

Services for Families and Children Involved With the Child Welfare System in North Carolina

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As part of the Title IV-E Waiver evaluation in North Carolina, a web-based survey collected information on service needs, unmet service needs, and service availability for public child welfare agency clients. Child welfare agency directors and staff from 79 out of 100 NC counties completed a survey that explored need and availability questions for 23 service categories typically used by child welfare clients.¹ Respondents also were asked about the number and type of foster homes providing care to children served in out-of-home placement by the agency.

The survey was carried out between June 1, 2005 and September 15, 2005. The first invitation to participate in the survey was sent to 137 respondents from 100 counties. Two weeks later, respondents received a reminder email about the survey. This was followed in late July and mid-August by further reminders to all respondents who had not yet completed the survey. Respondents were asked to provide services information for clients served by the agency between January 1, 2005 and March 31, 2005. Eighty-seven (87) respondents from 79 counties completed the survey. Over half of the respondents (62%) were child welfare directors, assistant directors, or program managers; Title IV-E Waiver demonstration coordinators accounted for 13% of respondents; frontline staff/child welfare workers (6%) and staff filling other agency roles (20%) comprised the rest of the respondents.

Service Needs

Respondents were asked to estimate the percentage of child welfare clients that needed each of 22 specific services. Service needs varied widely in counties. Only two services, parenting classes and substance abuse treatment/counseling, were needed by at least some clients in *all* respondent counties. No county reported that more than three-fourths of its clients needed credit counseling, respite care, homemaker/home management services, help with basic

¹ These service categories included: post-custody support services, child care, credit counseling, services related to domestic violence, education support for children, education support for family members, independent living skills for youth, intensive family preservation, housing support, mental health services, parenting classes, respite care, services for victims of sexual abuse, counseling and treatment for sexual offenders, substance abuse treatment, assistance with transportation, homemaker or home management services, help with basic household needs, legal services, job services, acute health care and dental care.

household needs, legal services, job services, or acute health care services. All of the services were needed by at least some clients of counties responding to the survey.²

Table 1 provides a summary of county responses for all services. There is a high degree of consistency across the services most frequently cited as being needed by more than 25% of child welfare clients. Mental health services, substance abuse services, and parenting classes are the most frequently cited service needs, with almost all counties reporting these service needs. Only two services--home management and assistance with household needs--among the 10 most needed services in Waiver counties are not identified in the top by all other counties. Among the top 10 service needs in other counties, only credit counseling is not included among Waiver counties' most needed services.

Table 1. Service Need among Clients in Waiver and All Other Counties

	Number of Counties Reporting that more than 25% of Clients Need the Service			Service Need Rank ¹		
	Waiver	All Other	Total	Waiver	All Other	Total
Mental health	28	36	64	1	1	1
Substance abuse services	27	35	62	2	2	2
Parenting classes	26	33	59	3	3	3
Child care	24	27	51	4	5	4
Domestic violence	22	26	48	5	6	5
Transportation	20	28	48	6	4	5
housing	17	17	34	7	10	9
Education support - child	15	20	35	8	8	7
Job services	15	18	33	8	9	10
Home management	12	14	26	10	11	11
Household needs	12	13	25	10	13	12
Dental care	11	14	25	12	11	12
Intensive family preservation	10	12	22	13	14	14
Independent living	10	11	21	13	15	15
Legal services	10	10	20	13	17	16
Credit counseling	9	26	35	16	6	7
Education support - family	9	11	20	16	15	17
Sex abuse services	9	10	19	16	17	18
Respite	8	9	17	19	19	19
Aftercare	7	9	16	20	19	20
Sex Offender services	6	3	9	21	22	21
Acute health care	2	6	8	22	21	22

¹ A rank of 1 indicates that the service was needed by more than 25% in the greatest number of counties. As rank increases the number of counties indicating that the service was needed by more than 25% of clients decreases.

² Table A-1 in the Appendix provides a summary of the number and percentage of counties reporting different levels of service need among child welfare clients.

Table 2 summarizes service need among child welfare clients from two perspectives. The first indicator provides a measure for how widespread the need is for particular services by identifying services needed by more than 25% of clients in over half of the reporting counties. The second indicator examines whether there are pockets of extensive needs for any specific service. This indicator provides the number and percent of counties reporting intense need (i.e. more than 75% of clients need this service) for specific services. The need for some services is both widespread and intense.

