DHS-4630A-ENG 12-11

Minnesota Permanency Demonstration: Final Evaluation

A report for the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services on the Minnesota Title IV-E Child Welfare Waiver Demonstration

Prepared for the Minnesota Department of Human Services
by the Institute of Applied Research

Copyright © 2011 by the Institute of Applied Research
Institute of Applied Research
103 W. Lockwood, Suite 200
St. Louis, MO 63119
(314) 968-9625
www.iarstl.org

Table of Contents

Executive Summary ..... i-vii

Chapter 1. Introduction 1
- A. Overview of the Demonstration 1
- B. Evaluation Design and Methodology 8

Chapter 2. Process Analysis 17
- A. Implementation 17
- B. Waiver Eligibility and Assignment 25
- C. Waiver Utilization 29
- D. Characteristics of Children and Caregivers 36
- E. Services 49
- F. Permanency, the MnPD Benefit and Caregiver Decisions 52

Chapter 3. Outcome and Impact Analysis 69
- A. Improvements in Permanency 71
- B. Child Wellbeing 84

Chapter 4. Analysis of Costs 92
- A. Cost Data Analysis 93
- B. Costs by Race and Special Needs 98
- C. Age of Children and Costs 99
- D. Conclusions 100

Chapter 5. Permanency and Child Wellbeing 102
- A. Permanency and Stability of the Living Situation 104
- B. General Wellbeing of Children 104
- C. Resilience, Coping and Functioning 106
- D. Relationship between Caregiver and Child 108
- E. Conclusion 109

Appendix A. Web-Based Entry Program 112
Appendix B. Pair-Matching Methodology 119
Appendix C. Foster Care Placement Counties 121

Executive Summary

The Minnesota title IV-E child welfare waiver demonstration, called the Minnesota Permanency Demonstration (MnPD), was a continuous benefit, assisted guardianship demonstration administered by the state Department of Human Services. The purpose of the MnPD was to determine whether a continuous (or single) benefit program would increase permanency rates and shorten foster care stays among children who have been in foster care for an extended period of time. The continuous benefit program raised the public assistance benefits received by caregivers who adopt or accept permanent legal and physical custody of their foster children to a level equal to the rate paid for foster care. Historically, benefit rates paid to eligible caregivers who offer a foster child a permanent home could be half the rate paid for foster care.

Any child who had been living in a safe and stable foster home at least six months, was title IV-E eligible and for whom reunification was ruled out was eligible for the MnPD project. Certain children who historically have been more difficult to move into permanent living situations were targeted by the project. These included children with special needs who had serious psychological, physical and behavioral problems, children who were older, children with siblings in foster care, and children who were American Indian and African American. The MnPD project ran from October 2005 through September 2010. This is the Final Evaluation Report of the demonstration.

Project Scope. The state was authorized to operate the MnPD in six counties, including the two metropolitan counties of Hennepin and Ramsey, a rapidly growing suburban county, Dakota, and three smaller rural counties, Carlton, Cass and Mille Lacs.

Research Design and Data Sources. The evaluation utilized a mixed experimental design, involving an experimental field study with random assignment in the metropolitan counties and a quasi-experimental, matched case comparison design in the non-metro counties. The experimental study provided the primary test of the impact and costs of the continuous benefit program. The process study examined implementation issues in all project counties, the effect of the program on the wellbeing of children and sought to understand why foster caregivers accepted or rejected the continuous benefit. Data sources included extractions and downloads from the state's Social Services Information System (SSIS), interviews and surveys of foster caregivers, a case-specific survey of a sample of cases by caseworkers, and site visits and staff interviews.

Implementation. Overall, the implementation of the program was uneven. A major issue that affected implementation of the MnPD from the first year of the project was concern among participating counties of their financial liability. Because the Minnesota child protection services system is county administered, the cost neutrality requirements of the MnPD project impact each

county individually and directly. Dakota and Ramsey counties assigned children to the MnPD project steadily throughout the five years of the demonstration. Hennepin County, after assigning a large number of children to the project initially, froze waiver assignment for nearly two years before restarting. Carlton County placed a moratorium on new waiver assignments after a year and did not assign any additional children to the waiver for the duration of the demonstration. Cass County assigned only two children to the waiver. Mille Lacs County did not assign any children to the waiver and formally withdrew from the project. There were, in effect, four rather than six counties that participated in the demonstration, and only two that participated without interruption throughout the full five years of the project.

Procedures for identifying eligible children and assigning them to the waiver varied at the very start of the project and then became generally uniform across counties. Generally, it was caseworkers who initially identified potential MnPD project children and brought them to the attention of their county project managers. County project managers, sometimes following discussion of permanency plans for the children during unit meetings, confirmed program eligibility and entered the names into the web assignment program developed by the evaluator. However, during the first program quarter in Ramsey and Hennepin counties, when a large number of eligible children were assigned to the program, the assignment method was different; project managers themselves identified eligible children using the state's SSIS data only and made the MnPD project assignment without consulting caseworkers.

Study Population and Characteristics. The full study population consisted of 1,250 children. This number included 944 children in Hennepin and Ramsey counties randomly assigned to the waiver, or experimental, group (n=488) and the control group (n=456), as well as 153 children assigned to the waiver in the other counties plus 153 matching, comparison children from non-MnPD counties. The mean age of children when assigned to the waiver was 8.4 years. Children with one or more physical, intellectual or psychological disabilities accounted for 45 percent of waiver group children. African American children comprised the largest ethnic group on the waiver, 45 percent. About a third (32 percent) of the children were Caucasian and 20 percent were American Indian. Hennepin County had the largest percentage of American Indian children assigned to the waiver (35 percent), while Ramsey County assigned the largest percentage of African American children (62 percent). The median household income of the foster caregivers was $42,104; 12 percent of the households received food stamps and one-third participated in the WIC program.

Half (49.2 percent) of waiver group children had been placed in the home of a foster caregiver who was related to them and 60.7 percent of the children were part of a sibling group in placement. The mean length of continuous placement in foster care for the waiver group children was 997 days, or 2.7 years; considering only the placement setting at the time of assignment, the mean length of

placement was 1.6 years. Over four in ten waiver group children were in foster care in a different county from the one in which the case originated, usually to be with relatives.

Based on information available to evaluators it appears that about 8 in 10 caregivers of waiver group children were offered the MnPD continuous benefit. Sometimes the offer was not made due to disruptions in the placement situation or because a caregiver or child did not want a permanent relationship. Occasionally, caseworkers had serious reservations about the suitability of a foster caregiver placement as a permanent home for a child.

Decision Making about Permanency. The most frequently expressed concerns among foster caregivers regarding adoption or permanent legal and physical custody of children in their care, were about the financial support they received and fears of losing medical assistance for the child. A large percentage of caregivers also expressed concerns about the child's behavior, the child's physical and mental health, and the special services needs of children related to their physical, intellectual or psychological disabilities. These concerns were more often reported by foster caregivers who accepted permanent legal and physical custody of children than those who chose to adopt. Relative caregivers were more likely than non-relatives to be concerned about the child's future relationship with his or her biological parents and more likely to consider how the child's parents might feel about permanency.

Caregivers who chose not to offer a foster child a permanent home within their family gave greater weight to the amount of financial support they might receive from the county or state, expressed greater concerns about the state of the foster child's physical and mental health, and were more likely to be concerned about the effect of the decision on their own children. Nearly half (45 percent) of the caregivers of waiver group children said they would have adopted or accepted permanent legal and physical custody of their foster child without the MnPD benefit; others said they would not have made the decision or were not sure. It was the judgment of caseworkers that about four in ten caregivers who ended up providing a permanent home for waiver group children had already decided to do so prior to the continuous benefit offer being made, and nearly as many were seen as leaning in that direction. This left about one in five cases, in the judgment of caseworkers, in which the offer made a clear difference. Interviews and surveys of caregivers suggested that the continuous benefit was considered more important in enabling caregivers to make a final permanency decision in the case of sibling groups.

Outcomes. Analyses were conducted separately for the experimental component of the study population (involving children randomly assigned (RA) to the waiver and control groups in Hennepin and Ramsey counties) and for the quasi-experimental component in other counties involving waiver

and matched comparison children. All children were in out-of-home placement when they entered the study population, and the majority had achieved permanency by the end of the study.

1. Adoption and Permanent Legal/Physical Custody. The MnPD significantly impacted rates of permanent legal and physical custody in the RA population (waiver: 19.0 percent, control: 8.6 percent). However, adoption was significantly more likely among control group children in the RA population (control: 53.1 percent, waiver: 45.9 percent). The statistical significance of this finding was the result of a program similar to the MnPD available to control group children in Ramsey County. When these children were removed from the analysis, no differences were found between waiver and control groups in adoption. Another analysis showed that adoption decisions were made for entire sibling groups and that certain imbalances in the proportions of sibling groups were present between experimental and control children in Hennepin County. This may also have been a factor in the comparisons of adoption outcomes for individual children.

2. Child's Age. The child's age was a factor in achieving permanency within the RA population but only for permanent legal and physical custody and not for adoption. The MnPD benefit was associated with a greater number of caregivers assuming permanent legal and physical custody of children in their care and the effects were strongest for younger children. Twenty percent of waiver group children under 9 years of age achieved permanent legal and physical custody versus 5.6 percent of control group children.

3. Relative/Non-relative. Adoptions were favored by non-relatives and permanent legal and physical custody was favored by relatives under the MnPD. Adoptions of RA children by non-relatives were found significantly more often among waiver group children, while adoptions by relatives occurred more often among control group children (analysis limited Hennepin County).

4. Ethnicity. Permanent legal and physical custody occurred significantly more often for both American Indian and African American children through the MnPD in the RA population. No differences were found in adoption outcomes for either group.

6. Special Needs. Among children with disabilities, no differences in permanent legal and physical custody were found as a result of the MnPD, although the proportions of these children achieving permanent legal and physical custody were very small in both the waiver and control groups. A trend favoring the waiver group was found in adoption outcomes in Hennepin County.

7. Reunification. Although the total numbers were small, significantly more control group children were reunified with their birth parents than waiver group children in the RA population.

8. Time to Permanency. Analyses demonstrated that permanency was achieved sooner for the waiver group within the MnPD study population as a whole, and particularly for the permanent legal and physical custody outcome. However, adoptions occurred within a mean of 305 days for the waiver group compared to 265 days for control group children, primarily due to the Adoption Equalization Program (AEP) in Ramsey County. Regarding permanent and physical custody, this outcome was achieved for RA waiver children in 170 days compared to 194 days for RA control children.

9. Placement and Permanency Disruptions. Looking at the entire MnPD study population, waiver children experienced an average of 2.0 relocations in foster care while control/comparison group children showed an average of 2.2. This difference was not statistically significant ($p = .242$). Very few disruptions after a permanency outcome was achieved were found and no meaningful analysis was possible.

10. Subsequent Accepted Abuse/Neglect Reports. No significant difference was found in the RA population for this outcome.

11. Length of Time in Foster Care. For the entire study population, MnPD waiver group children were in foster care placements for a mean of 625 days compared to 758 days for control/comparison group children. This difference was statistically significant. For RA waiver group children the number of days in foster care was 702 compared to 787 for control children.

12. Improvements in Child Well-being. Caregivers of waiver group children were more likely to say that the children wished to remain with them permanently. Caregivers of waiver group children were also more positive in their responses concerning how well the child was doing at the time that the caregiver was contacted. The general well-being of waiver group children was described more often as "excellent" by their caregivers than was the case with control group children (40.3 percent vs. 29.8 percent). Over half (53.5 percent) of waiver group children were said to be doing "a lot" better than a year ago compared with about one-third (34.4 percent) of control group children.

The assessment of caregivers of waiver group children, as a group, was more positive than that of caregivers of control group children on several child characteristics. On three of these characteristics, the difference between the two groups was statistically significant—"happy" ($p=.026$), "healthy" ($p=.043$), and "trusting" ($p=.037$). When the race of the child was considered, caregivers of White and American Indian children in the waiver group indicated their child was "very happy" substantially more often, while little difference was found between the two groups for African American children.

Cost Analysis. The cost analysis considered all county, state and federal costs available to evaluators, including costs associated with Foster Care maintenance and administrative costs, Adoption Assistance, Relative Custody Assistance, Adoption Assistance child care, and MnPD payments. Total mean costs calculated were $46,894 for wavier children and $51,457 for control children or a savings of $4,563 per child.

The pattern of higher costs for control children was found among White and African American cases and in cases of children with special needs. It was reversed for American Indian cases, although the numbers of cases for this part of the evaluation were small and a larger study would be necessary to validate the present results.

Ages of Children and Costs. Control and waiver savings were less for younger children compared to preteens (ages 10 to 12 years) and younger teens (ages 13 to 15). Thus, the greatest savings were found in the 10 to 15 year age range. Little difference in costs was found between waiver and control group children 16 years old and older, although overall costs for these children were less as they aged out of the system more quickly.

Generalizing the Cost Analysis to the All Minnesota Children in Foster Care. Certain cautions were pointed out in applying this analysis to the general Minnesota population in out-of-home placement. The MnPD had a special focus on children of color and special needs children. The project was successful in serving these populations. Whether savings would be higher or lower in the general population, where the portions of children of color and special needs children are different, is unknown. The MnPD did not appear to have increased rates of adoption but only permanent legal and physical custody outcomes in Hennepin and Ramsey counties, where the stronger random assignment experimental method was utilized. The reasons for this are not known but could have been related to incomes of potential permanent caregivers or to the greater proportion of special needs children in this project. Under a continuous benefits system, adoption rates might be higher in the general population. It is also possible that permanent legal and physical custody rates would be higher. In either case savings might be increased, but this cannot be known from the present analysis. Finally, in a minority of waiver group cases, caregivers were not offered the MnPD continuous benefit. How this affected outcomes is not known. In a statewide continuous benefit system, the benefit would effectively be present in all cases, even as the children moved from one foster caregiver to another, and all foster caregivers would be aware of it. No “offers” would be necessary, and this might also affect outcomes.

Conclusions. Analyses conducted in the evaluation of the MnPD supported the premise that the well-being of children is enhanced through the establishment of permanent homes and relationships with foster caregivers. The difference in outcomes between waiver and control group

children was significant but modest, and found only with respect to permanency through legal and physical custody outcomes. At the same time, these benefits were found to be achieved with some savings in total costs. Children in the waiver group were moved to permanency more quickly. Results further indicated that children who were the special target of the demonstration—children of color and children with special needs who have been historically more likely to remain in foster care for long periods of time—had a more difficult time achieving permanency, even with the added incentive of the MnPD continuous benefit. In the end it depends on the value a society places on child well-being and what cost it is willing to pay to assure it.

Chapter 1. Introduction

The Minnesota title IV-E child welfare waiver demonstration, called the Minnesota Permanency Demonstration (MnPD), was a continuous (or single) benefit assisted guardianship demonstration administered by the state Department of Human Services. It was approved by the federal Department of Health and Human Services, under Section 1130 of the Social Security Act, on October 1, 2004. The demonstration was authorized for 20 calendar quarters, beginning October 1, 2005 and ending September 30, 2010. The date of initial implementation was November 14, 2005. This is the final evaluation report of the demonstration.

A. Overview of the Demonstration

The objective of the Minnesota child welfare demonstration was to increase permanency outcomes in the living situations of children in foster care through the development of a new single or continuous benefit program. The continuous benefit program, as described in the demonstration's Terms and Conditions, provided foster caregivers "with benefit continuity that follows the child from foster care to a permanent adoptive or relative placement, regardless of the legal status of the child."

The continuous benefit program implemented in the Minnesota demonstration raised the public assistance benefits paid to foster caregivers in cases of adoption or a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody outcomes to a level equal to the rate paid for foster care. Under the traditional system in place at the start of the demonstration, a foster caregiver's benefit was significantly reduced (sometimes by as much as 50 percent) if they chose to adopt or accept permanent legal and physical custody for a child in their care. The basic hypothesis of the MnPD project was that child permanency rates would increase and stays in foster care would decrease through the elimination of financial disincentives that discouraged foster caregivers from offering children in their care a permanent home. As a demonstration, the purpose of the MnPD was to test that hypothesis.

In many states, legally permanent relative placement is referred to as guardianship; in Minnesota it is termed as a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody to a relative. Guardianship is also the term used in Section 473 of the Social Security Act, the section for which waivers were granted for the MnPD. (The specific waivers granted to the state are listed on page 4.) Minnesota statutes do not express a preference between the permanency alternatives of adoption or a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody to a relative.

Goals. As stated in the Terms and Conditions, the "overall goal of the single benefit program is to increase the willingness of foster care families to adopt or assume legal custody of special needs children by eliminating the financial barriers to these permanency options." Specific project goals include:

1. Increase the permanency rates of children in long-term foster care, especially children in targeted groups (American Indian, African American, and special needs).
2. Reduce long-term foster care stays, especially, again, for targeted children.
3. Reduce adoption and relative custody dissolutions and disruptions.
4. Improve the well-being outcomes of children in the foster-care system.
5. Improve participant satisfaction with the foster care system.
6. Reduce the administrative and direct service costs of foster care placements.
7. Enhance the state's understanding of effects of a continuous benefit on foster family decision-making and attitudes toward permanency.

Eligible and Targeted Children. The MnPD targeted children who were title IV-E eligible in home-based foster care for whom reunification had been ruled out as a permanency option. The project was limited to children placed in "safe and stable" foster homes for at least six months, although an amendment to the Terms and Conditions allowed exceptions to be made to the six-month rule. As described in the state's original child welfare waiver proposal and in the waiver Terms and Conditions, the project was intended to place particular attention on American Indian children and children with special needs. These later were defined as children who were older, part of a sibling group and/or had intense psychological, physical and behavioral problems. From the start of the project, African American children were also included among those given special emphasis. Both American Indian and African American children have historically been harder to achieve permanency, while being disproportionally represented in Minnesota's foster care system, especially in the population of children in long-term foster care. While children who are "older" are specifically referenced, the Terms and Conditions permitted children of any age, who otherwise met eligibility requirements, to be included in the MnPD project.

There are, therefore, two groups of children who formed the target population. The more comprehensive group consisted of children who met the minimum eligibility criteria, that is, they were "title IV-E eligible children in selected counties in home-based, long-term foster care for whom reunification has been rule out as a permanency option [and who have been] placed in a safe and stable home for at least six months." Within this larger group of eligible children are those more directly targeted in the demonstration, those described in the Terms and Conditions as having "special needs" to whom "the demonstration will place particular attention."

Background. Over many years, the state has sought ways to transition children in foster care into permanent homes. Nevertheless, many children have remained in foster care for extended periods of time despite these efforts. Many such children are older, members of sibling groups, and have a variety of special need conditions. The 2001, the Minnesota Children and Family Services Review (CFSR) concluded that the state's Adoption Assistance and Relative Custody Assistance programs' benefit reduction for foster caregivers was a serious barrier to permanency. The CFSR outcome analysis cited this issue as "discouraging adoption" and "reducing the number of relatives who might take advantage of the program instead of remaining as foster parents."

Two advisory groups convened by the Minnesota Department of Human Services in 2002 examined the issue of extended foster care stays and options available to move children sooner to permanent living arrangements. Participants in these groups argued that the benefit structure in place was a barrier to adoption and transfer of permanent legal and physical custody outcomes, and both groups recommended a single benefit program that eliminated what they saw to be counter-productive, financial disincentives involved in transitioning children from foster care to either adoption or permanent legal and physical custody.

A Minnesota legislative proposal in 2002 (*Single Benefit Package for Children in Out-of-Home Placement)* discussed the financial disincentives to child permanency in the existing child protection system and reviewed options for reform. The report described the basic problem of the difference in basic benefits between the foster care program (which paid $500-607 per month) compared with the Adoption Assistance and Relative Custody Assistance programs' (which paid $247-337 per month). Foster caregivers who wanted to adopt or assume permanent legal and physical custody of the children they cared for faced the prospect of losing about half of the financial assistance they received as foster caregivers. This can be a significant problem for foster caregivers with low incomes or in poverty, including many American Indian and African American relative foster caregivers. The legislative proposal suggested correcting this barrier by creating a single benefit program with a single assessment tool for all children and adjusting the benefit structure based on each child's needs.

A report of the Department of Human Services, *Study of Outcomes for African American Children in Minnesota's Child Protection System* (April 2002), described a deep concern about racial disparities in permanency rates and suggested a title IV-E waiver demonstration project as a possible funding option to study and restructure the traditional benefit programs.

The correlation between the disparity of benefits and permanency rates was also described in DHS's *Annual Progress & Services Report* of June 2003. Long-term foster care has been a particularly troublesome issue among American Indian children in the state. American Indian tribes and

communities generally oppose the termination of parental rights as a permanency goal for children in foster care because it is not consistent with their cultural values and traditions. This has been a barrier to the adoption of American Indian children. In addition, relatively high rates of poverty among American Indian and African American families, especially relative foster caregivers, have made accepting permanent legal care of children problematic when it means a loss or reduction of benefits.

The MnPD waiver project was viewed as a direct response by the state to these problems and as an opportunity to test a policy that was being considered as a way to improve permanency outcomes for children in foster care.

Specific Waivers. Under the federal title IV-E waiver Terms and Conditions, the state received waivers of the following provisions of the Social Security Act and Program Regulations in the operation of the title IV-E child welfare demonstration project:

- Section 472 (a): Expanded Eligibility: To allow the State to expend title IV-E funds for children and families who are not normally eligible under Part E of title IV of the Act as described in the Terms and Conditions.

- Section 474(a)(3)(E) and 45 CFR 1356.60(c)(3): Expanded Services: To allow the State to make payments for services that will be provided that are not normally covered under Part E of title IV of the Act; and to allow the State to use title IV-E funds for these costs and services as described in the Terms and Conditions, Section 2.0.

- Section 471 (a)(3): Waiver of State plan requirement that the State's foster care and adoption assistance plan be in effect in all subdivisions of the State.

- Sections 473(a)(1)(A), 473(a)(1)(B)(ii), 473(a)(3), and 45 CFR 1356.40 – Guardianship Payments: To allow the State to implement guardianship payment agreements and make guardianship payments to guardians for the care of children, as described in the Terms and Conditions, Section 2.

- Section 473(a)(3): To waive the provision requiring consideration of the circumstances of the adoptive parents.

Service Intervention Strategy. Within the limits set forth in the waiver Terms and Conditions, Minnesota instituted a continuous benefit program for eligible foster children and their caregivers. Through this program foster caregivers of children in the wavier group were offered a continuous

benefit, which was their current foster care benefit rate, if they adopted or accepted a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody of the children in their care. As opposed to the traditional system, as experienced by non-participating foster families across the state and control group caregivers in demonstration counties, benefits paid to waiver group foster caregivers were not reduced when the child moved from foster care to permanent care. The MnPD project examined the impact on permanency outcomes of the continuous benefit program contrasted with the existing Adoption Assistance and Relative Custody Assistance programs in the state.

Program Features. The core program features of the continuous benefit demonstration were the following:

- Reunification was ruled out as a permanency option for children assigned to the demonstration.
- All cases were required to be eligible for title IV-E reimbursement.
- Caregiver rights and responsibilities were clearly articulated in a written benefit agreement.
- All caregivers had to meet foster care licensure requirements.
- Adoption or permanent legal and physical custody was determined to be in the best interest of the child.
- The child was in the custody of the state court system.
- Adoption and permanent legal and physical custody were available to children of any age.
- A participating child had been residing in a safe and stable home for at least six months (with some exceptions permitted).
- Minnesota definition of relative or kin included persons related to the child by blood, marriage, or adoption, or an individual who was an important friend with whom the child had resided or had significant contact.
- Children in sibling groups were to be placed together in the same permanent home at the same rate.

Scope. The waiver Terms and Conditions of the MnPD permitted the state to operate the project in six counties. The six counties proposed by the state and named in the waiver Terms and Conditions were Cass, Carlton, Dakota, Hennepin, Mille Lacs, and Ramsey counties. Hennepin and Ramsey counties include the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, which comprise the largest metropolitan area in the state. Dakota County is a rapidly growing, relatively affluent suburban county just south of the Twin Cities. Cass, Carlton and Mille Lacs counties are smaller in population and more rural, located north of the Twin Cities. A primary reason for their inclusion in the MnPD was the number of American Indian children in their population and because these children were, from the start, a major focus of the project.

Participation Differences. For reasons that are discussed in Chapter 2, participation in the MnPD project by program counties varied a great deal. Dakota and Ramsey counties assigned children to the MnPD project on a steady basis throughout the five years of the demonstration. Hennepin County, after assigning a large number of children to the project initially, froze MnPD project assignment midway through 2007. The county resumed program assignment in March 2009, the 41st month of the demonstration, and continued through the end of the demonstration in September 2010, although at lower level than Ramsey and Dakota counties. Carlton County, after operating the project for 13 months, placed a moratorium on new waiver assignments in January 2007 and did not assign any additional children to the waiver for the duration of the demonstration. Cass County assigned only two children to the waiver, one during the first year of the demonstration and one during the second. Mille Lacs County did not assign any children to the waiver and formally withdrew from the project in the first program year. There were, in effect, four rather than six counties that participated in the demonstration, and only two that participated without interruption throughout the full five years of the project.

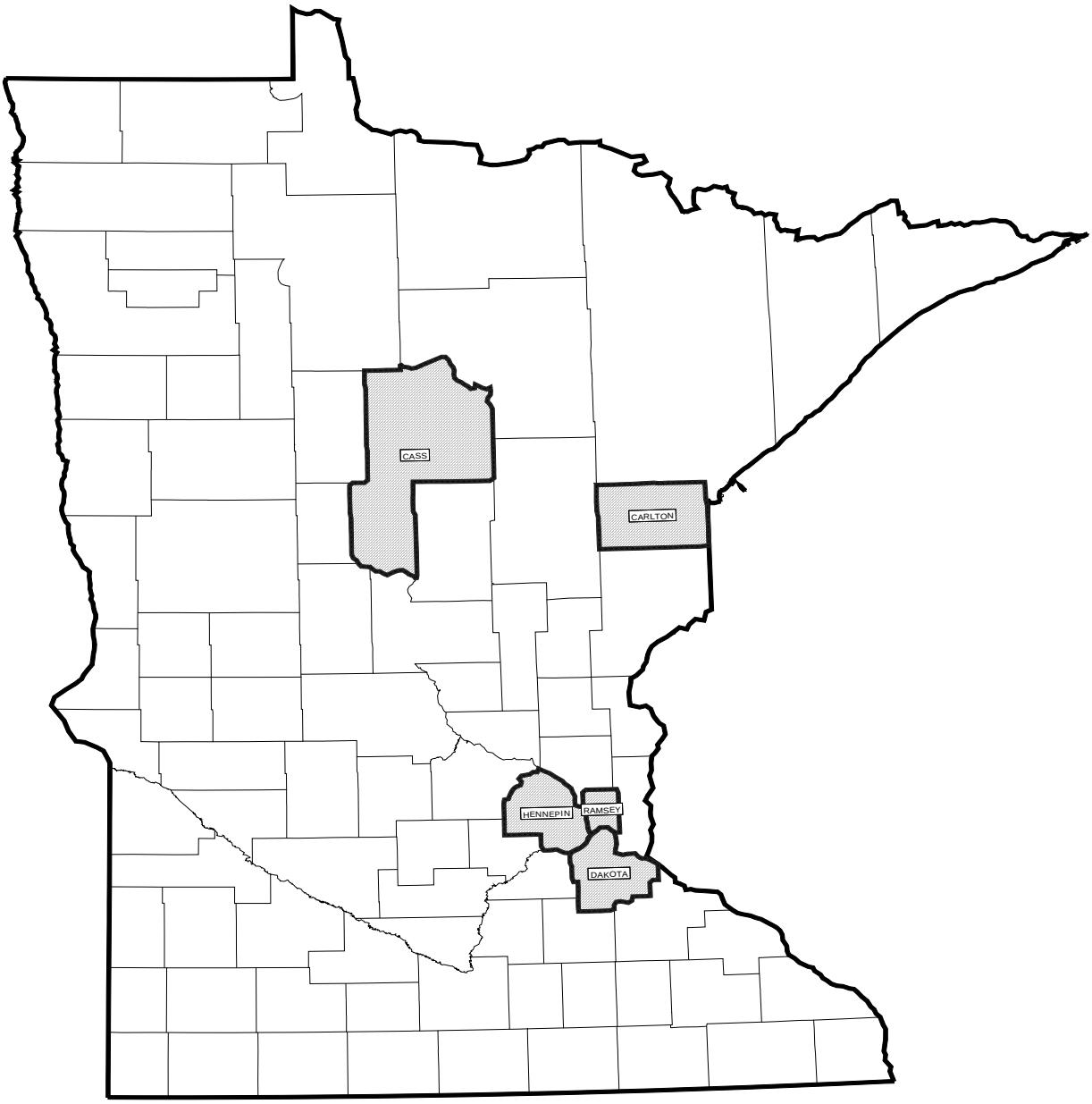
County Characteristics. Socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of participating counties are shown in **Table 1**. As can be seen there are substantial differences in the size of the populations of the counties, in the level of poverty and household income, and in population ethnicity
.

Table 1. Selected Characteristics of MnPD Counties

	Carlton	Cass	Dakota	Hennepin	Ramsey	MN	US
Population (2009 est)	34,327	28,534	396,500	1,156,212	506,278	5,303,925	308.7 m
Change (from 2000)	8.4%	5.1%	11.4%	3.6%	-1.0%	7.8%	9.7%
Under 18	23.7%	21.9%	25.9%	22.6%	23.1%	23.9%	24.3%
White	91.0%	86.3%	88.6%	79.8%	77.2%	88.6%	79.6%
African American	1.1%	0.4%	4.6%	10.9%	9.8%	4.7%	12.9%
American Indian	5.6%	11.3%	0.5%	1.2%	0.9%	1.3%	1.0%
Asian	0.5%	0.3%	4.0%	5.8%	9.7%	3.8%	4.6%
Hispanic	1.5%	1.4%	4.7%	6.4%	6.6%	4.3%	15.8%
Person/square mile	36.8	13.5	624.4	2,003.9	3,275.9	61.8	79.6
Median household inc	$49,270	$41,740	$71,988	$62,275	$52,762	$57,318	$52,029
Living in poverty	10.9%	14.5%	4.6%	11.0%	13.5%	9.6%	13.2%

Source: United States Census Bureau. Retrievable at http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/27/27053.html

The counties that participated in the MnPD and assigned children to the waiver are shown are shown on **Map 1**. While the waiver Terms and Conditions permitted the state to expand the demonstration to other counties with federal approval, no other counties were added.



Map 1. Counties that Participated in the MnPD

B. Evaluation Design and Methodology

Design of the Evaluation

The evaluation of the Minnesota Permanency Demonstration included an impact study, process study and cost analysis. Evaluators did not conduct the cost neutrality analysis, which was done by the Financial Operations Division of the Minnesota Department of Human Services.

The research design utilized in the evaluation was bifurcated in nature. The portion of the study that pertained to the metro counties of Hennepin and Ramsey involved an experimental design with the random assignment of children eligible for the waiver to the experimental or control group. In the other smaller counties, the research design was quasi-experimental, with randomization replaced by a pair-matching procedure that identified non-waiver cases in non-project counties that most resembled cases assigned to the waiver in project counties.

The experimental study with randomization in Hennepin and Ramsey counties provided the primary test of the impact of the MnPD continuous benefit program, although outcomes in other counties were also analyzed. Caregivers of control group children in the two metro counties and comparison group children in the other counties served as points of comparison for analyzing other issues, such how decisions are made about offering a child a permanent home, whether or not the continuous benefit offer is accepted, and the affects of permanency on child well-being.

In Hennepin and Ramsey counties, children were assigned randomly either to the waiver (experimental) or to the control group. Prior to random assignment, county agencies screened children for MnPD project eligibility. Random assignment was done through a web-based procedure designed by the evaluator. As a first step in this procedure, county MnPD project managers entered the characteristics of the child into the database that qualified him or her for the project. This provided evaluators with some essential information about the children in the study population and also served as a broad error trap to increase the probability that only children who met program eligibility criteria were assigned to one of the study groups. The web-based system used to assign children in a random manner to the waiver or control groups is described in **Appendix A**.

In the three non-metro counties, accurate screening data was especially critical. For each child assigned to the MnPD project in these counties, a similar child was found in another county in the state to serve as a matched case. Correct matching depended on knowing important characteristics of each child assigned to the project. Besides obvious types of demographic variables, children had also to be similar on several other variables that have the potential to affect placement outcomes and permanency. To insure that evaluators had all necessary information for matching, local county

MnPD project managers were asked to enter children that they assigned to the project into the same entry program available to the two random assignment counties. However, random assignment did not occur. Instead, confirmation was requested that the child was assigned to the MnPD project and that the foster caregiver would be offered the MnPD continuous benefit. Besides providing the evaluators with information on the characteristics of assigned children, this procedure also provided Social Service Information System (SSIS) identifiers. Accurate entry of such information was essential because no indicator was entered into SSIS indicating the MnPD assignment status of children. A description of the pair matching methodology is provided in **Appendix B**.

The process study monitored the implementation of the MnPD project, assessed the similarities and dissimilarities of county agency approaches to the project, and identified procedural and operational factors that influenced MnPD project assignments and outcomes. The process study focused particularly on the project's non-quantitative goals, including coordination with American Indian tribes, seeking to understand why foster caregivers of children in the waiver group accepted or rejected the continuous benefit option, soliciting additional information on the well-being of children in the study population and the attitudes of caregivers regarding the foster care and traditional benefit systems. The process study also monitored the level of participation in the MnPD project on the part of counties and the concerns or obstacles faced by those counties and their attitudes toward the MnPD project that might have affected their participation and, in turn, project outcomes.

The objective of the cost study was to examine the financial implications of instituting the continuous benefit program. The cost study was not a recalculation of cost neutrality, which involves IV-E federal funds only, but included and combined all available local, state and federal costs. Data utilized included foster care payments, case management costs, Adoption Assistance payments, Adoption Assistance child care costs, Relative Custody Assistance, as well as the continuous benefit payments through the MnPD. Costs were examined and compared for waiver and control group children overall as well as for children of different ages and ethnicities.

Research Questions

There were six core questions that guided the evaluation. They were:

A) What impact does the continuous benefit option have on moving children in foster care into permanent living arrangements?
B) What affect does the demonstration have on the well-being of children and the stability of their living situations?
C) Does the continuous benefit option improve the permanency and well-being of children who have been harder historically to move out of lengthy foster care placements--children with special needs, older children and children who are American Indian and African American?
D) Why do foster caregivers accept or reject the continuous benefit option?
E) What are the primary challenges faced by counties in implementing the continuous benefit program?
F) At what increase or decrease in costs are positive outcomes achieved?

The first two core questions in this list (A and B) are closely related. Improvement in permanency was assumed to be improvement in child well-being (an assumption built into federal legislation with the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997). Similarly, the third question (C) was an extension of the first two and focuses attention on groups of children that were the special target of the demonstration. The first three core questions were addressed in the impact study. The process study examined the next two core questions (D and E). The final question (F) was examined in the cost analysis.

The following is a list of the specific research questions related to program outcomes that have directed the impact study.

1. Do children who receive the MnPD continuous benefit (experimental/waiver group children) achieve permanency, whether through adoption or a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody to a relative, at higher rates than control/comparison group children?
    a) Do MnPD waiver group children achieve greater permanency outcomes through adoption than control children?
    b) Do MnPD waiver children achieve greater permanency through a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody than control children?
    c) What impact does the MnPD continuous benefit have on other outcomes, such as reunification and emancipation?

   d) What is the impact of the MnPD continuous benefit on children in relative care versus non-relative care?

2. What is the impact of the MnPD continuous benefit on children targeted by the demonstration?
   a) How does the MnPD continuous benefit impact the permanency outcomes of American Indian and African American children?
   b) How does the MnPD continuous benefit impact the permanency outcomes of children with special needs?
   c) What is the impact of a child's age on achieving permanency through MnPD continuous benefit?

3. Do children in the MnPD waiver group achieve permanency through adoption or permanent legal custody more quickly than control children?

4. Do MnPD waiver group children experience fewer disruptions in their living situations than control children?

5. Are there fewer reports of abuse or neglect for MnPD waiver group children than control group children?

6. Do MnPD waiver group children spend less time in foster care than control group children?

7. Do MnPD waiver group children experience improvements in other measures of their wellbeing (such as, educational and health status, or family functioning)?

Data Collection Procedures and Evaluation Activities

Major data sources being utilized for the evaluation include extractions from the Minnesota Social Services Information System (SSIS), interviews and surveys of foster family caregivers, detailed case-specific information collected from county caseworkers on waiver and control cases, site visits to county offices coupled with interviews of administrative, supervisory and field staff, and the collection and analysis of cost data associated with waiver/experimental and control group cases.

SSIS Data Extractions. The evaluators received monthly downloads of data extractions from SSIS. Data files were passed to the evaluator electronically in a compressed password-protected format

via an FTP site. Conversion programs, developed for the project, were then run that reorganize SSIS data for research purposes.

