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# FAMILY SUPPORT SUBSIDY ANNUAL REPORT

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Annual report of client enrollment and family survey data prepared for the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services by MPHI evaluators.

Fiscal Year 2014



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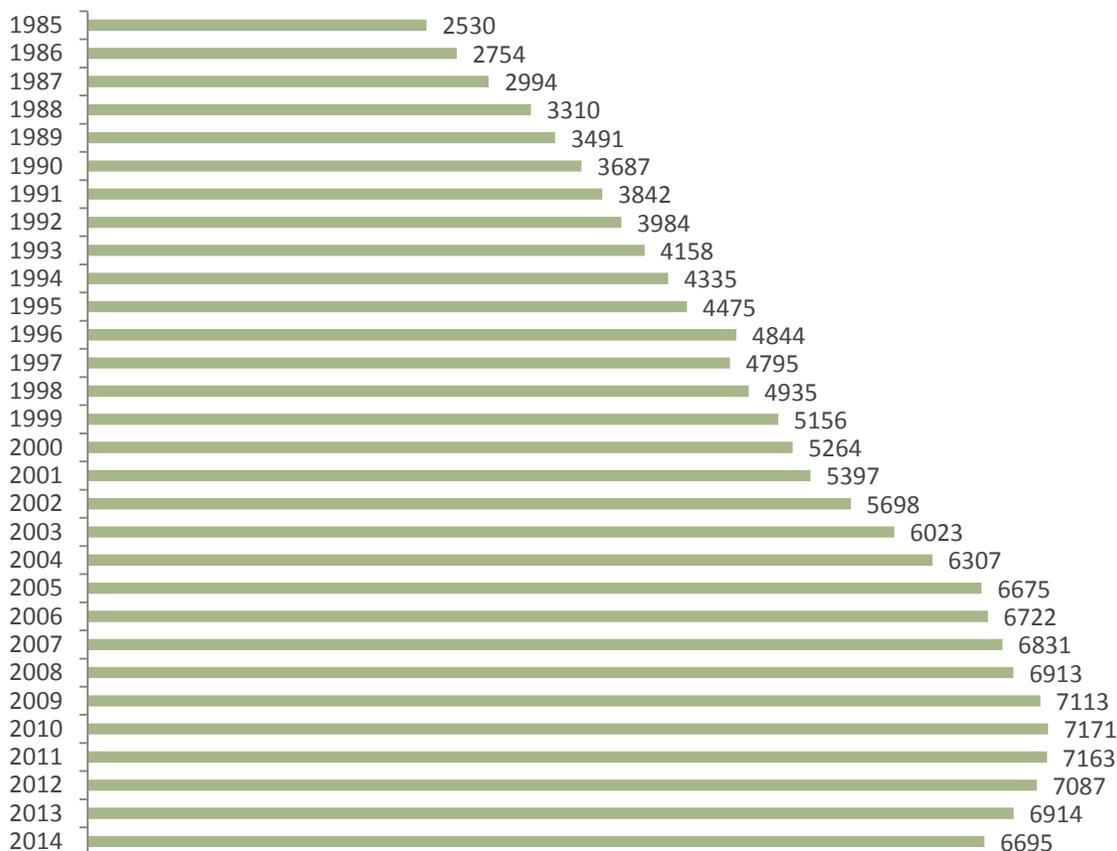
# FAMILY SUPPORT SUBSIDY PROGRAM

## HISTORY

Supporting families is a priority of Michigan’s public mental health system, as evidenced by the Family Support Subsidy Program (FSSP). Michigan’s philosophy is that children with developmental disabilities, like all children, need loving and enduring family relationships. For over two decades, the policy of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS—formerly the Michigan Department of Community Health) has been that children should be supported to live with their families. If out-of-home placement becomes necessary, it should be temporary and time-limited with a goal of family reunification whenever possible or, for some children, adoption. Permanency planning practices within Michigan’s public mental health system have supported this guiding principle by enabling families to keep their children out of institutional settings and other out-of-home placements.

The Family Support Subsidy Act, Public Act 249 of 1983, was the beginning of a major shift of Michigan’s mental health resources and services toward supporting, maintaining, and establishing permanent family relationships for children with severe developmental disabilities. The FSSP provides an essential support for families of children with developmental disabilities to assist with the extraordinary expenses associated with raising them. Figure 1 shows the number of children enrolled in the program over time. While program enrollment has increased markedly since 1985, there has been a downward trend since 2010.

**FIGURE 1. ENROLLMENT PEAKED IN 2010 AT 7,171 FAMILIES**



Unlike typically developing children, children with severe developmental disabilities often need lifetime support for daily activities such as walking, feeding, or dressing. Often, they have both mental and physical impairments and require 24-hour care. As a result, the families of children with severe developmental disabilities incur many expenses that other families do not. This program recognizes that these families have unique needs; it empowers them to decide what is needed to support their child's care; and it allows children to stay at home and out of residential placements.

## ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Families may be eligible for this program if: 1) their Michigan taxable income does not exceed \$60,000, 2) their child lives in Michigan with a birth parent, adoptive parent, or legal guardian, 3) their child is under age 18, and 4) their child has been recommended by a public school district's Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team (MET) as meeting the requirements for the special education categories of cognitive impairment, severe multiple impairments, or autism spectrum disorder. Children with an eligibility category of cognitive impairment may be eligible if their development is in the severe range of functioning as determined by the local or intermediate school district. Children with autism spectrum disorder must be receiving special education services in a program designed for students with autism spectrum disorder or in a program designed for students with severe cognitive impairment or severe multiple impairments.

