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| LOCAL COMMISSIONERS MEMORANDUM |
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Transmittal No: 90 LCM-128

Date: August 16, 1990

Division: Family and Children
Services

TO: Local District Commissioners

SUBJECT: Preventive Services Review Report

ATTACHMENTS: "PREVENTIVE SERVICES: MOVING INTO THE 90'S"
(Not available on-line)

Enclosed for your information is a copy of PREVENTIVE SERVICES: MOVING INTO THE 90'S. This report highlights recent trends in the makeup of foster care and preventive services populations, identifies areas of services needs, points to areas for improving service delivery and cross-agency coordination, and suggests next steps for further exploration and analysis of the characteristics and effectiveness of preventive services.

The report presents the findings of a review of a statewide random sample of 181 foster care cases and a preventive services program study conducted in the Fall of 1989 by the Division of Family and Children Services in conjunction with the NYPWA Services Committee. The preventive services component consisted of a review of 368 non-placement mandated preventive services cases from seven local social services districts (Albany, Erie, Onondaga, Ontario, Tompkins, Ulster, and New York City) supplemented by interviews with key administrators and program staff in these same local districts and selected preventive service agencies in New York City. Statewide trends for foster care and preventive services using data from the Child Care Review Service (CCRS) are also presented in the report.

Although there are methodological limitations on the comparative analysis of data between the two case samples and although it is also not possible to extrapolate statewide averages or percentages from these reviews, they do provide an important snapshot of these two populations during the time they were receiving services. The picture they present corroborates both the descriptions obtained from the staff interviews and from other comments and anecdotal reports from local districts and voluntary foster care and preventive services agencies over the last few years.

Both preventive services and foster care are portrayed as increasingly serving families with younger children. However, foster care placements for children under two years of age are shown to be occurring at a faster pace than the provision of preventive services to these families is occurring. Significant numbers of both the families receiving foster care and those receiving mandated preventive services are described as having multiple problems of an increasingly severe nature which often pose a health and safety risk to their children. This results in Child Protective Services (CPS) being their entry point to the child welfare system.

In the cases sampled for this review, 81% of the foster care cases and 50% of the preventive cases had "indicated" CPS reports. Parent-related problems of drug abuse or alcohol abuse were found in 64% of the cases in the foster care sample with drug abuse identified in 54% of the cases. The most common parent problems experienced by families in the preventive services case sample were mental illness (28.4%), domestic violence (27.9%), alcohol abuse (23.5%), drug abuse (20.5%), and homelessness (20.8%).

The findings of this report have major policy implications for foster care and the prevention of foster care, and for the future planning of preventive services programs in the 90's. They point to the importance of developing service strategies that better target families with young children, stress early intervention, and involve a comprehensive, coordinated multi-agency approach that includes all relevant community service systems and also includes the array of services from the child welfare system.

Finally, the findings point to the need for further analysis and evaluation of the preventive services program. The rich knowledge we have gained from this study will become the basis for the Department to undertake further evaluation activities geared to improving the effectiveness of the preventive services delivery system in preventing foster care and preserving families. Our immediate next step will be to conduct a repeat case reading study on statewide random samples of foster care and preventive services cases this upcoming fall. We will be seeking your support and cooperation in planning and implementing this next phase of our evaluation activities.

Keeping in mind its limitations and the clearly identified need for more rigorous evaluation of preventive services, this report is intended to elicit review and discussion. Your comments and reactions to it and any recommendations you may have for future efforts in this area will be of value to us as we design the next steps for the analysis and evaluation of this program.

Joseph Semidei
Deputy Commissioner
Division of Family
and Children Services