The evaluator maintained data files on all children in active MnPD cases including children in out-of-home placement, along with placement provider tables. These records included all intake and assessment data, case-management workgroups that were opened and caseworker time records. Case activity was tracked and monitored through these files, including cases that were closed and subsequently re-opened because of new reports of maltreatment. Through training provided as the demonstration was implemented in 2005, and through written instructions to local county offices, accurate entry of certain fields within SSIS that were necessary for the evaluation was emphasized, particularly fields associated with the special needs of children, court dispositions and special school status.

The original request for data extractions from SSIS was made in September 2005. The first extraction was received in December 2005 and downloads received monthly throughout the demonstration. Because of the case matching element of the evaluation design, extractions included data not only from counties participating in the demonstration but from all counties in the state. The last extraction of data utilized in this report was received in October 2010 and includes SSIS data through September 30, 2010.

The monthly downloads were provided in 101 separate data tables or files. Each data table contained information on some specific action, person or event. For example, information on the report and intake process were in two tables, one that pertained to the person and one that with information about the reported event. There were six tables with maltreatment-related information. Other tables provided information on the assessment and its results, on a variety of demographic information, and on any workgroups that were opened. Still other tables contained data on court petitions and dispositions, on placement and adoption activity, on vendors and foster care providers, on title IV-E eligibility, and on staff time related to specific cases. Some of the data contained in the tables represented new activity that occurred during the previous month, while other data was historical. Downloads, therefore, contained both new and former reports of child maltreatment as well as the history of placement occurrences.

The downloaded data tables were first converted into formats usable for research and the full complement of each month's data tables were archived. The initial conversion of the data tables was done through a number of extraction programs written for the project. Children assigned to the waiver (and control group children) had to be located in the background databases. Most of the data on these children, who composed the study population, were brought into the master research database. Some data on the children were kept in separate peripheral files because of

their complex nature or relative infrequency of use. Another database was constructed that contained the pool of possible matching cases for the three counties where random assignment was not done. Each month, as a new download was received, the process was repeated with the master research database growing both with the addition of new children and with the addition of new information on children already in the database. The research database was, therefore, historical, cumulative and comprehensive. It included data on all MnPD waiver and control group children from the time they were opened in the state child protection system through the end of the demonstration. The study population totaled 1,250 children, including waiver (experimental) and control group children.

Case-Specific Caseworker Survey. Because many relevant characteristics of children were not available through SSIS, an instrument was constructed and used to collect case reviews by caseworkers (and tribal caseworkers where this was necessary) as new cases were added to the waiver and control groups. The process was described as "case-specific" because it was keyed to specific waiver and control group cases about which caseworkers were asked to provide information on the care-giving situation and the history and characteristics of children, including health and education variables, needed to measure child well-being outcomes.

A web-based survey method was utilized in which e-mails were sent to caseworkers identified with specific children in SSIS records. Each e-mail contained a reference to a particular child and served as a cover letter that contained a hyperlink that enabled the caseworker to open the survey form via her/his Internet browser. The survey was located on the evaluator's website. Caseworkers were asked to respond to the surveys concerning no more than three cases during any 12-month period.

A one-fifth sampling proportion was originally planned. However, the number of children assigned to the waiver group was less than originally anticipated by evaluators, and the actual percentage was increased so that the number of completed surveys were sufficient for the analysis. The final completed number of case reviews was 496, 40 percent of the study population, and included 274 waiver children and 222 control children.

Caregiver Interviews and Surveys. Foster caregivers were essential sources of information for a number of the basic research questions in the evaluation. Feedback from caregivers was obtained in two phases and through two methodologies. One-on-one interviews were carried out with caregivers during the first half of the demonstration. During the second half of the project, mail surveys were employed. An important issue pursued in both the interviews and the surveys involved the decision-making processes of foster caregivers related to their consideration of adopting or accepting permanent legal and physical custody of children in their care. Caregivers of

children in the waiver group were expressly asked whether and how the continuous benefit option was presented to them and what specific concerns played an important role in their decision to accept or reject the offer. The interviews and surveys also sought the caregivers' assessments of the well-being of the children in their care. While the instruments used in the two data collection phases were similar, there were some differences between them. Most notably among these was an increased focus on issues related to child well-being in the latter survey instrument.

During the first phase of the evaluation, 129 caregivers were interviewed. The interviews were either face-to-face or by telephone depending on the preference of the caregiver. Caregivers were interviewed about an individual child and were not re-contacted when a second or third child appeared in the case. When repeated efforts to contact the caregiver to request an interview were unsuccessful, a mail survey questionnaire was mailed to them, and through this process, feedback was received from an additional 19 caregivers.

Evaluators endeavored to match the ethnicity of the foster caregiver and the interviewer. To accomplish this, evaluators included two consultants on the research team. One an American Indian, with a Master of Social Work degree, who lived in Duluth, was a member of the Chippewa Tribe. The Minnesota Chippewa Tribe is a centralized government for six Ojibwe (or Chippewa or Anishinaabe) bands in the state. The Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa have their administrative and service center on their reservation in Carlton County, one of the counties participating in the demonstration. As part of her MSW program, the interviewer had an internship with the Fond du Lac Band and was, therefore, known to them. The second consultant was an African American professor in the School of Social Work of the University of Minnesota in St. Paul. She has a Ph.D. in Social Work and assisted from the beginning of the demonstration project in the development of survey and interview instruments and in developing the interview protocol. She also was responsible for selecting three interviewers, training them and coordinating their work on the project.

In 2009, the second phase was initiated which involved a mail survey of all foster and permanent caregivers in the study population. In this process, all caregivers who had not already been successfully contacted for interviews and all new caregivers that entered the study were surveyed. In part, this action was taken to increase the number of caregivers from whom feedback was received. At the same time, the instrument was modified somewhat and additional information was solicited about the relationship between caregiver and child and about caregivers' views of the well-being of the children. During this phase of the evaluation 271 completed surveys were obtained from caregivers (out of 695 surveys attempted; a 39.0 percent response rate). Of family respondents who returned surveys, 135 were caregivers of waiver group children and 136 were caregivers of children in the control group.

In the end, the experiences and attitudes of 419 caregivers were obtained through the interviews and surveys. This included 210 caregivers of one or more children in the waiver group and 190 caregivers of one or more children in the control group.

The instruments used in the collection of feedback from caregivers complied with the requirements of the Institutional Review Boards of the Minnesota Department of Human Services and the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa.

Research Trips, Site Visits and Interviews of County Administrators and Staffs. Throughout the course of the demonstration senior researchers made site visits to counties participating in the demonstration. These site visits included interviews with state and county administrators, project managers, adoption and child protection unit supervisors and caseworkers. Other trips were made for meetings involving all participating counties and meetings with Department of Human Services project managers. Trips to the state were also made by evaluators for meetings with the MnPD Evaluation Advisory Committee, the SSIS technical staff, the statewide Indian Child Welfare Advisory Council, the Hennepin County ICWA team, the director of the Fond du Lac Band tribal social services unit, professionals of the American Indian Project at the University of Minnesota Duluth, and meetings for the recruitment and organization of in-state interviewers. A total of 22 trips were made to the state and 32 site visits made to participating MnPD counties. In addition, evaluators attended annual IV-E child welfare waiver demonstration meetings in Washington, DC throughout the demonstration.

Limitations of the Evaluation

Beyond dealing with the uneven implementation of the demonstration, the major limitation or complexity of the evaluation was its bifurcated nature. The portion of the study that pertained to the metro counties of Hennepin and Ramsey involved an experimental design with the random assignment of children eligible for the waiver to the experimental or control group. In the other smaller counties, the research design was quasi-experimental, with randomization replaced by a pair-matching procedure that identified non-waiver cases in other counties that most resembled cases assigned to the waiver in project counties. Beyond this there were two issues that affected the impact study within the metro counties where randomization occurred. One was a parallel, pre-existing county program in Ramsey County, the Adoption Equalization Program, which provided a financial incentive to low income relative caregivers to adopt foster children. Used nearly exclusively with control group cases, the effect of the program was to provide a segment of the control group something essentially the same as the experimental treatment. The second major issue was that the treatment itself, the MnPD continuous benefit, for a variety of reasons, was not

always offered to caregivers in the experimental group. Efforts were made in the analysis to account for these issues to the extent possible, but the process often proved difficult. Finally, the project was put on hold in three of the five counties during the 60-month demonstration period due to cost neutrality concerns of those counties. This reduced the number of cases in all analyses and affected the ability of evaluators to accommodate other complications through common statistical methods.

Chapter 2. Process Analysis

This chapter has six parts, A through F. The first, part A, is a review of major MnPD implementation issues and has three subsections: early implementation activities carried out by the state agency, county concerns about cost neutrality and their financial risk which affected local implementation of the program, and issues involving the American Indian community, an important focus of the demonstration from the beginning. Part B describes the manner in which counties operationalized the MnPD in identifying appropriate children and assigning them to the waiver. Part C provides a review of the utilization of the waiver in participating counties throughout the course of the project. Part D is an analysis of the characteristics of children and their caregivers in cases assigned to the waiver and a comparison of waiver and control cases. Part E is a discussion of MnPD waiver services. Part F is a discussion of factors found to influence decisions of caregivers to provide permanent homes for foster children in their care and an analysis of issues related to the acceptance or rejection of the continuous benefit option.

A. Implementation

Early Implementation Activities. During the early stages of the demonstration there were a number of major implementation support activities undertaken by the state agency, most often through the efforts of the state MnPD project manager. While the implementation of any new program inherently has its challenges, some that can be anticipated and some that cannot, the county-administered nature of the social services system in Minnesota presented the state agency special challenges. In recognition of this, frequent site visits were made by the project manager to participating counties both in the run up to the start of the demonstration and during the early months of the project's implementation for meetings with administrative, supervisory and field staff related to the demonstration and for informational presentations. Because of the large number of staff (and because of staff turnover) these site visits were most frequently made to Hennepin and Ramsey counties. The meetings focused on a wide range of matters related to the project's implementation, including systemic issues related to title IV-E eligibility and the complexity that arises in a county administered system in which individual counties are responsible for eligibility determination. During the first six months of the demonstration the project manager held 47 separate meetings with county staffs related to the MnPD project.

Also during the early months of the project, written MnPD project related material was developed for participating counties, tribes, and the general public. This included letters to tribal chairpersons, press releases, and a fact sheet. A guide for foster caregivers titled "Paths to Permanency" was

developed and distributed that compared legal, financial, cultural and family consequences of making a permanent commitment to children in their care. A companion version of the guide was made available for counties that did not participate in the demonstration. A "Frequently Asked Questions" reference manual was developed to serve as a policy and practice guide to administrators and caseworkers in participating counties as well as for caregivers and community stakeholders and tribal administrators. The manual was made available in both a written form and online through the state agency's website.

The project manager initiated outreach to tribal social services agencies impacted by the demonstration. These efforts focused on explaining and building support for the demonstration among American Indian social service agencies. Separate meetings were held with administrators with the Fond du Lac Band (Carlton County), the Leech Lake Band (Cass County), and the Mille Lacs Band (Mille Lacs County). Several discussions were held with members of the ICWA Advisory Council and American Indian professionals at the University of Minnesota Duluth American Indian Projects and Center for Regional and Tribal Child Welfare Studies, and a meeting was also held with the Minnesota Indian Child Welfare Act Law Center.

Steps were taken during the early months of the project to establish a tribal-state title IV-E agreement for Mille Lacs County that would allow some American Indian children in foster care to become title IV-E eligible. Outreach to American Indian agencies continued beyond the first year of the project and informational presentations were given and meetings held as part of an ongoing effort to support a broad understanding of the waiver project and its relation to permanency planning for American Indian children. This included meetings and training sessions involving the statewide Indian Child Welfare Advisory Council, Mille Lacs Tribal Social Services, and Leech Lake Tribal Social Services.

Work with American Indian agencies and participating counties also involved attention to Indian Child Welfare Act compliance issues. Efforts were made by participating MnPD county agencies to ensure that a tribal caseworker and a county caseworker met together with foster families to whom the MnPD continuous benefit offer was being made. Work with both tribal and county administrators was focused on supporting best practice approaches in working with American Indian children in foster care.

Several other implementation activities took place during the early months of the demonstration. The project was coordinated with the Adoption Unit at the state Department of Human Services to determine how best to include MnPD children in the state's adoption process to ensure these cases received the necessary legal consent documents and reimbursement for non-recurring adoption expenses. It was necessary to establish a system of tracking ongoing medical assistance benefits to

MnPD children when they moved to another state. The project manager also worked with the Minnesota Attorney General's Office to develop and update the written MnPD Benefit Agreement between counties and caregivers to ensure, as required by the Terms and Conditions of the demonstration, that children in families that accepted the MnPD option continued to receive health insurance coverage and payments equal to their foster care benefits. An approval was also obtained for the evaluation plan from the state agency's Institutional Review Board as well as from the separate and independent Fond du Lac Band Reservation Institutional Review Board.

Additionally, the project manager made informational presentations on the MnPD to state DHS management staff, the North-East County Social Services Supervisor's Conference, and to county social services agencies statewide via the state agency's Interactive Television-Video Services. Numerous meetings were also held with a variety of statewide and local stakeholder groups, including Children's Justice Initiative teams, the Minnesota Kinship Caregivers Association, the Minnesota Association of Child Caring Agencies, the State Ombudsperson Office, and the Council on Black Minnesotans.

As the project matured, implementation efforts focused mainly on technical assistance, training and support of county staffs involved in MnPD project. Outreach to stakeholder groups, including American Indian agencies, continued especially through the first half of the demonstration. By the third year of the project, the state agency had begun systematic efforts to seek ways to modify the traditional caregiver benefit programs more broadly to promote permanency among foster care children statewide. These efforts focused on ways to obtain a closer alignment in financial reimbursements provided to caregivers through the Adoption Assistance program, Relative Custody Assistance program and Foster Care program.

Cost Neutrality and County Financial Concerns. A major issue that affected implementation of the MnPD project from the first year was concern among participating counties of their financial liability. Because the Minnesota child protection services system is county administered, the cost neutrality requirements of the MnPD project impact each county individually and directly. Whether or not the project as a whole was cost neutral, each county would realize savings or incur expenses depending on its individual cost neutrality position.

During the first half of the first year of the demonstration, as participating county agencies began to assign children to the MnPD waiver, they grew increasingly aware of their potential financial risk. This knowledge did not affect all counties in the same way. Ramsey County, with offices in St. Paul and with its share of long-term foster care cases, accepted the planning projections made prior to the start of the project and remained focused on the potential positive benefits of the waiver

throughout the demonstration. Dakota County, a more affluent and rapidly growing suburban area, welcomed the MnPD project as a valuable tool to help them achieve their permanency goals for children in foster care. Dakota County accepted the possibility that extra costs might be incurred to achieve these goals but considered the risks worth the outcomes. Both Ramsey and Dakota counties assigned children to the waiver at a consistently steady rate throughout the five years of the demonstration.

In Cass County, the expressed financial concern had less to do with cost neutrality than the manner in which administrative title IV-E savings were apportioned between the county and the state agencies. From the start, the county was exceedingly uncertain about the potential costs and financial risks of the program. In the end, Cass County can hardly be considered to have participated in the MnPD project at all, assigning just two children to the waiver over five years.

Concern about financial risk was most acutely felt and freely expressed in Hennepin and Carlton counties. The two counties are quite different (see Table 1.1), but both feared the possibility of financial loss because of their commitment to pay the MnPD continuous benefit for waiver group children until they reached age eighteen.

Hennepin County, a large urban agency, operated the MnPD project within the ebb and flow of larger financial and political pressures. The federal Deficit Reduction Act was signed into law just three months after the county assigned its first waiver group child to the demonstration. The legislation was viewed as threatening the loss of significant financial resources and staff positions for the county, in child welfare generally, and in child protection specifically. Risking additional costs through the MnPD project quickly became difficult for the county to contemplate and justify. In 2007, Hennepin County suspended the assignment of additional children to the waiver due to a misunderstanding over the amount of reimbursement the county would receive for MnPD continuous benefit payments; the county had anticipated receiving a larger percentage of its costs. The suspension was lifted in early 2009, but the number of children assigned to the waiver by Hennepin County was far below what had been anticipated.

Quite different from Hennepin County, Carlton County is a much less populated, rural county where, according to a county administrator, most people within the child welfare community know one another. Two concerns about the project developed in the county within its first year. One was a matter of perceived fairness and one a question of potential MnPD project costs. The first concern arose over the fact that not all foster caregivers were eligible for the continuous benefit, but only those with children reimbursable through title IV-E. It is not uncommon in demonstration programs for ethical concerns to arise over the inclusion or exclusion of individuals in a new

"treatment"; this frequently happens when random assignment is used. But when the treatment affectively involves the different amount of money people receive for doing the same thing, it is not unreasonable to expect complications to arise over the question of social justice. Additionally, however, the county became concerned about the possibility that a small number of expensive MnPD project cases could create havoc with the agency's budget over an extended period of time and might prevent the county from carrying out other essential work. As a result of these concerns, a moratorium was placed on the assignment of new children to the waiver after the first 13 program months. At first temporary, the moratorium was never lifted.

Over a year past before participating counties began to learn about their potential financial position within the demonstration. The counties first received preliminary reimbursement for MnPD benefit payments in February 2007. However, it was not until 24 months after the start of the project that counties saw the first cost neutrality calculation.[1] While that calculation, which covered the period from November 2005 through March 2007, proved to be positive for all participating counties, the counties had been operating the MnPD project without concrete knowledge of their short or long term financial liability until then. Concerns about the long-term maintenance costs of the MnPD continuous benefit lingered from the early planning stages of the demonstration.

In a Memorandum of Understanding, the state agency had assured participating counties that, after federal waiver authorization expired, the state agency would pay the federal share of costs incurred that were not reimbursed by the federal agency and this was sufficient for all the participating counties. The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of September 2008 clarified the position of the federal agency and ensured that federal reimbursement could be expected through title IV-E, but only for children already receiving MnPD support through September 2008. In any event, by the fall of 2008, the MnPD program in the Hennepin and Carlton, the two counties most concerned about their financial risk, had already stalled.

MnPD and American Indian Tribes. From the earliest planning for the MnPD project, an important consideration was a focus on the state's American Indian communities and their children in longer-term foster care. The objective was to utilize the waiver to establish permanency for American Indian children in a manner consistent with how permanency is viewed by the tribes. Beyond this, the MnPD continuous benefit was seen as making a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody, or "customary" adoption (permanent arrangements that do not terminate parental rights

[1] The calculation of cost neutrality itself was complicated by the county-administered nature of the social service system in Minnesota. While fiscal information systems were in the process of becoming more centralized in the state while the demonstration was taking place, counties continued to operate independent financial and accounting systems. Among other things this meant that IV-E eligibility determination remained the responsibility of counties.

of biological parents), as affordable to relative or tribal foster caregivers of limited financial resources.

The intractability of foster care problems among the state's American Indian children was described in statistical detail in a February 2010 document entitled "Minnesota Child Welfare Disparities Report."[2] Data cited in the report, mostly from the years 2006-2008, indicated that American Indian children were placed in out-of-home care at nearly twice the rate of any other group and were 12 times more likely than White children to spend time in placement; as a group American Indian children spent more days in out-of-home care before achieving any kind of permanency and were more likely than other children to reach the age of majority in out-of-home care; and nearly 4 in 10 American Indian children in Minnesota lived in poverty.[3]

During pre-demonstration planning and during the first two years of the project, the state agency made a concerted effort to introduce the MnPD project to tribes through meetings with tribal representatives and presentations at ICWA Advisory Council meetings. The state waiver project manager provided training to tribal social service and justice professionals and shared MnPD tools and documents with American Indian child welfare workers. Additionally, the project manager addressed project implementation questions and concerns between tribes and counties.

While efforts at building understanding and trust were underway, there was another, more technical issue that affected the project in Cass and Mille Lacs counties. This involved title IV-E agreements with the tribes. Without such agreements federal IV-E funds could not be claimed by participating MnPD counties for American Indian children for whom legal responsibility was transferred to the tribal child welfare agency under the jurisdiction of a tribal court, although financial responsibility for out-of-home placement remained with the county. Such American Indian children could not, as a result, be assigned to the waiver. Although Mille Lacs County and Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe had a history of tribal county title IV-E agreements, there was not one in effect at the time of MnPD. While the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe and the state Department of Human Services had begun negotiations to establish a tribal state title IV-E agreement prior to the start of the MnPD project, an agreement was not reached until 2008. Since about half of out-of-home placements in Mille Lacs County involved children from the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe and a tribal state title IV-E agreement was not yet in place, the county asked to be withdrawn from the demonstration during the early stages of the project, since too few American Indian children would meet the MnPD eligibility criteria.

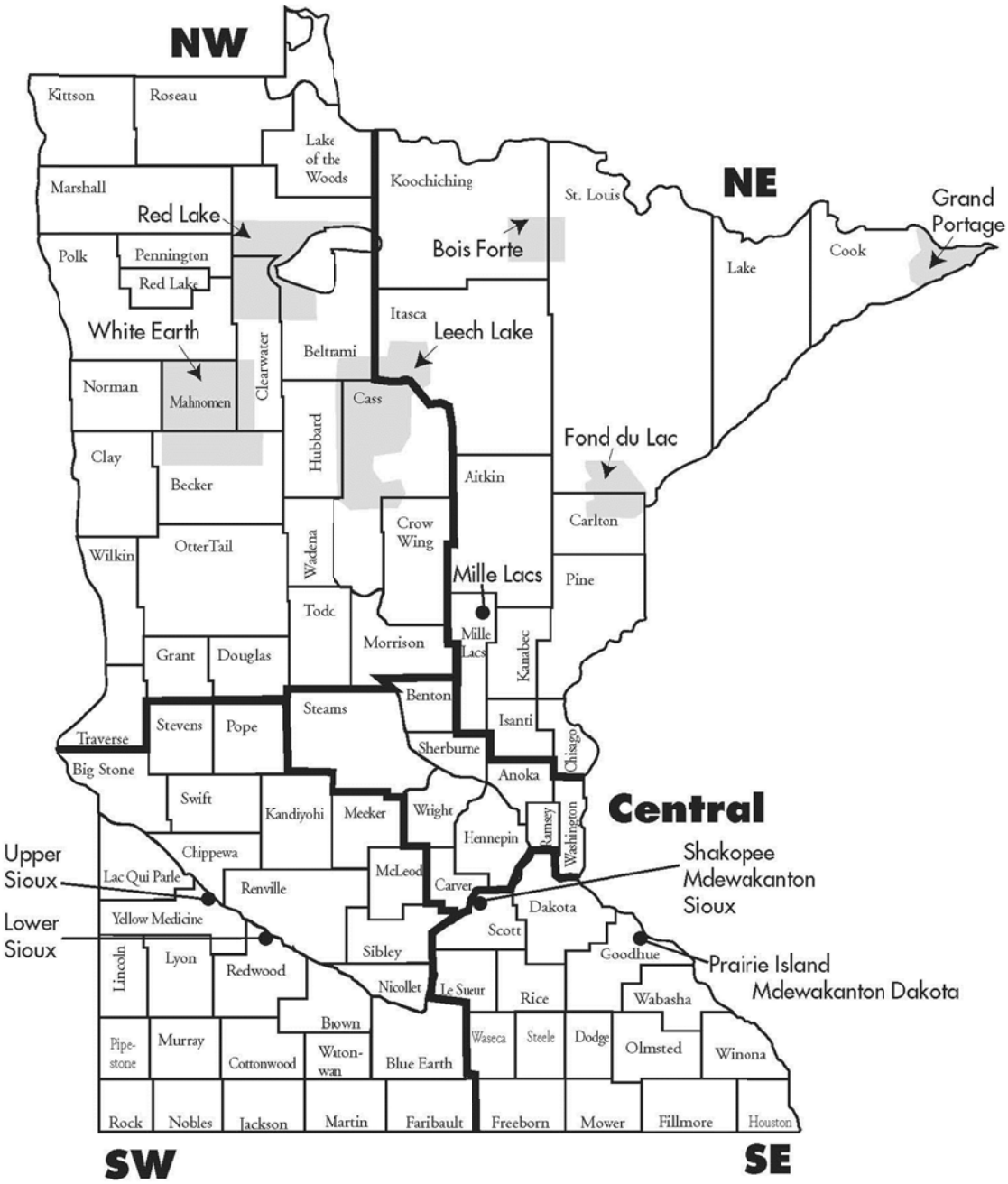
[2] The report is retrievable at: https://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfserver/Public/DHS-6056-ENG.
[3] The same report provided statistical justification for the state's decision to include African American children as one of the target groups of the MnPD project.

The Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe and the Minnesota Department of Human Services signed a title IV-E agreement in December 2007. This agreement authorized the Band to submit claims for eligible title IV-E administration, training and foster care maintenance costs. The department and the tribes participating in the American Indian Child Welfare Initiative (Leech Lake and White Earth Bands of Ojibwe) considered having the tribes participate in the MnPD in a role similar to the counties, but after consideration there was mutual agreement not to pursue this option.

Title IV-E agreements between American Indian communities and counties were already in place at the start of the demonstration in Hennepin and Ramsey counties. Although by state standards American Indian children made up a relatively small percent of the foster care population in Ramsey County (about 8 percent of the children assigned to the waiver in the county were American Indian), they had a much larger presence in Hennepin County. The Minnesota Children and Family Services Review of 2004 had noted that Hennepin County had the second largest urban American Indian population in the country—and over one-in-three (35 percent) children assigned to the waiver in the county were American Indian. Importantly, one of the project managers in Hennepin County remarked that the American Indian community "embraced the waiver" from the start.

Title IV-E agreements were not in place in Carlton and Dakota counties. In Dakota County this did not have an appreciable impact on the demonstration because American Indians made up less than half of 1 percent of the population and just one American Indian child in the county was assigned to the waiver. In Carlton County, which had a much larger proportionate American Indian population, a title IV-E agreement was not necessary because all child protection cases involving Fond du Lac Band members were under the jurisdiction of the state district court and legal responsibility and financial responsibility remained with the county. It is worth noting that the Carlton County and Fond du Lac social service agencies had long worked together on American Indian child welfare cases and provided one of the stronger models of integrated services in the state.

Map 2 shows the location of American Indian reservations in Minnesota. In the map, reservation lands are shown as shaded and the larger ones are named. There are numerous, small reservations throughout the southern part of the state. The larger ones and the ones impacted most by the waiver are in the northern part of the state.



Map 2. Reservations in Minnesota

B. Waiver Eligibility and Assignment

The process of identifying children appropriate for the MnPD, entering them into the assignment program, and offering the benefit to foster caregivers was generally similar among participating counties, but there were some important differences as well. In general, caseworkers followed the standard criteria for program eligibility to identify potential waiver cases. Any child who was title IV-E eligible and reimbursable, for whom reunification was ruled out, and who was living with a foster caregiver for at least six months was eligible for the MnPD project. The assigned adoption or child protection caseworker brought the cases that met these criteria to the attention of county MnPD project managers, who were supervisors or other administrators given responsibility to oversee and coordinate the waiver demonstration in their county. County project managers, sometimes following discussion of the cases during unit meetings, confirmed program eligibility and entered the cases into the web assignment program (which can be seen in Appendix A).

Offering the MnPD benefit to caregivers was done at varying points of time in the case, depending on where the foster caregiver was in the permanency decision making process and whether the permanency plan was expected to result in either adoption or a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody. Most typically, the MnPD benefit was discussed with the foster caregiver by the county caseworker at the point when financial options for permanency planning were introduced. In cases of adoption, if the child had already been in placement with the provider for six months, a conversation about the MnPD benefit could be held as soon as a termination of parental rights was anticipated. A foster caregiver that was interested in adopting would be informed by the caseworker of the differences between the state's Adoption Assistance program and the MnPD continuous benefit and was provided with a choice about which program to pursue.

In cases where the permanency plan was a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody, the child protection caseworker assigned to the case would discuss permanency options with the foster caregiver as soon as reunification with the child's birth family had been ruled out. If, at that point, the foster caregiver was interested in accepting a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody, the benefit would be offered soon afterwards by a child protection caseworker (Ramsey and Carlton counties), by an adoption caseworker (Hennepin County) or by the project manager (Dakota County). Usually, the MnPD benefit would be offered alongside the traditional Relative Custody Assistance program, if the caregiver qualified, and the family was able to choose the best option. Cases of American Indian children always included tribal social services agency involvement in permanency planning and decision making and notification of the permanency plan to the child's tribe.

In most circumstances, when a child was part of the waiver group, the MnPD continuous benefit was actively offered to the foster caregiver who was considering adoption or a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody. In some cases, however, the intention to offer the MnPD continuous benefit to a foster caregiver was interrupted, and the caregiver never learned of the benefit. This sometimes happened because the foster caregiver changed his or her mind about permanency planning before the financial benefit options could be discussed. This may have also happened because the child began to have problems in the home. Likewise, if a child moved from the caregiver's home to a residential treatment center for a short time or was moved to a new foster home, the timeline for offering the MPD benefit was reset, unless an approval for an exception to the six month stay in foster care requirement was obtained from the state agency. In a few circumstances, there was an older adolescent who turned 18 before the MnPD benefit offer was made. When a child was placed with a foster caregiver who was willing to adopt from the start of the placement, the adoption caseworkers would try to secure an adoptive placement agreement as soon as possible, after the termination of parental rights, rather than waiting six months, which may have made some foster caregivers ineligible for the MnPD project. Disruptions or changes in the permanency process, either before or after the MnPD benefit was offered, were not uncommon.

Carlton County. In Carlton County, caseworkers brought all new cases that they believed met program eligibility requirements to the attention of the supervisor of the county's Family Services Unit during weekly team meetings. The cases were discussed during these meetings, and if the supervisor subsequently confirmed that program eligibility criteria had been met, the child was assigned to the waiver group. Once assigned, it was understood that the caseworker would make the MnPD continuous benefit offer to the foster caregiver. To ensure that a case was title IV-E eligible and reimbursable, the county did not assign children to the waiver unless it had made at least one claim and received reimbursement for the claim. In Carlton County, four county caseworkers were responsible for adoption and foster care cases. In cases that involved American Indian children, the child's tribe was always notified and involved with the foster care placement and decisions about the child's care and permanency plan.

Cass County. As already noted, Cass County's participation in the MnPD project was limited to the assignment of two children. As described to the evaluator, this situation resulted from the county's concern about their financial risk, as indicated above, but also from the lack of children who might be appropriate candidates for the MnPD continuous benefit. The county found that children who might otherwise be eligible for the MnPD project lacked sufficient stability in their placement settings or were placed with foster caregivers who were not interested in making a permanent commitment to the child regardless of the financial incentives.

Dakota County. Dakota County fully embraced the MnPD project from the start and assigned as many eligible children as manageable. The MnPD project manager, who was also the supervisor of the adoption unit, told evaluators that the county kept "true to the original intent of the demonstration." The Dakota County policy was to offer the MnPD continuous benefit to all foster caregivers of new pre-adoptive cases that met the minimum waiver eligibility criteria. The project manager then confirmed that the child was title IV-E eligible and was in foster care at least six consecutive months with the same foster caregiver. New pre-adoption cases, where there had been an order for termination of parental rights, were the primary focus of attention.

In Dakota County, ongoing child protection cases, where the permanency plan involved a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody, were typically outside the primary area of responsibility of the MnPD project manager and were assigned to the waiver less frequently. These cases were the responsibility of the ongoing child protection services units, with several supervisors, and about 15 caseworkers. It was possible for these child protection cases to be discussed during weekly staff meetings and for eligible children to be assigned to the MnPD project, but the procedure for case identification and entry into the project was not as established as it was with the adoption unit. If a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody case was identified for the MnPD, it was the project manager who introduced the benefit to the foster caregiver. While adoption caseworkers in Dakota County believed that a high percentage of foster caregivers who were offered the continuous benefit would have adopted without MnPD, the county valued the project because it expedited the adoption process, eliminated financial disincentives, and removed the need for assessments of special needs for Adoption Assistance.

While the involvement and participation of all five counties was important for the waiver demonstration, the role of Hennepin and Ramsey counties was particularly important, since the experimental design was implemented only in those two locations. As described in Chapter 1, in Ramsey and Hennepin counties, but not other project counties, the web-based assignment system randomly selected children who had been entered for either the experimental (waiver or MnPD services group) or control (traditional services group) conditions.

Ramsey County. In Ramsey County, the MnPD project was viewed as an important avenue to increase permanency among children with long stays in foster care. From the beginning and throughout the demonstration, the county attempted to offer the MnPD continuous benefit to foster caregivers in all cases where children met minimum eligibility requirements and were randomly assigned to the waiver group. At the beginning of the demonstration, the MnPD project manager identified existing cases that met the basic requirements and entered them into the web assignment system. When the web system selected cases for the waiver group, the project manager notified the caseworker that the MnPD continuous benefit option should be offered to the

child's foster caregiver. Beginning in April 2006, caseworkers took over responsibility for making referrals of prospective eligible children to the project manager. Instructions to the caseworkers were that they use the minimum MnPD criteria when making these referrals. Both the child protection units and the adoption unit were responsible for identifying MnPD eligible children and referring them to the project manager.

Although implementation of MnPD in Ramsey County was relatively smooth, the county had a small, parallel adoption incentive program that complicated the evaluation's impact study. The program pre-dated the MnPD project and was called the Adoption Equalization Program (AEP). Like the MnPD continuous benefit, the Ramsey County AEP provided additional financial assistance to foster caregivers who sought to adopt children in their care. Unlike the MnPD project, the AEP was available only to relative foster caregivers who were otherwise financially unable to adopt. Since the start of the MnPD project, not surprisingly, the AEP was utilized nearly exclusively for cases randomly assigned to the control group (n=37); although it was used in one waiver case (and it appears the AEP was already in process in this case when waiver assignment occurred). The 37 control cases represented 16.7 percent of all Ramsey County control cases and had serious implications for the outcome analysis, as will be seen in Chapter 3.

Hennepin County. In Hennepin County, during the first months of the demonstration, potential waiver cases were identified for inclusion based solely on system data. All children who met the minimum program criteria—that is, they were IV-E eligible, reunification had been ruled out, and they were living in the same licensed foster home for at least the last six months—were considered eligible for the MnPD project and entered into the web-based assignment program. The names of children who were assigned to the waiver group were passed along to the caseworker for the child and it was assumed that the MnPD offer would be made to the foster caregiver. This method for assignment led to a few children being entered into the experimental group that were already set to finalize their adoptions. In some cases, Adoption Assistance paperwork had already been signed by the foster caregiver, so some caseworkers did not offer the MnPD benefit because the permanency process was nearing finalization. In addition, the MnPD benefit was not offered to some of these caregivers for other reasons, as will be seen later in this chapter.

Concerns over the potential costs of the program led Hennepin County to slow down waiver group assignment and eventually suspend assignments altogether in June 2007. While the suspension was in place, the county considered ways of narrowing MnPD project eligibility, including restricting eligibility only to cases involving older children who had been in continuous placement two to three years.[4] In March 2009, the decision was made by Hennepin County to restart waiver assignment,

[4] The independent change of eligibility requirements by one of the participating counties was not permitted by the Children's Bureau.

but not through the "automatic" method utilized in the first year of the program. When the county resumed waiver assignment, caseworkers were given the responsibility of making referrals for MnPD project assignment, as was done in Carlton, Dakota and Ramsey counties. Hennepin County supervisors were required to approve each case recommended by caseworkers. If approved, all cases involving waiver group foster caregivers, were given to an adoption unit caseworker to meet with the family and discuss the MnPD continuous benefit option. Adoption caseworkers were considered the most knowledgeable about the MnPD project and about the financial benefits available for foster caregivers considering making a permanent commitment to a child through adoption or a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody.

C. Waiver Utilization

During the five years of the Minnesota Permanency Demonstration, 1,097 children were identified as eligible for the continuous benefit program in the five participating counties. This included 474 in Hennepin County, 470 in Ramsey County, 113 in Dakota County, 38 in Carlton County, and 2 in Cass County.

In Hennepin County, 240 children deemed eligible for the MnPD continuous benefit program were randomly assigned to the waiver or experimental group and 234 were selected for the control group. In Ramsey County, 248 children were randomly assigned to the waiver group and 222 to the control group. Combined, then, there were 488 children in the experimental waiver group in the two metro counties and 456 children assigned to the control group. While eligible children in the two counties were randomly assigned to the two study groups, any siblings a child might have who also met the program's eligibility criteria were automatically assigned to the same study group, leading the size of the difference between the two groups to be slightly larger than they might have been based on randomization alone. Overall, the waiver group children had a somewhat larger number of eligible siblings than the control group children.

Table 2.1 shows the number of waiver and control group children in the two counties participating in the experimental design portion of the evaluation. In Carlton, Cass and Dakota counties, where random assignment did not occur, all children determined eligible for the MnPD project were entered into the assignment program and automatically became waiver group children. Each of these waiver group children were matched by the evaluators with similar cases in Minnesota counties that did not participate in the MnPD project. Thus, the 153 children assigned to the waiver in these non-experimental program counties were matched with 153 non-waiver group children in other parts of the state.