The program is publicized on the MDHHS website at [www.michigan.gov/mdhhs](http://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs) (type *Family Support Subsidy Program* in the search box). Michigan's community mental health services programs (CMHSPs) also perform outreach activities to promote the program within their geographic locations. CMHSPs target their efforts to local public school systems, CMHSP access centers, Early On®, hospitals, physician offices, public health agencies and more.

***“We thank you for your support and are very grateful for the subsidy program. We love our son and strive to do all we can for him to make his life better. A little extra financial support helps us very much!”***

***-Washtenaw County Parent***

The application process was designed to be simple, logical, and include documents already available to families. The application form must be supported by a copy of the child's birth certificate to verify age, a copy of the family's Michigan income tax return to verify taxable income, and verification from the local school district of an eligible educational category. Although it is not a requirement for eligibility, it is strongly encouraged that the child has a social security number. Upon receipt of the completed application, the Community Mental Health Services Program (CMHSP) verifies the family's eligibility. Each year, in the birth month of their child, the family is required to re-verify eligibility for the program. Coverage in the program begins the month following the CMHSP's receipt of the completed application and supporting documentation.

## SUBSIDY PAYMENTS

The subsidy is paid to the parent or legal guardian on behalf of the child. Checks are disbursed to families monthly. The subsidy income is not taxable and families may use the subsidy for any purpose that helps them care for their child.

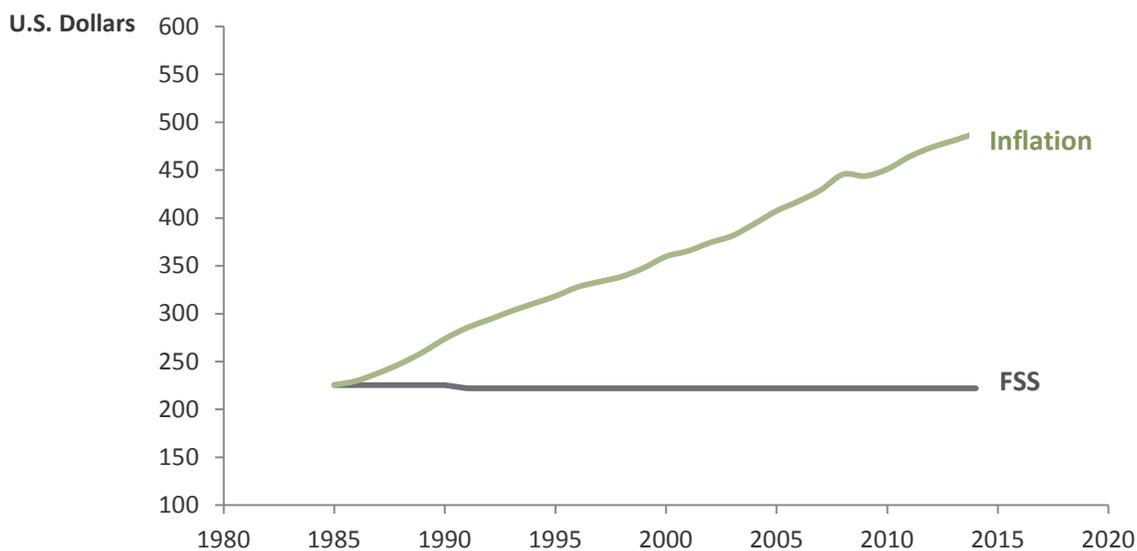
Payments were \$222.11 per month in FY14. The original payment in FY85 was \$225.54. The MDHHS may decrease the amount after notifying the Governor and the House and Senate Appropriations Committees that available revenues are insufficient to cover the program's obligations. The department is not permitted to reduce the amount of the monthly payment by more than an aggregate of 25% in one fiscal year without written approval of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees. FSSP is now funded entirely with federal dollars through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program.

*“Every penny helps but the subsidy amount is in no way a realistic reflection of the “extras” involved in caring for a severely multiple impaired child.”*

*-Ottawa County Parent*

In FY91, payments were decreased to \$215.66 due to budget restrictions and then increased to \$222.11 per month, where it has remained for the past 23 years. The purchasing power of these dollars has declined over time (see Figure 2). In 2014, \$488.45 was needed to have the same buying power as \$225.54 in 1985. The rate may be increased annually by legislative appropriation to match the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) rate for an adult living in the household of another (2014 SSI rate in MI was \$480.67).

**FIGURE 2. FSS AMOUNT HAS BEEN \$222.11 SINCE 1991**



*Note: Inflation based on original subsidy amount of \$225.54 in 1985*

# PROGRAM EVALUATION

## DATA SOURCES

Each year, the department gathers information from four sources to satisfy the reporting requirements of the Subsidy Act: (1) outreach activities as reported by CMHSPs, (2) follow-up reports on children leaving the subsidy program due to out-of-home placements, (3) enrollment information from the department's FSS data base, and (4) a family questionnaire sent to parents annually.