Table 2: Service Need by County Group

	Service needed by more than 25% of clients in <i>over half</i> of the counties		Number (and %) of counties reporting Service needed by 76 – 100% of clients	
	Waiver	All Other	Waiver	All Other
Aftercare				2 (5%)
Child care	•		5 (18%)	
Counseling, healthcare and other services related to domestic or partner violence	•	•	5 (18%)	3 (8%)
Education Support for Children	•	•	3 (10%)	1 (3%)
Education Support for Family Members			1 (3%)	1 (3%)
Housing support, resources to maintain & improve housing emergency housing assistance	•		2 (7%)	2 (5%)
Independent Living			2 (7%)	2 (5%)
Intensive Family Preservation			1 (3%)	1 (3%)
Mental health services	•	•	7 (24%)	15 (38%)
Parenting Classes	•	•	6 (21%)	7 (18%)
Substance abuse treatment counseling and other services for drug affected clients	•	•	7 (24%)	16 (41%)
Counseling, health care for victims of sexual abuse				2 (5%)
Counseling, treatment for sex offenders				1 (3%)
Assistance with transportation	•	•	1 (3%)	7 (18%)
Job services, assistance with finding a job	•			
Dental care			1 (3%)	1 (3%)

More than half of the Waiver counties identified nine services as being needed by more than 25% of their child welfare clients, the remaining 13 services were identified as needed by as many as 25% of clients. Similarly, half of the other counties identified six services needed by more than 25% of their child welfare clients. Table 2 identifies a high degree of overlap in these

most frequently needed services. A majority of counties in both groups reported that services related to domestic violence, education support for children, mental health, parenting classes, substance abuse, and transportation were needed by more than 25% of their clients.

The pockets of intense need are similar across the county groups. Mental health services, parenting classes and substance abuse treatment were mentioned most often by counties in both groups as high need among clients.

Table 3. Unmet Service Needs

	Number of counties reporting that more than 25% of clients were unable to obtain a needed service					
	# Waiver counties	# All Other	Total # counties	Waiver rank	Other rank	Total rank
Housing support	15	10	25	1	5	2
Transportation	13	12	25	2	2	2
Mental health	12	16	28	3	1	1
Substance abuse services	10	12	22	4	2	4
Legal services	10	10	20	4	5	6
Household needs	9	6	15	6	13	9
Dental care	9	5	14	6	17	10
Sex Offender services	8	11	19	8	4	7
Intensive family preservation	8	9	17	8	7	8
Respite	7	3	10	10	20	15
Child care	6	6	12	11	13	12
Acute health care	6	1	7	11	22	20
Parenting	5	9	14	13	7	10
Job services	5	7	12	13	10	12
Home management	5	7	12	13	10	12
Independent living	4	4	8	16	19	19
Education support - child	3	6	9	17	13	16
Credit counseling	3	6	9	17	13	16
Domestic violence	2	7	9	19	10	16
Education support - family	2	3	5	19	20	22
Sex abuse services	1	9	21	21	7	5
Aftercare	1	5	6	20	17	21

Unmet Service Needs

The survey asked respondents to estimate the percentage of clients who needed a particular service but were not able to obtain it. The majority of “Waiver” and “Other” counties identified the percentage of clients who were served by their agency during the time period of

(1/1/05-3/31/05) who needed a service and were unable to obtain it to be within 0-25%.³ The top five unmet service needs reported by the Waiver counties were housing support, transportation, mental health services, substance abuse services and legal services (Table 3). In addition to these 5 unmet service needs, other counties also included services for sex offenders among their top unmet service needs.

Over half of both Waiver and other counties reported that more than 25% of their clients who needed the following seven services were not able to obtain them: housing support, legal services, mental health services, services for substance abuse, respite, treatment for sex offenders, and assistance with transportation (Table 4). In addition, half of the Waiver counties reported unmet service needs for over 25% of clients who needed help with basic household needs and acute health care services. Dental care, parenting classes and services for victims of sexual abuse were not available to over 25% of clients in more than half of the other counties.