Table 2.1. Number of Waiver and Control Group Children By County

County	*Waiver/ Experimental*	*Non-Waiver/ Control*
Hennepin	240	234
Ramsey	248	222
Total	488	456

The full study population in the evaluation of the Minnesota Permanency Demonstration consisted of 1,250 children. This number includes 641 children assigned to the waiver group (488 from Hennepin and Ramsey counties and 153 from the other, non-experimental design counties) and 609 children assigned to the control group (456 from Hennepin and Ramsey counties and 153 matching children from non-project counties). These numbers are shown in **Table 2.2**.

Table 2.2. Number of Waiver/Experimental Children and Number of Control and Matching Children

County	*Waiver/ Experimental*	*Non-Waiver/ Control*	*Non-Waiver Match*
Carlton	38	0	38
Cass	2	0	2
Dakota	113	0	113
Hennepin	240	234	0
Ramsey	248	222	0
Total	641	456	153

The 641 children assigned to the waiver group, lived with 380 foster caregivers at the time of waiver group assignment, a mean number of 1.69 children per family. The number of waiver group foster caregivers with one child was 217 (57.1 percent), while 103 had two children, 36 had three children, 15 families had four children, 6 families had five children and 3 had six or more children in their care. The 609 control children lived with 415 foster caregivers, an average of 1.47 per family.

Figure 2.1 shows the cumulative number of children assigned to the waiver group during the demonstration extension from November 2005 through September 2010. During the first two months of the program, 30.4 percent of the children who would be assigned to the waiver during the five years were entered into the waiver group. During the first full quarter of the demonstration (November 2005 through January 2006), just under half of all waiver children who would become part of the study population, 46.2 percent (n=296), were assigned to the waiver group.

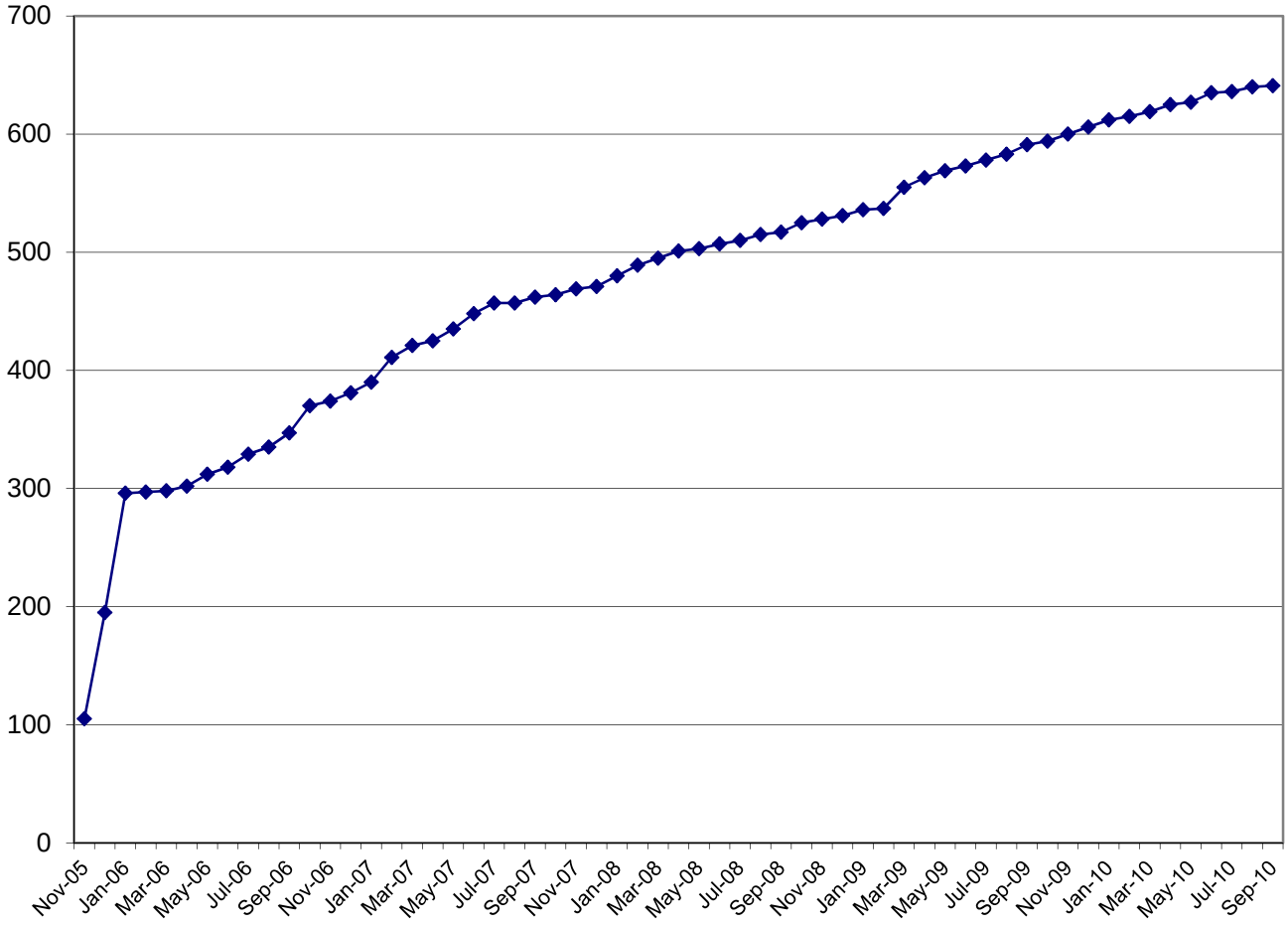


Figure 2.1. Cumulative number of children assigned to the waiver group

The state agency had assumed that there would be a large number of eligible, "target population" children available for immediate enrollment in MnPD project at the start. These were children who were MnPD eligible because they were title IV-E eligible, had lived in "safe and stable" foster homes in participating counties for at least six months and for whom reunification had been ruled out, and, in most instances, were considered to be "special needs" children. In its proposal for the waiver demonstration, the state agency had estimated that there might be as many as 730 such children in the waiting wings and ready to be enrolled in the project at the start. Other eligible, target children would be added to the waiver population as they became available, that is, when their time in foster care reached the minimum required length and reunification was ruled out. In general, therefore, the pattern of children assigned to the MnPD waiver was expected to be approximately what is represented in Figure 2.1, with a large proportion added immediately and then others assigned more gradually over the length of the project. It was the original estimate of the number that would be assigned at the start and then subsequently throughout the demonstration that proved overly optimistic.

Figure 2.2 shows the county composition of the waiver group across the full length of the demonstration.

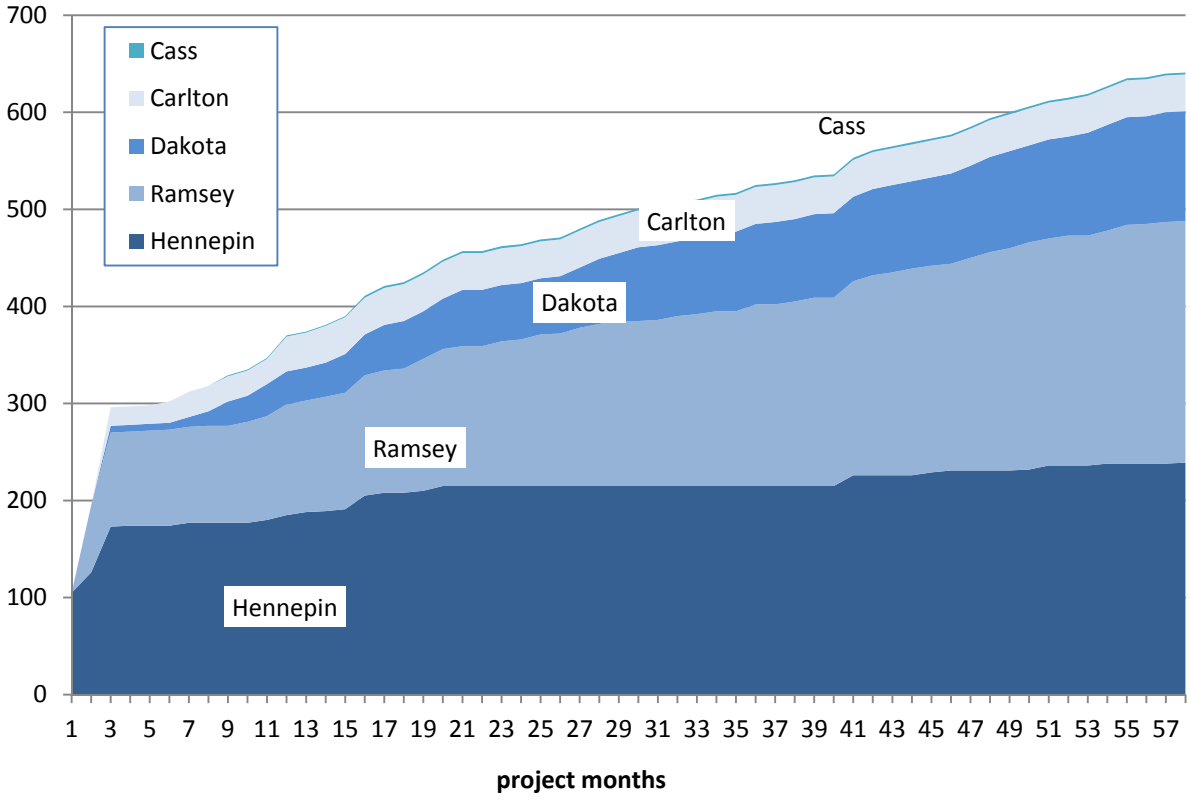


Figure 2.2. Cumulative number of children assigned to the waiver group by county

The utilization of the waiver by individual counties can be more easily seen in **Figure 2.3**, which shows the cumulative number of children assigned to the MnPD waiver by each county separately.

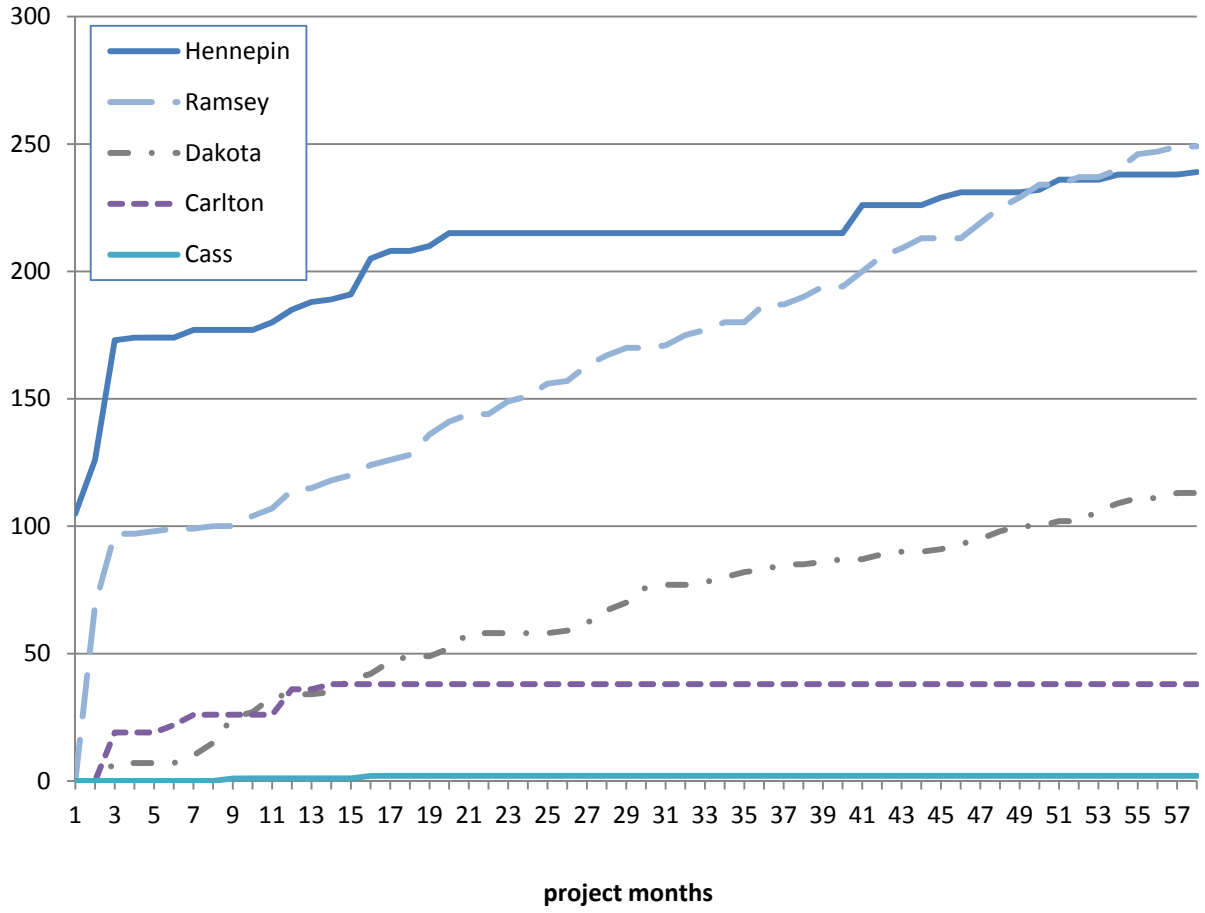


Figure 2.3. Cumulative number of children assigned to the MnPD waiver by each participating county plotted separately

Hennepin County was the first county to assign children to the waiver. The county assigned its first cases on November 14, 2005. On that day, the county randomly assigned 105 children to the study population, one-fifth (22 percent) of the total for the entire demonstration; of the 105 children, 44 became waiver group children and 61 control group children. During the first quarter of the demonstration, from November 2005 to January 2006, Hennepin County assigned 173 children to the waiver group and 184 to the control group, a total of 75 percent of its contribution to the study population. While the number of children the county assigned to the waiver slowed greatly after the first program quarter, and even stopped entirely for a time during the second and third year of the demonstration, Hennepin County was responsible for the last child to be assigned to the waiver, on September 19, 2010.

Ramsey County assigned its first child to the waiver on December 8, 2005. By the end of that month, it had assigned 69 children to the waiver group and 65 to the control group. By the end of the demonstration's first quarter, the county had assigned 97 children to the waiver group and 98 to the control group. These children were 41.5 percent of the total number the county would enter into the study population. Although the number of children assigned to the waiver by Ramsey County slowed at that point, the county continued to assign children to the MnPD project through the five years of the demonstration at a fairly steady rate. The county assigned its last child to the waiver on August 19, 2010.

After Hennepin and Ramsey counties, Dakota County assigned the next highest number of children to the waiver, 113. Like Ramsey County, Dakota County utilized the MnPD waiver at a steady rate for the entire demonstration. Unlike the two metro counties, Dakota County did not enter a very large percentage of its waiver group children during the project's first quarter. The county had made just 6 percent of its waiver group assignments by the end of January 2006. Dakota County assigned its last child to the waiver on August 25, 2010.

Carlton County assigned its first child to the waiver on January 26, 2006. During that month the county assigned 19 children. Through the rest of 2006, the county assigned another 19 children to the waiver. At that point the county placed a temporary hold on its waiver assignments. The hold turned out to be permanent and the county never assigned any additional children to the MnPD project.

Cass County assigned just two children to the waiver during the entire demonstration. One child in July 2006 and one in February 2007. Because of the small number, Cass County is not included in a number of the figures in this report.

Figure 2.4 shows the number of children assigned to the waiver by MnPD project counties during each month of the demonstration. Just under half of all children assigned to the waiver entered the study population during the first three months of the program, 296 of 641.

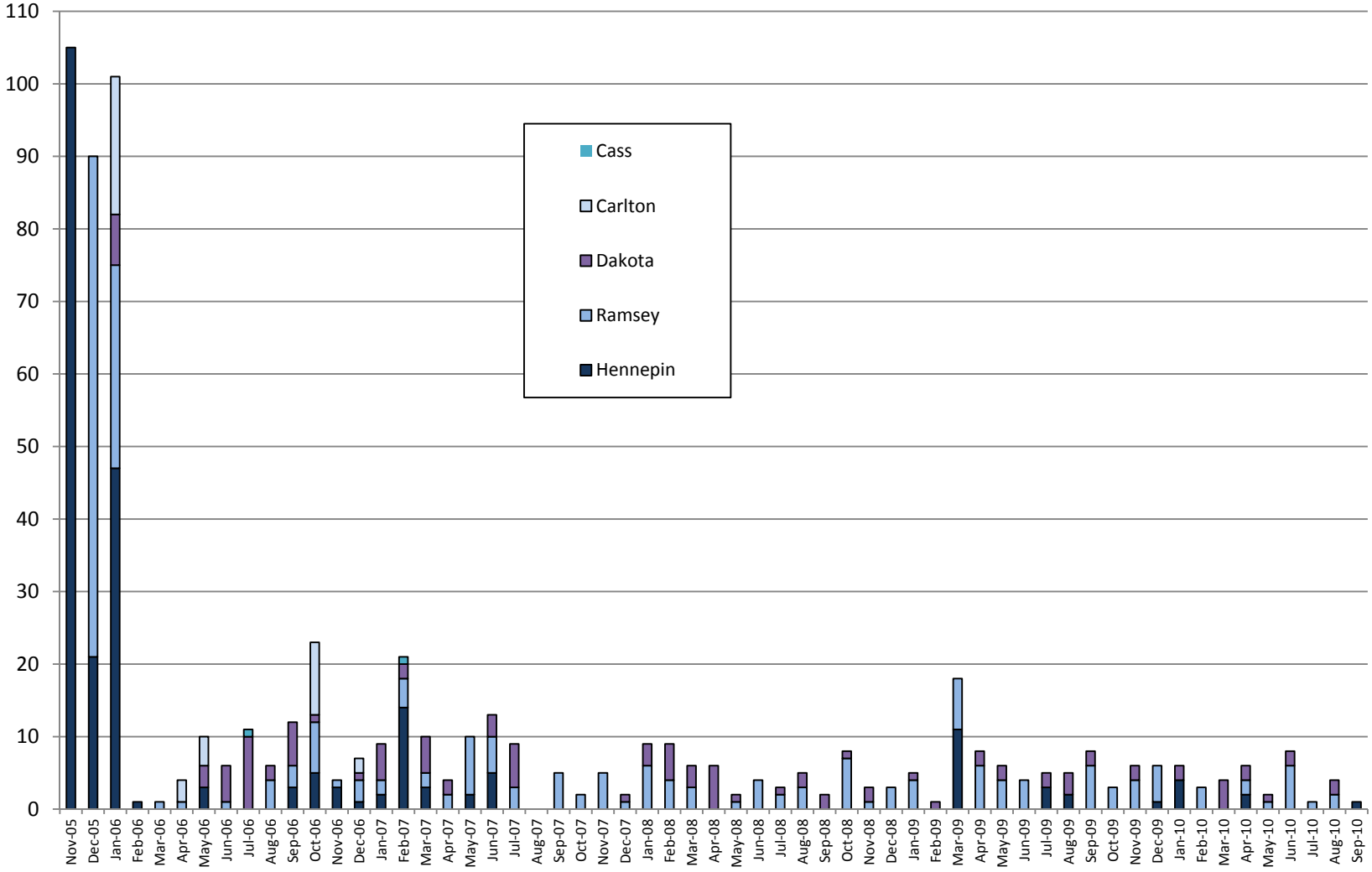


Figure 2.4. Number of children assigned to the waiver by county and project month

D. Characteristics of Children and Caregivers

Children

Gender. Considering all five counties, fairly equal numbers of girls and boys were assigned to the waiver—312 and 329—with a slight edge favoring boys. This slight difference between girls and boys was also the case in Hennepin and Ramsey counties where the experimental design was in place: 52.5 percent of waiver group children were boys; 47.5 percent were girls.

Age. The mean age of children when they were assigned to the waiver was 8.4 years. The mean age of control group children was essentially the same, 8.3 years. The mean age of children in the two metro counties was very close, 8.8 years in Hennepin County and 8.6 in Ramsey County. Children assigned to the waiver in Dakota County were somewhat younger overall; the mean age was 6.5 years. In Carlton County the mean age of waiver group children at the time of assignment was a little higher, 10.0 years.

A quarter (24 percent) of waiver group children in Hennepin and Ramsey counties were under the age of three when assigned to the waiver, including 16 percent who were infants younger than two. Another 27 percent of waiver group children in these counties were aged 5 to 10, and 20 percent were 11 to 14. At the same time, 18 percent of waiver group children in these counties were 15 years old or older when assigned, including 7 percent who were 17 or 18. **Table 2.3** provides an age breakdown of waiver children in the two metro counties.

Table2.3. Ages of Children in Hennepin and Ramsey Counties When Assigned to the Waiver

age	Hennepin	Ramsey
0-1	13.9%	17.4%
2	8.9%	8.3%
3-4	12.0%	10.9%
5-6	9.9%	10.0%
7-8	8.2%	7.4%
9-10	8.4%	9.1%
11-12	11.0%	9.6%
13-14	8.2%	11.5%
15-16	11.2%	10.4%
17-18	8.2%	5.3%

Ethnicity. African American children comprised the largest ethnic group on the waiver, 44.9 percent. About a third (32.0 percent) of the children were White and 20.3 percent were American Indian. A small percentage (2.8) were Asian American. The racial breakdown of all waiver group children can be seen in **Figure 2.5.**

The ethnicity of waiver group children in each participating county is provided in **Figure 2.6**. The difference in the ethnicity of waiver group children among the counties was one indication of variations that existed within the context of individual county programs. A majority of Carlton County waiver group children were American Indian (55.6 percent); the rest (44.4 percent) were White. Nearly 8 in 10 (78.6 percent) waiver group children in Dakota County were White; the others were African American except for one American Indian child.

The children in Hennepin and Ramsey counties were the most ethnically diverse. In Hennepin County, 44.6 percent of the children in the waiver group were African American, 35.1 percent were American Indian, 19.9 percent were white, and .4 percent were ethnically Asian American. In Ramsey County, a majority of waiver group children were African American, 62.1 percent, while 23.0 percent were White, 8.2 percent were American Indian, and 6.6 percent were Asian. While the ethnic makeup of the waiver group population in the two metro counties was diverse, the difference between them was significant. In particular, Hennepin County had a much larger percentage of American Indian children in its waiver group than did Ramsey County, while Ramsey County had a higher percentage of African American children in its waiver group.

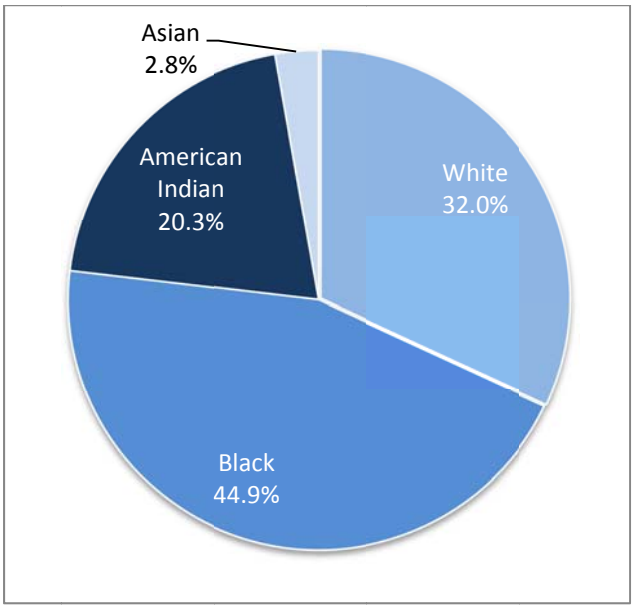


Figure 2.5. Ethnicity of Children in the Waiver Group

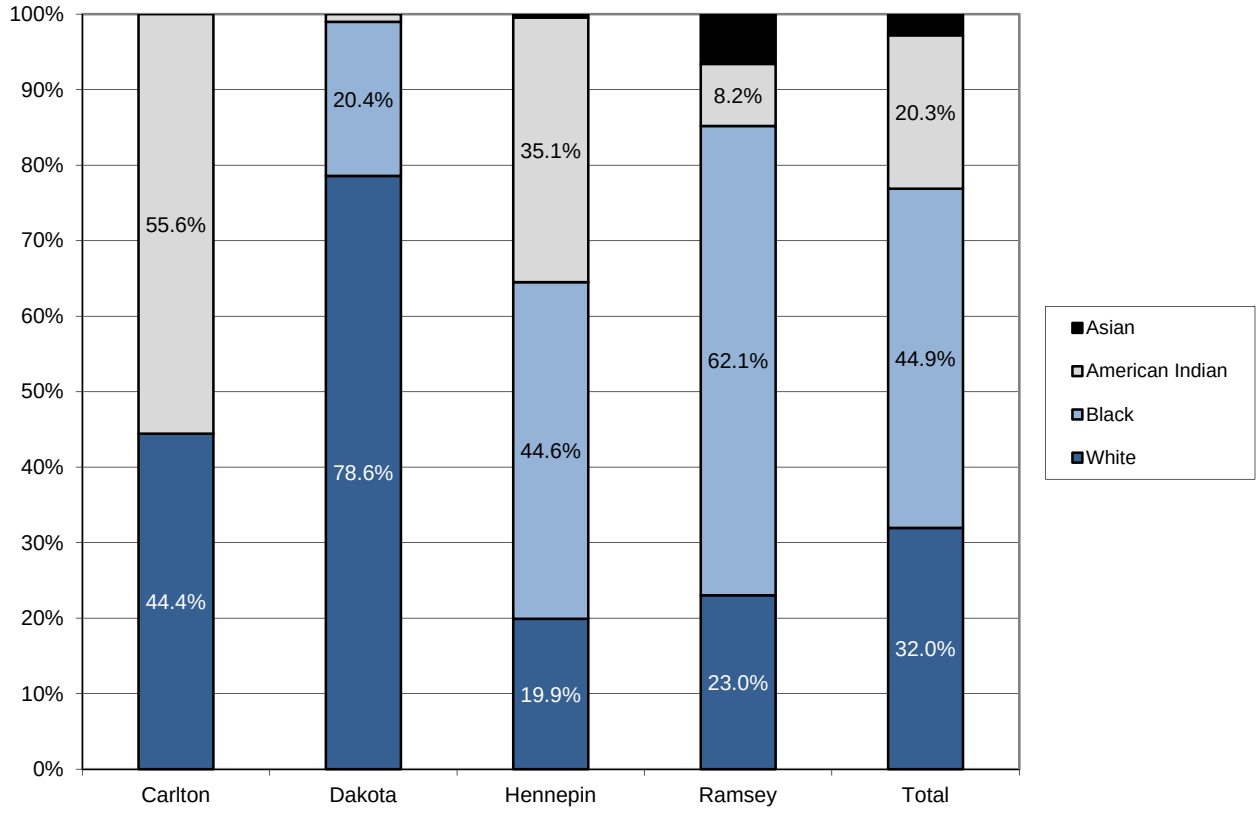


Figure 2.6. Ethnicity of waiver children by county

Disabilities. Children with one or more physical, intellectual or psychological disabilities accounted for 44.6 percent of waiver group children. In the two metro counties in the experimental study, the percent of waiver children with disabilities was 47.5. Among counties in the demonstration, this figure was highest in Hennepin County (53.3 percent) and lowest in Dakota County (33.6 percent); the percentage in Carlton County was 39.5 percent and in Ramsey County it was 41.9 percent. Of the total number of waiver group children with at least one disability, 41.3 percent were children with an emotional disturbance. **Figure 2.7** shows the percentage of children with one or more disabilities and the percentage with specific types of disabilities.

Special Education. According to reports of caseworkers in the case-specific survey,[5] over a third (36.0 percent) of all waiver group children in school attended special education classes. This figure was somewhat higher in the two metro counties of Hennepin and Ramsey where 40.4 percent of

[5] Throughout the report, all data reported as obtained from caseworkers, unless otherwise noted, was collected through the case-specific survey sample.

waiver group children attended special education classes, compared with 44.5 percent of control group children.

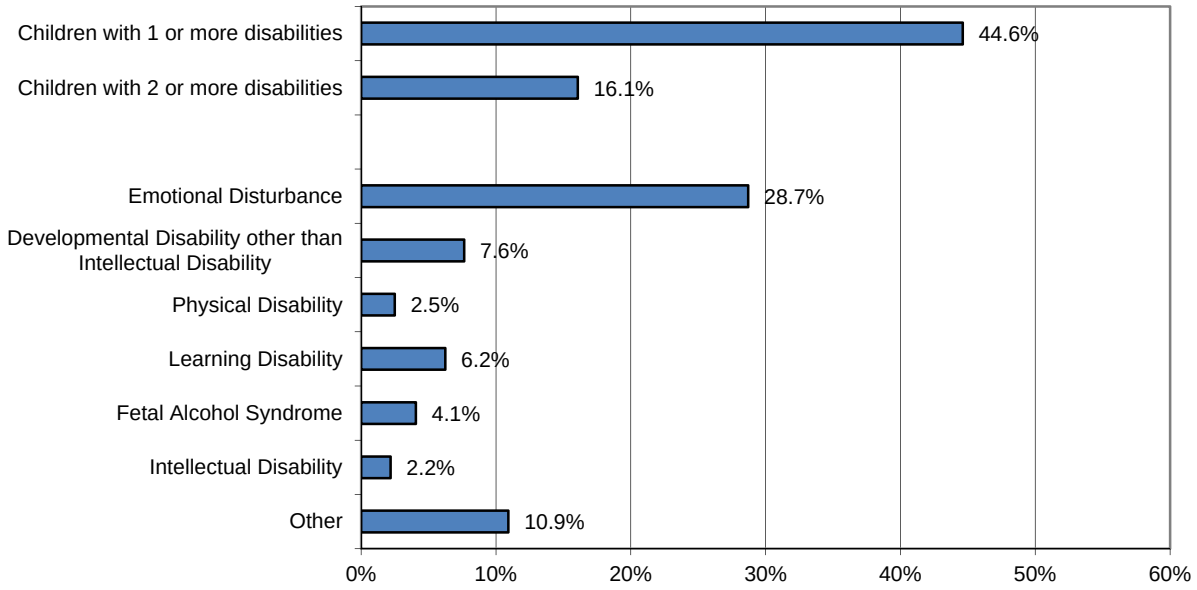


Figure 2.7. Percentage of MnPD waiver children with disabilities

Special Services. Four waiver group children in 10 (40.0 percent) were receiving "special services" according to the case reviews conducted by caseworkers. In Hennepin and Ramsey counties the figure was 41.6 percent. Special services involved a wide array of services related to a child's health conditions or needs, mental health, developmental and physical disabilities, and learning disabilities.

School Attendance. Caseworkers indicated that 71.1 percent of waiver group children were in school at the time of the case reviews. Only 1.1 percent of waiver group children were reported to have dropped out, but another 6.4 percent were not in school for other reasons. Students in vocational training or GED programs in Ramsey and Hennepin counties accounted for a small proportion of these children. The remaining 21.4 percent were too young to be enrolled in school.

Delinquency and Status Offenses. Caseworkers reported that 17.2 percent of waiver group children had been involved in delinquent activities. This figure was somewhat higher in Hennepin and Ramsey counties where the percentage according to caseworkers was put at 19.2 percent among waiver group children; the percent of control group children said to be involved in delinquent activities in the metro counties was lower, 15.8 percent. In Hennepin and Ramsey counties, 8.6 percent of waiver group children had had one delinquency charge, while 6.1 percent

had two or more. In addition, 6.6 percent of the waiver children had a truancy charge and 6.1 percent had been runaways. As will be seen, the behavior of children in foster care and concerns about discipline were factors that affected foster caregivers' decisions to adopt or accept a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody.

Relationship with Biological Parents. Children in the waiver group varied in the amount of contact they had with their biological parents. According to caseworkers, one in five (20.3 percent) saw their parents at least once a month. Another 16.1 percent of the children saw their biological parents more than twice a year. Over a third (36.3 percent) did not see their parents at all according to caseworkers. However, caseworkers did not know how much contact one in five (20.8 percent) children had with their biological parents. During interviews, caregivers reported that for both control and waiver group children, one in five saw a biological parent once a month or more. These caregivers reported that about two-thirds of children (control group—69.8 percent, waiver group—66.7 percent) had contact with their biological parents less than once a year or not at all.

Visits between biological parents and children were frequently hampered by major barriers. Caseworkers reported that 50.5 percent of waiver group children had a mother whose parental rights had been terminated, and 45.5 percent had a father whose parental rights had been terminated. Often the whereabouts of the biological mother and father were unknown, 20.7 percent of waiver group children had a mother and 31.8 percent had a father that could not be located. A smaller proportion had a mother or father that was incarcerated, 3.5 percent and 6.6 percent respectively. The mother of 3.5 percent of waiver children was deceased, as was the father of 5.1 percent of waiver children.

Kinship vs. Unrelated Placement. Slightly less than half (45.7 percent) of all the children in the study population had been placed in the home of a foster caregiver who was related to them; 54.3 percent of the children were placed in foster homes with non-relatives. The relatives with whom children were placed were most often their uncles or aunts and somewhat less frequently their grandparents. About 1 waiver group child in 10 was placed with another relative, such as a cousin or an extended tribal relative, or someone close to the family and considered a relative.

American Indian Children. Among American Indian children who were the subjects of case-specific surveys, 5.9 percent had been reunited with one of their biological parents by the time of the survey. Among the rest, 29.2 percent had been placed with a caregiver who was a member of the child's tribe and 35.2 percent were living with an American Indian caregiver of another tribe; one in three (33.3 percent) were placed with a non-American Indian caregiver, often a relative but not always a blood relative of the child.

Siblings. Analysis of data available in SSIS indicated that 47.7 percent of children were members of a sibling group in out-of-home placement. Through the case-specific survey, caseworkers reported that over half of the waiver group children in the sample, 58.6 percent, had a brother or sister in placement with the foster caregiver—38.5 percent with the same caregiver and 20.1 percent with a different caregiver. Another 11.0 percent of waiver group children had a sibling at home with the biological parent, while 14.7 percent had a sister or brother over 18. Only 8.4 percent of waiver group children had no siblings. Carlton County had the largest percent of waiver group children who were part of a sibling group in foster care, based on data in SSIS (65.8 percent).

Days in Foster Care Prior to MnPD Waiver Assignment. Guidelines during the demonstration set the minimum amount of time MnPD eligible children were required to be in foster care prior to MnPD project assignment to be six months, with certain exceptions. Data shows, however, that most children had been in foster care much longer than this. **Figure 2.8** shows the mean number of days children were in foster care before assignment to the waiver. The average length of continuous placement for waiver group children was 997 days, or 2.7 years. When only the current placement setting was considered, the mean length of placement was 1.6 years. Variation among counties in the length of placement may be partly explained by the mean age of children selected for the MnPD project in each participating county.

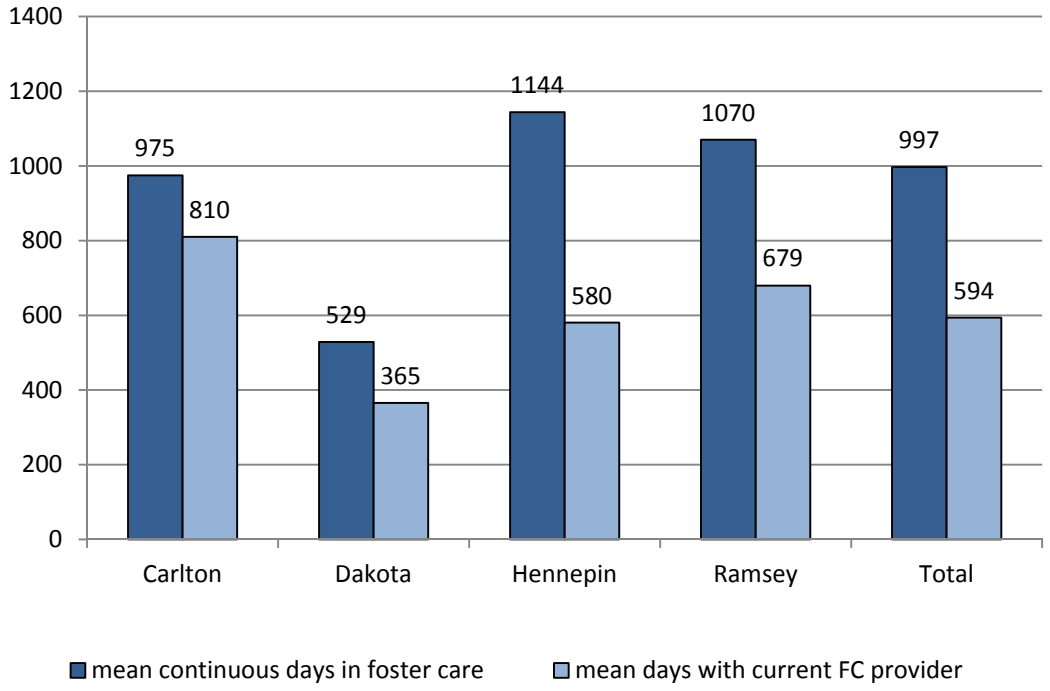


Figure 2.8. Mean days in out-of-home placement settings prior to waiver group assignment for children in the waiver group

Placement Changes. About one in three (34.8 percent) waiver group children changed foster caregivers after entering the study population. This has happened most frequently among waiver group children in Hennepin County (36.8 percent), followed by Ramsey County (36.0 percent). The figures are smaller in Carlton County (23.0 percent) and Dakota County (17.7 percent).