## WHO RECEIVES THE SUBSIDY?

In FY 2014, **6,695 families** received the subsidy across Michigan. Demographic characteristics of subsidy families are reported in Table 1. The mean age of children in the program was 10.7 years ( $SD=4.1$ ). The majority of children receiving the subsidy were White, male, from the lowest income level, and diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

**TABLE 1. ELIGIBLE CHILDREN PREDOMINANTLY WHITE, MALE, AUTISTIC, & FROM LOWEST INCOME LEVEL**

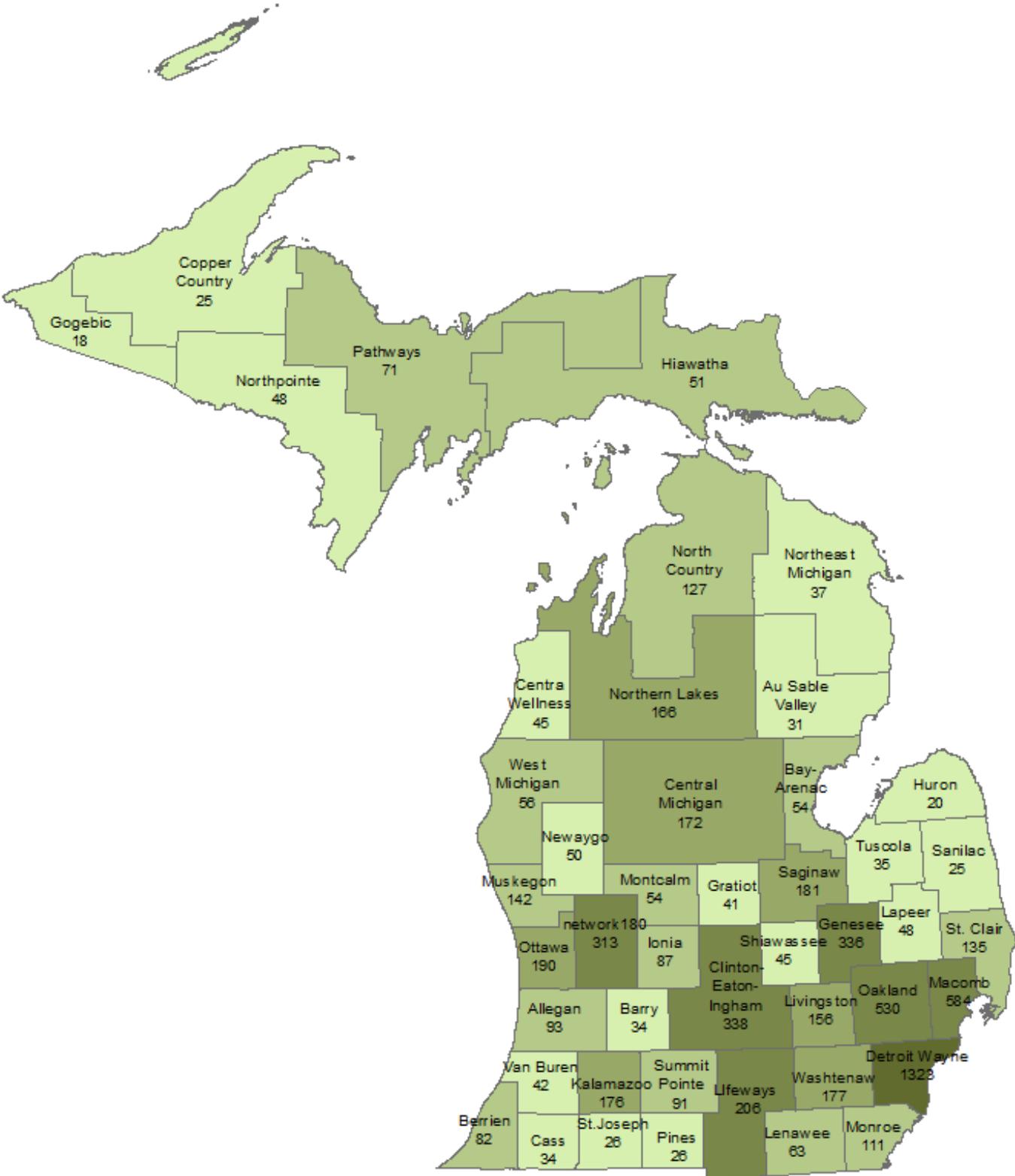
	% Enrolled Families		% Enrolled Families
<b>Educational Eligibility Category</b>		<b>Age</b>	
Cognitive Impairment	7.0	1-3 years	3.9
Severe Multiple Impairments	23.0	4-6 years	14.9
Autism Spectrum Disorder	70.0	7-9 years	19.3
		10-12 years	23.0
<b>Taxable Income Level</b>		13-15 years	24.3
\$19,999 or less	70.2	16-18 years	14.6
\$20,000-\$44,999	22.9		
\$45,000-\$60,000	6.9	<b>Race</b>	
		White	62.5
<b>Gender</b>		Black/African American	22.4
Male	74.6	American Indian/Alaska Native	0.6
Female	25.0	Asian	1.8
Unreported	0.4	Other	6.9
		Unknown	5.8

There has been noticeable growth in the proportion of children diagnosed with autism which can be partly attributed to the increase in this diagnosis in the U.S. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that the 2014 national prevalence rate for autism spectrum disorder is estimated at 1 in 68 births. According to the Michigan Department of Education, there were 17,444 public school students with autism spectrum disorder in 2014.<sup>1</sup>

Families throughout the whole state receive the subsidy. Figure 3 shows the geographic distribution of these families across the state, by CMHSP.