In three Waiver counties over three fourths of clients who needed homemaker services, parenting classes and dental care were unable to obtain these services. Respite care and counseling or treatment for sexual offenders were not available to most of the clients who needed these services in 2 and 4 Waiver counties respectively. At least one other county reported that most of the clients who needed each of the following services were not able to obtain them: aftercare, homemaker services, housing support, legal services, mental health services, parenting classes, counseling for sexual offenders, assistance with transportation and dental care.

³ Table A-2 in the Appendix provides a summary of the number and percentage of counties reporting different levels of unmet service need among child welfare clients.

Table 4: Unmet Service Needs by County Group

	Service unavailable to more than 25% of clients that needed it in <i>over half</i> of the counties		Number (and %) of counties reporting Service unavailable to 76 – 100% of clients who needed it	
	Waiver	All Other	Waiver	All Other
Aftercare				1 (3%)
Help with basic household needs	•			
Homemaker services			1 (4%)	3 (9%)
Housing support, resources to maintain & improve housing emergency housing assistance	•	•		1 (3%)
Legal services	•	•		2 (6%)
Mental health services	•	•		1 (3%)
Parenting Classes		•	1 (5%)	2 (6%)
Substance abuse treatment counseling and other services for drug affected clients	•	•		
Respite	•	•	2 (8%)	
Counseling, health care for victims of sexual abuse		•		
Counseling, treatment for sex offenders	•	•	4 (17%)	7 (19%)
Assistance with transportation	•	•		1 (3%)
Acute health services	•			
Dental care		•	1 (4%)	1 (4%)

Foster Home Availability

The number of public agency foster homes in a county ranges from 0 to 225 (Table 5). Counties participating in the Title IV-E Waiver demonstration contained an average of 58 public foster homes, whereas all other counties reported an average of 20 foster homes. Since each group of counties consists of large, medium and small counties, however, a wide range exists in the number of homes in counties in each group. The smallest number of public agency foster homes reported for Waiver counties was eight, but the largest number 225. For other counties the number of public agency foster homes ranges from none to 27 in all other counties... Similar variation exists in the numbers of private agency foster homes reported, ranging from an average of 51 private agency foster homes in Waiver counties to 16 for the average comparison county to 7 in all other counties. It is important to note, however, that more than half of the respondents from each county group were unable to estimate the number of private agency homes in the county.

Table 5 also provides summary information concerning the number of foster homes for counties grouped by size. Nearly half (47%) of the survey respondents were from small (Level 1) counties, 39% were from medium (Level 2) counties and 14% were from large (Level 3) counties. Level 1 counties reported on average 11 public agency foster homes and 4 private agency foster homes; medium counties reported an average of 35 public agency foster homes and 21 private agency foster homes; in large counties there were on average 117 public agency foster homes and 116 private agency foster homes.

Only 37 counties were able to provide estimates of the number of both public agency and private agency foster homes. Among small counties, three-fourths (76%) could estimate the number of both types of foster homes compared to one-fourth (26%) of medium-sized counties, and 60% of large counties. Among counties providing both estimates, 43% (16 counties) estimated that there were from 7 to 79 more public agency foster homes than private agency foster homes in the county; 41% (15 counties) estimated about the same number of public agency and private agency homes in the counties. Only six counties estimated many more private agency homes than public agency homes in the counties with private agency homes exceeding public agency foster homes by anywhere from 12 to 180.

Table 5. Average Number of Foster Homes and Children in Out-of-Home Placement

	Number of children in placement authority in the county				Number of public agency foster homes in the county				Number of private agency foster homes in the county			
	N	Mean	Median	Range	N	Mean	Median	Range	N	Mean	Median	Range
All counties	70	121	64	2 - 1,017	68	36	22	0 - 225	38	25	3	0 - 338
Waiver	29	205	120	11 - 1,017	28	58	35	8 - 225	13	51	5	0 - 353
Other	41	62	36	2 - 204	40	20	14	0 - 94	25	11	2	0 - 75
Level 1	33	35	30	2 - 121	32	11	8	0 - 51	25	4	0	0 - 30
Level 2	27	102	118	26 - 170	26	35	31	14 - 76	7	21	10	0 - 45
Level 3	10	458	441	196 - 1,017	10	117	102	55 - 225	6	116	85	15 - 353

