

SHARED FAMILY CARE: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

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Shared Family Care (SFC) offers a unique opportunity to help families achieve permanency for their children and move toward self-sufficiency. In SFC, whole families are placed in the homes of community members who **mentor** the families and work with a team of professionals to help the families obtain the skills and resources they need to become self-sufficient. As an around-the-clock **parenting** program, mentors teach participants practical parenting skills in the context of daily living. A **family support team** helps the family identify goals that are consistent with their case plan, and develop a plan for achieving them. Staff provide the family with intensive case management services and linkage to community resources, and the team closely monitors the family's progress. In addition, SFC programs typically offer **housing assistance** and **aftercare** services. Unlike traditional foster care, the birth parent(s) maintains primary responsibility for the care of her child(ren), and the parent and child learn to live together as a family. Because of the comprehensive and supportive nature of the program, SFC has been effective at **reunifying** families, **preventing** family separation, and helping parents **decide** whether or not to relinquish their parental rights.

Who are the Mentors? Mentors involved in SFC come from diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. Most are women, although almost half are married, and several are single men. The average age of the mentors is 46 years, and almost half have their own children (or grandchildren) living with them. About 75% have at least some education beyond high school, and most either work full-time (69%) or are retired (20%).

Who are the Participants? Most SFC clients are single women with young children, although two-parent families and single fathers have participated. On average, participants are 28 years old and have two children. They typically are very poor, isolated, lack stable housing, and have little education. More than half have a history of substance abuse.

What are the Program Outcomes? Although SFC has now been implemented in several states, the most reliable outcome and cost data come from the SFC Program in Contra Costa County, CA.

- SFC graduates' median monthly **income** increased from \$520 at intake, to \$1,100 at graduation. Additionally, 76% of graduates were **employed** at graduation, compared to only 36% at intake.
- The percentage of families **living independently** (in permanent or transitional housing) increased dramatically from intake (18%) to graduation (76%).
- Three children from 1 graduated family (4%) reentered foster care within one year of completing the program. From a total of 36 children from graduated families, this represents an 8% **re-entry rate** after 12 months. In comparison, 13% of children in California reenter foster care within 12 months of reunification after regular non-kin foster care.

What are the Costs of SFC? Based on a single parent with *two* children in Contra Costa County, CA, the average monthly cost of a SFC placement (including administrative costs) is close to \$3,000. With an average placement duration of 6 months, the total cost for one family is approximately \$18,000. Thus, direct expenses associated with SFC appear to be slightly higher than basic foster care, but considerably lower than treatment foster care. However, these costs are offset by savings resulting from providing housing and services to parents as well as children, and preventing (or minimizing) parent-child separation. To support the comprehensive array of services SFC provides, blended funding packages may be necessary. Various private and public funds for child welfare, homeless, substance abuse, TANF, and general social services have been used to finance SFC.