<sup>1</sup> From <http://www.gvsu.edu/autismcenter>. 2014 ASD numbers Date: April 3, 2015

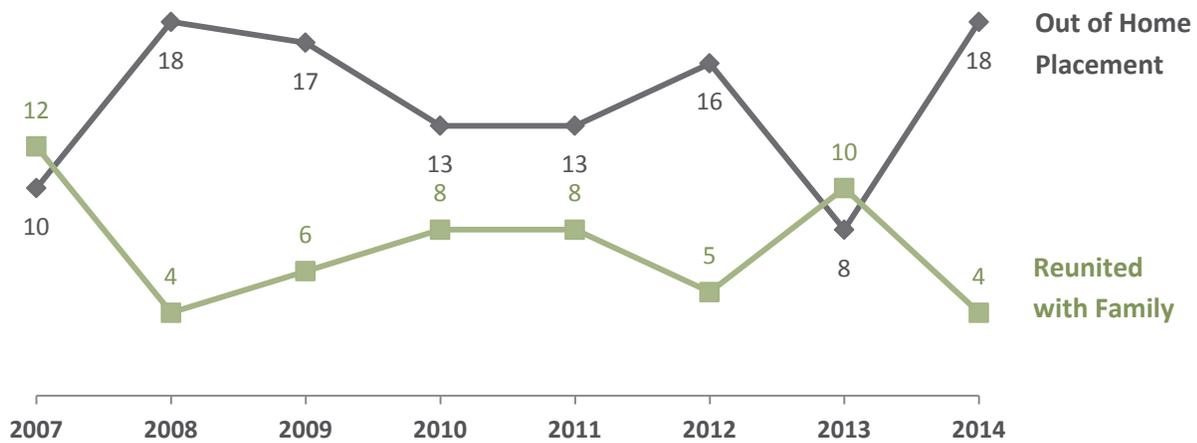
FIGURE 3. TOTAL NUMBER OF SUBSIDY FAMILIES BY CMHSP



## PROGRAM IMPACT: REDUCING OUT OF HOME PLACEMENTS

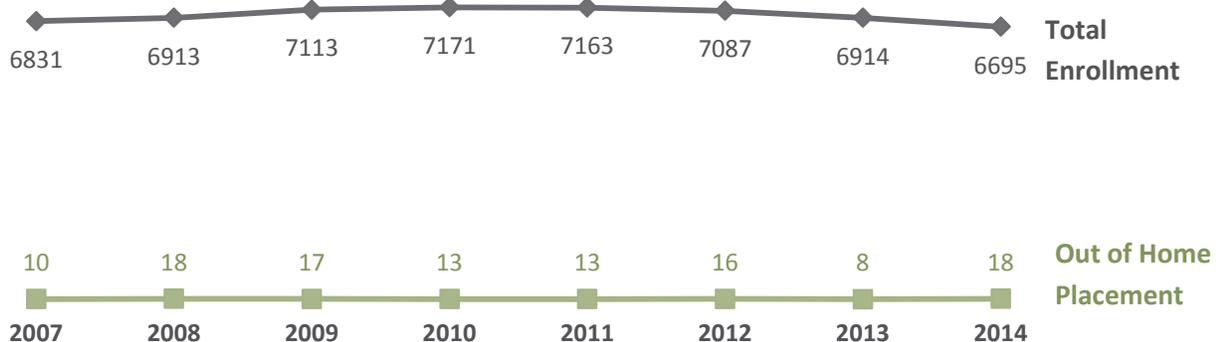
Follow-up at the end of the fiscal year indicated that **18 children (0.3%)** were placed out of home during FY14. The number of children enrolled in the subsidy program who have been placed out-of-home has dropped from a high of 45 in FY86 to 18 children in FY14. No families qualified for the one-time double subsidy payment (provided to assist in a child’s return to home from placement). **Four children went home to their families**, after an absence, and were returned to the subsidy program. **Three children were adopted** after having been enrolled in the subsidy program and then placed out-of-home. Figure 4 presents the number of children placed out of the home and those reunited with their families since 2007.

**FIGURE 4. OUT OF HOME PLACEMENTS AND REUNIFICATIONS SINCE 2007**



For perspective, Figure 5 shows these same numbers compared to total enrollment, illustrating the very small percentage (less than 0.5% of all children in the program) impacted by out of home placement. This is a reflection of the success of the program in keeping children at home with their families.