Since the number of children currently under the placement authority of specific counties ranges from two to more than 1,000 (Table 6), it is informative to analyze the relationship between the number of foster homes in a county and the number of children

currently in out-of-home placement in the county. Among respondent counties, the percentage of children placed in public agency foster homes ranges from 0 to 95% versus 0 to 75% of children placed in private agency foster homes. On average 39% of children in out-of-home placement in the respondent counties were in public agency foster homes compared to 18% of children living in private agency foster homes. These percentages varied by size of county and whether the county was participating in the Waiver demonstration. In Waiver counties slightly more than one-third of children (35%) are in public agency foster homes compared to 42% of children in other counties. About one-fifth (22%) of children in Waiver counties are in private agency foster homes compared to 15% of children in other counties. Both groups of counties report a larger percentage of children placed in public agency foster homes than in homes operated by private agencies as indicated by average ratios of children in public agency homes as private agency homes of 3.6 and 3.0 respectively.

Small and large counties estimate that one-third of the children were placed with a public agency foster home compared to 49% of children from medium-sized counties. Large counties, however, report an average of 26% of children in out-of-home placement are in private agency foster homes compared to only 16% in both small and medium counties.

The percentage of children placed out-of-county serves as a proxy for availability of placement resources. One reason respondents indicated for placing children out of county was the lack of therapeutic placements for special needs children. Other reasons that a county might choose to place a child out of county include placement with a relative or lack of adequate foster homes in the county. On average 20% of children in large counties were placed out-of-county compared to 25% and 38% of children in medium-sized and small counties, respectively. In Waiver counties, a smaller percentage of children (26%) were placed out of county than in other counties (31%). Across all respondent counties, an average of 31% of children were placed out of county.

Table 6. Average Percentage of Children Placed in Public and Private Foster Homes by County Groups

	Mean % and Range of children placed in public agency FHs	Mean % and Range of children placed in private agency FHs	Average Ratio of Children placed in public agency homes to children placed in private agency homes
Total	39 (0 – 95%)	18 (0 – 75%)	5.5 (0 – 75)
Waiver	35 (4 – 95%)	22 (0 – 68%)	3.6 (.25 – 20)
Other	42 (0 – 95%)	15 (0 – 75%)	3.0 (0 – 16)
Level 1	34 (0 – 95%)	16 (0 – 75%)	4.5 (0 – 38)
Level 2	49 (20 – 90%)	16 (0 – 37%)	8.3 (.67 – 75)
Level 3	33 (6 – 80%)	26 (0 – 75%)	1.5 (.47 – 4)

Appendix A

Table A-1. Number and percent of Counties Reporting Different Levels of Service Need among Child Welfare Clients¹

Service Need	0-25% LOW NEED		26-75% MED NEED		76-100% HIGH NEED	
	<i>Waiver</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Waiver</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Waiver</i>	<i>Other</i>
What percentage of child welfare clients needed each service?						
Aftercare (post - custody) support services	22 75.9%	30 76.9%	7 24.1%	7 17.9%		2 5.1%
Child care	4 11.8%	13 32.5%	19 67.9%		5 17.9%	
Credit counseling	20 69%	21 56.8%	9 31%	16 43.2%		
Counseling, healthcare, and other services related to domestic violence/partner violence	7 24.1%	14 35%	17 58.6%	23 57.5%	5 17.2%	3 7.5%
Education support for children	14 48.3%	20 50%	12 41.4%	19 47.5%	3 10.3%	1 2.5%
Education support for adult family members	18 66.7%	29 72.5%	8 29.6%	10 25%	1 3.7%	1 2.5%
Independent living skills for youth	18 64.3%	29 72.5%	8 28.6%	9 22.5%	2 7.1%	2 5%
Intensive Family Preservation	19 65.5%	28 70%	9 31.0%	11 27.5%	1 3.4%	1 2.5%
Housing support including resources to maintain and improve housing, as well as, emergency housing assistance	12 41.1%	22 56.4%	15 51.7%	15 38.5%	2 6.9%	2 5.1%
Mental health services	1 3.4%	4 10%	21 72.4	21 52.5%	7 24.1%	15 37.5%
Parenting classes	3 10.3%	6 15.4%	20 69.0%	26 66.7%	6 20.7%	7 17.9%
Respite care	21 72.4%	30 76.9%	8 27.6%	9 23.1%		
Counseling, health care and other services for victims of sexual abuse	20 69%	30 75%	9 31%	8 20%		2 5%
Counseling and treatment for sex offenders	23 79.3%	37 92.5%	6 20.7%	2 5%		1 2.5%

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Table A-1 contd.