Target Population. By removing the potential financial barriers to permanency, the MnPD project sought to increase the "willingness of foster care families to adopt or assume legal custody of special needs children." In the Minnesota child welfare system, special needs children include those that are older, part of a sibling group, or who have intense psychological, physical and behavioral problems. American Indian and African American children are also considered a special needs group because of their significant overrepresentation in the long-term foster care population.

Table 2.4 shows the percent of children with special needs (as defined above) assigned to the waiver group from the participating counties. The table shows the percent of waiver group children with specific characteristics and the percent with at least one listed special need. When the only ethnicity included is American Indian, 91.6 percent of waiver group children across all counties have at least one of these characteristics. When African American ethnicity is added as a special-needs characteristic (bottom half of Table 6), the percent increases to 93.4 percent, only a small increase due to the large percent of African American children who have at least one other target characteristic.

Waiver group children with one or more disabilities were observed least frequently in Dakota County (33.6 percent) and most frequently in Hennepin County (53.3 percent). Dakota County also had the least number of waiver group children that were older than the median age of all waiver group children (31.0 percent), while Carlton County had the largest proportion of older waiver group children (65.8 percent). As shown in Table 2.4, all counties, but Dakota County, had 95 percent or more of waiver group children with one or more special needs. Ramsey County had the highest percent of waiver group children with at least one of these special-need characteristics, 98.4 percent. Although Dakota County had the lowest percentage of waiver group children with special needs, the proportion was still three out of four.

Other issues and characteristics affecting waiver group children could increase the degree of difficulty caseworkers faced in moving children from foster care to permanency. For example, delinquency problems were reported by caseworkers in 17.2 percent of waiver group cases. Close to a third (28.2 percent) of waiver children 10 and older had reported delinquency offenses. More Carlton County waiver group children had some reported prior delinquency problem (29.4 percent), followed closely by Ramsey County (21.6 percent). Ramsey County had the largest percent of

waiver group children reported to be involved in special education (42.6 percent) and who needed special service arrangements (46.5 percent). On average, Hennepin County children spent more time in foster care prior to waiver assignment (1,144 days; followed closely again by Ramsey County children, 1,070). Nearly one in five foster caregivers in Ramsey and Hennepin Counties (18.4 percent) reported they received food stamps, an indication of very low household income. All of these factors could be expected to influence the success of permanency efforts, and form part of the frame of reference for interpreting the MnPD project impact analyses.

Table 2.4. Waiver Group Children with Special Needs

County	Number of Waiver Children	Percent with a Disability	Percent Older than Median Age	Percent with Siblings in Foster Care	Percent American Indian	Percent with Any Special Need
Carlton	38	39.5%	65.8%	65.8%	55.6%	94.7%
Dakota	113	33.6%	31.0%	46.9%	0.9%	74.3%
Hennepin	240	53.3%	52.5%	43.9%	35.1%	94.1%
Ramsey	248	41.9%	53.2%	49.4%	8.2%	96.4%
Total	641	44.6%	49.9%	47.7%	20.3%	91.6%
Note: the lower half of the table is the same as the top half except for the ethnicity category. African American children have been added, which increase slightly the percent with any special need.						
County	Number of Waiver Children	Percent with a Disability	Older than Median Age	Percent with Siblings in Foster Care	American Indian or African American	Any Special Need
Carlton	38	39.5%	65.8%	65.8%	52.6%	94.7%
Dakota	113	33.6%	31.0%	46.9%	18.6%	76.1%
Hennepin	240	53.3%	52.5%	43.9%	76.7%	96.3%
Ramsey	248	41.9%	53.2%	49.4%	69.0%	98.4%
Total	641	44.6%	49.9%	47.7%	62.1%	93.4%

Comparison of Waiver and Control Group Children. **Table 2.5** shows how the characteristics of waiver group children compared to control group children on major demographic variables and Child Protection Services case characteristics. As expected, the groups are quite similar on nearly all variables available to evaluators.

Table 2.5. Characteristics of Waiver and Control Group Children

		Waiver	Control
Sex	Female	48.7%	50.9%
	Male	51.3%	49.1%
Race	White	30.4%	35.3%
	African American	42.7%	43.5%
	Native American	19.3%	14.1%
	Asian	2.7%	3.3%
	Unknown	4.8%	3.8%
Age	Mean Age	8.4	8.3
	0-5.49 years	39.8%	39.2%
	5.5-10.49 years	21.1%	23.3%
	10.5-14.49 years	19.7%	17.4%
	14.5 years and older	19.5%	19.7%
Disability	any	44.6%	52.6%
	2 or more	16.1%	17.7%
	emotional disturbance	29.7%	35.7%
	DD, not intellectual disab.	7.6%	7.9%
	physical disability	2.5%	2.0%
	learning disability	6.2%	5.5%
	fetal alcohol syndrome	4.1%	4.8%
	intellectual disability	2.2%	3.5%
	hearing, speech, or visual impairment	4.9%	7.5%
Age at 1st removal	mean	5.2	5.2
Days spent in current foster care episode	mean	594	596
Any CPS case management workgroup prior to MnPD		70.5%	75.7%
n of CPS case management workgroups prior to MnPD	mean	1.59	1.76
Any prior placement episodes		26.5%	24.3%
Difficulty of care level (0-7)	mean	2.4	2.5
Placement setting	relative	47.7%	43.3%
	non-relative	52.3%	56.6%

Caregiver Families

Income. Data on total household income was gathered from caregivers on the family survey. The amount of income from all sources during the last 12 months in both the waiver and control groups was distributed over a wide range but was similar. The median household incomes of the two groups was nearly identical $42,104 for waiver group families and $42,267 for control group families. Fifteen percent of all MnPD families reported annual incomes of less than $20,000; 25.7 percent reported income between $20,000 and 39,999; 28.0 percent reported income between 40,000 and 59,999; 12.8 percent reported between $60,000 and $79,999; and 17.9 percent reported income of $80,000 and above.

Financial and Service Assistance Received by Caregiver's Household. Nearly three-quarters of all caregivers (73.8 percent) of both waiver and control group children reported receiving benefits from some type of public assistance program. Forty-three percent of surveyed caregivers said they had a child who participated in the school lunch program. About one-third (33.6 percent) of the caregivers participated in the WIC program, 12.2 percent received food stamps and 4.8 percent received TANF (MFIP) payments. Housing assistance was received by 6.3 percent of caregivers and 15.5 percent received utilities assistance. Providers caring for White children reported receiving utilities assistance less often (5.4 percent) than caregivers with African American children (23.6 percent) or American Indian children (20 percent). Fewer than one in ten (8.5 percent) of all the primary caregivers said they received child support and 5.5 percent received unemployment benefits.

Employment. The majority of caregivers (77.2 percent) reported that at least one adult in the home was employed, either full-time or part-time. Sixty-four percent of all caregivers surveyed said there was a wage earner in the household who worked full time. Another 18.9 percent of waiver group caregivers and 26.5 percent of control group caregivers had a part-time worker in the household. A little more than a third of respondents in the waiver group (37.2 percent) reported full time employment and 55.3 percent reported that they were employed either full time or part time. This is compared to 71.9 percent of primary caregivers in the control group. Unemployment was reported by 31.9 percent of waiver group caregivers and 15.6 percent of control group caregivers. Those caregivers who were caring for White children reported a full-time wage earner in the home more frequently (79.7 percent) than those caregivers caring for African American children (55.6 percent) or American Indian children (48.6 percent), though levels of unemployment were relatively equal.

Education. The education level of primary caregivers was fairly similar between the waiver and control groups. Overall, 25.5 percent had four-year college degrees and 45.7 percent reported

some college work. Another 26.1 percent said they had high school degrees or GED's, while 2.7 percent said they had not completed high school. A majority of respondents with African American children in their home (80.0 percent) reported some college or completion of a four-year degree. The proportions were somewhat less for caregivers with American Indian (68.6 percent) or Caucasian (65.7 percent) children.

Marital Status. Caregivers that responded to the family survey in both experimental and control groups were more likely to be married (61.8 percent) than single. Among those who did not report being married, 22.0 percent were divorced or separated, 11.0 percent were never married and 5.2 percent were widowed. Respondents in the family survey sample caring for White children were slightly more likely to be married (68.5 percent), then those caring for African American (44.4 percent) or American Indian children (57.8 percent).

Medical Insurance. Foster and adopted children in the homes of caregivers obtained health insurance mainly through the state's Medical Assistance program, and all foster and MnPD children should be covered by the program. Health coverage through Medical Assistance was reported for a majority of foster (87.5 percent) and adopted (72.6 percent) children. Private insurance only covered 22.3 percent of adopted children and 4.3 percent of foster children. About half of all caregivers (51.0 percent) with biological children in the home said that these children had private insurance, and 59 percent of all caregivers said that their personal coverage was through private insurance. Fourteen percent of the adults who responded to the family survey reported that they currently had no medical coverage for themselves.

Housing Stability. Caregivers in the waiver group said they have lived at their present address for 12.4 years on average. In interviews, the majority of caregivers also said that they like their neighborhoods "very much" (89.0 percent) and described them as "very" safe (90.4 percent) and friendly (86.3 percent) places. Control group caregivers had similar positive views about their neighborhoods, and have lived at their present address for 12.8 years on average.

Levels of Stress Reported by Caregivers. Primary caregivers were asked in the family survey about areas of stress in their lives. More than half (58.8 percent) reported some stress related to their economic or financial outlook and 42.9 percent reported some stress about the overall well-being of children in their home. Twelve percent of caregivers described the level of stress they felt related to their children as high. Twenty percent said stress related to their financial situation was high. There were no significant differences between waiver and control group caregivers.

Household Composition. Most family survey respondents lived in homes with multiple children and more than one adult. Six in ten caregivers in the waiver group had two adults in the home,

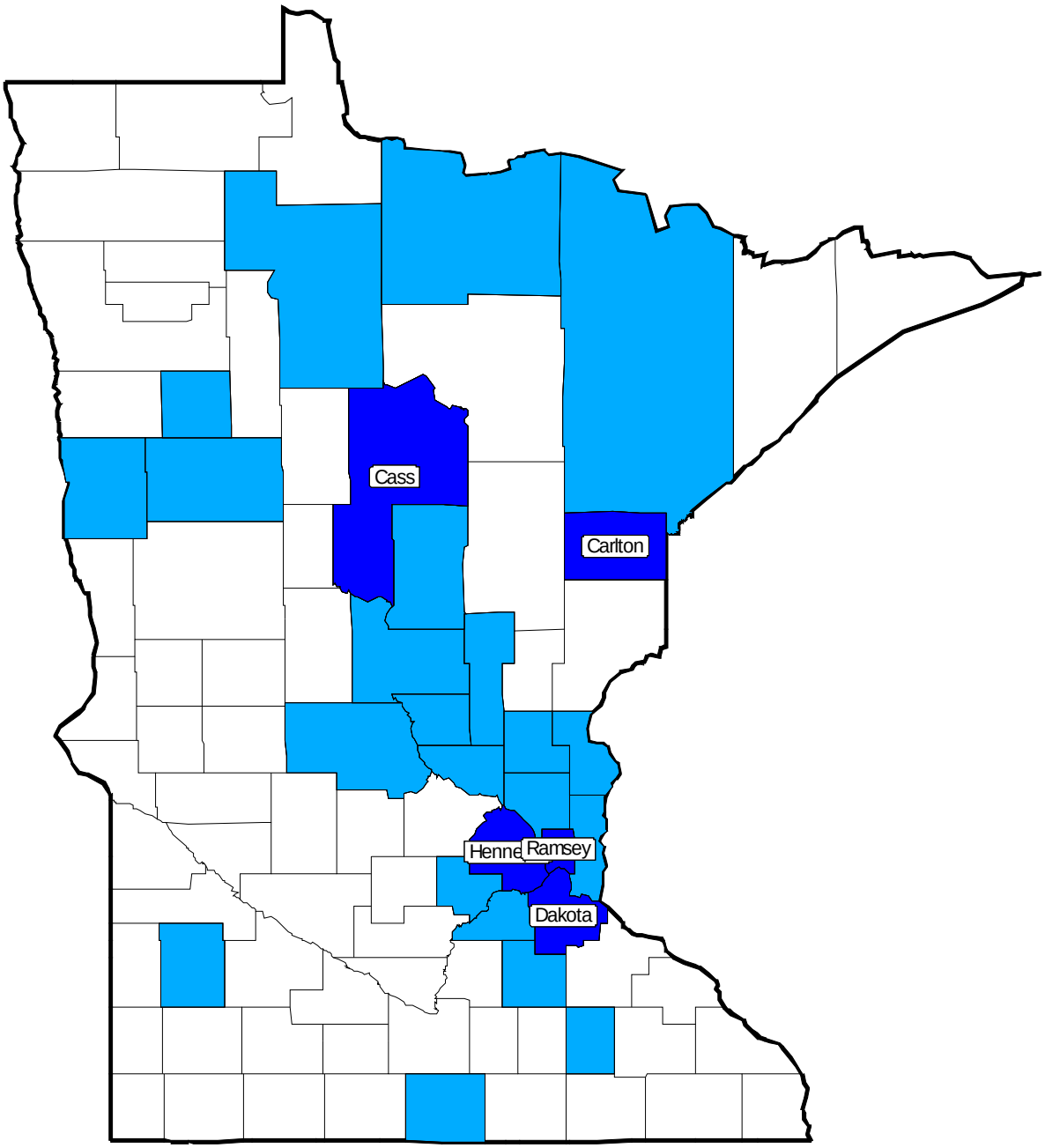
while a little over half (52.6 percent) of control caregivers did. About 30 percent of both waiver and control group caregivers lived alone with their children, and 13.5 percent had between three and five adults in the home. The number of children ranged from one to nine, with most families housing two to five children. Ten percent of caregivers lived with only one child, and the average number of children for all households was 3.4. Ages of the children were reported as infant to adult, with a mean age of 10.2 years. Caregivers themselves had an average age of 49.6 years.

Placement Counties

Children who are placed in foster care by the participating MnPD county were frequently placed in a different county from the one in which the case originated, usually to be with relatives. During the program, 55.9 percent of waiver group children were placed in foster care within the MnPD participating county, while 44.2 percent were placed in other counties. Among the counties, Dakota County had the highest percentage of its waiver group children in placement in another county (51.3 percent), followed by Hennepin County (49.4 percent), Ramsey County (38.6 percent) and Carlton County (26.3 percent).

Sometimes a placement county was near or adjacent to the county where the case originated, such as when a Dakota County child was placed in Ramsey County. But other times the two counties were separated by a considerable difference. **Map 3** on the following page shows the counties in which waiver group children were placed. **Table C.1** in **Appendix C**, shows the counties in which waiver group and control group children from each participating MnPD county were placed. The term 'provider county' in the table refers to the county where the caregiver resides.

American Indian children were often placed in a county other than the one with original jurisdiction. The situation of these children was complicated by the number of different American Indian tribes and bands within the state. **Table C.2** in Appendix C shows the foster care disbursement of the American Indian children in the study population. The table shows the tribe or band of the children, as given in SSIS, along with the county where the case originated and the caregiver's county. The top portion of the table shows the placement of waiver group children, while the bottom part shows where control group children were placed. The table is an indication of an area of complexity which challenged the state and county child protection agencies. The table provides one of the reasons the state agency engaged in significant outreach efforts to American Indian leaders across the state and why the state project manager made presentations and answered questions and concerns at several quarterly meetings of the statewide Indian Child Welfare Advisory Council.



Map 3. Foster Care Placement Counties of Waiver Group Children

E. Services

An offer of the MnPD continuous benefit option to eligible waiver group foster caregivers was the critical "service" provided during the demonstration. The MnPD project provided benefit continuity that followed the child from foster care to an adoptive or permanent legal relative home. Without the continuous benefit, a foster caregiver's subsidy may have been reduced by up to 50 percent if the caregiver made a commitment to provide the child with a permanent home. The service provided by the MnPD continuous benefit was the removal of this financial disincentive to adoption or a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody.

Though it was initially expected that all caregivers with foster children who met program eligibility criteria and were assigned to the waiver group would be offered the benefit, this did not always occur. Evaluators requested information about which families had been offered MnPD by talking directly with county project managers, and this information was provided, if known. **Table 2.6** shows the number of children assigned to the waiver group in the participating counties during the MnPD project along with the best information about the number and percent of children whose foster caregivers were offered the MnPD continuous benefit.[6]

Table 2.6. Number of Children Assigned to the MnPD Waiver Group and Number of Children in Foster Families Offered the MnPD Option

County	Assigned to Waiver Group	Offered MnPD Option *n*	Offered MnPD Option *%*
Carlton	38	31	81.6%
Cass	2	1	50.0%
Dakota	113	111	98.2%
Hennepin	240	160	66.7%
Ramsey	248	219	88.3%
Total	641	524	81.7%

[6] The number of foster caregivers offered the MnPD continuous benefit in Hennepin County is undoubtedly an undercount, but represents the number of cases in which confirmation was received by evaluators from county project managers that the offer was made.

Throughout the demonstration, the MnPD continuous benefit was offered to the foster caregivers of 8 in 10 (81.7 percent) waiver group children, based on information available to evaluators. In those situations where the offer was not made to a specific foster caregiver, there were typically valid reasons why the MnPD continuous benefit was not introduced. Sometimes there was a disruption in the foster situation—a child may have run away or requested a change in foster caregivers or the foster caregivers themselves may have experienced a problem, such as a separation or serious illness. Caseworkers with first-hand knowledge of a specific child may have also discerned an impediment to permanency in the foster home even when MnPD project technical eligibility criteria were met. This was less likely to occur when MnPD project referrals were initiated by caseworkers, as was the practice in all active MnPD counties after the first program quarter. Concerns of caseworkers regarding permanency in certain situations involving longer-term foster caregivers is discussed in more detail in Part F of this chapter.

Other Services. Consideration of the MnPD continuous benefit offer involves more than the amount of financial assistance received. Foster caregivers and children have caseworkers who provide various kinds of assistance and support. In the survey of caregivers conducted for the evaluation, caregivers were asked what services or supports had been most useful to them. It was an open-ended question, and two-thirds of the respondents wrote in specific comments. Financial assistance in some form or another was frequently noted by caregivers as an important support for their family while providing foster care to children. However, from their perspective, it was not always the most critical support.

Among those who wrote in some comment, 31 percent mentioned the help or accessibility of the agency caseworker as an important factor—"the ability to call the social worker anytime" or being able to count on the "help from proactive and supportive social workers." One foster caregiver said, "Ramsey County supported the child the whole time he lived with me." Another, with a long history as a foster caregiver with the county, stressed how meaningful this caseworker-caregiver relationship can be: "I had a wonderful social worker for 20 years, who helped me to care for 40 children. She retired a year ago and I quit foster care."

Nearly as many caregivers (29 percent) referred to training, classes, or support groups on foster parenting as important to them as caregivers. Specific mention was made of "adoption support groups," "trainings on disabilities," and "class for mental health for teenage children." One respondent explained that the most important support was "talking with other grandparents that are raising their grandchildren."

Financial assistance was the third most frequently mentioned support or service by respondents; 19 percent wrote in specific comments about one of the benefit programs (such as Adoption

Assistance, Relative Custody Assistance, or the MnPD continuous benefit) being an important service. As will be seen in the next section, this does not mean that only one-fifth of the caregivers considered financial assistance important to them.

Among caregivers who responded to the question, most noted more than one type of service and support that was important to them. If financial assistance was part of the comment, it was usually paired with a more concrete type of support. In several cases, medical assistance was listed along with general financial assistance. "The insurance and monthly money—it allows me to be an at-home parent and be there for all five kids," explained one caregiver. Another individual said it was the "counseling and money" that made the difference in her experience as a caregiver. And another referred to "the great social workers, therapy for the kids, and financial income."

Counseling and therapy was mentioned by 16 percent and medical assistance by 14 percent of respondents. Smaller numbers of respondents mentioned child care assistance, and the WIC (Women, Infant and Children's nutrition program), as well as special services for children with disabilities, transportation, and food and clothing assistance.

During the more in-depth interviews that were conducted, the potential loss of assistance or services from the county agency appeared to be a critical issue for many of the caregivers. This was especially true for those caregivers of children with intensive medical, behavioral, educational or mental health needs. During the interviews, one in four foster caregivers said that the caseworker who presented the MnPD continuous benefit option to them also offered to help them find new services if some were lost by moving to permanency with the child. Others did not hear or remember the caseworker mentioning anything about post-permanency services or assistance. More than half of caseworkers (56.4 percent) who completed case-specific surveys, however, said they tried to refer caregivers to services following acceptance of the MnPD continuous benefit. Caseworkers said they made referrals to following services: programs for the developmentally disabled, mental health counseling, medical assistance, child care assistance, early childhood education, in-home parenting education, mentoring programs, and other therapeutic assistance for the child.

The role of other services and supports in the decision of foster caregivers to offer children permanent homes is continued in the next section.

F. Permanency, the MnPD Benefit and Caregiver Decisions

The decision to adopt or accept a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody is a complex personal and family matter for each foster caregiver. The bond with the child is paramount, but foster caregivers must also consider the feasibility of maintaining a life-long relationship with the child. They must assess the practical aspects of the situation, including the ongoing needs of the child, the relationship of the child to other children in the home, cultural differences that may exist, the timing of the adoption or the transfer of permanent legal and physical custody, the age of child, and the overall financial implications of making a permanent commitment to the child. Foster caregivers were at different points in their deliberations concerning permanency when offered the MnPD continuous benefit option, and these factors affected their decision-making.

Discussions of Adoption and Permanent Legal and Physical Custody

Because achievement of a permanency outcome is such a central goal for children in foster care, the option of adoption or a transfer of permanent legal custody to a relative is expected to be discussed at some point with all foster parents, especially when legal permanency timelines are imminent. The timing and manner in which this permanency discussion is broached is important and can impact family decisions. The caseworker assigned to the child should discuss permanency options with the foster caregiver early in the placement episode, and decisions about those options must be made after it becomes clear the placement is safe and stable and reunification with the child's biological parents is not in the child's best interest.

The experimental research design in Hennepin and Ramsey counties provided the best basis for assessing the effect of the MnPD continuous benefit option on the decisions of foster caregivers regarding adoption and a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody. By itself, the control group in these counties is a good starting point in this assessment as it represented the status quo to which the new practice can be compared. Eighty-five percent of foster caregivers in the control group who were interviewed reported that they had spoken with a caseworker about adoption or a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody. Some reported that this discussion was not initiated by a caseworker, but by the foster caregiver herself/himself. Sometimes the caregivers accepted the child into their home with the understanding that adoption or a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody would be pursued by the county. But this was not the case with all foster caregivers, some of whom saw themselves as providing a vital, but temporary, service for children.

When caseworkers were asked in the case-specific survey whether they or any other caseworker ever discussed adoption or a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody with the current foster caregiver of a child in the control group, 86.1 percent said yes, 11.6 percent said no, and a

small percent (2.3) said they were not sure. These responses, in part, reflect the dynamic nature of some of the cases within the foster care system. Caregivers may change while a case is open, even in cases with foster families thought once to be "safe and stable," caseworkers may also change, temporarily or permanently. The reasons caseworkers gave for not discussing permanent arrangements with caregivers tended to be limited to a small number of factors: recent disruptions in the placement setting, the age of the child, and the wishes of the child were the most common.

One in four of the control group children in cases in which adoption or a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody had not been discussed were no longer living with the original caregiver: one had run away, three were in group homes, two were in new foster homes, one was placed with his grandparent. Children in the other cases where permanency had reportedly not been discussed were most often older—84 percent were aged 15 or older when assigned to the study population and a majority were 17 or older and on the verge of aging out of the system; one in five of the children had expressed a wish not to remain with the original caregiver.

The attitude of the child towards adoption or a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody can be the most powerful reason to pursue or reject a permanent relationship. In just under half of case-specific surveys (45.3 percent), caseworkers reported that the child had been present when permanency was discussed with the foster caregiver, and 43.8 percent of the caseworkers said that they had discussed permanency with the child directly. Among all children considered old enough to express an opinion, (72.7 percent), caseworkers reported that about half, (48.1 percent), said they wanted to remain permanently with their current caregiver, 10.9 percent of the children said they did not want to remain with the foster caregiver permanently; and the others were unsure.

While caseworkers favored working towards a permanency outcome between the caregiver and the foster child in a majority of cases, some held reservations about this even in situations in which both the foster caregiver and child agreed to pursue it. When caseworkers were asked whether they had reservations about the current foster caregiver adopting or accepting permanent legal and physical custody of a child in the control group, one in five (21.7 percent) said that they did. When asked what their concerns were, nearly a third (30.7 percent) mentioned the financial situation of the foster family, 7.8 percent expressed concerns about the emotional or intellectual adequacy of the caregiver, 3.7 percent had reservations about the safety of the foster family's neighborhood, 2.8 percent were concerned about the condition of the foster family's home or the space available for the child, 1.8 percent noted problems with drugs or alcohol within the family, and 15.6 percent had other specific concerns, from various problems or changes within the foster family itself, to the health of the child, the ability of the caregiver to handle the child's behavior or special needs, the child's age, or the continued bond between the child and his or her biological parents.

Concerns of Caregivers about Permanency

Caregivers were asked during interviews and in surveys about concerns they had when considering adopting or accepting permanent legal and physical custody of foster children in their care. A large percentage of caregivers cited many issues that were important to them when making this decision, indicating the often complicated nature of assuming permanent legal responsibility for a child. The most frequently cited issue among all caregivers in the study was the amount of financial support they received from the county or the state; over 8 in 10 caregivers of children in the study population said this; nearly half (48.5 percent) said the level of financial assistance was "very important" to them, 21.9 percent said it was "somewhat important," and the others said it was of minor importance. Nearly as many caregivers also said fear of losing medical assistance was an important consideration; 60 percent said it was "very important."

Other considerations reported as important by a large percentage of caregivers were the behavior of the child, the child's mental health and physical health needs, the child's relationship with his or her biological parents, the caregiver's own health or that of another family member, the effect of the decision on the caregiver's own children, and the number of children already in the home. **Figure 2.9** shows the percentage of all caregivers of children in Hennepin and Ramsey counties who expressed specific concerns related to the decision to adopt or assume permanent legal and physical custody of a child in their care. There were no significant differences in the concerns of caregivers of children in the waiver or control groups.

As was seen earlier in the report, and again later in the outcome analysis section, a substantial minority of foster caregivers were caring for more than one child, often caring for a sibling group. Placing siblings together was an objective of the MnPD. However, caring for multiple foster children, whether siblings or not, complicates the permanency decision of the caregiver in both financial and practical ways. A second or third child is another child to hug, to feed, to supervise, child care to arrange and pay for, school teacher to see, etc.

In the case-specific survey, caseworkers were asked for their perceptions of the concerns that foster caregivers expressed to them about adoption or a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody of children in their care. Overall, while caseworkers tended to report many of the same kinds of issues or concerns for foster families, the percentage of families viewed by caseworkers as having specific concerns was lower than the percent of families who reported concerns. **Figure 2.10** shows the response of caseworkers concerning foster caregivers in the control group. Interestingly, caseworkers generally saw caregivers of waiver group children as having significantly fewer concerns than caregivers of control group children. This suggests that caseworkers were likely to see the continuous benefit option available to waiver group caregivers as ameliorating the concerns

of these foster caregivers. As noted above, however, there were no significant differences in the concerns expressed by the two groups of caregivers themselves.

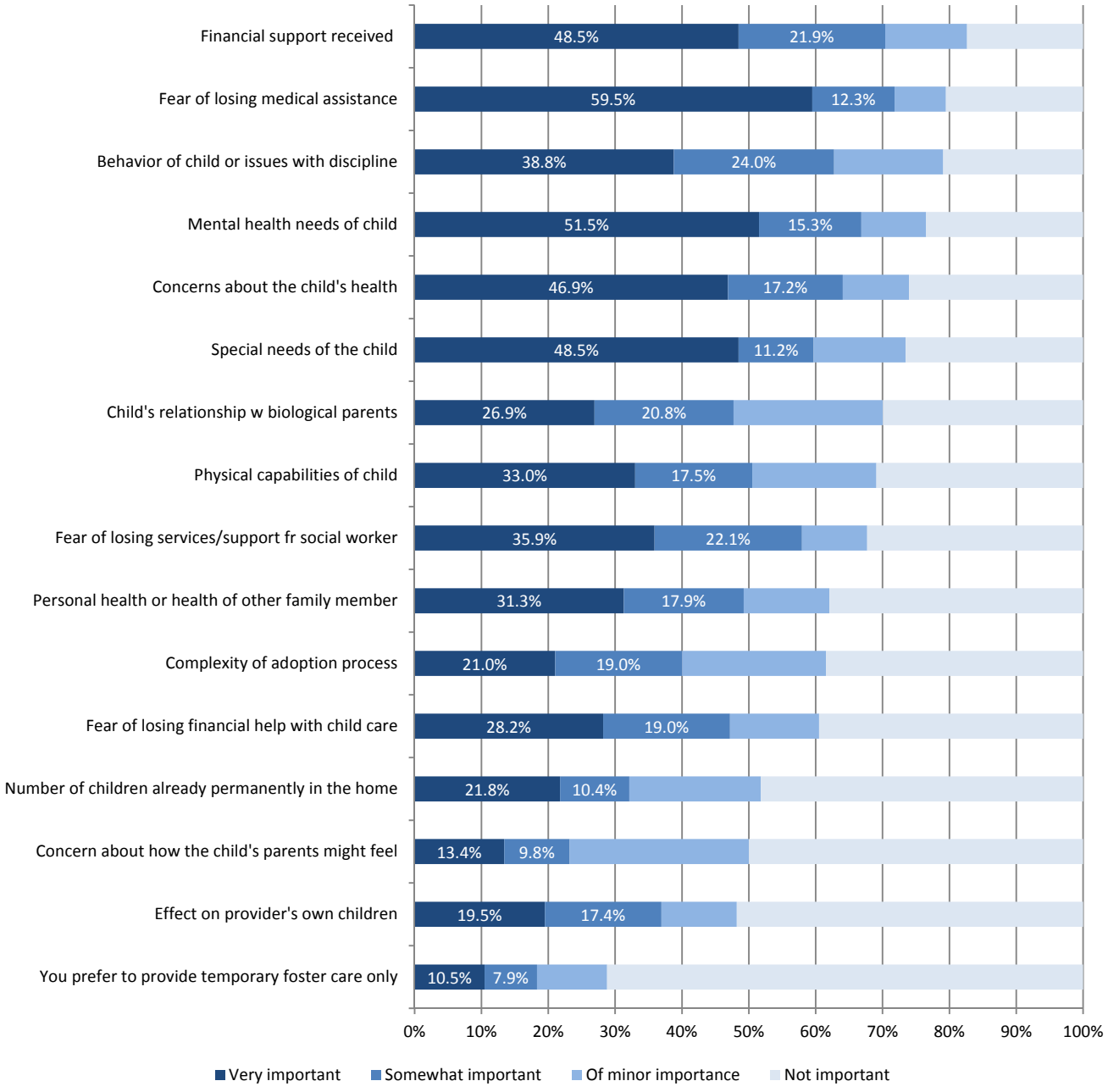


Figure 2.9. Percent of caregivers expressing specific concerns about adopting or accepting permanent legal and physical custody of foster children (waiver and control group combined)

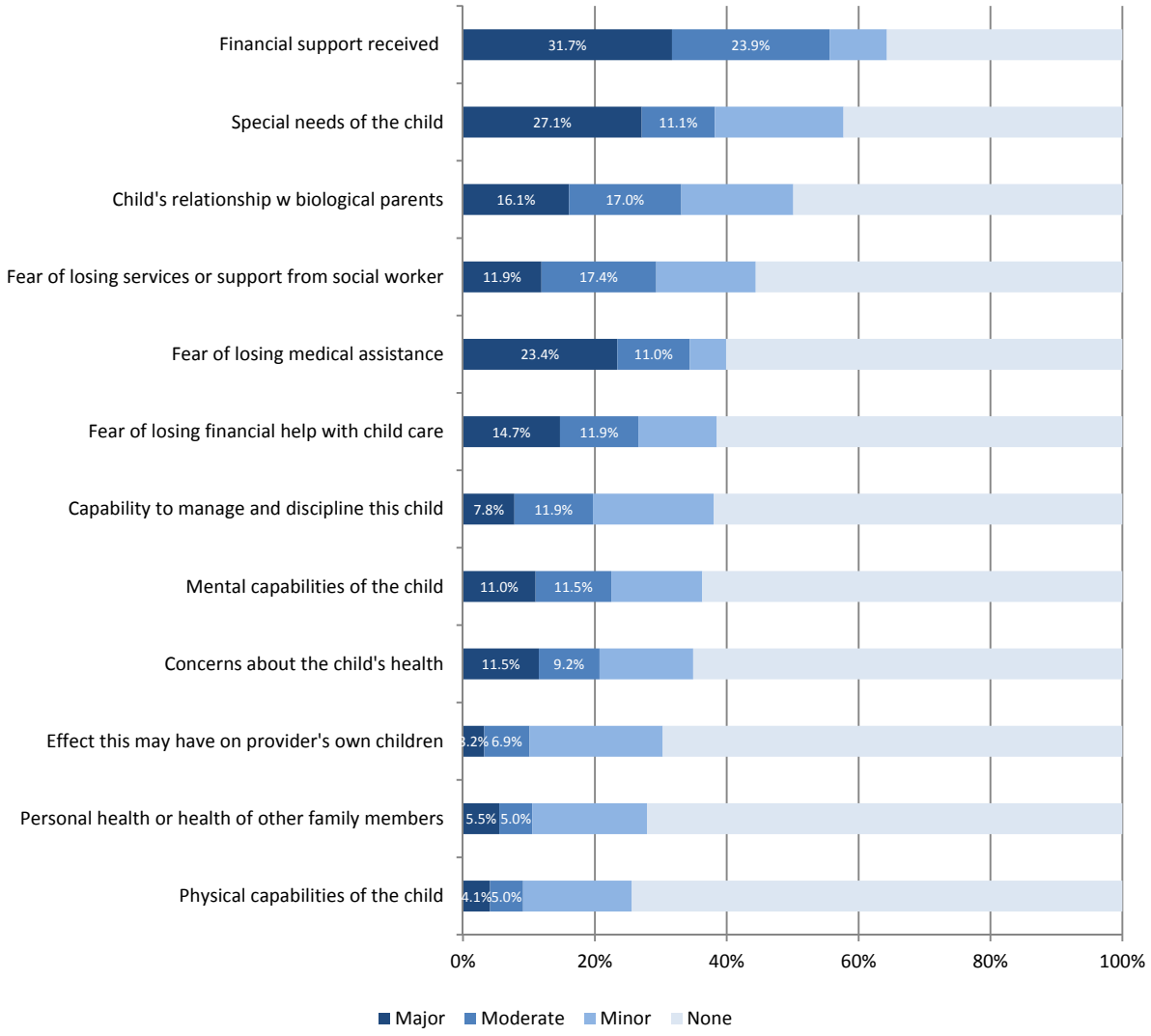


Figure 2.10 Percent of caseworkers who judged caregivers in the case-specific sample to have particular concerns about adoption or permanent legal and physical custody of children (control group only)

The difference in reports from caseworkers and caregivers about the specific concerns of families in the control group can be seen in **Figure 2.11**. The figure compares the percentage of caseworkers who reported in the case-specific survey that families in the control group had various concerns with the percentage of caregivers in the control group who voiced these same concerns. As can be seen, caseworkers tended to under estimate how many caregivers had specific concerns. Moreover, caseworkers often did not fully discern the level of importance among caregivers of issues implicated in their decision to provide a child in their care with a permanent home.

