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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 2015



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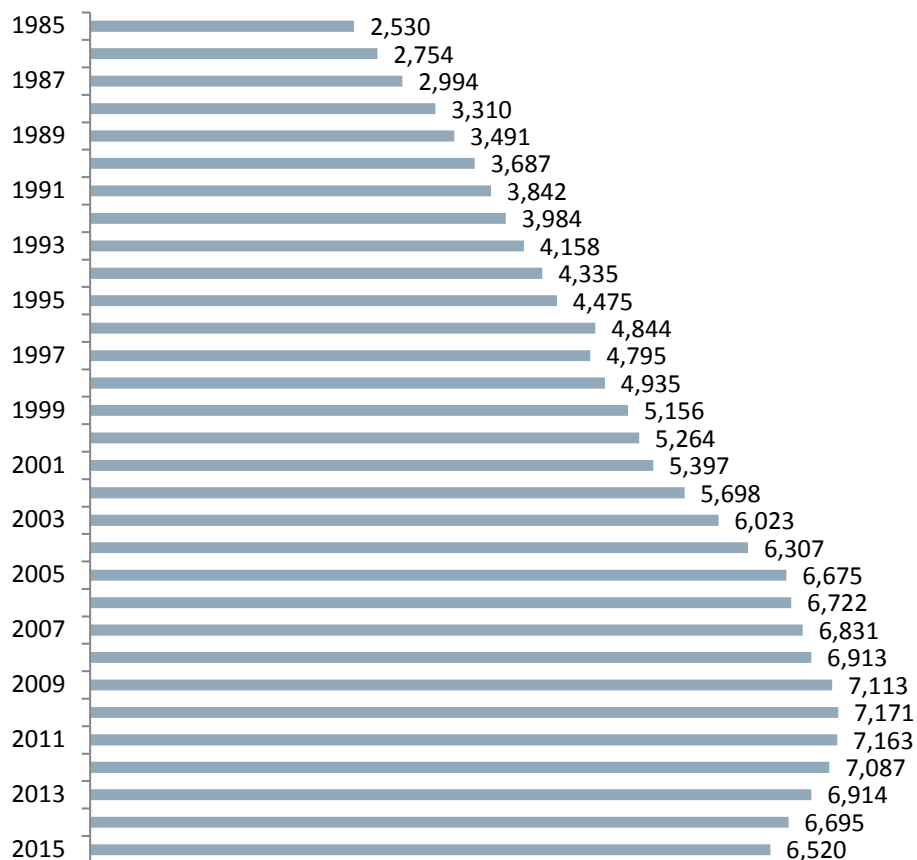
# FAMILY SUPPORT SUBSIDY PROGRAM

## 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 Departments of Community Health and Human Services 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**



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 advertised 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 advertise the program within their geographic locations. CMHSPs target their efforts to local public school systems, CMHSP access centers, Early On<sup>®</sup>, hospitals, physician offices, public health agencies and more.

***“The Family Support Subsidy Program is very helpful for families who are providing for special needs children. It can be very difficult...this subsidy helps a lot. Our children need lots of love and additional support and this helps.”***

***-Detroit Wayne 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

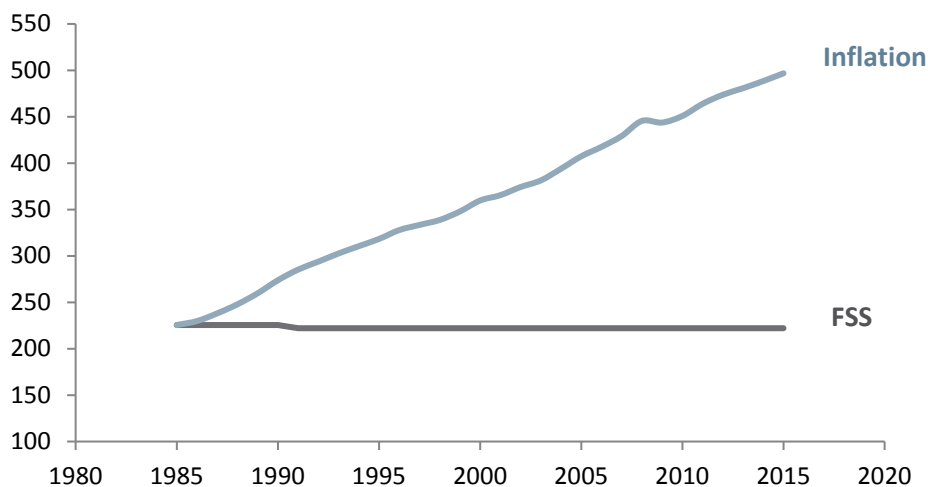
The subsidy is paid to the parent or legal guardian on behalf of the child. Checks are disbursed to families monthly. The subsidy income is not taxable and families may use the subsidy for any purpose that helps them care for their child. Payments were \$222.11 per month in Fiscal Year 2015. The original payment in Fiscal Year 1985 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.