**FIGURE 5. OUT OF HOME PLACEMENTS ARE VERY LOW COMPARED TO TOTAL ENROLLMENT**



## WHAT FAMILIES SAY ABOUT THE SUBSIDY

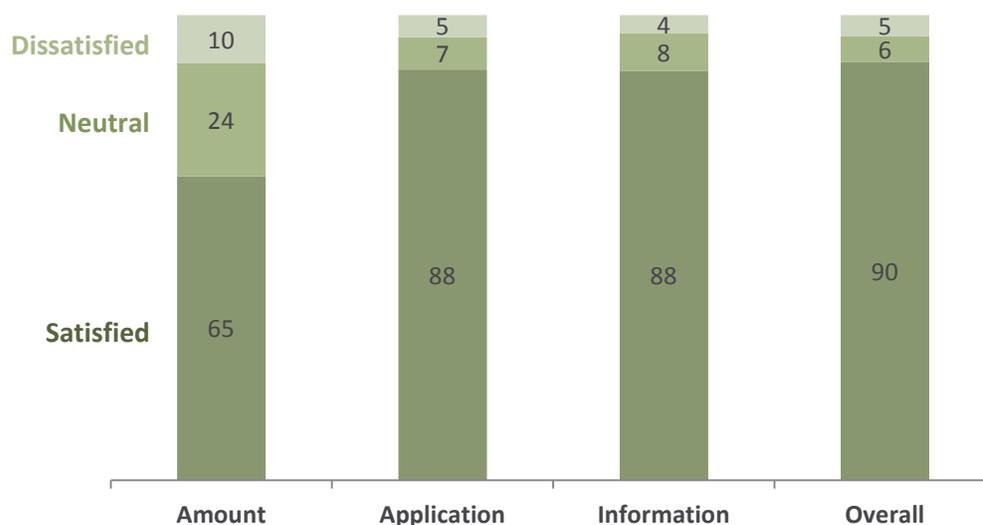
Each year, families have the opportunity to provide feedback on the subsidy program in a survey. In FY14, **1,040 families responded to the annual family survey** (950 paper forms and 90 on-line forms, response rate of 15.5% of all subsidy families). Demographic characteristics of families returning the survey were comparable to all subsidy families. Only one respondent indicated that their child returned home from an out-of-home placement within the year and that the subsidy had “Greatly” influenced that decision.

**TABLE 2. FAMILIES RESPONDING TO SURVEY HAD SIMILAR DEMOGRAPHICS COMPARED TO ALL FSS FAMILIES**

	%		%
<b>Educational Eligibility Category</b>		<b>Taxable Income Level</b>	
Cognitive Impairment	7.1	\$19,999 or less	46.1
Severe Multiple Impairments	21.7	\$20,000-\$44,999	33.4
Autism Spectrum Disorder	69.9	\$45,000-\$60,000	12.1
Unreported	1.3	Unreported	8.4
<b>Time in Program</b>		<b>Race</b>	
1-12 months	12.4	White	69.0
13-24 months	14.0	Black/African American	16.9
More than 24 months	68.8	American Indian/Alaska Native	2.1
Unreported		Asian	6.1
<b>Gender</b>		Other	
Male	76.4		5.9
Female	23.3		
Unreported	0.3		

Families respond to a series of questions about their satisfaction with various aspects of the subsidy program. **66% of families reported that the subsidy was adequate to meet their child’s needs.** Figure 6 shows the levels of satisfaction with various aspects of the program.

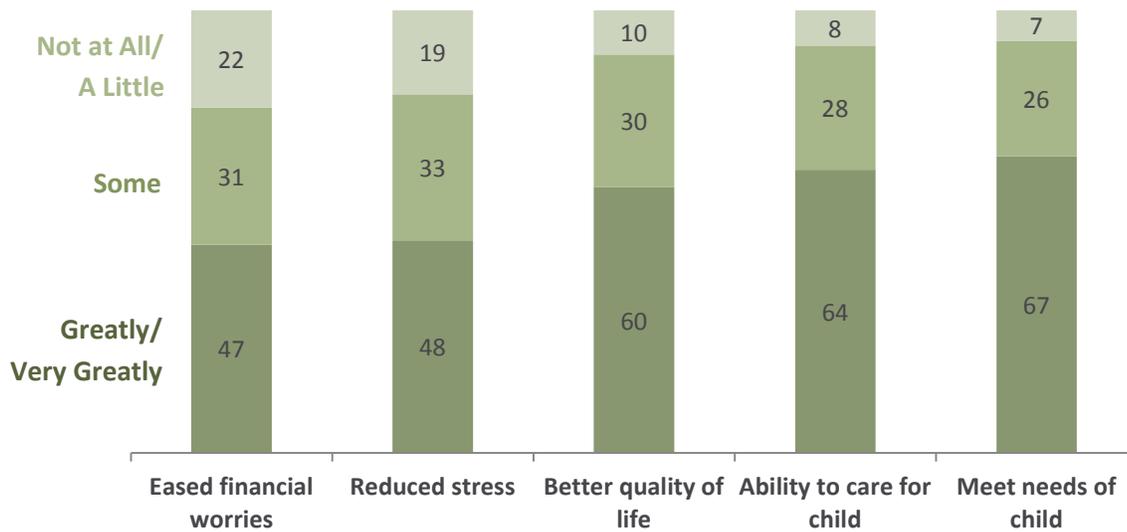
**FIGURE 6. FAMILIES REPORT HIGH SATISFACTION WITH THE SUBSIDY PROGRAM (%)**



**Satisfaction rates are lowest for the amount of the subsidy.** Families do report high levels of satisfaction for the application process, information they received about the program, and their overall experiences