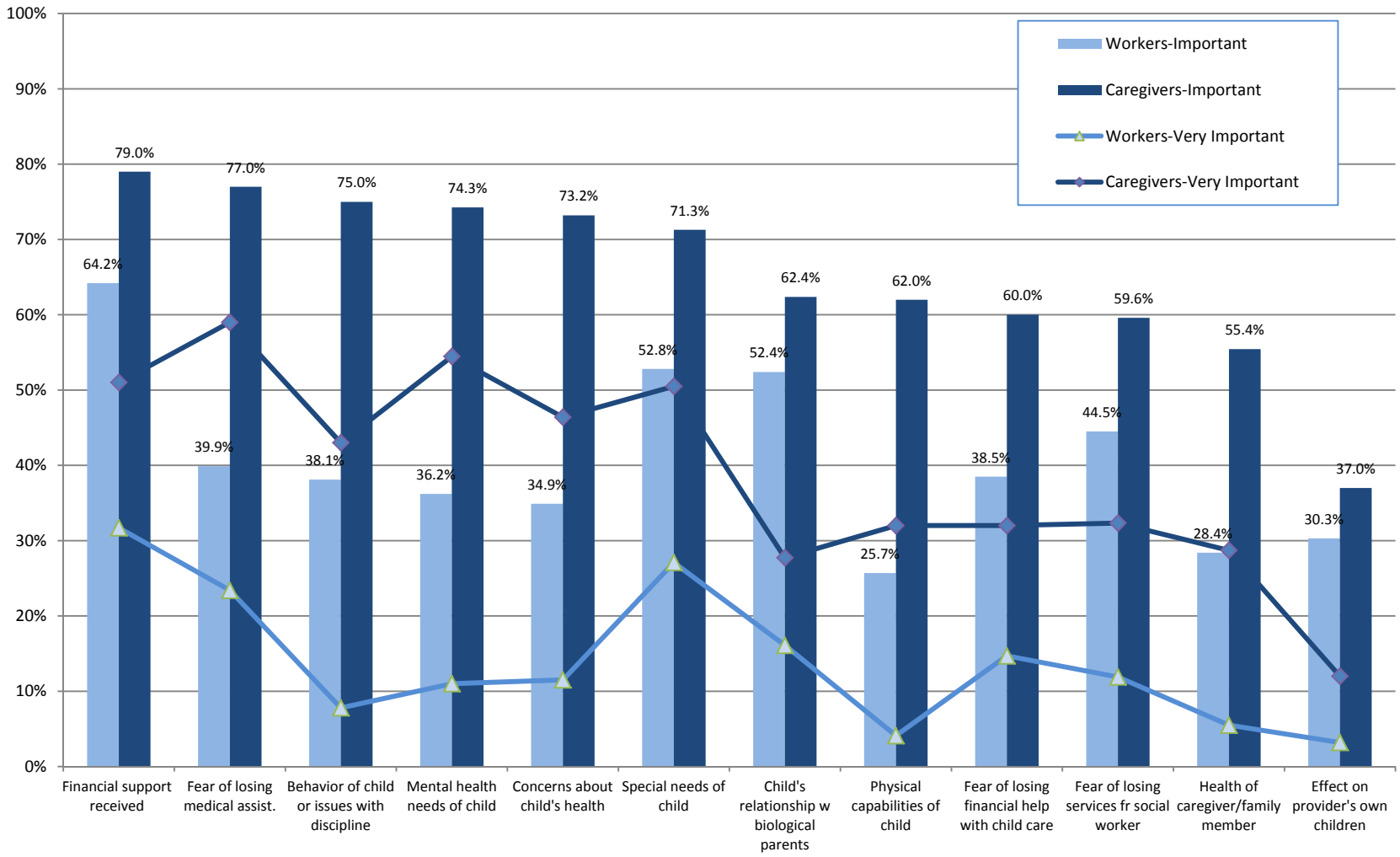


Figure 2.11. Reports by caregivers and caseworkers about the relative importance of specific issues for caregivers in the control group when deciding whether to adopt or accept transfer of permanent legal and physical custody of foster children

Twice as many caregivers had concerns about the child's physical or mental health, feared losing medical assistance for the child, were concerned about the behavior of the child, as well as issues related to the health of the caregiver or someone else in the caregiver's family. Differences between caseworkers and caregivers were generally greater when comparing the percent of families whose concerns about specific issues was considered to be "very important."

Main Reasons for the Permanency Decision

More than two-thirds of all family survey respondents (68 percent) answered an open-ended question regarding the main reason they decided to adopt or accept permanent legal and physical custody of a child in their care, or not to pursue either permanency option.

Reasons for Permanency. Among those who chose to pursue a permanent relationship with the child, respondents' comments were chiefly related to the bond they felt between themselves and the child. Caregivers explained that they chose to make a permanent commitment primarily because of their love for the child and their desire to provide stability for him or her. A typical response was "We loved him and wanted to give him a permanent home." "To give her a forever family," was another. Other caregivers wrote that they wanted to ensure the child "would have some stability in her life and a chance to grow" or to "make her feel safe and loved." In one comment the foster caregiver said it was the child's emotional well-being that prompted her decision: "It was for the sake of the child. He had bonded, and any separation would have been detrimental to his emotional well-being." Of the 116 comments from all caregivers in the two metro counties who had established a permanent relationship with the child, 99 (85.3 percent) listed a reason that dealt directly with love, family, or the desire to provide a stable home.

Relative caregivers often simply mentioned their blood relation to the child and implied that the reason for accepting the child permanently was obvious because of this relationship. "He is my nephew" said one caregiver. "She is family," said another, "I didn't want her passed around from house-to-house." A third said, "I didn't want them to go live with strangers." One grandparent summarized the sentiment this way: "My granddaughter needed a stable home and I didn't want her to go anywhere but with me."

Eight caregivers commented that their intention was to adopt the child from the very start, even before the foster placement began. "We went into the process planning to adopt" said one caregiver. Another said, "It was our decision prior to meeting her." Others had previously adopted siblings of the child and wanted to maintain the biological ties. As one caregiver said, "We decided to adopt prior to her being placed with us. We wanted a sibling group." In another case it was a

combination of these reasons: "We were unable to have biological children so we looked into adopting a sibling group. We fell in love with our kids from the start."

Only a few (4.6 percent) of the caregivers of children in the waiver group who commented on their reasons for providing a permanent home to the children mentioned the MnPD continuous benefit or financial reasons in their explanation about why they decided to adopt or accept a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody. One of these caregivers simply wrote in "MnPD" as her reason, another stated it this way: "Honestly, considering her disability, the main reason (we adopted) was to keep her with siblings, and with MnPD we could afford to adopt."

Reasons Against A Permanency Decision. For those caregivers who had decided not to adopt or accept permanent legal and physical custody, reasoning behind the decision was more diverse. One in four comments from these caregivers dealt with concerns with the child's family of origin or explained that the child had been reunified or moved to another foster home. Examples of these comments were "The courts gave dad custody," or "We signed the consent to adopt papers, but two weeks later she was moved to a paternal aunt." One comment stated, "It was not the child's wishes. Expectations were high for reunification." One caregiver, a relative of the child, said: "The mother was against (permanency) and would not agree."

Several caregivers noted the age of an older child. "He moved out at 18," one said. Another commented that "I have her in long term-foster care because she is 18 and is graduating from high school this year." Some caregivers of adolescent-aged children noted the child's wishes as the reason for forgoing a permanency decision.

A small number of caregivers said their reasons for not pursuing permanency were related to the behavior of the children in the home or other problems. One said, "She wouldn't take her meds. She was too difficult, and was lying, stealing, fighting and running away." Likewise, a couple of caregivers were worried that the children's behavior would grow worse as they got older and so were hesitant to commit to a permanent relationship.

Aside from these reasons, most other caregivers who had not yet adopted or accepted permanent legal and physical custody described personal and circumstantial reasons for their decisions. These explanations varied greatly and ranged from "We fear we are too old to adopt a baby," to recent divorces and medical problems within the family. One caregiver said that she traveled often with her job and another said that there were "too many boys in the home close to her age." One foster caregiver simply said, "I do not want to adopt."

Only two caregivers in this group of respondents indicated in written comments that they were concerned about finances as a primary reason for not pursuing a permanent relationship. Even in these cases, however, it was not the only reason given. For example, one said, "It's my age—not sure how long I will be healthy. No funds were offered. I did not want to end up in poverty." The other said, "I wasn't going to adopt her because she didn't want it, and I was concerned about finances and no services." Neither of these individuals was in the experimental group and so they were not offered the MnPD continuous benefit.

As will have been noticed, the written, open-ended comments for and against offering a child a permanent home did not neatly mirror what caregivers had indicated they considered to be important when presented with a taxonomy of possible concerns. Someone checked financial support as something that was considered along with a number of other issues on a list. But when asked to express their motives they were more likely to focus on inter-personal reasons. Part of the reason for this is surely social psychological and involves the manner in which people make self-presentations—whether in surveys or in face-to-face interactions. And this may affect differences seen in **Figure 2.11** between what caregivers noted and what caseworkers perceived. Both the checked list of considerations and the stated reasons for an action may be accurate, even though not apparently consistent and uniform.

The MnPD Continuous Benefit Option

All of the children assigned to either the waiver or control group in Hennepin and Ramsey counties were judged to have met the technical eligibility requirements of the MnPD continuous benefit. And yet, as has been seen, the situations were not always simple and straightforward. Disruptions sometimes occurred in longer-term foster families that had nothing to do with the foster child. An older foster child often had a mind of his or her own and sometimes did not wish to remain in the foster home on a permanent basis. Sometimes caseworkers had serious reservations about a particular foster home and, despite the length of time a child had lived there, still might not have viewed it as in the child's best interest to remain there permanently, even though, in most instances, some discussion of permanency options took place.

The Offered and Unoffered Option. The reality of the MnPD program was that the continuous benefit option was not offered to all foster caregivers with children assigned to the waiver group and who were technically eligible for it. Based on caseworker responses to the case-specific survey, it appears that the possibility of adoption or a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody was not discussed with about 8 percent of caregivers of children in the waiver group and these were a part of the group not informed of the MnPD continuous benefit option. Three examples of cases

assigned to the waiver group by county project managers in which the MnPD continuous benefit was not offered to the foster caregiver were described to evaluators during site visits.

The first had to do with what was described as the particular "family dynamics" in the case. The case involved a child in the care of his grandfather who, while accepting the child in foster care on a permanent basis, was unwilling to seek a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody for fear of breaching relations with his own son, the child's father. The second case involved an American Indian child living with a non-Indian foster caregiver, who was not the child's relative, and would not, according to the caseworker, have been accepted by the child's tribe as the child's permanent caregiver. The third case involved a teen-age girl whose mother was in prison; the girl continued to feel a strong bond with her mother, did not want a permanent home with the foster caregiver, and wanted to be reunited with her mother when she was released.

Other caseworker reservations resulted from the perception of caregivers who had "rigid parenting style" or were "unable to set appropriate limits." One caseworker doubted a caregiver's "ability to parent a special needs child" and another described a caregiver as having a "difficult time with the child's behavior." Other reservations of caseworkers were related to the financial situation of the foster family or the age or health of the caregiver. One caseworker remarked that the caregiver had "too many high needs children in the home." Another said "the extended family is too volatile."

In the survey of caregivers, foster caregivers of waiver group children were asked whether anyone had ever spoken to them about the MnPD continuous benefit option. About one in four (26.1 percent) said they could not remember anyone having done so. In one-on-one interviews the percentage of caregivers who said they had not had a conversation about the MnPD continuous benefit with a caseworker was lower (13.3 percent) than in the mailed survey. This difference may have been due to the additional probing of the interviewer during the interviews and the general problem of remembering the name of a specific program when completing a written survey without being able to ask for clarification.

How the Benefit Was Offered. Foster caregivers in the waiver group reported they were typically informed about the MnPD continuous benefit through face-to-face home visits by a caseworker (70.4 percent). Occasionally, foster caregivers learned about the MnPD continuous benefit through a phone call (14.1 percent), office visit (5.6 percent) or other method (9.9 percent), such as a letter. Most frequently, foster caregivers said the person who contacted them about the MnPD continuous benefit offer was a county caseworker (91.9 percent); sometimes it was a caseworker with a community agency (5.4 percent) or a tribal caseworker (2.7 percent).

Among American Indian caregivers who were interviewed, tribal caseworkers were the source of the MnPD continuous benefit offer 18.2 percent of the time. These caregivers reported that the tribal caseworker was their primary caseworker 27.3 percent of the time. Others said they worked with both a tribal and a county caseworker (18.2 percent) or that their primary caseworker was from a county agency (36.4 percent) or a caseworker from a community agency (18.2 percent).

Caseworkers' Understanding of Family Situations. Most foster caregivers interviewed said they felt that the caseworker assigned to their child understood their situation as a family. Nine out of ten waiver group caregivers believed the caseworker "fully" or "mostly" (81 percent and 9.5 percent) understood their circumstances. Sixty-seven percent of interviewed control group caregivers felt their caseworker "fully" understood their situation, and another 26 percent felt the caseworker "mostly" understood. Only a very small proportion of all foster caregivers believed that the caseworker did not understand their situation.

Caregivers' Comprehension of the MnPD Single Benefit Program. After receiving information about the MnPD continuous benefit, 74.0 percent of caregivers interviewed said they believed they understood how the MnPD continuous benefit worked. The remaining number said they either did not understand the MnPD continuous benefit (13.7 percent) or were unsure about it. (12.3 percent).

Concerns about the MnPD Continuous Benefit Program. While the majority of caregivers (70.8 percent) who were offered the MnPD continuous benefit said that they did not have any concerns about it, others (29.2 percent) did. Statements captured during interviews revealed concerns covering a range of topics, but several indicated a worry about the MnPD payment provisions:

- "Does the benefit increase with the cost of living?"
- "I have twins and am unsure if the other twin will qualify for the benefit."
- "If the benefit was taken away we'll be forced to sell the house and get rid of the kids."
- "If the county or state runs out of money, what would happen?"
- "I need to make sure my child has health care."
- "Sounds almost too good to be true."

Satisfaction with Delivery of the MnPD Single Benefit Offer. Whether or not they still had questions about the MnPD continuous benefit, eight out of ten (80.9 percent) caregivers interviewed said they were "very" or "generally" satisfied with how the MnPD continuous benefit was offered to them. Comments about the process of discussing the benefit were generally very positive:

- "I'm 100 percent satisfied. It was great"
- "The worker answered my questions even after she had explained it."
- "It was done very, very well. It's such a wonderful thing."

Those that were not satisfied with the caseworker's explanation expressed thoughts such as these:

- "I felt when they explained it, they didn't understand the program."
- "I still don't understand this benefit at all."
- "It's not the social worker's or county's fault, it's the newness of program."

Concerns about Permanency within the Waiver Group. Concerns of caregivers of children in the study population in Hennepin and Ramsey counties was discussed above **(See Figure 2.9)**. As noted, differences between caregivers in the waiver and control groups were not statistically significant. There were differences worth noting, however, within the waiver group between caregivers who adopted waiver group children and those who accepted the transfer of permanent legal and physical custody. These differences can be seen in **Figure 2.12**. By and large, compared with caregivers who adopted children, caregivers who accepted a transfer of permanent custody tended to express a greater number of concerns and to describe them as having a higher order importance. The differences between the two groups were statistically significant with respect to the amount of financial support received from the county or state in caring for the child (p=.05) and concerns about the child's health (p=.04), and nearly so with respect to the possibility of losing medical assistance for the child (p=.06).

These differences were undoubtedly related at least partly to the relative financial situation of the two groups of families: caregivers who accepted a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody of waiver group children reported incomes of about one-fifth less than caregivers who adopted children, that is about $10,000 less in total annual household income. Caregivers who accepted the transfer of permanent legal and physical custody of waiver group children also more often said that considerations of the child's relationship with his or her biological parents entered into their decision to make their home legally permanent for the child. A larger percentage of them also said they considered how the child parent's might feel, although the difference was not statistically significant. As the figure shows, there were two issues more often expressed by adoptive caregivers—concern about the effect of their decision of their own biological children and the overall number of children in the home.

A related finding involved differences among relative and non-relative caregivers of waiver group children, whether or not they adopted or accepted a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody of the children. Caregivers who were related to waiver group children were more likely to

say they were concerned about the child's future relationship with his or her biological parents than were non-relative caregivers (65.1 vs. 36.4 percent; p=.0360). A similar difference was found for the caregivers' concerns for how the child's biological parents might feel. Caregivers who were related to their foster children were five times more likely to say this was an important issue when considering permanent legal and physical custody or adoption; 41.8 percent of relative caregivers said this compared with 7.6 percent of non-relative caregivers (p=.001). There were no other significant differences in the concerns **(listed in Figure 2.12)** expressed by relative and non-relative caregivers.

MnPD Continuous Benefit as Incentive to Adopt or Accept Permanent Legal and Physical Custody. The bottom-line effect of the MnPD continuous benefit on moving children to permanency is examined in the next chapter. The interviews and surveys of caregivers, however, help us understand more fully how the MnPD continuous benefit played a role in the permanency decisions of foster caregivers. Of survey respondents who said they remembered someone talking to them about the MnPD continuous benefit option, 90 percent said they accepted it. Of these, in turn, 55.8 percent said they would have adopted or accepted permanent legal and physical custody of the waiver group child without the MnPD benefit, 44.2 percent said either they would not have or were not sure. The comments of a number of waiver caregiver survey respondents indicated the importance to them of the increased financial support, permitting some to provide permanent homes for siblings:

- "We had no means to adopt without it."
- "I would not have been able to make sure she had everything she needed if not for MnPD."
- "[The child] has so many problems…I would not have adopted her without the benefit…the benefit will encourage others to adopt."
- "We wanted to adopt [the child] but knew we couldn't afford it without the benefit."

Other caregivers stated that though they would have gone forward with adoption or a transfer permanent legal and physical custody without the benefit, but the MnPD benefit helped make their decision easier. As one foster caregiver explained, "Without MnPD, I would have to work out of the home full time. This would have been harder on the kids. They need constant guidance and care." Another said, "We had already made the decision to adopt before finding out about MnPD, but it's been a blessing to us." A number of caregivers expressed a sentiment similar to that of one respondent: "It certainly made it easier, but we would have made it work."

For a number of caregivers, therefore, the added financial benefit was not viewed as a necessary pre-condition, but important to them nonetheless. Some caregivers made a point to de-emphasize any financial incentive that was offered.

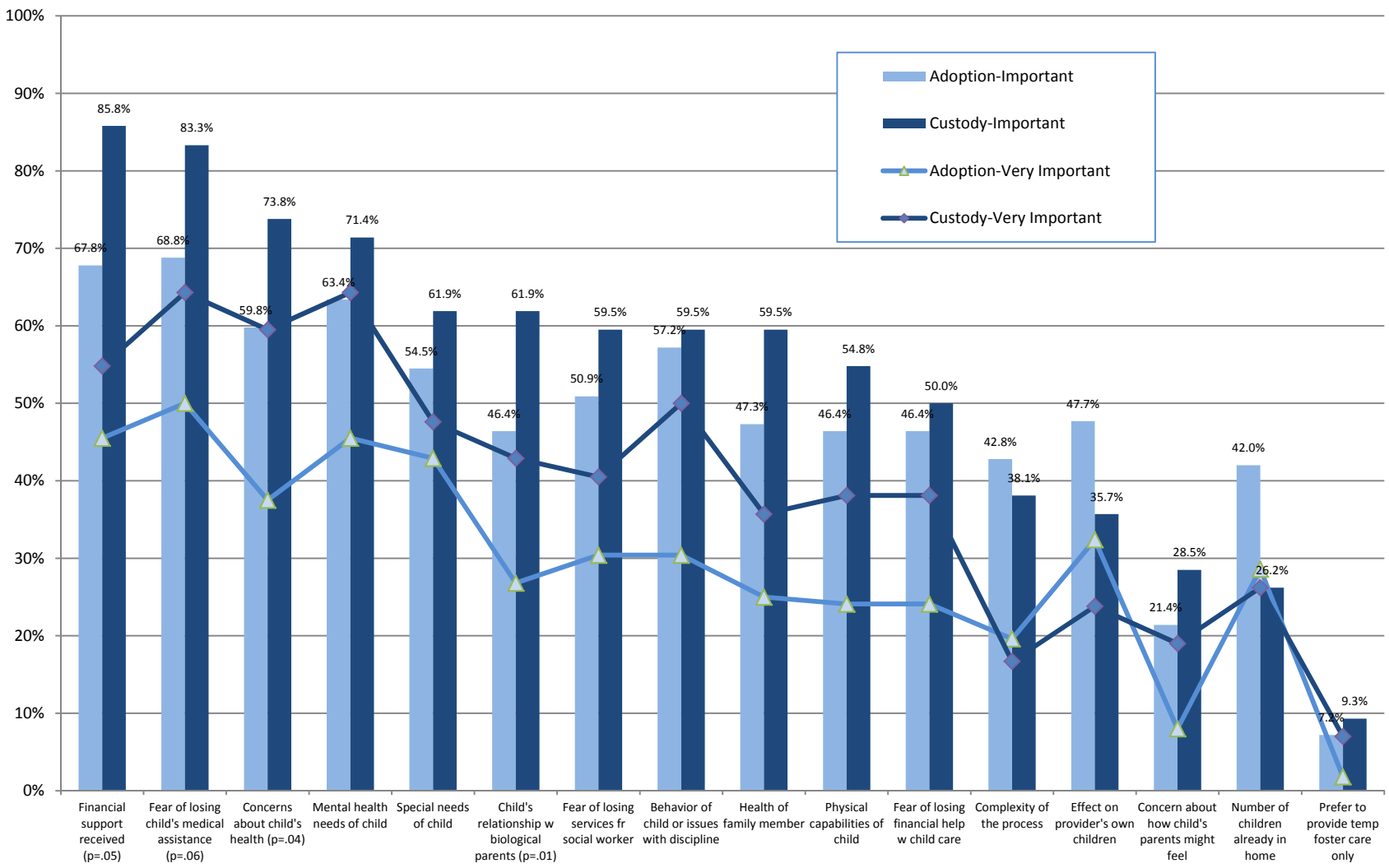


Figure 2.12. Percent of caregivers who adopted or accepted permanent custody of waiver group children who said specific issues played an important role in their decision

- "The money doesn't make us a family. I love them as my own."
- "It's not about the money. Just wanted all of us to be together."
- "It (the money) wasn't on top. We just wanted him to be safe."
- "It would have been hard but money wasn't the reason I adopted her. I love her—we would have made it."
- "This is my grandchild whom I've raised. His parents were not caring for him, so I have to take him regardless."

However, even among caregivers who said they could afford to adopt or accept permanency legal and physical custody without the MnPD continuous benefit, there were often reservations. Comments of caregivers during interviews frequently indicated a lack of confidence in the family's financial ability to care for the child. As one said: "Barely, I'd have been struggling and would have needed to find extra income."

Keeping sibling groups together was an objective of the MnPD project and several caregivers talked about the cost of caring for siblings and their decision about adoption or a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody.

- "We could only comfortably afford to adopt one child without MnPD. With MnPD we were able to adopt a sibling group of four."
- "Without MnPD, we probably would have felt differently adopting her siblings, especially her DD sister. Later we were asked to adopt kids who were not MnPD, and we couldn't afford it."
- "Possibly not both kids. MnPD helped adoption happen much sooner than without."

The problem always is interpreting what someone does, or is likely to do, based on what he/she says. For example, relative caregivers of waiver group children were more likely than non-relative caregivers to say that they would have made the same decision regardless of the MnPD benefit (68.6 percent vs. 31.1 percent; p=.04). Nonetheless, as will be seen in the next chapter, it was among relative caregivers who accepted permanent legal and physical custody that the MnPD continuous benefit made a difference. This may well be related to the fact that relative caregivers had a lower mean household income than other caregivers, and that what they wanted to do and what they could do without assistance were not always the same thing.

With respect to ethnicity, caregivers of African American children were more likely to report that they would have made the same permanency decision without the MnPD continuous benefit (65.9 percent) compared with caregivers of White children (37.5 percent) or American Indian children (26.3 percent).

Other Concerns that Impacted the Adoption/Permanent Legal and Physical Custody Decision. A variety of non-financial concerns of caregivers have been noted throughout this section. Some of these were strong enough to counter the financial benefit of the MnPD project. For example, the fear of losing the services of the caseworker was a concern frequently mentioned.

- "I'm worried about losing case management and support services in case something happens in the future."
- "I'm worried about a decrease in the support I get from the county worker."
- "I need a long term social worker."

Concern about the child's relationship with his or her biological parents was often very strongly felt.

- "I'm afraid of the parents coming and taking him and not knowing what to do, or who to call if that happened."
- "What if the mother tries to get him and doesn't bring him back?"
- "I'm worried about her physical safety with the biological parents."
- "I worry they (biological parents) may try to take away the children later."

And these concerns were sometimes mixed with general apprehensions about the length and complexity of the adoption or permanent legal and physical custody process itself.

- "There is not enough information and too much paperwork."
- "The change from one caseworker to another slowed the adoption process."
- "There are so many court appearances."
- "We were just worried and anxious that there would be problems with the adoption process. We had her since she was baby and wanted to make sure she would stay."

Cultural Perceptions of Adoption and Permanent Legal and Physical Custody as a Potential Concern. While cultural perceptions about adoption and transfer of permanent legal and physical custody also sometimes influenced a caregiver's decision, it did not appear to be a major barrier for most caregivers. Eighty-seven percent of interview respondents said that people from their culture had generally had positive attitudes towards adoption and transfer of permanent legal and physical custody. Nevertheless, the act of terminating parental rights appeared to be a larger issue for caregivers who were fostering American Indian children. Two caregivers said in interviews that supporting termination of parental rights had been difficult for tribes.

Rejection of the MnPD Benefit. When asked expressly why they declined the MnPD continuous benefit offer, some caregivers expressed long-term financial concerns, the cost or loss of child care, the age of an older child or the caregiver's own age. Some caregivers quite bluntly said they did not want to adopt the child, or that their spouse did not, or that the child opposed it.

- "The children do not want to be adopted."
- "When [child] decided she didn't want to be adopted all conservation ended."
- "We don't like this child. He has too many problems and it would be difficult to have a life long relationship with him. It's in his best interest."
- "My husband is against it."
- "We have no attachment to this child, no desire to go further."

When caseworkers were asked to state why, in their view, some foster providers declined the MnPD continuous benefit offer, the reasons they cited were primarily of three kinds—the age of the child (in the case of youths approaching their 18th birthday), the lack of interest on the part of caregivers to pursue permanency, and concerns among caregivers of losing county services and support from caseworkers. Comments of caseworkers related to the latter issue included: "Because of the high needs of the child they are fearful of losing support from the county" and "they want social services to remain involved and help in crises."

Effects of MnPD as Seen by Caseworkers. In the case-specific survey, caseworkers were asked about the effects of the MnPD continuous benefit on the decision of caregivers of waiver group children. It was the judgment of caseworkers that about four in ten (43.2 percent) caregivers who ended up providing a permanent home for waiver group children had already decided to do so prior to the MnPD continuous benefit offer being made, and nearly as many (37.8 percent) were seen as leaning toward such a decision. This left a minority of cases in the judgment of caseworkers in which the offer made a clear difference. For those leaning, it may have kept some from changing their minds or enabled them to accept permanency sooner.

Permanency vs. Foster Care. When concerns about permanency expressed by all waiver and control group caregivers in the study were examined, there were three main differences between caregivers who chose to adopt or accept permanent legal and physical custody and those who did not. Those who chose not to offer a foster child a permanent home within their family 1) gave greater weight to the amount of financial support they might receive from the county or state, 2) expressed greater concerns about the state of the foster child's health, and 3) were more likely to be concerned about the effect on their own children of the decision.

Chapter 3. Outcome and Impact Analysis

The impact analysis of the MnPD utilized a mixed research design, involving both experimental and quasi-experimental elements. In the two large urban counties in the demonstration, Hennepin and Ramsey, random assignment of children to an experimental (waiver) or control group was utilized. In these counties, names of children that were determined to be appropriate for the MnPD continuous benefit program were submitted to a random assignment process. This is the strongest type of group research design and was used for a majority (944 or 75.5 percent) of the children considered in the impact analysis. Of these, 488 were assigned to the waiver group and the MnPD continuous benefit could be offered to their foster caregivers. The remaining 456 were placed in the control group in which the MnPD continuous benefit was not offered.

The random assignment process was conducted separately in the two counties. Thus, all waiver and control group children that entered in the study population could be identified by county. This permitted both separate and combined analyses of the Hennepin County and Ramsey County programs. For the remaining counties in the demonstration, Carlton, Cass and Dakota, a matching procedure was utilized. Any child in a participating county that was considered MnPD project eligible was assigned to the waiver group. There were 153 such children in Carlton, Cass and Dakota counties. Researchers then searched the state Social Services Information System (SSIS) for the most similar matching comparison child. This quasi-experimental part of the study population, therefore, consisted of 306 children (24.5 percent of the total study sample) 153 children assigned to the waiver group and 153 children selected for the comparison group. The total study population, including all waiver or control/comparison group children, consisted of 1,250 children.

Three analyses were planned: 1) comparisons of the randomly assigned waiver and control group children, 2) comparisons of waiver and matched comparison group children, and 3) comparisons of all waiver group children with all control/comparison group children. The greater weight should be placed on the Hennepin and Ramsey counties experimental design in interpreting the impact of the MnPD project because randomization controls extraneous variables and creates more similar waiver and control groups. In the following, the randomly assigned segment is abbreviated as RA while the non-randomly assignment segment is designated as NRA. Research questions 1 through 5, considered in the next section, were each addressed through data obtained through SSIS.

A problem mentioned previously in this report was the decision of some caseworkers *not* to offer the MnPD benefit to some of the foster caregivers with children in the randomly assigned waiver group. Some children in Hennepin and Ramsey counties, therefore, were designated as being part of the experimental group but never received the expected 'treatment.' This does not affect the

experimental design, as such, since under random assignment it can be assumed that a similar group of control group children *would not have been offered the MnPD continuous benefit.* However, failure to offer the benefit can be assumed to have diluted the effects of the waiver.

Comparison Group Matching Procedures. In the NRA segment of the study, comparison group children were selected from other Minnesota counties through a pair matching procedure, utilizing data extracted from SSIS. The object of pair matching was to obtain identical *groups* of children. Comparison group children were selected on a periodic basis—generally two to three times per year. These matching children were also used for the cost-neutrality calculations for the NRA counties. In selecting potential matches, the first step was to select a pool of potential title IV-E eligible matching children and to segment the pool by race into three parts: White, American Indian and African American. Matches for children of each racial/ethnic type that have been assigned to the waiver were selected from the corresponding pool segment. In addition males were only matched with males and females with females, and age was taken into consideration.

Segmenting by ethnicity limited the sizes of the pools because of the relatively small numbers of older children in outstate Minnesota counties. For example, the number of African American females in their later teens and in placement and title IV-E eligible and available to match with a MnPD project eligible child of this type was relatively small. Given these limitations, the best match was selected based on similarities of the following variables: presence of disabilities, difficulty of care codes, length of time in foster care, the age of child at the time of first removal and placement, relative versus non-relative foster provider, the child's age, and the proximity of the child's county of origin to the participating MnPD county. Although procedures favored selection of children in long-term foster case, it was impossible to determine solely from the SSIS data system the likelihood of reunification with parents, which sometimes occurred after lengthy stays in foster care. A final criterion was to rule out of consideration children who were eligible for title IV-E, but for whom reimbursement claims had not been made. Thus, both the waiver and comparison groups were composed of children in foster care active under title IV-E.

Children of Color and Children with Special Needs. As described earlier in this report, the waiver Terms and Conditions indicated that children of color and children with special needs would be targeted through the waiver. For this reason, African American and American Indian children were analyzed separately. While a subset of Asian American children were also present, the size of this sub-sample was too small for valid analysis. Children with special needs were identified via disability fields in SSIS. Two groups were considered: 1) children with any disability and 2) children with severe disabilities. The latter were composed of the following categories: fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, traumatic brain injury, severe emotional disturbance, chemical dependency and

developmental disability (with and without intellectual disability). A large proportion of the children in these categories had multiple disabilities.

Other Important Variables. In outcome analyses, the age of the child and whether the foster caregiver was related to the child were also considered to be important variables influencing whether a child moved from foster care to a permanency outcome.

A. Improvements in Permanency

Research Question 1: ***Was the proportion of children who achieved permanency through adoption, permanent legal and physical custody or reunification greater for the waiver group?***

The first two outcomes listed in this research question represent the goals of the MnPD project: permanency outcomes through adoption or through permanent legal and physical custody. Reunification is an alternative outcome that, if the MnPD project approach was found to work, might have been expected more often among control group cases.

Information on adoptions was obtained from two sources within SSIS: the discharge reason at the conclusion of the placement episode and the order issued at the conclusion of court hearings. These two sources usually provided identical information with some exceptions. To accomplish a discharge from placement a discharge reason must be entered, and this source of information was considered the most reliable. The results of court hearings were not always consistently entered by caseworkers and in a few cases discharge reasons were entered but no corresponding court orders were found. Permanent custody refers to the legal status under Minnesota law of "permanent legal and physical custody." This is similar to the status of guardianship in other states. A small number (9) of "customary tribal adoptions" of American Indian children took place. These resemble permanent custody cases more than traditional adoptions because customary tribal adoptions do not involve terminations of parental rights, rather a "suspension of parental rights". For this reason, these cases were included within the permanent custody category. Reunification refers to return to biological parents or other legal custodians of children.

MnPD Impact on Adoption. Adoption outcomes can be seen in **Table 3.1**. More randomly assigned (RA) control group children were adopted (53.1 percent) than waiver group children (45.9 percent), a difference that was statistically significant ($p = .016$). This difference is explained by variations in Ramsey County. In Hennepin County, adoption rates were virtually identical with 54.0 percent of MnPD waiver group children adopted compared to 54.2 percent of control group children (not significant). In Ramsey County, however, only 38.6 percent of waiver group children were adopted compared to 51.8 percent of control group children ($p = .003$). This imbalance occurred primarily

because of a unique program in Ramsey County, the *Adoption Equalization Program (AEP)*. This Ramsey County program provided subsidies to relative foster caregivers that chose to adopt who would not otherwise be able to adopt. The AEP was offered and accepted by 37 foster caregivers of control group children and 1 caregiver of a waiver group child.

Table 3.1. Adoption of MnPD Children

Adoption		
	Random Waiver	*Random Control*
RA	45.9%	53.1%
Total	488	456
	Non-Random Waiver	*Comparison*
NRA	56.3%	32.0%
Total	153	153
ALL*	*All Waiver*	*All Control/Comparison*
Entire Sample	48.4%	47.8%
Total	641	609
* RA = Randomly Assigned, NRA = Not Randomly Assigned, ALL = RA and NRA children combined		

The AEP financial support was determined to have been offered after random assignment had occurred and, thus, represented an imbalance in the experimental design. If these children are dropped from the analysis in Ramsey County, 38.3 percent of waiver group children were adopted without the additional AEP subsidy compared to 44.8 percent of control children, a difference that was not statistically significant. How adoption rates would have differed in Ramsey County if the AEP was not implemented cannot be known, although it must be assumed that adoption would not have occurred in some cases or at least would have been delayed. The lack of a significant difference in Hennepin County and similar results in Ramsey County after AEP children have been removed from the study, suggests that the MnPD continuous benefit was not effective within the full RA sample in moving children to adoption more frequently. However, this analysis does not take into account the effects of sibling groups on adoption. This topic is considered below following a discussion of permanent legal and physical custody outcomes.

Within the non-random assigned (NRA) groups, a significantly greater ($p < .001$) percentage of children (56.3 percent) were adopted than comparison children (32.0 percent). This may be due in part to the inability of the evaluators to verify fully that reunification had been ruled out for

comparison group children, as was discussed in the introduction to this section and in the analysis of reunification presented below.

MnPD Continuous Benefit Impact on Transfers of Permanent Legal and Physical Custody. In the area of permanent legal and physical custody (**Table 3.2**), significantly more ($p < .001$) waiver group children in the full sample (21.2 percent) reached permanency than control group children (7.9 percent). The differences were reflected in both sub-samples: RA (19.0 percent versus 8.6 percent, $p < .001$) and NRA (28.5 percent versus 5.9 percent, $p < .001$). In addition, unlike adoptions there were significant differences between waiver and control groups in both RA counties (Hennepin County: waiver group, 10.9 percent; control group, 6.8 percent, $p = .079$; Ramsey County: waiver group, 26.9 percent control group, 10.5 percent, $p < .001$). The MnPD continuous benefit appears to have had the greatest effect on the willingness of foster caregivers to assume permanent legal and physical custody of the children in their care.

Table 3.2. Permanent Legal and Physical Custody of MnPD Children

Permanent Legal and Physical Custody		
	Random Waiver	*Random Control*
RA	19.0%	8.6%
Total	488	456
	Non-Random Waiver	*Comparison*
NRA	28.5%	5.9%
Total	153	153
ALL*	*All Waiver*	*All Control/Comparison*
Entire Sample	21.2%	7.9%
Total	641	609
* RA indicates Randomly Assigned, NRA indicates Not Randomly Assigned, ALL indicates both RA and NRA children		

Impact of Sibling Groups. An uncontrolled variation occurred between the waiver and control groups in the random assignment (RA) counties. At the start of the project, procedures were put in place in Hennepin and Ramsey counties to identify sibling groups in order to avoid splitting children from the same family between the waiver and control groups. All siblings were to be entered as a group based upon the random assignment of the first child entered into the study.[7] Thus, if the first child was assigned to the waiver group, all the siblings of that child would also be assigned to the

[7] Siblings in this analysis include full biological siblings, half-siblings and step-siblings.

waiver group. Sibling groups were also assigned to the control group in the same manner. It was thought that mixing of siblings across waiver and control group status would weaken the potential effects of the MnPD project since permanency decisions are often made for entire sibling groups. In the present study, when adoption and permanent legal and physical custody outcomes occurred, sibling groups were only rarely split. When one sibling was adopted, all were adopted and similarly for permanent legal and physical custody cases.