*“While I greatly appreciate the subsidy, the amount barely puts a dent into the actual monthly expense of my special needs child. I pay \$320 per month out of pocket for therapy not covered by insurance.”*

*-Ottawa County Parent*

In Fiscal Year 1991, 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 2015, \$496.81 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 (2015 SSI rate in Michigan was \$488.67).

**FIGURE 2. FAMILY SUPPORT SUBSIDY 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 database, and (4) a family questionnaire sent to parents annually.

## WHO RECEIVES THE SUBSIDY?

In Fiscal Year 2015, **6,520 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 10.8 years. The majority of children receiving the subsidy were white (61.2%), male (74.7%), from the lowest income level (72.4%), and diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (70.9%).

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 United States. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that the 2015 national prevalence rate for autism spectrum disorder is estimated at 1 in 68 births. According to the Michigan Department of Education, there were 17,986 children receiving special education services under the autism spectrum disorder eligibility at the end of 2014.<sup>1</sup>

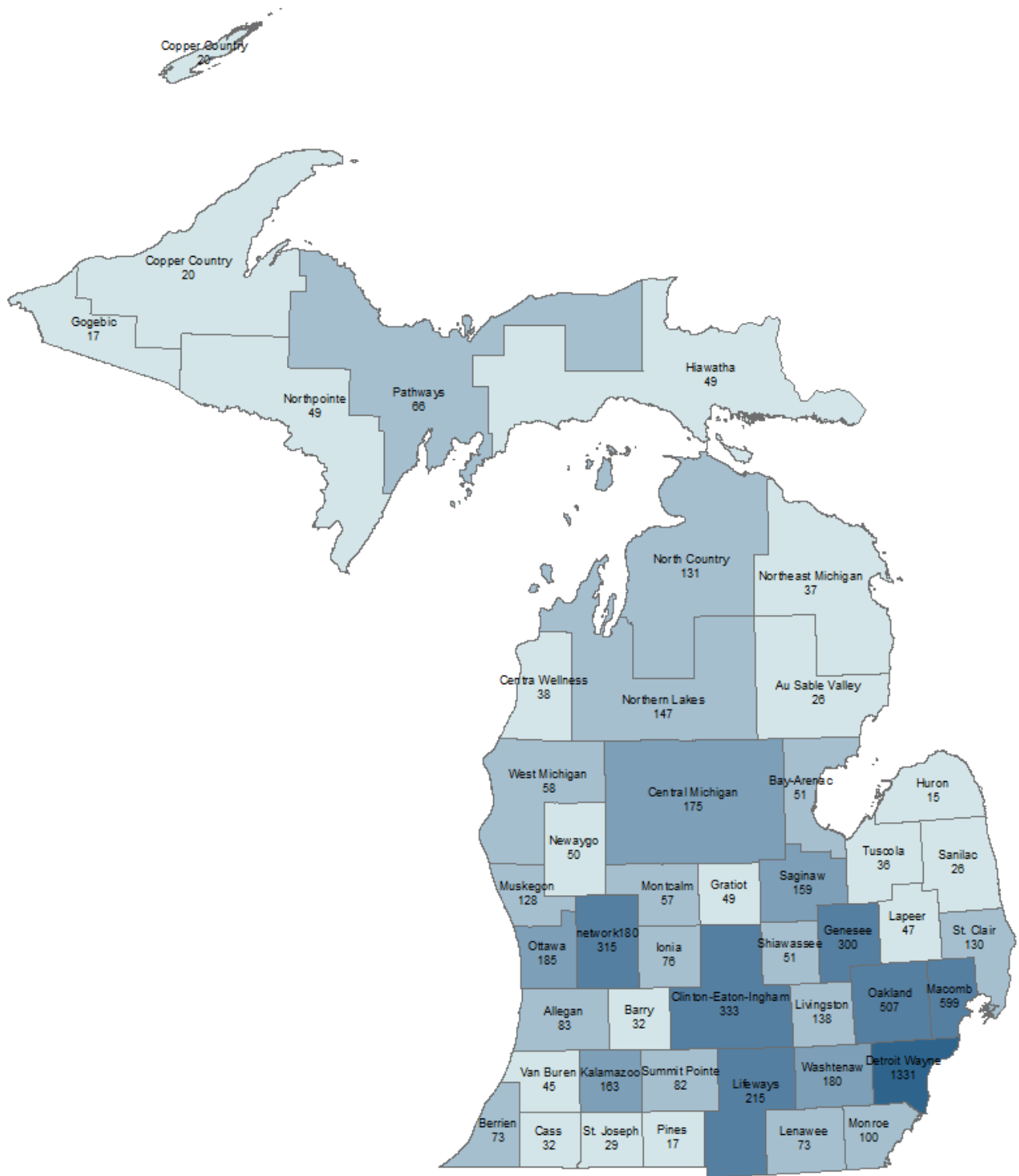
Families throughout the entire state receive the subsidy. Figure 3 shows the geographic distribution of these families across the state, by CMHSP. Detroit Wayne CMHSP serves the largest number of families, accounting for 20.4% of all recipients in the state.