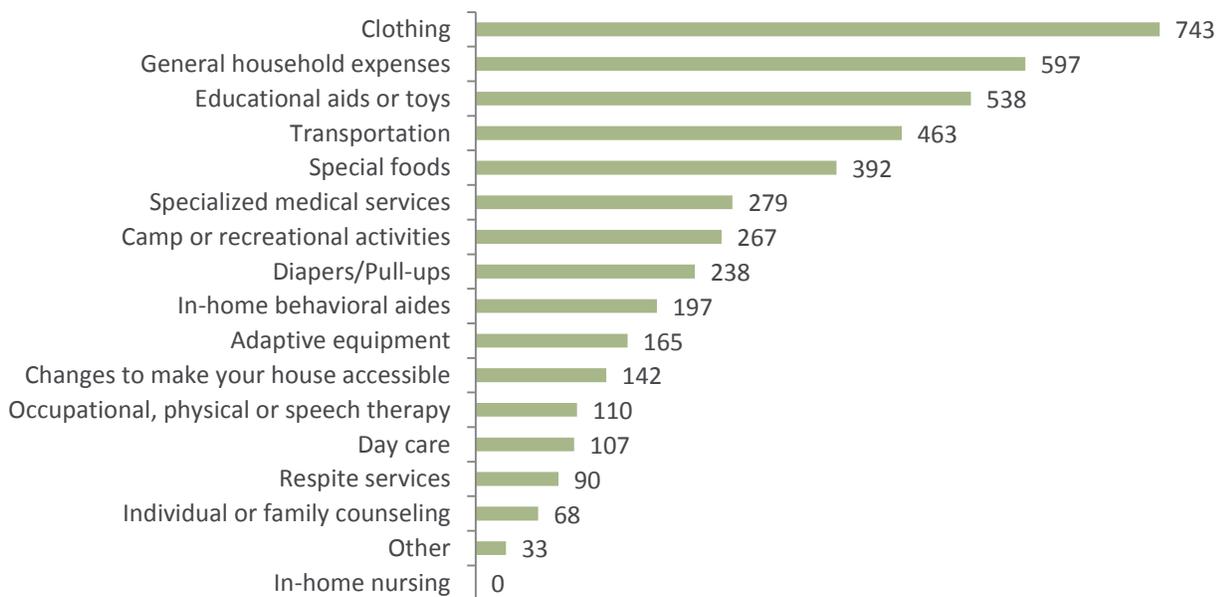
with the program. Families from the lowest income levels tended to report higher levels of satisfaction with the program.<sup>2</sup> Families were also asked a series of questions about the impact of the subsidy on various aspects of their lives. As illustrated in Figure 7, parents reported that the subsidy had the most profound impact in helping them meet their child’s special needs, care for their child, and achieve a better quality of life. The subsidy had a moderate impact on reducing overall stress or easing financial worries.

**FIGURE 7. FAMILIES REPORTED POSITIVE IMPACTS OF SUBSIDY ON THEIR LIVES (%)**



Families report many uses of the subsidy over the past year (see Figure 8).<sup>3</sup> **Families reported using their subsidy for an average of 4.7 different services** (ranging from 0 to 15 services reported).

**Figure 8. Families used many different services with their subsidy**



<sup>2</sup> Application:  $\chi^2(8)=17.8, p=.02$ ; Information:  $\chi^2(8)=26.5, p<.001$ ; Overall:  $\chi^2(8)=15.5, p=.05$

<sup>3</sup> Service use data based on paper surveys only (n=950) due to technical difficulties with on-line form.

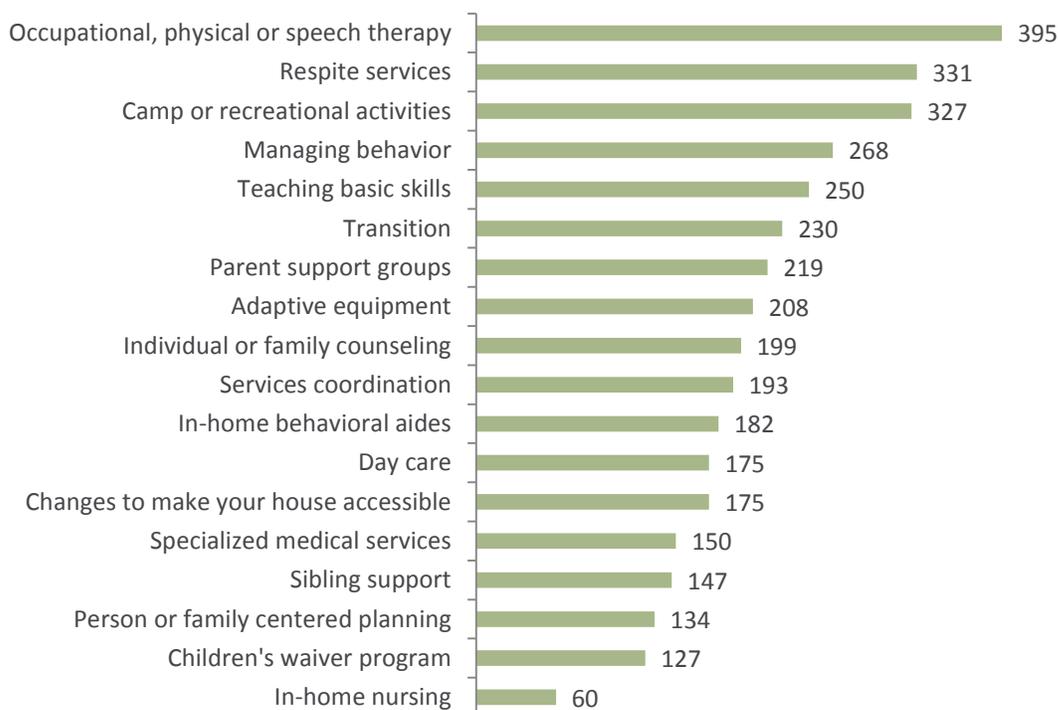
Given the growing number of subsidy children diagnosed with autism (see Table 1, page 4), it is interesting to note that these families report significantly different rates of use of several service categories depending on their child’s diagnosis (see Table 3). Only those services found to be significantly different by group are reported.<sup>4</sup> Children with autism were more in need of behavior-related services while families with children with other diagnoses were more likely to need physical supports.