Over large samples, any differences in sibling group size would likely have averaged out. However, assignment to the MnPD project slowed during the final two years, particularly in Hennepin County, resulting in a smaller than expected sample size, with 239 children in the waiver group and 236 in the control group for a total of 475 children. In Hennepin County[8], 23.4 percent of waiver group children (n = 56) were in two-person sibling groups, while 17.8 percent of control group children (n = 42) were in such two person groups. Likewise, 20.5 percent of waiver group children (n = 49) were in sibling groups of size three or greater, while in the control group 29.2 percent (n = 69) were in similar sibling groups (**Table 3.3**). This imbalance had effects on the study.

At the time of the interim study, waiver group children in Hennepin County were shown to be adopted more often and the demonstration appeared to be on course to show a difference in adoptions in this county. By the conclusion of the study, as was shown above, no differences in adoption were apparent between the waiver and control groups in this county. One of the reasons for this change can be seen in **Table 3.3**.

In the adoption finalized column it can be seen that adoptions occurred more frequently (73.9 percent) among the 69 control group children in the larger sibling groups. There were ten groups of three siblings, in which 21 control group children were adopted. There were five groups of four siblings of which 11 control group children were adopted and groups of five, six and eight siblings in which all 19 control group children were adopted. Among the 49 waiver group children, there were nine groups of three siblings in which 15 waiver children were adopted and four groups of four siblings and one group of six, in which 18 waiver group children were adopted.

The decision to adopt occurred simultaneously for virtually all the siblings and in every case (save one group of four siblings, of which three were adopted and one remained in care) all the children in the sibling group were either adopted or remained in care (or in one case three siblings were reunified). The pattern of decisions, not about individual children, but about groups of children can easily lead to imbalances in outcomes in samples of this size. Indeed, the shift to higher adoption

[8] Ramsey cases are not considered in this analysis because of contaminating effects of the AEP, discussed above.

proportions for the control group occurred in a short period of a few months when three of the largest groups of siblings in the control group moved from placement to adoption.

On the other hand, the table also reveals that among the groups of children with no known siblings, waiver group children in Hennepin County moved to adoptions (37.1 percent) and to a lesser extent to permanent legal and physical custody (20.0 percent) more frequently than their control group counterparts (31.6 percent and 17.9 percent).

Table 3.3. Permanency Outcomes by Size of Sibling* Groups in Hennepin County

Waiver children	*Reunifi-cation & row percents*	*Adoption finalized & row percents*	*Emanci-pated & row percents*	*Perm. custody & row percents*	*Other# & row percents*	*Total & column percents*
With no known siblings	3	39	29	21	13	105
	2.9%	37.1%	27.6%	20.0%	12.4%	44.5%
With sibs outside the project**	0	18	4	1	6	29
	0.0%	62.1%	13.8%	3.4%	20.7%	12.3%
With one sibling in the project	1	39	4	1	11	56
	1.8%	69.6%	7.1%	1.8%	19.6%	23.7%
With three or more siblings in the project	0	33	2	3	11	49
	0.0%	67.3%	4.1%	6.1%	22.4%	20.8%
					Total	239
Control children						
With no known siblings	7	30	27	14	17	95
	7.4%	31.6%	28.4%	14.7%	17.9%	40.2%
With sibs outside the project**	1	18	4	0	7	30
	3.3%	60.0%	13.3%	0.0%	23.3%	12.7%
With one sibling in the project	2	29	4	2	5	42
	4.8%	69.0%	9.5%	4.8%	11.9%	17.8%
With three or more siblings in the project	4	51	2	0	12	69
	5.8%	73.9%	2.9%	0.0%	17.4%	29.2%
					Total	236

* Siblings included full biological siblings, half-siblings, and step-siblings.
**In most instances these siblings were not in placement but were listed as other family members in assessment or case management workgroups.
'Other' refers primarily to children remaining in foster care.

Because decision making tends to be about sibling groups rather than individual children, it might be fairer to compare groups of siblings within the waiver and control conditions rather than individual children. In this analysis, children with no siblings are counted as groups of one and each

group of two or more siblings is counted only one time. As shown in the previous sections, Hennepin County adoption outcomes were essentially equivalent in that 54.0 percent of MnPD waiver group children were adopted compared to 54.2 percent of control group children. However, when sibling groups were considered, 49.4 percent of the MnPD waiver group was adopted compared to 46.3 percent of control group children. The difference is small and not statistically significant but demonstrates how variations in permanency decision making by foster caregivers about groups of children may be hidden when analysis is limited to comparisons of individual children.

As also previously discussed, in Hennepin County, 10.9 percent of individual waiver group children achieved permanent physical and legal custody compared to 6.8 percent of control group children ($p = .079$). This was a statistical trend and was evidence that the MnPD project was successful in promoting this type of permanency outcome. This difference was maintained in the sibling group analysis with 13.6 percent of the waiver group achieving permanent legal and physical custody compared to 9.1 percent of the control group. It is also apparent in **Table 3.3** that permanent legal and physical custody outcomes were more likely for single children with no siblings, whereas adoption was less likely for this group and more likely for children in sibling groups.

Reunification. Only small percentages of RA children were reunified (**Table 3.4**). This was to be expected because the two RA counties were instructed to submit children to random assignment only when reunification with the biological parents had been ruled out (through termination of parental rights) or effectively ruled out (through intention to terminate parental rights or at least not reunify children with their biological parents). Nonetheless, reunification occurred in some (4.1 percent) of total RA cases in Hennepin and Ramsey counties.

Table 3.4. Reunification of MnPD Children

Reunification		
	Random Waiver	*Random Control*
RA	2.4%	5.9%
Total	488	456
	Non-Random Waiver	*Comparison*
NRA	1.3%	13.7%
Total	153	153
	All Waiver	*All Control/Comparison*
Entire Study Sample	2.2%	7.9%
Total	641	609

More control group children (5.9 percent) were reunified than waiver group children (2.4 percent, $p = .006$), perhaps reflecting in part the increased levels of permanent legal and physical custody outcomes in waiver group cases. Among the NRA children, comparison group children were selected from around the state based on information available through the SSIS. While priority was given to children in long-term foster care, reunifications occurred in 13.7 percent of comparison group cases compared to 1.3 percent of waiver group cases. The difference was also statistically significant ($p < .001$). This difference along with the higher difference among RA group children led to an overall difference (waiver, 2.2 percent versus control, 7.9 percent) that was also statistically significant ($p < .001$).

Emancipation. A final category of outcome was the number of children that reached legal adult age (18) and were released or emancipated from foster care. Overall, 146 of 1,250 children (11.7 percent) had aged out of foster care by the conclusion of the five year waiver period. Among RA children, 13.1 percent of waiver group children versus 12.5 percent of control group children were emancipated by the end of data collection, a difference that was not statistically significant. Among NRA children, 5.3 percent of waiver group children versus 11.1 percent of control group children were emancipated, a difference that was statistically significant ($p = .05$). These findings argue for the basic comparability of waiver and control group children in the RA sample on the basis of proportions of children near the age of 18 who are less likely to be adopted or have a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody. The difference among NRA children again points to the difficulty of finding exact age matches between control and waiver group children from the limited pool of children available for matching.

Impact of the Age of Child on Achieving Permanency through MnPD. Age is taken here as the age on the day the child was assigned to the study as a waiver group or control/comparison group child. Somewhat more than half of the children in the study (55.6 percent) were under 9 years of age at that point in time. The rest were mainly between 9 and 17 years of age, although a few (1.6 percent) were 18 or older at the time they entered the study. The child's age was a factor in the move to permanency under the MnPD project but only for transfer of legal and physical custody outcomes and not for adoption.

Considering adoption within the RA group (and excluding the anomalous Ramsey County cases), children less than 9 years old were adopted at about the same rate in both groups (Hennepin County, waiver: 74.5 percent; control 75.4 percent; $p = .485$). Similarly, no difference was found for the older group (Hennepin County, waiver: 31.6 percent; control: 30.0 percent; $p = .456$). However, age was an important factor for the achievement of permanent legal and physical custody outcomes of MnPD waiver group children. For those less than 9 years of age in the entire RA group, 20.2 percent of waiver group children achieved permanent legal and physical custody while only 5.6

percent of the control group did (p < .001). A similar difference with a statistical trend was found for older children (entire RA group, waiver: 17.6 percent; control: 12.0 percent; p = .066). This would indicate that under random assignment the MnPD continuous benefit enhanced the choice of foster caregivers to assume permanent legal and physical custody and the effects were strongest for the younger children in the sample.

In the NRA group, age was not important for either adoption or permanent legal and physical custody outcomes, as both younger and older children were adopted and moved to permanent legal and physical custody substantially more often (Less than 9 years—waiver: 22.2 percent; control: 8.8 percent. 9 years or older—waiver: 40.4 percent; control: 1.6 percent).

Impact of Relative versus Non-relative Caregiver on Achieving Permanency through MnPD. Less than half of the children entering the study were in relative foster care (45.7 percent). Most of the remaining children were in non-relative foster care (54.3 percent).[9] Limiting the analysis of adoption outcomes in the RA sample to Hennepin County, the MnPD continuous benefit increased adoptions by non-relative caregivers compared to relative caregivers. (Adoptions among Hennepin relative caregivers: waiver: 42.2 percent; control: 55.3 percent; p = .038, compared to non-relative caregivers: waiver: 63.8 percent; control: 53.4; p = .055.) A similar finding occurred in the NRA sample lending support to the conclusion that MnPD continuous benefit led more often to adoption outcomes among non-relative foster caregivers.

The findings for permanent legal and physical custody outcomes were more consistent. In the RA sample, permanent legal and physical custody occurred more often for children with relative caregivers (waiver: 31.6 percent; control: 15.5 percent; p <.001), but was also present more often among non-relatives, albeit at a lower level (waiver: 6.5 percent; control: 2.1 percent, p = .015). In the NRA sample, the impact of MnPD continuous benefit among relative caregivers was also stronger for permanent legal and physical custody outcomes (waiver: 53.2 percent; comparison: 11.9 percent; p < .001) and again significant, but at a lower level for non-relative providers (waiver: 11.2 percent; comparison: 3.9 percent; p = .048).

MnPD Impact on Permanency Outcomes for African American and American Indian Children. Sufficient numbers of African American children were present for analysis only in Hennepin and Ramsey counties, that is, among RA cases. Just as there was no statistically significant difference between waiver and control groups overall for adoption outcomes in these two counties, there was also none for African American children. Limiting the analysis to Hennepin county cases only, African American children were adopted equivalently in the waiver (57.3 percent) and the control

[9] SSIS did not include the name of a specific foster family for 10 children in the study population who were excluded from the present analysis.

groups (56.5 percent). The MnPD continuous benefit did not appear to lead to greater adoptions of the African American children in the RA sample.

As an aside, we note that African American children, regardless of waiver or control group membership, were adopted slightly more frequently that other children. Among non-African American waiver group children, 44.5 percent were adopted compared to 47.2 percent of African American children. Among control group children, the comparable percentages were 50.0 percent and 55.7 percent. This may have been related to the older average age of African American children in the study compared to other children. On the other hand, African American children in the MnPD waiver group achieved permanent legal and physical custody significantly more often (waiver, 15.7 percent; control, 7.8 percent, $p < .001$) in the two RA counties.

Looking at the overall population, including RA and NRA children in all counties, American Indian children in the MnPD waiver group were more likely to be adopted (waiver, 35.5 percent; control, 24.4 percent, $p = .059$). The reader should remember that this refers to traditional adoptions and that the small numbers of customary or tribal adoptions were grouped in the present analysis with permanent legal and physical custody cases for the reasons described above. This difference occurred only when the RA and NRA samples were combined. The combined sample included 210 American Indian children, of which 103 were in the RA waiver group, 56 in the RA control group, 21 in NRA waiver group and 30 in the NRA comparison group. In the RA sample alone, no difference was found in adoptions of MnPD waiver group American Indian children compared to the control group, even when the sample was limited to Hennepin County. Likewise, no difference was found for the NRA sample alone where very few American Indian children experienced traditional adoptions (n=5). More American Indian children who were adopted under the MnPD continuous benefit were adopted by non-relatives, conforming to the overall pattern for adoption outcomes, as described above.

American Indian children were more likely to achieve permanent legal and physical custody outcomes, which in this analysis includes customary tribal adoption. Among NRA children in Carlton County, where nearly all such children in the NRA sample resided, 70.0 percent of American Indian children achieved permanent legal and physical custody outcomes compared to 16.3 percent of non-American Indian children. Among RA children in the two urban counties, 24.3 percent of waiver group American Indian children under MnPD waiver group achieved permanent legal and physical custody or tribal adoption outcomes compared to 10.7 percent American Indian children in the control group ($p = .029$). Thus, the increase in permanent legal and physical custody outcomes under the MnPD continuous benefit occurred for both American Indian and non-American Indian children.

Impact of the MnPD on Permanency for Special Needs Children. For the present analysis it was possible to consider children with any listed disability, as well as those children with severe disabilities. Most of these children could be described as special needs, fitting the criteria and emphasis of the waiver Terms and Conditions. **Tables 3.5 and 3.6** show adoption and permanent legal and physical custody outcomes, respectively, for non-disabled children and children with any disability. This group includes the severely disabled as well as those children with less severe disabilities, such as learning disabilities. There were 622 of the 1,250 children in the present analysis with at least one disability listed (any disability). This amounted to half (49.8 percent) of the children in the MnPD project, indicating some success in selecting such children for assignment. Of the 622 children with disabilities, slightly over half (338 or 54.3 percent) were categorized as severely disabled, as defined above.

Table 3.5. Adoption of Disabled MnPD Children

Adoption				
	Not Disabled		***Disabled***	
	Random Waiver	*Random Control*	*Random Waiver*	*Random Control*
RA	33.9%	44.4%	59.2%	60.8%
Total	257	216	233	240
	Non-Random Waiver	*Comparison*	*Non-Random Waiver*	*Comparison*
NRA	50.0%	22.8%	67.9%	37.5%
Total	98	57	53	96
	All Waiver	*All Control/ Comparison*	*All Waiver*	*All Control/ Comparison*
All	38.3%	39.9%	60.8%	54.2%
Total	355	273	286	336

Regarding adoption (**Table 3.5**), the effects are evident among non-disabled children of AEP utilization for control group children in the Ramsey County RA sample. Among the children with disabilities in this sample, however, the control group advantage in adoptions was reduced (waiver: 59.2 percent; control: 60.8 percent). Separating the two RA counties, waiver group children with disabilities under MnPD were adopted slightly more frequently (63.0 percent) than control group children with disabilities (60.7 percent), although given the reduced sample size, the difference was not large enough to reach statistical significance. In Ramsey County, the proportions were reversed, as they were for the entire Ramsey County sample (waiver: 55.2 percent; control: 61.0 percent), but again the differences were not statistically significant.

Among NRA group children, both children who were disabled and non-disabled, were adopted significantly more frequently under MnPD (p = .001). The waiver-control difference among children with disabilities was particularly large (67.9 – 37.5 = 30.4 percent). This translated into an overall difference among the entire combined RA and NRA samples with 60.8 percent of waiver group children with disabilities being adopted compared 54.2 percent of control children (p = .055).

In the area of permanent legal and physical custody outcomes (**Table 3.6**), the difference for non-disabled RA group children was statistically significant (p = .012) while that for children with disabilities was not (p = .396). However, only very small proportions of RA group children with disabilities achieved this permanency status either among waiver group children (7.7 percent) or control group children (4.6 percent). This was not the case among the NRA cases. For both groups, permanent legal and physical custody outcomes occurred significantly and substantially more often for waiver group children (non-disabled: p = .001; disabled: p < .001).

Table 3.6. Permanent Legal and Physical Custody of MnPD Children with Disabilities

Permanent Legal and Physical Custody				
	Without disabilities		***With disabilities***	
	Random Waiver	*Random Control*	*Random Waiver*	*Random Control*
RA	29.2%	13.0%	7.7%	4.6%
Total	257	216	233	240
	Non-Random Waiver	*Comparison*	*Non-Random Waiver*	*Comparison*
NRA	36.7%	12.3%	13.2%	2.1%
Total	98	57	53	96
	All Waiver	*All Control/ Comparison*	*All Waiver*	*All Control/ Comparison*
All	31.3%	12.8%	8.7%	3.9%
Total	355	273	286	336

The pattern of outcomes for the children with severe disabilities resembles those for children with any disabilities and it is not necessary to produce similar tables to those just examined. Looking at all waiver and control/comparison group children, however, the severely disabled were adopted more often (waiver, 62.6 percent; control 51.8 percent, p = .031) than non-disabled children (waiver, 44.1 percent; control 45.9 percent, p = .316). Both groups achieved permanent legal and physical custody more often, with the severely disabled at overall lower percentages as described above (waiver, 8.8 percent; control 4.7percent, p = .097, trend) than non–severely disabled children

(waiver, 24.9 percent; control 9.3 percent, $p < .001$). We can conclude that some evidence was found of success in achieving permanency outcomes among children with disabilities, although the outcomes were not consistent for all subgroups.

Research Question 1b. ***Did children in the waiver group achieve permanency through adoption or permanent legal and physical custody more quickly than control children?***

If the MnPD project was effective in motivating foster caregivers to adopt or assume permanent legal and physical custody, it was reasoned that it might also shorten the time until these outcomes were finalized. To this end, the number of days that passed from the date of assignment of children to the study as waiver or control/comparison group cases until a permanency outcome was achieved was considered.

Adoptions occurred within a mean of 268 days for the waiver group compared to 446 days for the control/comparison group, 68 percent longer. This difference was substantial and statistically significant ($p < .001$). For the NRA group children the comparable figures were waiver: 169 days; comparison: 352 days ($p < .001$) and for RA children they were: waiver: 305 days; control: 265 days ($p < .001$).

Permanent legal and physical custody outcomes occurred within a mean of 140 days for the waiver group compared to 196 days for the control/comparison group, which was a significantly shorter period ($p = .056$). For the NRA children, the comparable figures were waiver: 74 days; control: 206 days ($p = .010$) and for RA children the figures were waiver: 170 days; control: 194 days ($p = .498$). The difference within the randomly assigned group was statistically significant for adoption but not for permanent legal and physical custody outcomes.

Research Question 2. ***Was the proportion of disruptions in living situations of children lower for the waiver group?*** **Research Question 3.** ***Was the mean number of displacement days per child less for the waiver group?***

Two kinds of disruptions were considered: 1) disruptions in foster care through a change of caregivers and 2) disruptions of adoption, permanent legal and physical custody or reunification after permanency was achieved.

There are many reasons why a child might experience a change in his or her foster care setting. Many of these are not necessarily legitimate disruptions. For example, a change in foster placement setting for purposes of the child's education, medical treatment or other treatment may be only temporary changes. We considered the following to be changes in foster placement settings listed on the SSIS record, that usually indicate a valid disruption: behavioral consequences, entry into

corrections, entry into detention, changes for reasons of the child's safety or stability, entry into a shelter and into a runaway status. Looking at the entire study population, waiver group children experienced an average of 2.0 relocations in foster care settings for one of these reasons while control/comparison group children showed an average of 2.2 relocations. This difference was not statistically significant (p = .242).

Regarding the second type, disruptions after permanency numbered so few that no meaningful analysis was possible. There were 18 disruptions in adoption (waiver: 8; control/comparison: 10). There were 14 disruptions in permanent legal and physical custody (waiver: 12; control/comparison: 2). There were also 14 disruptions after the child's reunification with biological parents (waiver: 1; control: 13). Because of the small numbers, no conclusions about disruptions were possible.

Finally, displacement days refer to number of days after a disruption in foster care (the first type of disruption considered above). It was thought that the MnPD continuous benefit might reduce such days. Taking the average number of days for all waiver and control/comparison group children, it was found that the mean for waiver group children was 319 days and for control/comparison group children was 324 days, a difference that was not statistically significant. The MnPD continouos benefit did not appear to have any impact on displacement days.

Research Question 4a: *Was the percent of abused/neglected children with a subsequent accepted abuse/neglect reports less for the waiver group?*

In this analysis, the broadest definition of an abuse/neglect report was used: any new call to the county social service agency intake unit that was accepted as a valid child maltreatment report. In some states it would be possible to go on to consider whether the Child Protective Services (CPS) report was later substantiated. This approach would be invalid in Minnesota where a differential response system is in place throughout the state and the majority of reports receive a family assessment rather than a traditional investigation. Family assessments do not lead to a finding of substantiated or unsubstantiated maltreatment.

The timeframe within which new reports were counted was from the date of assignment of the child to the evaluation until the end of data collection. Children that had achieved permanency were also monitored to determine whether new (CPS-maltreatment) reports were received after adoption, permanent legal and physical custody or reunification outcomes.

Considering all children in the study, 22.0 percent of waiver group children experienced at least one new report compared to 22.7 percent of control/comparison group children. This difference was

not statistically significant (p = .415). However, a difference was found in the NRA sample, where 16.6 percent of waiver group children received a new maltreatment report compared to 23.5 percent of comparison group children (p = .084). The waiver-control group difference in the RA sample was 23.7 percent versus 22.4 percent (p = .345).

Differences were also considered for children that moved to permanency outcomes. One-fifth (20.0 percent) of waiver group children that were adopted, achieved permanent legal and physical custody or were reunified, had new reports compared to one-quarter (25.1 percent) of control/comparison group children. This difference was significant (p = .047). On the other hand, the differences were reversed among children who were still in foster care placement by the end of the study, with 27.1 percent of waiver group children receiving new reports compared to 18.5 percent of control group children (p = .026). After examination of subsets of cases, however, the significance of these differences was not clear.

Research Question 5: *Was the mean length of time in foster care less for children in the waiver group?*

For this analysis the number of days was counted either until permanency (or emancipation) had been achieved or, for children still in foster care, until the end of data collection.

For the entire study sample, MnPD waiver group children were in foster care placements for a mean of 625 days compared to 758 days for control/comparison group children. This difference was statistically significant (p = .002). The difference was reflected in both study sample segments. For NRA waiver group children it was 371 days compared to 669 days for comparison group children (p < .001) and for RA waiver group children the number of days was 702 compared to 787 for control group children (p = .101).

B. Child Well-being

Research Questions 6-8: *Did MnPD waiver children experience improvements in other measures of well-being (such as educational achievement, health status, or family functioning)?*

A number of issues related to the elements of this question have been addressed in previous sections of this report. In this chapter, certain comparative analyses are presented. The responses of all caregivers to the family survey provide some indications of the effects of the MnPD continuous benefit on child well-being. The following is an analysis that compares responses of caregivers of waiver group children with responses of caregivers of control group children.

Stability of the Living Situation. When surveyed, 77.9 percent of caregivers of waiver group children and 69.3 percent of caregivers of control group children said that the children in question were living with them, a difference of 8.6 percent. In situations in which the children were still living with the caregiver, and for children that caregivers considered old enough to have an opinion, caregivers of waiver group children were more likely to say that the children wished to remain with them permanently (82.5 percent vs. 71.6 percent).

General Well-being of the Children. Caregivers were asked their judgment about how well the child was doing now, that is, at the time of the survey. Caregivers of waiver group children were more positive in their responses overall than caregivers of control group children. The general well-being of waiver children was described more often as "excellent" by their caregivers than was the case with control group children (40.3 percent vs. 29.8 percent). Fewer waiver group children than control group children were described as "satisfactory" or "not well" (18.7 percent vs. 25.9 percent). See **Figure 3.1**.

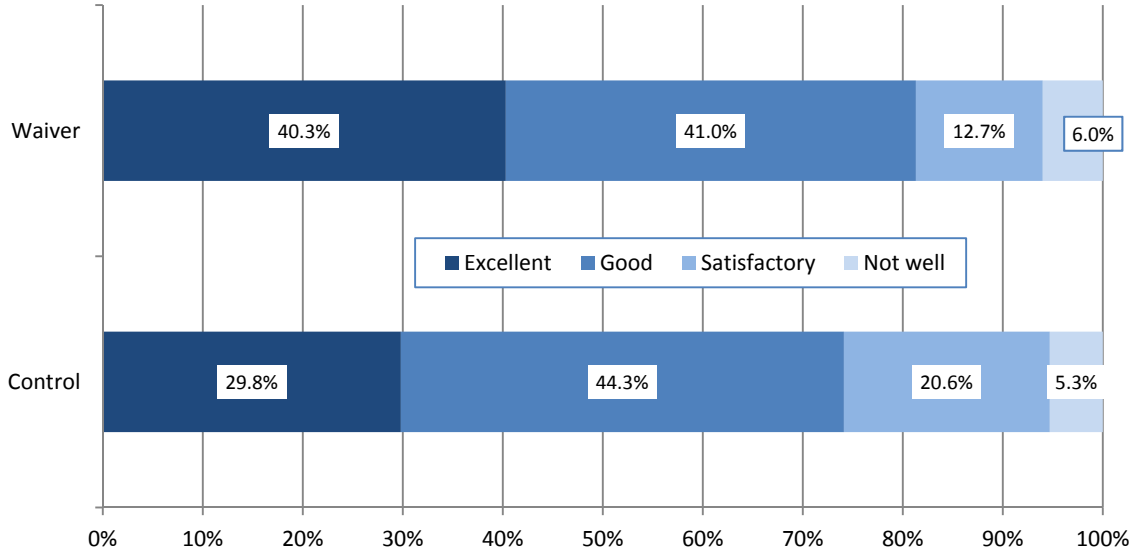


Figure 3.1. General well-being of children as reported by their caregivers

Caregivers of waiver group children were also more likely to describe the children as doing better now than a year ago. Over half (53.5 percent) of waiver group children were said to be doing "a lot" better than a year ago compared with about one-third (34.4 percent) of control group children. On the other hand, fewer waiver group children were reported to be doing "the same" or less well than previously compared with control group children (22.5 percent vs. 35.1 percent). See **Figure 3.2**.

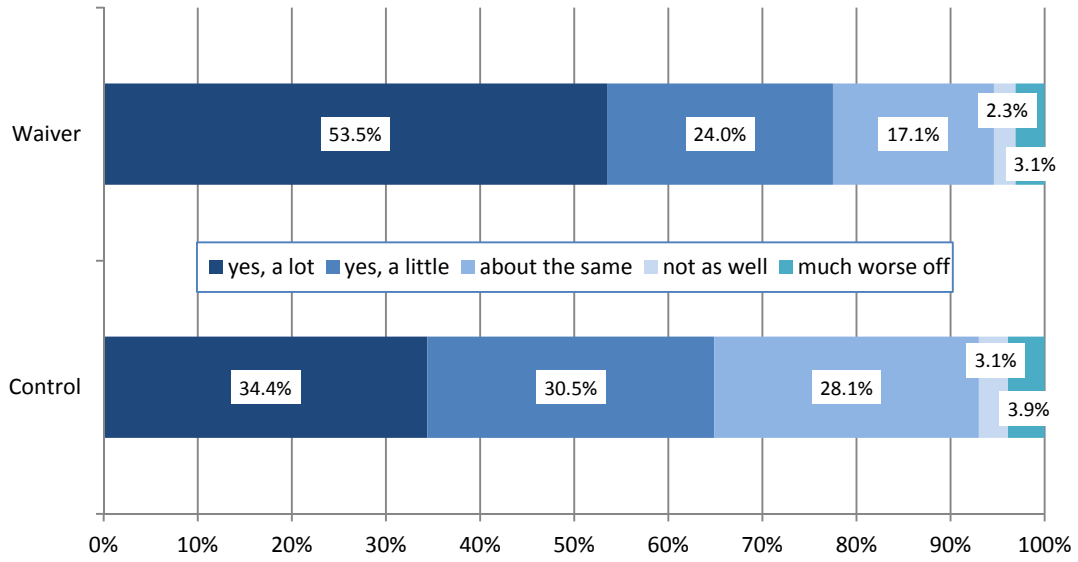


Figure 3.2. General well-being of children now compared to one year ago

Child's Disposition. Caregivers were asked to provide more detail about how the child was doing. They were asked if they would describe the child as happy, affectionate, healthy, friendly, trusting, self-confident and calm. In the survey, respondents gave their replies on a three-point scale: "very," "somewhat," or "no." The assessment of caregivers of waiver group children, was more positive than that of caregivers of control group children on each of the seven characteristics, but the difference on individual items was often small. On three of the characteristics, the difference between the waiver and control groups was statistically significant—"happy" (p=.026), "healthy" (p=.043), and "trusting" (p=.037). **Figure 3.3** is a graph which plots the responses of caregivers to the question: "Would you describe the child as a happy child?"

Figure 3.4 plots the mean responses of caregivers to each of the seven items converted to a three-point scale, where "very" = 1, "somewhat" = 2, and "no" = 3. The more positive assessments of caregivers who had adopted or accepted permanent legal and physical custody of children can be seen graphically in the figure.

In **Figure 3.5** the question addressed in **Figure 3.3** is shown for the three most prevalent ethnic groups in the study. In this case a notable difference was found in that both caregivers of White and American Indian in the MnPD group indicated 'very happy' substantially more often, while little difference was found between the groups for African American children.

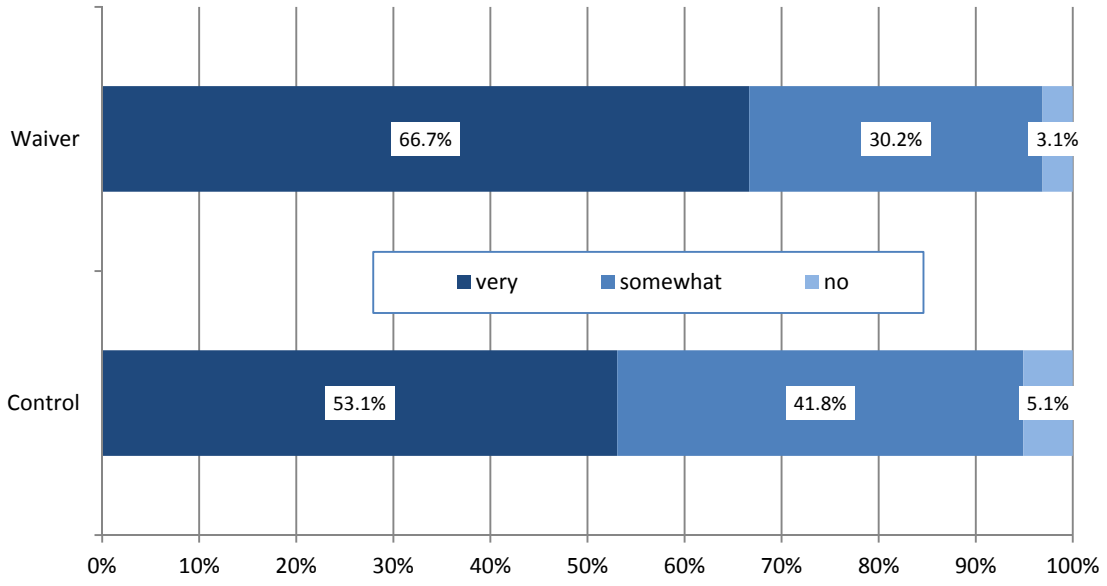


Figure 3.3. Would you describe the child as a happy child?

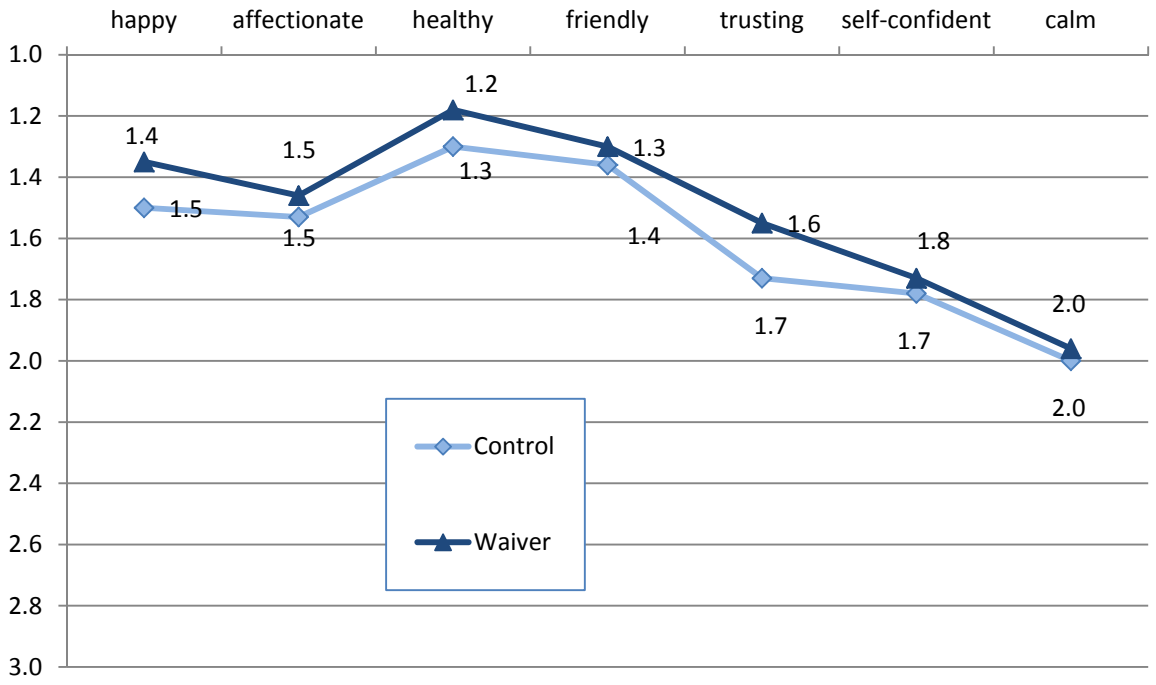


Figure 3.4. Mean assessment of child by caregivers (where "very" = 1, "somewhat" = 2 and "no" = 3)

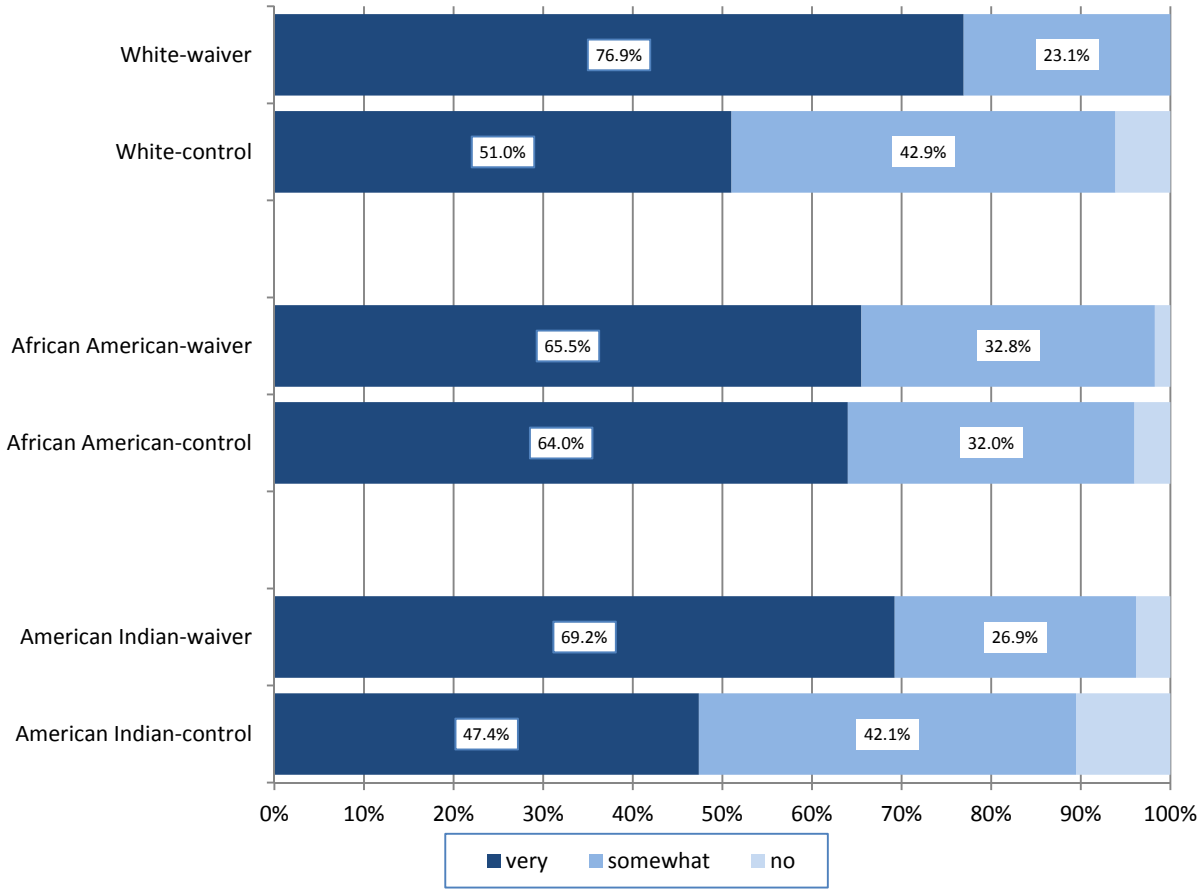


Figure 3.5. Would you describe the child as a happy child?
(Differences by race of the child)

Caregivers were asked to rate their relationships with the children. The means responses are shown In **Figure 3.6**, where scores ranged from "strongly agree" (1) to "strongly disagree" (5). Higher mean scores on the positive items (top seven in chart) indicate a poorer rating of relationships, while higher scores on the remaining items (bottom eight in chart) indicates a better rating of relationships. As is evident, the scores of the top seven items in the chart, which are statements of positive relationships were generally similar for both groups.