**TABLE 1. ELIGIBLE CHILDREN PREDOMINANTLY WHITE, MALE, AUTISTIC AND LOW INCOME**

Demographics	% Enrolled Families
<b>Educational Eligibility Category</b>	
Autism Spectrum Disorder	70.9%
Severe Multiple Impairments	22.1%
Cognitive Impairment	7.0%
<b>Taxable Income Level</b>	
\$19,999 or less	72.4%
\$20,000-\$44,999	21.2%
\$45,000-\$60,000	6.4%
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	74.7%
Female	24.9%
Unreported	0.4%
<b>Age</b>	
1-3 years	4.0%
4-6 years	14.8%
7-9 years	19.3%
10-12 years	22.2%
13-15 years	25.0%
16-18 years	14.7%
<b>Race</b>	
White	61.2%
Black/African American	22.7%
Asian	1.7%
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.7%
Other	6.5%
Unknown	7.2%

<sup>1</sup> From <http://www.gvsu.edu/autismcenter>. 2014 ASD numbers Date: May 2, 2016

**FIGURE 3. TOTAL NUMBER OF SUBSIDY FAMILIES BY COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES PROGRAM**

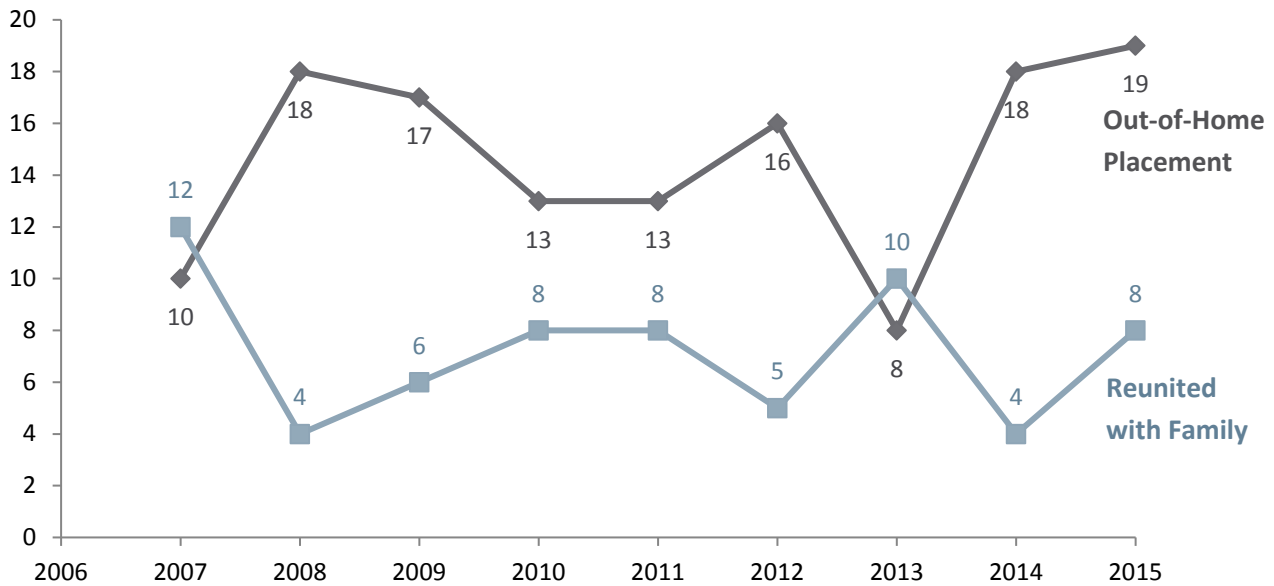




## PROGRAM IMPACT: REDUCING OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENTS

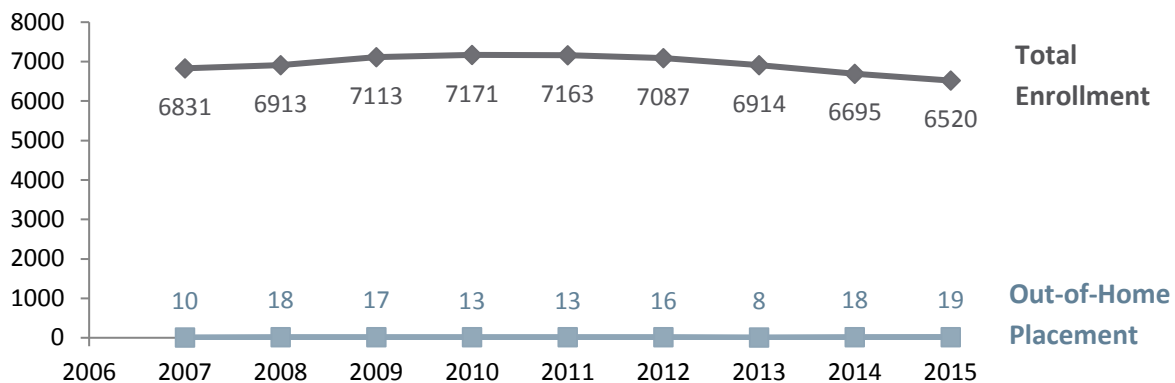
Follow-up at the end of the fiscal year indicated that **19 children (0.3%)** were placed out of home during Fiscal Year 2015. The number of children enrolled in the subsidy program who have been placed out-of-home has dropped from a high of 45 in Fiscal Year 1986 to 19 children in Fiscal Year 2015. No families qualified for the