**TABLE 3. FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM USED THE SUBSIDY MORE OFTEN FOR BEHAVIORAL SERVICES**

Service	Autism (%)	Severe Multiple Impairment or Cognitive Impairment (%)
Camp or recreation	<b>32.1</b>	19.3
Behavioral aides	<b>24.5</b>	12.0
Individual or family counseling	<b>9.6</b>	1.5
Diapers/Pull-ups	19.5	<b>37.8</b>
Adaptive equipment	11.6	<b>31.6</b>
Changes to make house accessible	9.9	<b>26.5</b>
Transportation	43.8	<b>60.7</b>

Families were also asked about which services they perceived as being their highest need from a list of 18 services. Top priorities, rated by families as needed “Often” or “Almost Always” are presented in Figure 9.

**FIGURE 9. FAMILIES RATED THERAPY, RESPITE, AND RECREATION AS THE TOP THREE NEEDS**



<sup>4</sup> Chi-square tests were used. Seventeen tests were performed and the p-values for statistical significant was set at .003 in order to correct for the number of tests conducted.

Finally, families were asked to provide any feedback about the program which overwhelmingly revolved around three main themes (specific parent comments organized around these themes are available on page 12):

- 1) **Deep gratitude and appreciation for the program**
- 2) **Specific examples of how the money was used to enrich their child’s life and alleviate stress**
- 3) **Comments about how the subsidy has remained the same rate and how it doesn’t pay for as much as it used to**

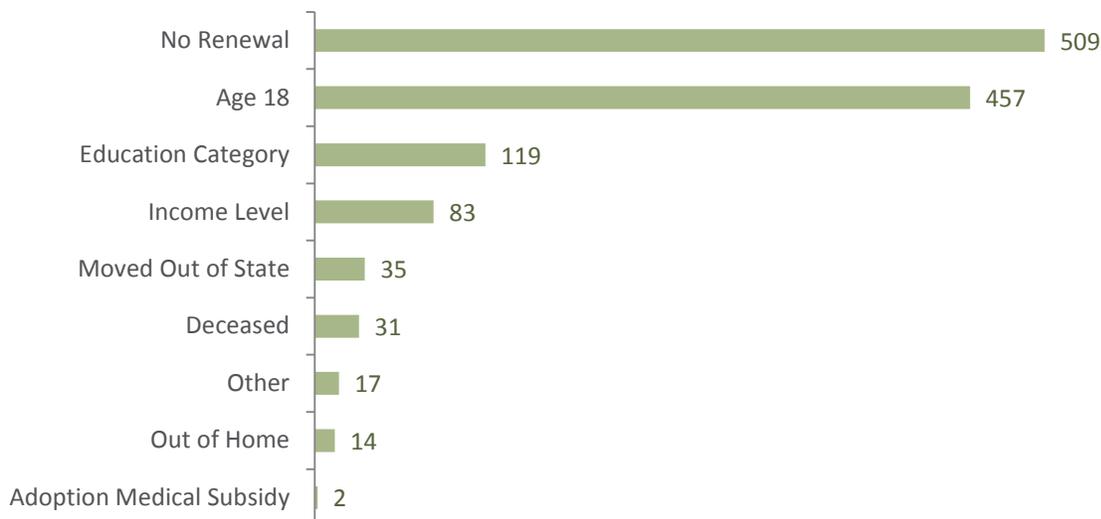
*“Raising a child with special needs can be challenging. Knowing we have community support helps soften the stress load. Keep up the great work.”*

*-Northern Lakes Parent*

## FAMILIES LEAVING THE PROGRAM

In FY14, **1,267 families left the subsidy program**. Children leave the subsidy program for several reasons (Figure 10). Families not renewing enrollment is most frequent reason for leaving the program (40.2%), followed by turning age 18 (36.1%).

**FIGURE 10. 1,267 FAMILIES LEFT THE PROGRAM IN 2014**



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## CONCLUSIONS

The main purpose of the Family Support Subsidy Program is to provide financial support to families who have a child with developmental disabilities so these families can keep their children at home and provide them with the additional supports and services they need. Results of the evaluation support several conclusions about the efficacy of the program.

- **The program is successfully helping to reduce the number of out of home placements for children with severe impairments.** The number of children effected by out of home placements represents only 0.3% of all subsidy children.
- **Families report high satisfaction with the subsidy overall.** Families are satisfied with the application process (88%), information received (88%), and overall experience with the program (90%). The majority of families reported that the subsidy helped their quality of life, ability to care for their child, and helped them meet their child's needs.
- **Families use the subsidy for a wide range of services.** Families reported using an average of 4.7 different services last year with their subsidy. The top five services across all families were: clothing, general household expenses, educational aids or toys, transportation, and special foods. Families with children with autism are more likely use their subsidy for behavioral supports while families with children with severe multiple impairment or cognitive impairment are more likely to use the subsidy for physical supports.
- **The subsidy payment has not kept up with inflation and thus does not cover as many services as it used to.** The subsidy payment has remained at \$222.11 since 1991. If the original payment of \$225.54 in FY85 had kept up with inflation, families should be receiving \$488.45 in 2014 to cover the same expenses. Family's report lowest satisfaction levels with the amount of the subsidy, with less than 50% of families reporting the subsidy helps ease financial worries or reduces stress.