Regarding conflict and difficulties in relationships shown in the bottom eight items in **Figure 3.6**, caregivers of waiver group children were more likely to disagree regarding difficulties in "struggling with each other," "physical affection," "anger," and "unpredictability." Only on the question of "bad moods of the child" did control group children receive higher average ratings.

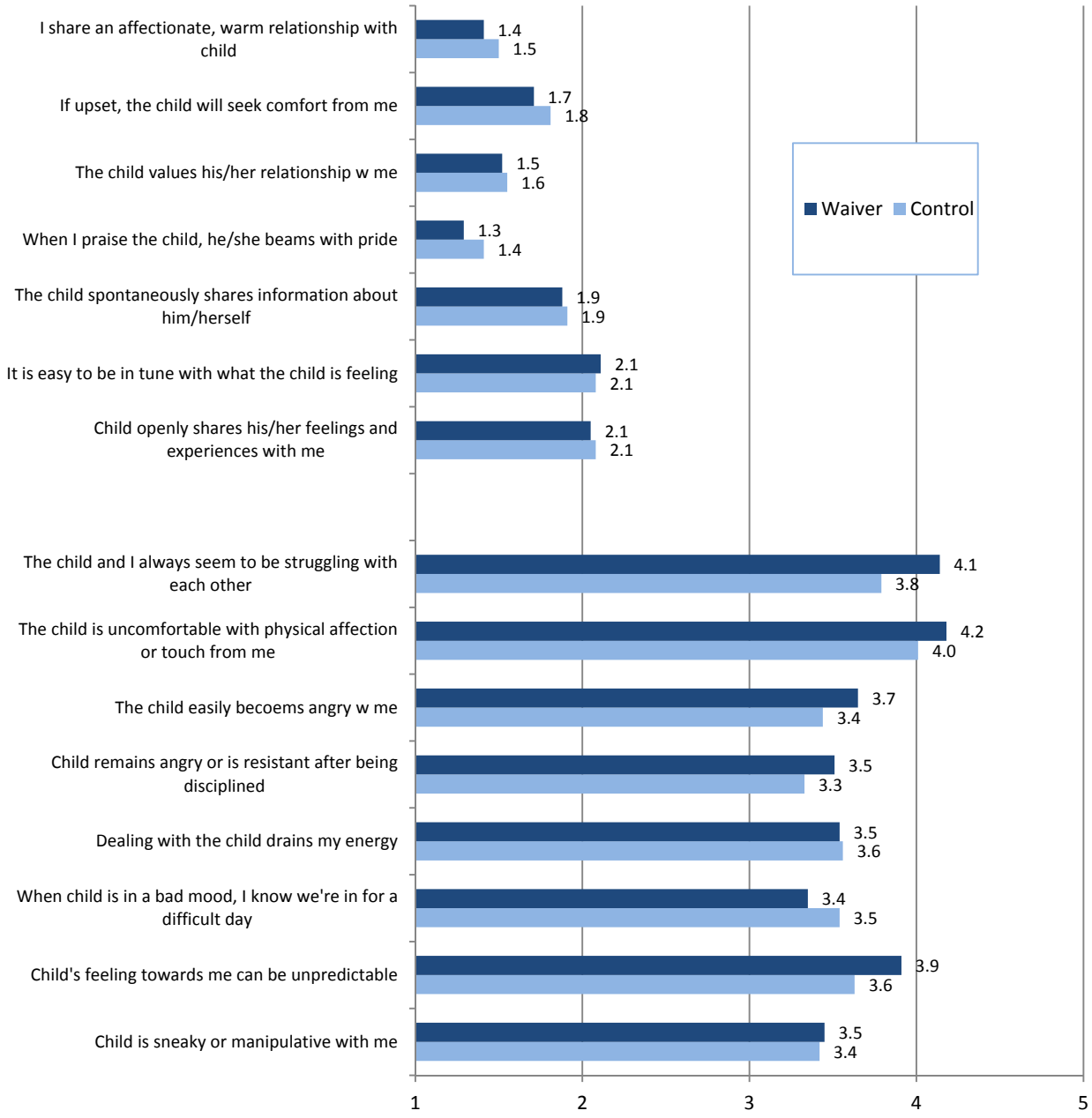


Figure 3.6. Caregivers ratings of their relationships with children

Caregivers were asked about various child behavioral, health, psychological/emotional issues and developmental issues. These are shown in **Table 3.7**. This table is limited to providers of waiver and control group children in the RA sample. Some differences are apparent but the only difference that was statistically significant concerned the question of "taking responsibility for actions," in which waiver group children were rated as substantially more likely.

Table 3.7. Comparison of Selected Responses from Foster Caregivers Concerning Child Well-being (RA Sample)

Foster Caregiver Responses	*Waiver*	*Control*	*Significance*
Child has had persistent health problems or takes medication on a regular basis	38.9%	39.2%	---
Child argues a lot: always or mostly	23.2%	26.8%	---
Child complains about being lonely: rarely	79.6%	79.2%	---
Child shows a sense of humor: always or mostly	68.7%	70.1%	---
Child takes responsibility for actions: sometimes	49.5%	26.5%	.002
Child is depressed: sometimes	34.4%	32.3%	---
Child has feelings of loss about biological parents	55.3%	53.7%	---
Child worries about biological parents	44.7%	42.1%	---
Child has a mental or physical disability	37.0%	29.0%	---
Child has ADD or learning disability	50.5%	44.8%	---

In **Table 3.8** the responses of caregivers concerning the experiences of children in school are shown. At the time of survey contact, 75.3 percent of waiver group children and 74.3 percent of control group children were in school.

Most of children not in school, had not yet reached school age, although a small number of older youths had dropped out of school. Of the total children who were either in school or had dropped out, the proportion of dropouts for the waiver group was 26.0 percent and 17.3 percent for the control group. Generally school performance was rated about equivalently for the two groups. Only in the area of "how much the children liked being in school" was a difference found with waiver group caregivers indicating significantly more frequently that their child liked school "very much."

Table 3.8. Comparison of Responses from Foster Caregivers Concerning the Child's Experiences in School (RA Sample)

Foster Caregiver Responses	*Waiver*	*Control*	*Significance*
Child suspended from school: many or a few times	20.9%	17.8%	---
Child is doing excellent or good in school	65.6%	66.7%	---
Child is doing fair or poor in school	34.4%	33.3%	---
Child likes school: very much	61.9%	39.2%	.053
Child has an A or B grade point average	57.7%	48.3%	---
Child has a C or D grade point average	42.3%	51.7%	---
Multiple schools attended in last two years	40.0%	46.0%	---
Total Children in School	75	73	

Chapter 4. Analysis of Costs

The analysis of the costs of the MnPD project described in this chapter was based on demonstration cases in four counties: Carlton, Dakota, Hennepin and Ramsey. As noted in the previous chapter, the analysis of the impacts was based on a mixed experimental design that combined random assignment in Hennepin and Ramsey counties with a quasi-experimental design involving a matched comparison group in other counties. There were 944 randomly assigned (RA) waiver and control cases included in the analysis. From the matched comparison design (non-randomly assigned or NRA), 302 cases were included.[10]

The primary objective of the cost analysis was to accumulate and compare *all* costs. The purpose was not to limit the costs to title IV-E claims of Minnesota to the Federal Government nor to recalculate the cost-neutrality analysis, which included only the federal share of costs. The present analysis combined all local, state and federal costs available to evaluators for all waiver and control cases in the four counties.

Data utilized in the analysis came primarily from the state Social Services Information System (SSIS) and from local, that is, county accounting systems. The direct costs of foster care, payments to foster caregivers, for title IV-E eligible children were entered into SSIS tables throughout the demonstration.

Indirect or administrative costs of children in foster care were computed using two data sources: caseworker time records, which were also contained in SSIS, and quarterly costs for case management services that were calculated as part of the state's cost allocation reporting to the Federal Government.

There were also direct costs for children who were adopted or achieved permanent legal and physical custody outcomes. These included Adoption Assistance (AA) and Relative Custody Assistance (RCA) payments as well as, for waiver group children only, the MnPD costs of the continuous benefit. While AA and RCA are statewide programs, there were also some costs associated with the Adoption Equalization Program (AEP), a program limited to Ramsey County.[11] These post-permanency direct costs were available from county accounting personnel and from queries of the state financial data system. Each of these costs and data sources is explained in more detail below.

[10] Two cases in Cass County and their two matched comparisons were not included.
[11] During the month of this writing Ramsey County administration decided to discontinue offering the AEP to families.

A. Cost Data Analysis

Sources and Types of Cost Data

Direct and Indirect Costs of Foster Care. Because all the children assigned to the study were title IV-E eligible, foster care payment information was entered into a special table in SSIS. Payments to foster (and other residential care) caregivers were broken down in the table into three categories: intake and planning, maintenance, and training. Analyses of data files revealed that maintenance payments accounted for slightly less than 90 percent of total costs. In addition, vendor payments in some cases exceeded the total of the three categories and appeared to reflect a total based on the *per diem* rates. The total vendor payment was utilized in the following calculations.

Foster care payments in Minnesota are based on standard rates that are adjusted based on the special needs of children. These special needs adjustments are referred to as Difficulty of Care (DOC) rates. The DOC level is based on an initial assessment and possible reassessment of the child's special needs in care by county caseworkers. Base rates are determined by the age of the children with higher payments for older children. The base rates are then increased by a set amount proportional to the DOC score assigned to the child.[12] Thus, the same caregiver may receive different foster care maintenance payments for each child in his or her care.

Final foster care costs included costs while the child was in care during the original case (beginning from the date the child entered the study until permanency was achieved or data collection ended) and, for a small minority of cases, foster care costs during a second stay in foster care after permanency had been disrupted. We saw in the previous chapter that time (days) in foster care was less for waiver group children, reflecting in part the effects of MnPD continuous benefit. This is the primary cause of the differences shown here in average costs:

Mean direct payments for foster care per child during the 60-month demonstration:

	Hennepin	Ramsey	Carlton	Dakota	Total
Control	$24,806	$23,606	$42,868	$20,444	$24,690
Waiver	$20,966	$17,074	$21,966	$3,524	$16,424

Indirect (administrative) costs were calculated in several steps. Time-record information entered by caseworkers into SSIS was collected. The records for the children involved in this analysis were nearly all (more than 97 percent) under the "case management" accounting code. Times were

[12] See the Bulletin (#09-32-16) of the Minnesota Department of Human Services, November 24, 2009 (http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/publications/documents/pub/dhs16_147373.pdf).

entered as minutes for a certain date, permitting evaluators to determine all the times that caseworkers devoted to children and their families and foster caregivers while the child was assigned to the demonstration and before the date in which permanency was achieved (or the demonstration ended). Time records were missing for some cases from the monthly SSIS extractions uploaded to the evaluators, which necessitated the estimation procedures described below.

As part of their claims for title IV-E administrative costs associated with Federal financial support, states develop a cost allocation plan. The plan applies to various funding sources and includes a computation of indirect costs based on staff time for various categories of activities. Within child welfare, this includes case management activities. In Minnesota, indirect costs are calculated for each county for each yearly quarter. Evaluators requested and obtained these costs for all Minnesota counties for the 20 quarters from October 2005 through September 2010. These indirect cost amounts were utilized along with caseworker time records to determine hourly and total costs of case management for children during their stays in foster care.

Costs were estimated for missing time records by first computing the median per minute of time per case and using the median to calculate the total mean cost per day for cases in which time records were present in the dataset. Cost per day varied significantly by county, with the highest costs incurred in Hennepin and Ramsey counties. Finally, the number of days was multiplied by the cost per day for the county in which the child had been placed. Administrative costs also reflect the reduced total days in foster care among waiver children:

Mean indirect (administrative) costs for case management during the 60-month demonstration:

	Hennepin	Ramsey	Carlton	Dakota	Total
Control	$13,301	$11,734	$6,686	$3,163	$10,432
Waiver	$10,049	$10,344	$2,768	$1,245	$8,174

This analysis shows that costs for foster care were in the hypothesized direction with lower rates for both direct and indirect costs associated with the waiver group.

Costs after Permanency was Achieved. After adoption or permanent legal and physical custody was achieved, costs could still be incurred through financial benefit payments to permanent caregivers. The first category of payments considered was Adoption Assistance. As noted, these payments were obtained from financial records associated with particular waiver and control group children.[13] Although Adoption Assistance may be reimbursed through title IV-E, the total state and

[13] This information was collected on a quarterly basis throughout the course of the MnPD demonstration by Deb Jensen, Title IV-E Fiscal Management Analyst, DHS - Financial Operations Division, and provided to evaluators.

federal portions are considered here. In addition, child care payments were also provided to many of the families that adopted children through Adoption Assistance.

The Adoption Assistance costs for control cases were substantially greater than for MnPD waiver cases.[14] This was expected as Adoption Assistance was replaced by the MnPD continuous benefit payments for most waiver cases. However, some waiver children were later adopted in cases in which caregivers had previously declined the continuous benefit or in which the continuous benefit had not been offered. As described in previous chapters, there was a source of error in the experiment in Ramsey County, where 37 control cases overall were offered AEP. We cannot know how many of these children would have remained in foster care had AEP not been offered. These cases could not be removed from the present analysis without distortion of the comparative results. AEP costs were estimated in this analysis by adding amounts sufficient to increase Adoption Assistance to the level of the previous foster care payments. The AEP totals were then combined with Adoption Assistance in calculating means. The following average costs were:

Mean payments for Adoption Assistance child care

	Hennepin	Ramsey	Carlton	Dakota	Total
Control	$6,404	$1,733	$449	$712	$3,279
Waiver	$1,915	$132	$0	$0	$768

Mean payments for Adoption Assistance (and AEP) maintenance

	Hennepin	Ramsey	Carlton	Dakota	Total
Control	$17,378	$12,341	$3,980	$6,511	$12,691
Waiver	$2,347	$905	$0	$0	$1,231

A second category of support for caregivers who accepted a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody was the traditional Relative Custody Assistance (RCA) program. RCA payments were found for only 45 cases in the study sample.[15] Thus, the mean values for RCA were small:

Mean payments for Relative Custody Assistance

	Hennepin	Ramsey	Carlton	Dakota	Total
Control	$325	$623	$31	$56	$365
Waiver	$212	$22	$0	$0	$88

[14] Adoption assistance costs were available (by child) only for about the last half of the demonstration. The figures in this report, therefore, are less than actual expenditures. Individuals interested in using these results for purposes of projection and planning should be aware that actual costs incurred for AA were greater.

[15] RCA payments are made from state funds, but the program is directly connected to TANF (MFIP in Minnesota). To receive RCA payments, the caregiver must apply for the MFIP child-only grant—equivalent to basic maintenance for the child. RCA supplements the MFIP benefit depending on the caregiver's income and the child's special needs.

Finally, MnPD payments to permanent caregivers were considered. This category of payments applied only to waiver cases and represented the uniform level of support for families that achieved permanency for children in their care. The average payment among waiver cases was large primarily because permanent arrangements were achieved for many of the children early in the demonstration. For this reason, caregivers received payments, in many cases, for a substantial portion of the 60 months of the demonstration. Payments of over $1,000 per child per month were common.

Mean payments for MnPD continuous benefit

	Hennepin	Ramsey	Carlton	Dakota	Total
Control	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
Waiver	$22,468	$15,287	$21,967	$25,684	$20,209

Each of the mean costs discussed so far is shown in **Figure 4.1**, where their relative sizes can be compared.

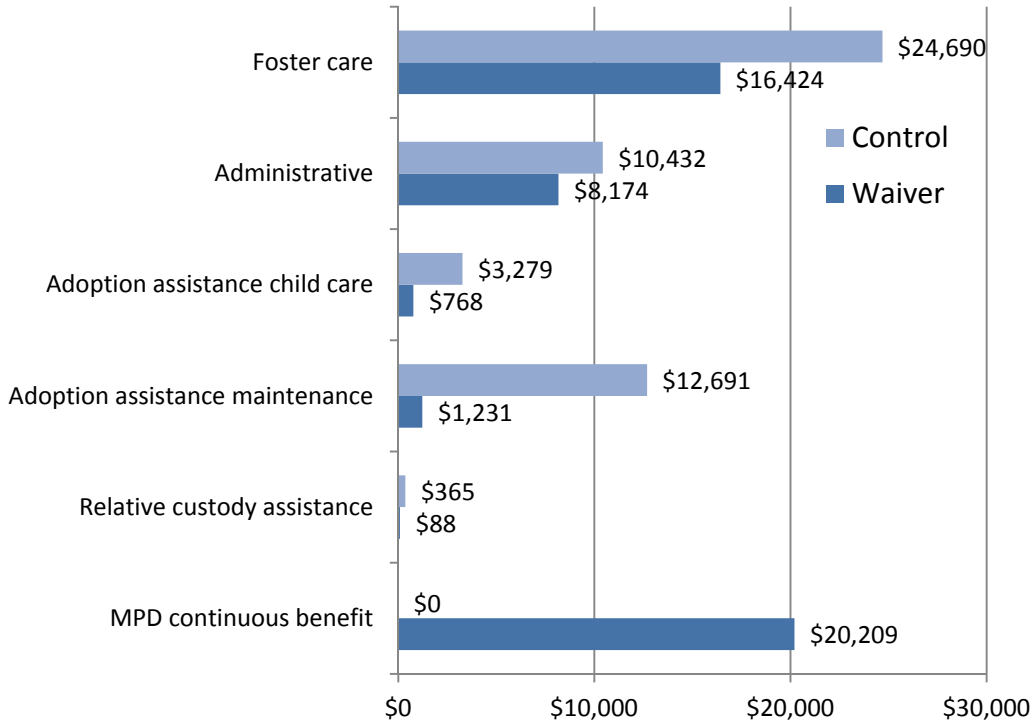


Figure 4.1. Mean costs associated with waiver and control group children

To meet the goals of the MnPD project, the excess costs for control group children (shown in the top 5 sets of bars) had to exceed the cost of MnPD continuous benefit (shown in sixth and lowest bar). This was indeed the case. The mean costs of MnPD continuous benefits was $20,209. On the

other hand, the aggregated mean costs of total expenditures was $4,563 less for the waiver group than the control group.

Total Summed Costs

A summary breakdown of the mean costs for the waiver and control groups is shown in **Figure 4.2**. Total mean costs for the waiver group, including foster care, Adoption Assistance (including both child care and maintenance costs), Relative Custody Assistance, Administrative costs and the cost of the MnPD continuous benefit was $46,894. For the control group, these mean costs totaled $51,457 and, of course, did not include MnPD benefits.

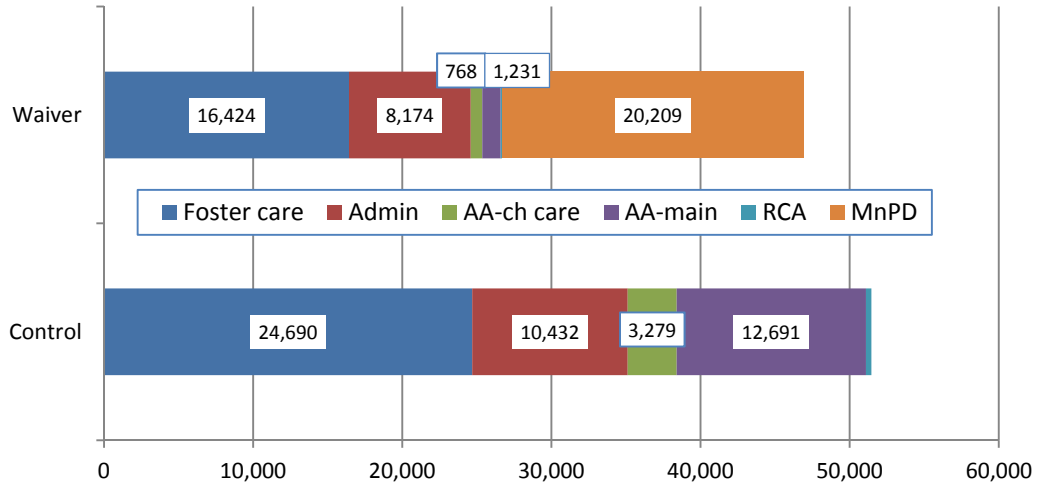


Figure 4.2. Mean waiver and control group costs by cost category

Figures 4.1 and 4.2 show that control costs were higher in each category except, of course, the MnPD continuous benefit. And the analysis shows that the sum of all the differences in other costs (control group costs minus waiver group costs) was greater than the cost of the MnPD benefit.

The expectation that gave rise to the MnPD was that the savings would accrue through lower costs for foster care, in particular the reduction in indirect or administrative costs after permanency was achieved. For this to be true, total costs for MnPD would have to be less than the total differences in other (non-administrative) costs. **Table 4.1** shows the same mean costs by cost category already shown in figure 4.2, along with the difference in costs within each category, as was seen in Figure 4.1. In addition, Table 4.1 also shows the cost totals without administrative costs and suggests that, even without a reduction in these indirect costs, mean total expenditures would have been less for

the waiver group. Finally, the table also shows that, if Adoption Assistance costs for child care were removed from the comparison along with administrative costs, the costs would be nearly the same.

Table 4.1. Mean Waiver and Control Group Costs by Cost Category

	Control	Waiver	difference
Foster care	24,690	16,424	8,266
Administrative	10,432	8,174	2,258
AA-child care	3,279	768	2,511
AA-maintenance	12,691	1,231	11,460
Relative Custody Asst.	365	88	277
MnPD	0	20,209	-20,209
Total	51,457	46,894	4,563
Total w/o Admin costs	41,025	38,720	2,305
Total w/o child care & admin costs	37,746	37,952	-206

The total of aggregated mean costs across all the cost categories for control and waiver groups in each MnPD county were:

Mean total costs from assignment to the study until the demonstration end

	Hennepin	Ramsey	Carlton	Dakota	Total
Control	$62,214	$50,037	$54,014	$30,887	$51,457
Waiver	$57,957	$43,764	$46,702	$30,453	$46,894

B. Costs by Race and Special Needs

Race/Ethnicity of the child did not affect the differences in costs between waiver and control for White and African American cases. The total mean costs differed across race/ethnicity categories, but were in the same direction as those for the total sample. The final averages for White cases were: control: $44,722; waiver: $38,689. For African American cases they were: control: $59,655; waiver: $52,663. For American Indian cases the averages were reversed: control: $46,266; waiver:

$50,275. This occurred primarily because the MnPD continuous benefit averages were greater than other groups and Adoption Assistance averages were lower for American Indian children in the control group. However, it should be noted that this analysis included only 122 American Indian children in the waiver group and 84 in the control/comparison group. In samples this small, it is possible for a few cases to skew cost totals in either direction. A larger sample of American Indian children would be required to determine the validity of these results. Total average costs for waiver group children with special needs were greater but the difference between the groups was in the same direction: control: $63,038; waiver: $57,583.

C. Age of Children and Costs

In **Figure 4.3,** average total costs are shown for different age groups of waiver and control group children. The chart shows savings for children across the age categories.

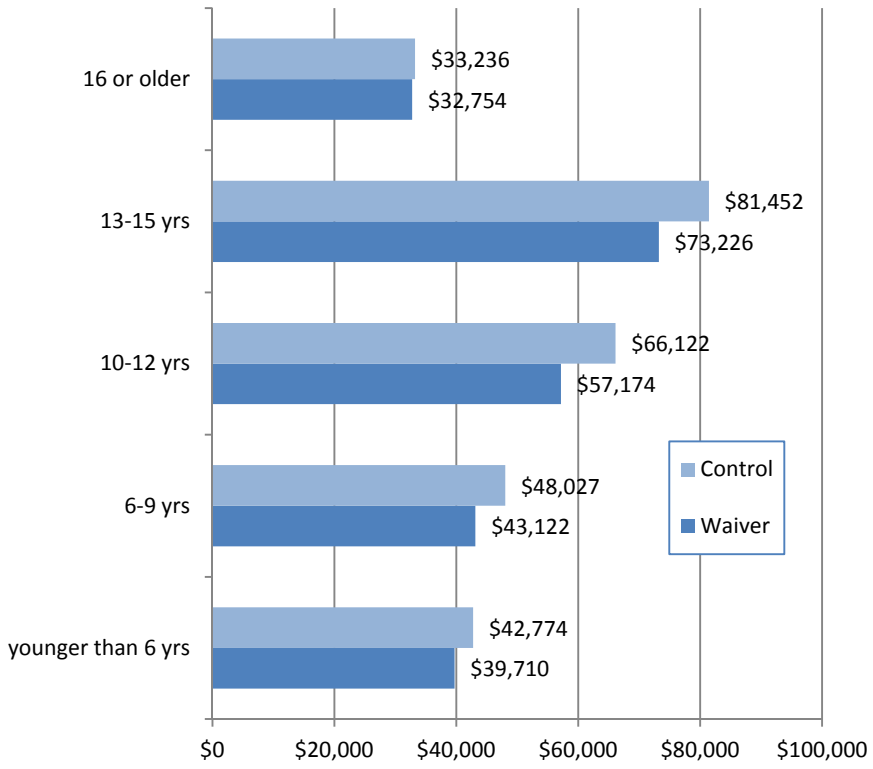


Figure 4.3. Total cost for waiver and control cases by age at the time of assignment to the demonstration

It should be noted that less savings were seen for preschool children ($3,064) and more for preteens and younger teens (10-12: $8,948; 13-15: $8,227). The least savings were observed

among the children 16 and older, but overall expenditures for these cases were substantially less, as the children aged out of the system very quickly.

D. Conclusions

Cautions in Generalizing from these Analyses. There are several critical differences in the MnPD population that should be considered in applying the results of the analyses in this chapter to the entire population of children in out-of-home care in Minnesota.

First, the emphasis in the MnPD program was on children of color including both African American and American Indian children. There was also an emphasis on selecting children with special needs. As we have seen, the MnPD demonstration project was successful in selecting children in both these areas. For this reason, the question can be asked, although it cannot be directly answered without further analysis of Minnesota financial data, whether the results of this study can be applied to the remainder of children in care and their caregivers. If adoptions and permanent legal and physical custody outcomes are easier to achieve for White and non-special needs children, as is likely the case, then permanency rates might be even higher than the rates observed in this study, but costs under a full continuous benefit system might change as well—in either direction.

Second, the somewhat surprising finding of the MnPD program was that no evidence could be found in the randomly assigned sample—the more reliable portion of the research design—that a continuous benefit influenced adoption outcomes. Adoptive caregivers that responded to surveys in this study tended to have higher overall incomes while families that assumed permanent legal and physical custody had lower incomes. Although there are many motivations for accepting permanent legal and physical custody, very low income is a constraining factor that may make it difficult or impossible for families to transition from higher foster care rates to lower post-permanency support rates. In these cases, the extra funds available under MnPD may have made permanency possible for cases in which it would otherwise have been impossible. This might explain why the MnPD appeared to produce results for permanent physical and legal custody outcomes in Hennepin and Ramsey counties but not for adoptions. On the other hand, the MnPD demonstration involved high proportions of children with special needs. This also may have been a constraining factor in increasing adoptions. It is possible that a continuous benefit might be more effective in increasing adoptions in the broader population of children in placement among which there are lower proportions of children with severe disabilities. Again, this cannot be determined from the present study.

Finally, the MnPD benefit was *not offered* to some portion of experimental families in Hennepin and Ramsey counties. We know that this was the case for at least 18 percent of families but the actual

proportion may have been 20 percent or more. The question is whether permanency rates would have been even higher in these two counties, particularly in the area of permanent legal and physical custody outcomes, had offers been made in all cases. It is possible that the average costs per child of the MnPD continuous benefit would have been greater and corresponding foster care costs for waiver children less had offers been made in all cases, but this cannot be determined in the present analysis. In a statewide continuous benefit system, the benefit would effectively be present in all cases, even as the children moved from one foster caregiver to another, and all foster caregivers would be aware of it. No "offers" would be necessary, and this might affect outcomes.

The impact analysis demonstrated that the MnPD project led foster caregivers to adopt or assume permanent legal and physical custody more quickly, and although no differences were found between waiver and control groups in the rates of adoptions in the two randomly assigned counties, significant increases in the rates of achievement of permanent legal and physical custody outcomes were observed. These represent real and positive accomplishments of the MnPD waiver project.

The saving shown in this analysis, however, was in large part attributable to a shortening of the time that the wavier group children spent in out-of-home placement and the consequent savings in costs after permanency was achieved.

As we have noted, one of the causative factors, among many others, for the changes observed was the increase in financial benefits to the caregivers available through the MnPD waiver compared to the benefits available to the caregivers in the control group. The argument in establishing the demonstration was that this could be accomplished without an increase in federal title IV-E costs as well as local costs, that is, that reductions in the costs associated with continued foster care—in particular the indirect or administrative costs—would offset any increases in payments after permanency was achieved. This analysis would indicate that this outcome was achieved.

The ultimate goal of the demonstration was to realize an improvement in the permanency outcomes of children in the foster care system. The value of permanency for the well being of children has long been emphasized by child and family advocates, child welfare practitioners, academic scholars and public policymakers. The positive effects of permanency on the well-being of children are examined in the next chapter.

Chapter 5. Permanency and Child Well-being

The Minnesota Permanency Demonstration was predicated on the benefits of permanency outcomes for children in foster care. The assumption was that a safe, stable home achieved through adoption or a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody was preferable to long-term foster care. This is not to say that all foster care situations are harmful or not beneficial to children who must be removed for their own welfare and safety from the homes of their biological parents. For many children there may never be an alternative to foster care. But the underlying principle is that, all else being equal, a child's home that is legally permanent, safe and stable, is preferable to one that is not. This chapter explores what was learned through feedback from caregivers of children in the study population about the effects of permanency on child well-being.

As described in Chapter 1, feedback was solicited throughout the evaluation from both waiver and control families throughout the demonstration, first through interviews and, during the second half of the project, through surveys. A key objective of the interviews was to learn about factors that influenced the decision of caregivers to adopt or accept a transfer of permanency legal and physical custody of their foster children. While this question was also pursued in the surveys, the surveys were designed to focus closer attention on the relationship between the child and the caregiver and on issues related to the child's well-being from the perspective of the caregiver.

Differences between the survey responses of caregivers of children who were in the waiver group from those of caregivers of children in the control group were described in Chapter 2. The analysis presented in this chapter is different. It does not compare differences between experimental and control groups. Rather, it compares the survey responses of caregivers of children who achieved permanency (whether through adoption or a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody) with the responses of caregivers of children who did not achieve permanency through either of these means.

In this analysis caregivers who responded to the survey have been split into two different groups—1) those caregivers who had adopted or accepted a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody of a child in the study population by the time the survey was conducted and 2) those caregivers who, for whatever reason, had not. For the sake of simplicity, the first group is often referred to as the permanency group and the second group is frequently referred to simply as the other group or non-permanency group.

All the data included in what follows was derived from caregiver surveys. In the surveys, each caregiver was asked about a particular child. As noted in the methodology section in Chapter 1, there were 271 surveys returned to evaluators. Of these, 155 were from caregivers of children who

attained permanency, whether they were in the waiver or control group, and 116 were from caregivers of other children in the study population, again including both waiver and control group children. All data reported in this chapter was derived from and refer to the 271 caregivers who responded to the surveys. Unless specified otherwise, the term permanency in this chapter always refers to permanency outcomes resulting either from adoption or a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody.

Characteristics of Children and Caregivers in the Surveyed Population. Overall, children whose homes were made permanent were younger (average age 8.1 years) than children who did not achieve permanency (11.2 years). There were some differences in the ethnicity of the groups: within the group of children that achieved permanency, 38.1 percent were White, 42.6 percent were African American, 14.2 percent were American Indian and 11.6 percent were Hispanic. Within the group that did not achieve permanency, a smaller percentage of the children were White (28.3 percent) and somewhat larger percentages were African American (38.9 percent), American Indian (20.4 percent), and Hispanic (14.2 percent).

Children in permanent homes were more often related by blood to the caregiver than were the other children (45.2 percent compared to 33.6 percent). Of children who achieved permanency, 57.4 percent of their caregivers were their grandparents and 27.9 percent of their caregivers were their aunts or uncles. Of children who did not achieve permanency, these numbers were nearly reversed: 50.0 percent of their caregivers were aunts or uncles, and 33.6 percent of their caregivers were their grandparents.

The mean age of caregivers in the two groups was quite close: 48.6 years for those in the permanency group and 50.5 for those in the non-permanency group. The average household size was also close: 6.0 persons, including 4.1 children, for caregivers of children in the permanency group, and 5.3 persons for caregivers of the other children, including 3.4 children.

Caregivers of children in the permanency group were more likely to report they were married (61.8 vs. 47.8 percent) and less likely to be divorced (11.8 percent v. 31.3 percent). Mean household income for caregivers of children in the permanency group was higher, $48,000 vs. $37,000, and slightly fewer of these households received food stamps than other households (11.0 percent v. 13.8 percent). Caregivers in the permanency group were more likely to have had some education beyond high school (77.5 percent) compared with caregivers in the non-permanency group (67.0 percent).

A. Permanency and Stability of the Living Situation

Of the 155 children in the survey population who had moved from foster care to permanency, 72.3 percent had been adopted and 27.7 percent were in the permanent legal and physical custody of their caregivers. All but two of these children were living with the caregivers who had provided them a permanent home at the time of the survey. Of the 116 children in the survey population who had remained in foster care or had other outcomes, 43.2 percent were living with the caregiver at the time of the survey, 56.8 percent were not.

That over half (56.8 percent, n=66) of the caregivers of children in the non-permanency group reported that the children no longer lived with them was an unexpected finding. Some of this is accounted for by the age of the "children." Fourteen were youths aged 18 and older at the time of the survey; of whom nine had left the caregiver to live on their own or with friends, one moved to a different foster provider, and the whereabouts of the others were unknown to the caregiver surveyed. Among the 52 children under the age of 18 in the non-permanency group, 16 moved to a different foster caregiver, 14 had moved to live with a relative, 7 returned to live with one of their biological parents, and the whereabouts of the others were unknown to the caregiver responding to the survey. Why children moved from the original caregiver to another foster setting was not always clear, although respondents sometimes indicated the reason—such as the caregiver's divorce, the hospitalization of the caregiver, the request of the caregiver (because of the behavior or medical problems of the child, or the number of children in the home), or the request of the child for a change.

B. General Well-being of Children

Caregivers were asked to give their assessment of the child's general well-being (either now or the last time they saw the child). Caregivers who had adopted or accepted permanent legal custody of children were more likely to report that the well-being of the child in their care was "excellent" compared with caregivers of children who remained in foster care or were living in other circumstances (45.7 percent vs. 21.1 percent). Two (1.3 percent) of the children in the permanency group were described by their caregivers in the survey as doing "not well," compared with 11.4 percent of the other children. The difference between the two groups of caregivers on this general measure of well-being was statistically significant; p=.001. (See **Figure 5.1**.)

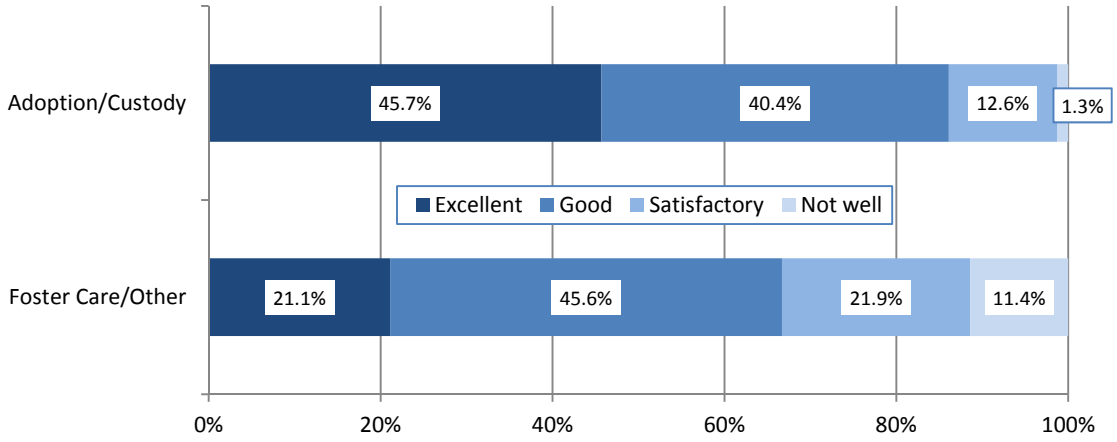


Figure 5.1. General wellbeing of children as reported by caregivers

Similarly, when asked for their judgment about whether the children were doing better now than a year ago, respondents who had adopted or accepted permanent custody of children were more likely to say the children were better off and less likely to say the children were worse off than were caregivers of children in the non-permanency group (p=.003; see **Figure 5.2**.)

