed to work with no more than four families at any time. Families may be referred to other agencies for additional, less-intensive services at the end of the intensive Family Preservation program. In addition, the caseworker may be available to help the family

for brief interventions after the termination of services. In contrast, the maximum length of service for the less intensive Family Preservation program is six months. These caseworkers work with more families because the children are not in immediate risk of an out-of-home placement.

### **Program Location**

The intensive Family Preservation Services program currently operates in the following counties:

<b>County</b>	<b>Program</b>
Alamance	Alamance/Caswell Area Mental Health, Developmental Disability and Substance Abuse agency (Burlington)
Alexander	Foothills Area Mental Health, Developmental Disability and Substance Abuse agency (Lenoir)
Brunswick	Methodist Home for Children (Raleigh)
Buncombe	Blue Ridge Area Mental Health, Developmental Disability and Substance Abuse agency (Asheville) Buncombe County DSS (Asheville)
Burke	Foothills Area Mental Health, Developmental Disability and Substance Abuse agency (Lenoir) Home Remedies Bringing It All Back Home (Morganton)
Cabarrus	Cabarrus County DSS (Concord) Piedmont Behavioral Health Care (Salisbury)
Caldwell	Foothills Area Mental Health, Developmental Disability and Substance Abuse agency (Lenoir) Home Remedies Bringing It All Back Home (Morganton)
Catawba	Catawba County DSS (Newton)
Chatham	Methodist Home for Children (Raleigh)
Cherokee	Mountain Youth Resources (Sylva)
Cleveland	Cleveland County DSS (Shelby)
Cumberland	Cumberland Area Mental Health, Developmental Disability and Substance Abuse agency (Fayetteville)
Davidson	Baptist Children's Home
Franklin	Vance, Granville, Franklin and Warren Area Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services Agency (Henderson)
Forsyth	Forsyth-Stokes Area Mental Health, Developmental Disability and Substance Abuse agency (Winston-Salem)
Gaston	Gaston County DSS (Gastonia)
Graham	Mountain Youth Resources (Sylva)
Granville	Vance, Granville, Franklin and Warren Area Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services Agency (Henderson)
Guilford	Youth Focus (Greensboro)
Haywood	Smokey Mountain Counseling Center (Waynesville)
Iredell	Iredell County DSS (Statesville)
Jackson	Mountain Youth Resources (Sylva) Smokey Mountain Counseling Center (Waynesville)

<b>County</b>	<b>Program</b>
Macon	Mountain Youth Resources (Sylva)
McDowell	Foothills Area Mental Health, Developmental Disability and Substance Abuse agency (Lenoir)
New Hanover	Methodist Home for Children (Raleigh)
Northampton	Choanoke Area Development Assoc. (Rich Square)
Person	Person County Partnership for Children/Family Connections (Roxboro)
Pitt	Methodist Home for Children (Raleigh)
Richmond	Sandhills Center for Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, Substance Abuse Services (Rockingham)
Scotland	Methodist Home for Children (Raleigh)
Stokes	Forsyth-Stokes Area Mental Health, Developmental Disability and Substance Abuse agency (Winston-Salem)
Swain	Smokey Mountain Counseling Center (Waynesville)
Vance	Vance, Granville, Franklin and Warren Area Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services Agency (Henderson)
Warren	Vance, Granville, Franklin and Warren Area Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services Agency (Henderson)
Wayne	Methodist Home for Children (Raleigh)
Wake	Methodist Home for Children (Raleigh)
Wilson	Methodist Home for Children (Raleigh)

The less intensive Family Preservation program operates in the following counties:

<b>County</b>	<b>Program</b>
Buncombe	Blue Ridge Center (Asheville)
Cherokee	Cherokee County DSS (Murphy)
Cleveland	The Cleveland Center (Shelby)
Forsyth	Youth Opportunities (Winston-Salem)
Guilford	Youth Focus (Greensboro)
Haywood	Haywood County DSS (Waynesville)
Henderson	Trend Community Mental Health (Hendersonville)
Hoke	Methodist Home for Children (Raleigh)
Macon	Macon Program for Progress (Franklin)
McDowell	Foothills Area Mental Health (Marion)
Person	Person County Family Connections

**REFERRALS** Families are referred into the program when:

- Other agencies have determined that the service needs of the family are beyond the resources (time, skills, staff) of the current service provider;
- The children can still safely remain in the home (at least on a short-term basis);
- Direct and immediate intensive family preservation services are needed to prevent removal of the children from their homes; and

- At least one parent or primary caregiver is willing and able to participate in the program.

**ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS**

Intensive Family Preservation Services are available to families with one or more children ages birth through 17 years who are at imminent risk of out-of-home placement into the social services, mental health, or juvenile justice systems. The risk may be caused by the actions of the child him or herself, or by someone else in the home. The less intensive Family Preservation program also responds to families in crisis, but not those at imminent risk of an out-of-home placement. Again, to receive these less intensive services, a child must be determined to be a danger to him or herself or others, or threatened by others in the home.

Children who are potentially eligible for the services include those alleged or found to be abused, neglected, or dependent, emotionally or behaviorally disturbed, undisciplined or delinquent, and/or that have medical needs that with assistance could be managed in the home. The major issues facing children at the time of referrals include family violence, school difficulty, alcohol or other drug abuse by one or more family members, neglect, various types of abuse (physical, sexual, emotional/verbal), and unemployment of the caretaker.

There are no income or resource requirements in this program. However, each participant is required to provide the agency with their Social Security number.

**NUMBERS SERVED**

Family Preservation Services were provided to a total of 579 families in FY 1997. There were a total of 1,332 children in these families, of which, 967 were in imminent risk of being removed from the household. Approximately 30% of the children served are between the ages of birth and five.

At the end of the services, less than 8% of the children at imminent risk of out-of-home placement were actually removed from the home. As a whole, families experienced positive changes on environmental, social support, family/caregiver characteristics, family interactions and child well-being scales. The state estimates a net cost savings of \$3.26 dollars saved for every \$1 spent on the program.

Less intensive Family Preservation services were provided to 99 children in FY 1997. Neglect was the main reason for these referrals.

**PRIORITIZATION SYSTEM**

Family Preservation Services are not available to all in need, and are not provided in every county. Even in the counties where a program is operating, there may be insufficient staff or resources to serve all in need. If the family cannot be accepted for immediate services, then the referring agency will be informed so they can move ahead to carry out their service responsibilities.

**APPEAL RIGHTS**

A family that is dissatisfied with their assigned caseworker or the services they receive should contact the supervisor of their local Family Preservation program. If the family is still dissatisfied, the family can contact the head of the local agency.

**FINANCING** Family Preservation programs receive funding through a combination of federal and state dollars. The federal funds come through the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997.

**ADMINISTRATION** The Family Preservation program is administered on the federal level by the Administration for Children and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services. On the state level, the program is administered by the Division of Social Services, in conjunction with the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services within the NC Department of Health and Human Services and the Office of Juvenile Justice within the Governors Office. On the local level, the program is operated through a number of public and private agencies.

**SOURCES OF LAW**

Federal statute:	PL 105-89 (Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997)
Federal regulations:	None
State statute:	NCGS 143B-150.5
State policy manual:	Family Preservation Policies and Standards

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

Children's Services Section  
Resource Development Team for Community-Based Programs  
NC Division of Social Services  
NC Department of Health and Human Services  
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Raleigh, NC 27603-5905  
919-733-2279

Office of Juvenile Justice  
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919-733-3011

Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities  
and Substance Abuse Services  
NC Department of Health and Human Services  
325 N. Salisbury St.  
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