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# ADDITIONAL PARENT COMMENTS

## DEEP GRATITUDE AND APPRECIATION

My family is so very thankful for any bit of help we receive. The stresses that come along with a disabled child can be huge, but we'd like to say thank you for the support subsidy. We've always dealt with great people who've helped us out with this program too.

*Saginaw County*

Overall this is a wonderful program. Not sure how we would manage without it. I'm very grateful Michigan offers this subsidy.

*Detroit Wayne*

I am grateful for the extra financial help this program. I have and will recommend this program to others because the services that I have received have been wonderful.

*Detroit Wayne*

Just want to say thank you sincerely for providing this Family Subsidy.

*Lifeways*

This is such a great program. The woman that handles my son's case has always been so kind and helpful. I hope that this program continues for many years to help families similar to mine that have struggled to comprehend what autism is and means.

*Unknown County*

Thank you for helping me and my family. We're very, very appreciative. Financially, it helps us with bills, family time together and more.

*Detroit Wayne*

We are very thankful for the subsidy program! It helps my family so much as I have 3 children with Autism and can't work full-time or pay for all the extra services they need.

*Montcalm County*

As a widow with four handicapped children, I am very grateful for the help of this program. Thank you so much.

*North Country*

Thank you for always treating our family with dignity and respect.

*Saginaw County*

The subsidy has increased my child's quality of life thereby increasing our family's well-being.

*Detroit Wayne*

No matter what the amount, every dollar helps with the costs of raising a child with a disability.

*Oakland County*

We are very grateful for any and all help we get. We have 6 children, 3 of which have special needs. Thank you so much, as always.

*Unknown County*

## SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF HOW THE MONEY WAS USED

The FSS helps us to be able to do special things together as a family as well as assists us with practical items for our child's care. Thank you. *Ottawa County*

Our child has made immense progress in many areas and we will continue all that we can to our best ability. Extra money or any money provides for special foods, mending of clothes to fit, commuting back and forth to summer camp and/or school meetings and activities. Our child was even invited to a birthday party this summer! *Bay-Arenac*

Thank you for what you help us with. This is a very expensive road and with both parents working we wouldn't be able to do the therapies we do without this help. *Ottawa County*

My son began taking horseback riding lessons six years ago. It has made a huge difference in him. He is confident, strong, and happy. This really helped with his core muscles. He seems to be very comfortable when he's around the horses and they respond very well to him. Without the subsidy program I would have never been able to afford such a great therapy for my son. *Washtenaw County*

This support has pulled us through some hard times like transportation and help to get adaptive things for our child. *Unknown County*

I am greatly appreciative of this. In the past five years I often worried how I would ever be able to get ahead a bit. Our son needs extra visuals so we as a family do things. We can now find velcro shoes and things like that as well. Diapers unfortunately are hard to find for a bigger kid. This has helped put gas in our vehicle, buy snowpants when his get ripped, haircuts, particular foods, school supplies, etc. Has helped ease a little stress. *North Country*

We are grateful for the money we receive each month. Now that our diapers are not covered, it helps to cover that cost. Any assistance at this point is helpful. *Detroit Wayne*

The money we get from this program is so very helpful and we do appreciate the help. With the extra funds I was able to buy him a safety handle for the bath tub as his mobility is an issue after his spinal cord surgery in January. This extra money for us is the difference between making it and not making it. Thank you so very much! *Monroe County*

Thank you for this. Without the subsidy my son wouldn't have OT. He loves to draw so it helps with all the rolls of paper that he goes through. *Allegan County*

The subsidy received is very useful for purchasing learning toys and things for my son. I had to get him a new swing for indoors during the last year and the money received enabled me to do that. This help is greatly appreciated. *Detroit Wayne*

## COMMENTS ABOUT SUBSIDY AMOUNT

Although I am very happy to have some financial support, it is a drop in the bucket for the help that is really needed to care for my son. I am however very glad and thankful for what you have been able to provide.

*Livingston County*

I am grateful to have the Family Support Subsidy. Our medical expenses are very high. The subsidy only covers 2 days of therapy a week each month. Our normal schedule is 3 times a week 52 weeks a year. Thank you for helping us out. Every little bit helps.

*Monroe County*

I am very appreciative of this program. It helps getting through the month. With the price of food, gas, paper products and clothes going up it would be nice if this program had a cost of living rate with it. It sure wouldn't hurt. Thank you.

*Bay-Arenac*

The money has been very helpful but with the cost of living going up the amount of the money is getting harder and harder to stretch. Thanks for the help.

*Unknown County*

While I appreciate this very much. With gas, medical expenses, and costs in general going up it really just does not stretch like it used to.

*Lifeways*

I am thankful for the subsidy but the amount is very low and has not gone up in a long time despite inflation. Now that respite is no longer available to people without Medicaid this is the only CMH service we receive. We are not eligible for SSI for him either. An increase would be very helpful.

*Ottawa County*

We have received the subsidy for our autistic son for almost 14 years. We are curious as to why the amount of the subsidy hasn't/doesn't increase with the cost of living? It's been the same amount every year.

*Clinton-Eaton-  
Ingham*