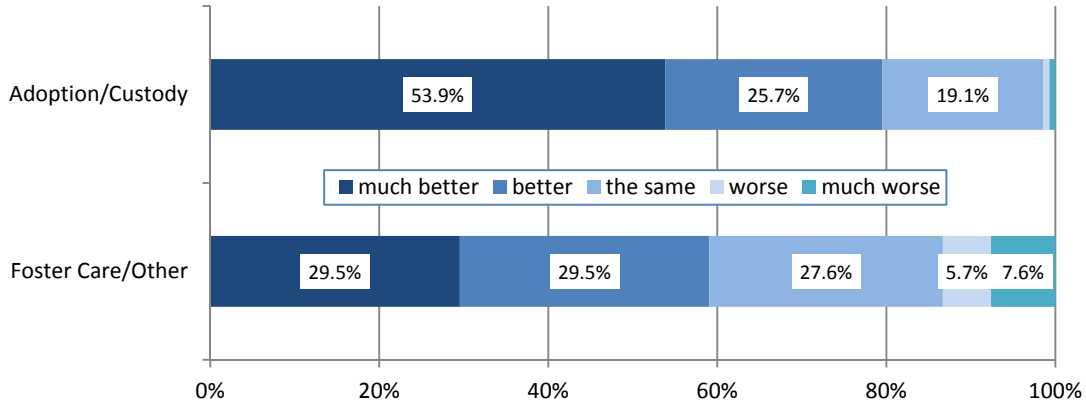


Figure 5.2. General well-being of children now compared to one year ago

Health Conditions. The percentage of children reported to have some type of health problems was somewhat smaller among children who moved to permanency, 35.8 percent versus 40.0 percent among the other children. Very slight differences were also present in the percentage of the permanency group of children reported to have mental or physical disabilities (32.7 percent v. 35.5 percent) and the percent reported to have learning disabilities or ADHD (45.9 percent v. 48.6 percent), but the individual differences were not significant.

School. Among school-age children, those in the permanency group were less often reported to miss school frequently (0.8 percent v. 8.2 percent) and less likely to have been suspended (2.4 percent v. 8.0 percent) or to have dropped out of school (12.0 percent v. 21.7 percent). There was little difference between the two groups in reported progress in school or in grades attained, or in whether the children liked school. Caregivers of children in the permanency group were also somewhat more likely to have talked to the child about his or her grades or school work and about other school-related activities of the child. And, finally, children who had achieved permanency were somewhat less likely than the other children to have changed schools during the previous two years, another indicator of greater stability in their lives.

Juvenile Delinquency. On a not unrelated matter, caregivers of children in the permanency group were much less likely say that the child had ever been in trouble with juvenile authorities (11.6 percent v. 35.3 percent) or to report that the child had ever been placed in juvenile detention (2.1 percent v. 31.9 percent).

C. Resilience, Coping and Functioning

Caregivers were asked whether they would describe the children as happy, affectionate, healthy, friendly, trusting, self-confident and calm. The assessment of caregivers of children in the permanency group was generally more positive than caregivers of other children on each of the seven characteristics. The differences on four of the seven were statistically significant ($p<.05$)—happy, affectionate, friendly and trusting. As an example, **Figure 5.3** shows the responses of caregivers to the question: "Would you describe the child as a happy child?"

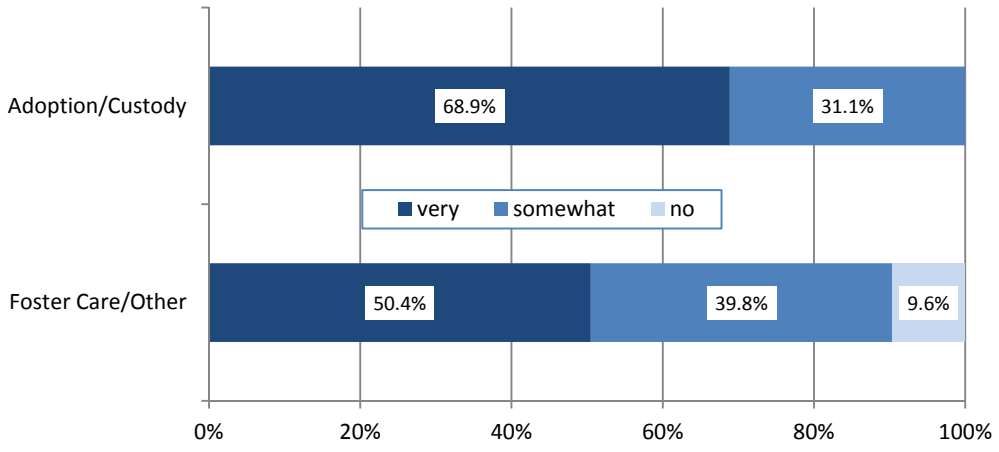


Figure 5.3. Would you describe the child as a happy child?

Figure 5.4 plots the mean responses of caregivers converted to a three-point scale, where "very" = 1, "somewhat" = 2, and "no" = 3. The more positive assessments of caregivers who had adopted or accepted permanent legal custody children can be seen graphically in the figure.

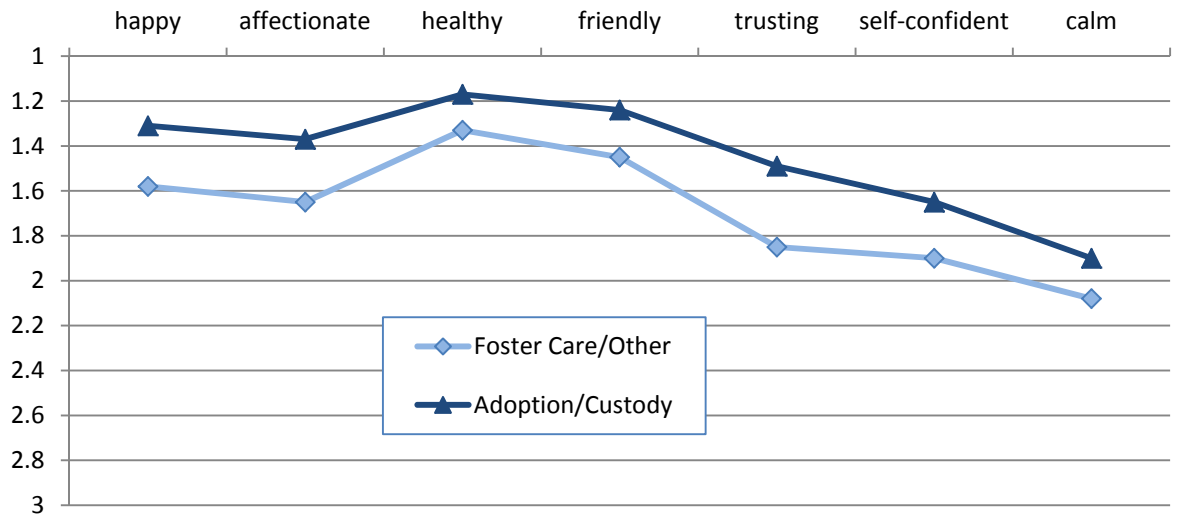


Figure 5.4. Mean assessment of child by caregivers (where "very" = 1, "somewhat" = 2 and "no" = 3)

Caregivers were also asked a series of questions about the behavior of the children. They were asked:

<u>Would you say that this child:</u>

1. Gets along with other members of the family?
2. Argues a lot?
3. Complains about being lonely?
4. Shows a sense of humor?
5. Takes responsibility for his/her actions?
6. Is sad or depressed?
7. Makes you proud?

Caregivers of children in the permanency group were more likely to say that the child got along with other members of the family and made them proud. These same caregivers were less likely to say that the child argued a lot, complained about being lonely, or was sad or depressed. For each of these items the difference was statistically significant ($p<.05$). For the other two items, that the child showed a sense of humor and took responsibility for his/her actions, the difference was not significant.

Caregivers were asked about the feelings the children had for their biological parents, and significant differences were found between the groups. When asked whether the child had "feelings of loss about his/her biological parents," 46.6 percent of the caregivers who had adopted or accepted permanent legal custody of the children said yes, compared with 59.1 percent of caregivers of children in the non-permanency group (p=.04). When asked whether the child "worries about his/her biological parents," 37.8 percent of caregivers of children in the permanency group said yes, compared with 45.9 percent of caregivers of the other children.

D. Relationship between Caregiver and Child

In the survey, caregivers were asked to describe their relationship with the children in their care. This was done using a 15 item list and a 5-point, Likert-type response scale, from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The items are shown below. The items are mixed so that if a relationship was entirely positive the respondent might agree with some items and disagree with others.

The mean responses on all items were in the same direction: caregivers who adopted or accepted permanent legal custody of children reported a more positive relationship with them. The differences between the groups of caregivers were statistically significant (p<.05) on 9 of the 15 items—numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 13, and 14—which have asterisks attached in the list below.

15 Items on Relationship Scale

1. I share an affectionate relationship with the child.*
2. We always seem to be struggling with each other.*
3. If upset, the child will seek comfort from me.*
4. The child is uncomfortable with physical affection or touch from me.*
5. The child values his/her relationship with me.*
6. When I praise the child, he/she beams with pride.*
7. The child spontaneously shares information about himself/herself.*
8. The child easily becomes angry at me.
9. It is easy to be in tune with what the child is feeling.
10. Child remains angry or is resistant after being disciplined.
11. Dealing with the child drains my energy.
12. When child is in bad mood, I know we're in for a long difficult day.
13. Child's feelings toward me can be unpredictable & change suddenly.*
14. Child is sneaky or manipulative with me.*
15. Child openly shares his/her feelings and experiences with me.

Figure 4.7 shows the mean responses of the two groups of caregivers to items on the relationship scale. The items for which agreement represents a positive relationship are grouped at the top of the scale and items for which disagreement represents a positive relationship are grouped at the bottom.

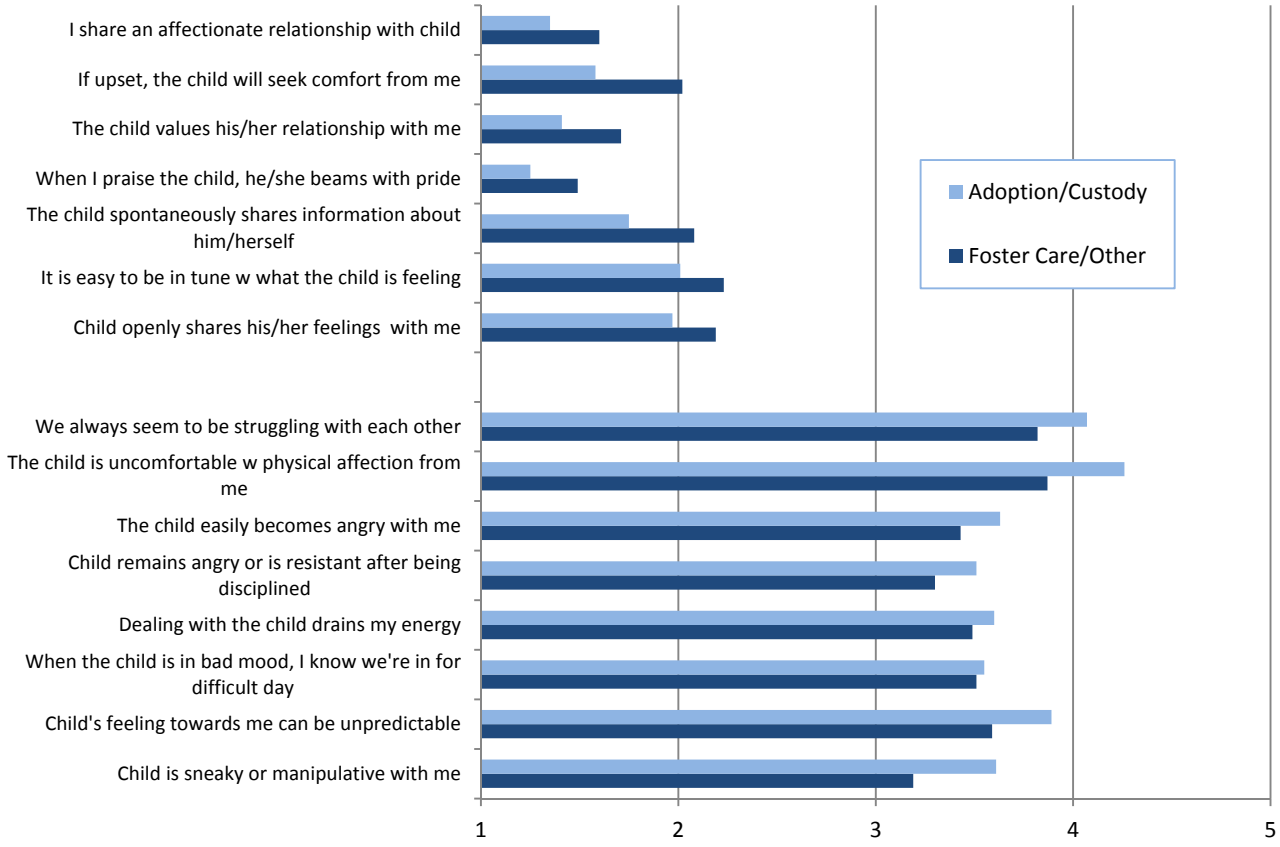


Figure 4.7. Mean responses of caregivers to questions about their relationship with the children in their care (on 5-point scale, where 1=strongly agree and 5=strongly disagree)

E. Conclusion

The analysis presented in this section focused only on differences in child well-being between children in the study population who were moved to permanency during the demonstration and those who were not. The analysis did not distinguish between waiver and control groups. However, the findings support the underlying premise of the Minnesota title IV-E waiver demonstration, that promoting permanency has a direct impact on child well-being. This premise is consistent with the primary goals of child welfare services as articulated by the Children's Bureau, which has emphasized the importance of safety and protection, timely permanency outcomes, and child well-being.

The results of the impact analysis showed that the MnPD continuous benefit had a positive effect on moving children to permanency. Children assigned to the waiver attained permanency in greater proportions and more quickly. Results further indicated that children who were the special target of the demonstration—children of color and children with special needs who have been historically more likely to remain in foster care for long periods of time—had a more difficult time achieving permanency, even with the added incentive of the continuous benefit. Yet, this combination of findings indicates that the demonstration and the effort to target these children through the MnPD project were both generally effective and justified. In the end it depends on the value a society places on child well-being and what cost the society is willing to pay to assure it.

Appendix

Appendix A

Assignment of Children to Waiver or Control Groups

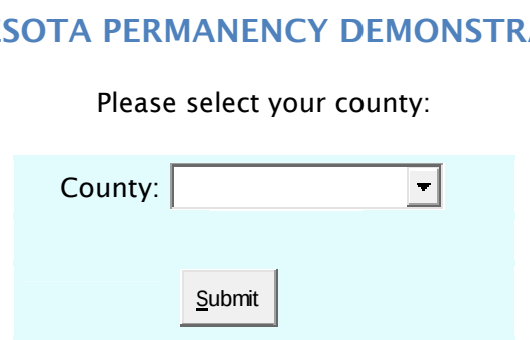
Detailed Instructions with Internet Screens

I. Determine that a child is eligible and appropriate for the MPD. There are certain basic selection criteria: 1) in safe and stable foster care for at least six months, 2) eligible for Title IV-E and 3) at least one of the following: a) state ward, b) long-term foster care by court order, c) filing for termination of parental rights, pending or completed, d) filing for transfer of permanent legal and physical custody, pending or completed

II. Make sure you have basic information on the child (name, SSIS person ID, foster family name, SSIS foster family ID, a case management workgroup ID, any special needs of the child, **and (for Hennepin and Ramsey) whether the child has siblings in placement**).

III. Open the assignment program in your Internet Brower (Internet Explorer or Netscape) and type in the following into the address bar:
http://www.iarstl.org/mn/ive/mnive.htm

Make this address a favorite in your browser so that you can come back to it again without retyping this address. When you press the Enter key on your keyboard, a page will appear with the following:



Select your county and click the **Submit** button. The following popup will appear:

Enter the user name and password for your county. These will be emailed to your county. They should be given only to the person entering data into the system in your county and to the responsible supervisor or administrator. Click the **OK** button.

IVa. The following screen will appear in Carlton, Cass, Mille Lacs and Dakota Counties. Enter the information. If one person always enters the information in each county (which we recommend) you may simply enter your initials into the first and last name field. Enter the name of the child and the other information called for. Note that both boxes under 1) must be checked and at least one box under 2) must be checked. Under 3) check only boxes that apply to this child.

MINNESOTA PERMANENCY DEMONSTRATION

Child Identification Entry Page

Your Name: First	**Last**
Name of Child: First	**Last**
Child's SSIS Person ID:	
Current SSIS Case Management Workgroup ID:	
Foster Provider Name:	**Provider SSIS ID:**

1. Check if the child: *(both of these must be checked to proceed)*

☐ Has been in safe and stable licensed foster care for at least six months

☐ Title IV-E eligible

2. Current legal status of child: *(check any that apply, one must be checked)*

☐ State ward

☐ Long-term foster care by court order

☐ Filing for termination of parental rights, pending or completed

☐ Filing for transfer of permanent legal and physical custody, pending or completed

3. Check ALL of the following that apply to this child:

☐ Diagnosed moderate to severe mental retardation

☐ Mild mental retardation

- ☐ In special school or mainstreamed as a special school student
- ☐ Other developmental disability (e.g., autism, seizure syndrome, cerebral palsy, ...)
- ☐ Learning disability
- ☐ Physically disabled
- ☐ Diagnosed severe mental health or emotional disabilities
- ☐ Present or past juvenile delinquency
- ☐ Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Fetal Alcohol Effects
- ☐ Chronic illness
- ☐ Other Special Needs Indicate: _____

Submit

Click the Submit button when all the information has been entered. If you have made errors in entry you may receive messages as you go along or at the end of the entry.

A small popup window will appear asking you to confirm that your entries are correct. Then the following screen will appear.

Submission Received

Enter another child

View list of children previously entered

IVb. In Hennepin and Ramsey Counties, the following screen will appear. Enter the information. If one person always enters the information in each county (which we recommend) you may simply enter your initials into the first and last name field. Enter the name of the child and the other information called for. Note that both boxes under 1) must be checked and at least one box under 2) must be checked. Under 3) check only boxes that apply to this child. There is an additional item (4) for Hennepin and Ramsey—described below.

MINNESOTA PERMANENCY DEMONSTRATION

Child Identification Entry Page

Your Name: First	**Last**
Name of Child: First	**Last**
Child's SSIS Person ID:	
Current SSIS Case Management Workgroup ID:	
Foster Provider Name:	**Provider SSIS ID:**

1. Check if the child: *(both of these must be checked to proceed)*

☐ Has been in safe and stable licensed foster care for at least six months

☐ Title IV-E eligible

2. Current legal status of child: *(check any that apply, one must be checked)*

☐ State ward

☐ Long-term foster care by court order

☐ Filing for termination of parental rights, pending or completed

☐ Filing for transfer of permanent legal and physical custody, pending or completed

3. Check <u>ALL</u> of the following that apply to this child:

☐ Diagnosed moderate to severe mental retardation

☐ Mild mental retardation

☐ In special school or mainstreamed as a special school student

☐ Other developmental disability (e.g., autism, seizure syndrome, cerebral palsy, ...)

- ☐ Learning disability
- ☐ Physically disabled
- ☐ Diagnosed severe mental health or emotional disabilities
- ☐ Present or past juvenile delinquency
- ☐ Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Fetal Alcohol Effects
- ☐ Chronic illness
- ☐ Other Special Needs Indicate:

4. Does this child have siblings in out-of-home placement?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If you answered 'Yes' to Question 4,

4a. Have any of these siblings been previously assigned to the MPD waiver?

(click to see previously entered children)

- ☐ Yes, a sibling was previously assigned to the waiver (experimental) group
- ☐ Yes, a sibling was previously assigned to the non-waiver (control) group
- ☐ No

Submit

In Hennepin and Ramsey, item 4) concerns siblings of this child that were submitted earlier to the MPD and have been assigned to the Waiver or the Control groups. It is very important that this item be entered correctly. If the Yes button is checked then 4a must be answered. If you know that the child has siblings in placement but cannot remember whether they have previously been submitted to this program click the link that says: "(click to see previously entered children)". This will open a popup window that will permit you to check previous children entered and their waiver or control status. This is to ensure that siblings are all assigned either to the waiver or to the control group.

Click the Submit button when all the information has been entered. If you have made errors in entry you may receive messages as you go along or at the end of the entry.

A small popup window will appear asking you to confirm that your entries are correct. Then one of the following two screens will appear. This first screen reports that the child was assigned to the waiver group:

Submission Received

James Smith is assigned to the Waiver group

This Child is Assigned to the MPD Waiver (MPD benefits may be offered to this provider).

Enter another child

View list of children previously entered

The second screen reports that the child was assigned to the control group.

Submission Received

James Smith is assigned to the Control group

This Child is Assigned to the MPD Waiver (MPD benefits may be offered to this provider).

Enter another child

View list of children previously entered

Make a note of the group to which the child has been assigned. The MPD may be offered only to foster families of children assigned to the waiver group.

V. At various points the following link will appear:

View list of previously entered children

This link may be clicked to see a list of previously entered children. The order in which they appear may be changed. The options are a) name of child, b) SSIS person ID#, c) SSIS case management workgroup ID#, and d) date entered into this system.

VIEW LIST OF PREVIOUSLY ENTERED CHILDREN

Order the list by:

Submit

Select the order and click the **Submit** button. A list like the following will appear:

Children entered for Carlton County:

Child Name	SSIS Person ID	CM Workgroup ID	Worker Name	Date Entered
Case, Test	55555555	44444555	Loman, Tony	10/13/2005 10:19:56
John, John	34555555	46546546	L, T	10/13/2005 17:07:33
Lee, Chris	69857812	55627899	L, T	10/17/2005 12:48:31
Lewis, Hank	22222222	66666666	L, T	10/14/2005 15:05:25

This list is in alphabetical order of last name.

Appendix B
Pair Matching Methodology

In order to accomplish matching, a "pool" of children from which matches could be made was needed. The term pool refers to a larger group of children of the same general type. Ideally, the entire pool of potential matches should be two or three orders of magnitude larger than the group of children assigned to the waiver in order to create the best matches possible. Whether this is possible can only be determined after the demonstration begins and the numbers and types of children assigned to the waiver in non-metro counties is observed. Determining the adequacy of the pool of children for matching purposes will be one of the first problems to be solved in the evaluation.

Variables available from SSIS on children from the selected counties who are IV-E eligible and meet the criteria of the waiver will be assembled, reviewed and prioritized for importance to the matching process. Variables utilized in matching includes demographic and social variables (such as age, sex, race/ethnicity, and tribe for American Indian children), case characteristics (including length of time in placement, previous cases and removals, difficulty of care rating of the child, and whether a specialized foster care support agency as provided contracted assistance), and geography (first choice will be adjacent counties with similar socio-economic and CPS caseload characteristics). Once the new waiver child has been identified, the evaluator runs its matching programs to select the best comparison match from the non-waiver counties.

In selecting individual matched pairs, all (or the large majority of) children in the pool of potential matches are considered. Each variable is assigned a priority weight. Weights will be summated for each child in the pool. The child with the highest score will be selected as the match. While the procedure produces matched *pairs* of children, the object is to produce *matched groups*. The difference is critical, because it allows some flexibility in matching (that is, some differences between the children in particular pairs), so long as the characteristics of the waiver and comparison group as a whole are not significantly different.

Ideally, matching children should be selected from counties that are similar in demographic and resource characteristics. Matching counties must be selected on an empirical basis. Part of the problem of determining the adequacy of the matching pool is to determine whether similar children can be identified in counties initially selected for comparison cases. Specific American Indian tribes are found in the two northern

counties in the study: Carlton and Cass. If at all possible, matching children are selected from the same tribes. The best counties for comparison matches are the adjacent counties of St. Louis, Crow Wing, and Itasca. This may be expanded to Aitkin, Kanabec, and Morrison counties. Matches for the Twin Cities suburban county of Dakota are selected from the suburban counties of Anoka, Carver and Scott.

Appendix C
Placement Counties

As discussed in Chapter 2, children who are placed in foster care by a participating MnPD county are frequently placed in a different county, usually to be with relatives. **Table C-1** shows the counties in which waiver group and control group children from each participating MnPD county were placed during the first half of the demonstration. The term 'provider county' refers to the county where the caregiver resides.

American Indian children also are often placed in a county other than the one with original jurisdiction. The situation of these children is complicated by the number of different American Indian tribes and bands within the state. **Table C-2** shows the foster care disbursement of the American Indian children who are in the study population. The table shows the tribe or band of the children, as given in SSIS, along with the county of case responsibility and the county where the caregiver resides. The top portion of the table shows the placement of waiver children, while the bottom part shows where control children have been placed.

Table C.1. Placement Counties of Experimental and Control Children

Hennepin County Children

Provider County	Control *n*	Exp. *n*	Total *n*	Control %	Exp. %	Total %
Anoka	5	20	25	2.1%	10.5%	5.3%
Becker	5	5	10	2.1%	4.2%	2.1%
Beltrami	2	5	7	0.8%	2.9%	1.5%
Benton	1	2	3	0.4%	1.3%	0.6%
Carver	0	1	1	0.0%	0.4%	0.2%
Cass	0	3	3	0.0%	1.3%	0.6%
Chippewa	1	0	1	0.4%	0.4%	0.2%
Chisago	0	4	4	0.0%	1.7%	0.8%
Clay	0	2	2	0.0%	0.8%	0.4%
Clearwater	4	0	4	1.7%	1.7%	0.8%
Crow Wing	0	1	1	0.0%	0.4%	0.2%
Dakota	2	7	9	0.8%	3.8%	1.9%
Dodge	1	4	5	0.4%	2.1%	1.1%
Faribault	0	1	1	0.0%	0.4%	0.2%
Hennepin	135	121	256	57.2%	107.1%	53.9%
Isanti	12	2	14	5.1%	5.9%	2.9%
Koochiching	0	1	1	0.0%	0.4%	0.2%
LeSueur	1	0	1	0.4%	0.4%	0.2%
Lyon	0	2	2	0.0%	0.8%	0.4%
Mahnomen	0	2	2	0.0%	0.8%	0.4%
Mille Lacs	1	3	4	0.4%	1.7%	0.8%
Morrison	0	1	1	0.0%	0.4%	0.2%
Nicollet	1	0	1	0.4%	0.4%	0.2%
Pine	0	2	2	0.0%	0.8%	0.4%
Ramsey	24	18	42	10.2%	17.6%	8.8%
St. Louis	1	2	3	0.4%	1.3%	0.6%
Scott	0	5	5	0.0%	2.1%	1.1%
Sherburne	4	1	5	1.7%	2.1%	1.1%
Stearns	0	1	1	0.0%	0.4%	0.2%
Washington	11	3	14	4.7%	5.9%	2.9%
Wright	8	0	8	3.4%	3.3%	1.7%
Out of State	16	20	36	6.8%	15.1%	7.6%
Unknown	1	0	1	0.4%	0.4%	0.2%
Total	236	239	475	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table C.1, continued

Ramsey County Children

Provider County	Control *n*	Exp. *n*	Total *n*	Control %	Exp. %	Total %
Anoka	7	5	12	3.2%	2.0%	2.6%
Beltrami	4	0	4	1.8%	0.0%	0.9%
Carlton	0	1	1	0.0%	0.4%	0.2%
Cass	0	1	1	0.0%	0.4%	0.2%
Chisago	1	0	1	0.5%	0.0%	0.2%
Clay	0	2	2	0.0%	0.8%	0.4%
Crow Wing	2	0	2	0.9%	0.0%	0.4%
Dakota	10	10	20	4.5%	4.0%	4.3%
Hennepin	19	52	71	8.6%	20.9%	15.1%
Hubbard	1	0	1	0.5%	0.0%	0.2%
Isanti	1	0	1	0.5%	0.0%	0.2%
Lyon	0	1	1	0.0%	0.4%	0.2%
Mille Lacs	0	1	1	0.0%	0.4%	0.2%
Ramsey	151	153	304	68.6%	61.4%	64.8%
Scott	0	1	1	0.0%	0.4%	0.2%
Sherburne	1	0	1	0.5%	0.0%	0.2%
Stearns	3	1	4	1.4%	0.4%	0.9%
Washington	7	4	11	3.2%	1.6%	2.3%
Wright	1	0	1	0.5%	0.0%	0.2%
Out of State	6	10	16	2.7%	4.0%	3.4%
Unknown	6	7	13	2.7%	2.8%	2.8%
Total	220	249	469	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table C.1, continued

Carlton County Children

Provider County	Exp. *n*	Exp. %
Carlton	28	**73.7%**
Dakota	3	7.9%
St. Louis	6	15.8%
Out of State	1	2.6%
Total	38	100.0%

Dakota County Children

Provider County	Exp. *n*	Exp. %
Anoka	1	0.9%
Beltrami	6	5.3%
Dakota	55	48.7%
Freeborn	1	0.9%
Hennepin	6	5.3%
Isanti	1	0.9%
Morrison	3	2.7%
Ramsey	12	10.6%
Rice	2	1.8%
Scott	3	2.7%
Sherburne	2	1.8%
Stearns	1	0.9%
Washington	3	2.7%
Winona	1	0.9%
Out of State	5	4.4%
Unknown	11	9.7%
Total	113	100.0%

Table C.2. Assignment & Provider County of American Indian Children of Different Bands & Tribes

Waiver Children		Assignment County					
TRIBE of child	Provider County	Carlton	Cass	Dakota	Hennepin	Ramsey	Total
Unknown tribe	Anoka	0	0	0	0	1	1
Unknown tribe	Chisago	0	0	0	2	0	2
Unknown tribe	Dakota	0	0	1	0	0	1
Unknown tribe	Ramsey	0	0	0	3	2	5
Unknown tribe	St. Louis	2	0	0	0	0	2
Omaha Tribe of Nebraska	Stearns	0	0	0	1	0	1
Hannahville Indian Community	Hennepin	0	0	0	1	0	1
Minnesota Chippewa tribe (unidentified band)	Hennepin	0	0	0	0	1	1
Fond du Lac Band of Chippewa Indians	Carlton	11	0	0	0	0	11
Fond du Lac Band of Chippewa Indians	St. Louis	1	0	0	0	0	1
Grand Portage Band of Chippewa Indians	Carlton	2	0	0	0	0	2
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	Beltrami	0	0	0	1	0	1
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	Carlton	4	0	0	0	0	4
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	Clay	0	0	0	2	0	2
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	Faribault	0	0	0	1	0	1
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	Hennepin	0	0	0	8	1	9
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	Isanti	0	1	0	0	0	1
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	Mille Lacs	0	0	0	3	0	3
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	Ramsey	0	0	0	1	0	1
Mille Lacs Band of Chippewa Indians	Anoka	0	0	0	4	0	4
Mille Lacs Band of Chippewa Indians	Hennepin	0	0	0	1	0	1
Bois Forte (Nett Lake) Band of Chippewa Indians	Beltrami	0	0	0	1	0	1
White Earth Band of Ojibwe	Anoka	0	0	0	0	1	1
White Earth Band of Ojibwe	Becker	0	0	0	4	0	4
White Earth Band of Ojibwe	Beltrami	0	0	0	1	0	1
White Earth Band of Ojibwe	Cass	0	0	0	3	0	3
White Earth Band of Ojibwe	Hennepin	0	0	0	3	0	3
White Earth Band of Ojibwe	Isanti	0	0	0	1	0	1
White Earth Band of Ojibwe	Koochiching	0	0	0	1	0	1
White Earth Band of Ojibwe	Mahnomen	0	0	0	2	0	2
White Earth Band of Ojibwe	Ramsey	0	0	0	3	5	8
White Earth Band of Ojibwe	Scott	0	0	0	1	0	1
White Earth Band of Ojibwe	Washington	0	0	0	0	1	1
Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians	Anoka	0	0	0	1	0	1
Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians	Dakota	0	0	0	0	1	1
Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians	Hennepin	0	0	0	2	0	2
Spirit Lake Tribe	Anoka	0	0	0	1	0	1
Spirit Lake Tribe	Cass	0	1	0	0	0	1
Spirit Lake Tribe	Hennepin	0	0	0	1	0	1
Standing Rock Sioux Tribe	Hennepin	0	0	0	3	0	3
Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe	Anoka	0	0	0	1	0	1
Crow Creek Sioux Tribe	Anoka	0	0	0	1	0	1
Oglala Sioux Tribe - Pine Ridge	Anoka	0	0	0	1	0	1
Oglala Sioux Tribe - Pine Ridge	Dakota	0	0	0	3	0	3

Table C.2, continued

Control & Match		Assignment County					
TRIBE of child	Provider County	Carlton	Cass	Dakota	Hennepin	Ramsey	Total
Oglala Sioux Tribe - Pine Ridge	Dakota	0	0	0	3	0	3
Oglala Sioux Tribe - Pine Ridge	Hennepin	0	0	0	3	0	3
Rosebud Sioux Tribe	Dakota	0	0	0	2	0	2
Rosebud Sioux Tribe	Dodge	0	0	0	4	0	4
Rosebud Sioux Tribe	Hennepin	0	0	0	4	0	4
Rosebud Sioux Tribe	Ramsey	0	0	0	1	0	1
Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux Tribe	Beltrami	0	0	0	1	0	1
Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux Tribe	Hennepin	0	0	0	0	1	1
Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux Tribe	Ramsey	0	0	0	0	1	1
Lac du Flambeau Band of Chippewa	Hennepin	0	0	0	1	1	2
St. Croix Chippewa	Hennepin	0	0	0	1	0	1
Other US tribe	Hennepin	0	0	0	1	3	4
Other US tribe	Ramsey	0	0	0	0	1	1
Other US tribe	Ramsey	0	0	0	1	0	1
Unknown tribe	Becker	2	0	1	0	0	3
Unknown tribe	Isanti	0	0	1	0	0	1
Unknown tribe	Mahnomen	0	0	1	0	0	1
Unknown tribe	Ramsey	0	0	0	0	1	1
Alaskan Native	Beltrami	0	0	0	1	0	1
Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska	LeSueur	0	0	0	1	0	1
Fond du Lac Band of Chippewa Indians	Ramsey	0	0	0	1	0	1
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	Beltrami	1	1	0	1	0	3
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	Dakota	0	0	0	1	0	1
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	Hennepin	0	0	0	3	0	3
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	Itasca	1	0	0	0	0	1
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	Wright	0	0	0	1	0	1
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	Unknown	0	0	0	1	0	1
Mille Lacs Band of Chippewa Indians	Crow Wing	1	0	0	0	0	1
Mille Lacs Band of Chippewa Indians	Hennepin	0	0	0	3	0	3
Bois Forte (Nett Lake) Band of Chippewa Indians	Sherburne	0	0	0	1	0	1
White Earth Band of Ojibwe	Anoka	0	0	1	0	0	1
White Earth Band of Ojibwe	Becker	4	0	1	2	0	7
White Earth Band of Ojibwe	Clay	1	0	0	0	0	1
White Earth Band of Ojibwe	Clearwater	0	0	0	2	0	2
White Earth Band of Ojibwe	Dakota	0	0	0	0	1	1
White Earth Band of Ojibwe	Hennepin	0	0	0	4	0	4
White Earth Band of Ojibwe	Itasca	1	0	0	0	0	1
White Earth Band of Ojibwe	Mahnomen	0	0	1	0	0	1
White Earth Band of Ojibwe	Washington	0	0	0	2	0	2
Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians	Beltrami	1	0	0	0	4	5
Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians	Clearwater	0	0	1	0	0	1
Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians	Hennepin	0	0	0	3	0	3
Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians	Ramsey	0	0	0	2	1	3
Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians	Washington	0	0	0	2	0	2

Table C.2, continued

Control & Match		Assignment County					
TRIBE of child	Provider County	Carlton	Cass	Dakota	Hennepin	Ramsey	Total
Spirit Lake Tribe	Hennepin	0	0	0	2	0	2
Spirit Lake Tribe	Olmsted	2	0	0	0	0	2
Standing Rock Sioux Tribe	Mille Lacs	0	0	0	1	0	1
Three Affiliated Tribes of the Fort Berthold Reservation	Ramsey	0	0	0	1	0	1
Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians	Anoka	0	0	0	1	0	1
Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians	Hennepin	0	0	0	1	0	1
Oglala Sioux Tribe - Pine Ridge	Hennepin	0	0	0	1	0	1
Oglala Sioux Tribe - Pine Ridge	Itasca	1	0	0	0	0	1
Rosebud Sioux Tribe	Isanti	0	0	0	2	0	2
Rosebud Sioux Tribe	Lincoln	1	0	0	0	0	1
Rosebud Sioux Tribe	Ramsey	0	0	0	2	0	2
Rosebud Sioux Tribe	Wright	0	0	0	3	0	3
Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux Tribe	Ramsey	0	0	0	0	1	1
Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux Tribe	Renville	1	0	0	0	0	1
Unknown Chippewa	St. Louis	1	0	0	0	0	1
Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Chippewa	Ramsey	1	0	0	0	0	1
Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Chippewa	Out of State	0	0	0	1	0	1
Other US tribe	Hennepin	0	0	1	1	1	3
Other US tribe	Otter Tail	1	0	0	0	0	1
Other US tribe	Out of State	0	1	0	0	0	1

Minnesota Department of **Human Services**

Children and Family Services

www.dhs.state.mn.us

DHS-4630A-ENG 12-11