Substance abuse treatment counseling and other services	2 6.9%	4 10.3%	20 69%	19 48.7%	7 24.1%	16 41%
Assistance with transportation	9 31%	12 30%	19 65.5%	21 52.5%	1 3.4%	7 17.5%
Homemaker or home management services	17 58.6%	26 65%	12 41.4%	14 35%		
Help with basic household needs such as furniture and utilities	17 58.6%	27 67.5%	12 41.4%	13 32.5%		
Legal services	19 65.5%	30 75%	10 34.5%	10 25%		
Job services including assistance with finding a job	14 48.3%	22 55%	15 51.7%	18 45%		
Acute health care services	27 93.1%	34 85%	2 6.9%	6 15%		
Dental care	18 62.1%	25 64.1%	10 34.5%	13 33.3%	1 3.4%	1 2.6%

¹ Top number gives # counties, bottom number gives %.

Table A-2. Number and Percent of Counties by Level of Unmet Need among Clients who Need Specific Services¹

Unmet Service Need	0-25% LOW		26-75% MED		76-100% HIGH	
	<i>Waiver</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Waiver</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Waiver</i>	<i>Other</i>
What percentage of clients served by your agency during this time period needed this service and was unable to obtain it?						
Aftercare (post - custody) support services	22 95%	28 84.8%	1 4.3%	4 12.1%		1 3%
Child care	19 76%	29 82.9%	6 24%	6 17.1%		
Credit counseling	19 86.4%	30 83.3%	3 13.6%	6 16.7%		
Counseling, healthcare, and other services related to domestic violence/partner violence	21 91.3%	26 78.8%	2 8.7%	7 21.2%		
Education support for children	21 87.5%	25 80.6%	3 12.5%	6 19.4%		
Education support for adult family members	21 87.5%	27 90%	2 12.5%	3 10%		
Independent living skills for youth	18 81.8%	27 87.1%	4 18.2%	4 12.9%		
Intensive Family Preservation	17 68%	25 73.5%	8 32%	9 26.5%		
Housing support including resources to maintain and improve housing, as well as, emergency housing assistance	11 42.3%	25 71.4%	15 57.7%	9 25.7%		1 2.9%
Mental health services	13 52%	19 54.3%	12 48%	15 42.9%		1 2.9%
Parenting classes	17 77.3%	24 72.7%	4 18.2%	7 21.2%	1 4.5%	2 6.1%
Respite care	18 72%	32 91.4%	5 20%	3 8.6%	2 8%	
Counseling, health care and other services for victims of sexual abuse	22 95.7%	24 72.7%	1 4.3%	9 27.3%		
Counseling and treatment for sex offenders	16 66.7%	25 69.4%	4 16.7%	4 11.1%	4 16.7%	7 19.4%

Table A-2, contd.

Substance abuse treatment counseling and other services	13 56.5%	22 64.7%	10 43.5%	12 35.3%		
Assistance with transportation	13 50%	23 65.7%	3 50%	11 31.4%		1 2.9%
Homemaker or home management services	19 79.2%	27 79.4%	4 16.7%	4 11.8%	1 4.2%	3 8.8%
Help with basic household needs such as furniture and utilities	17 65.4%	28 82.4%	9 34.6%	6 17.6%		
Legal services	15 60%	25 71.4%	10 40%	8 22.9%		2 5.7%
Job services including assistance with finding a job	20 80%	25 78.1%	5 20%	7 21.9%		
Acute health care services	17 73.9%	32 97%	6 26.1%	1 3%		
Dental care	15 62.5%	29 85.3%	8 33.3%	4 11.8%	1 4.2%	1 2.9%

¹ Top number: number of counties
Bottom number: percentage