one-time double subsidy payment (provided to assist in a child's return to home from placement). **Eight children went home to their families**, after an absence, and were returned to the subsidy program. **No 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

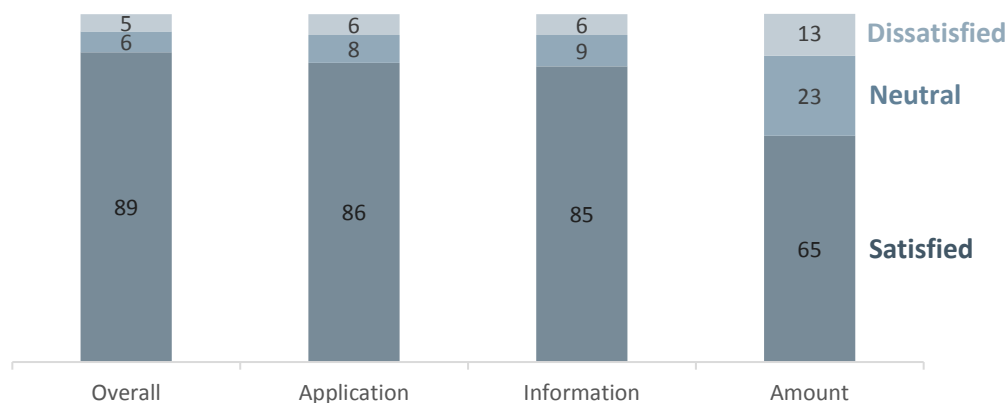
Each year, families have the opportunity to provide feedback on the subsidy program. In Fiscal Year 2015, **1,526 families responded to the annual family survey** (23.4% response rate). Demographic characteristics of survey respondents were comparable to all subsidy families. One respondent indicated that his/her child returned home from an out-of-home placement within the year and that the subsidy had substantially influenced that decision.

Families respond to a series of questions about their satisfaction with various aspects of the subsidy program. Figure 6 shows the levels of satisfaction with various aspects of the program. **Satisfaction rates are lowest for the amount of the subsidy.** While 65% of families reported satisfaction with the subsidy amount, only 56% reported that the subsidy amount was “Usually” or “Always” adequate to meet their child’s needs. 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 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 and care for their child.

**TABLE 2. SURVEY RESPONDENTS HAD SIMILAR DEMOGRAPHICS COMPARED TO ALL FSSP FAMILIES**

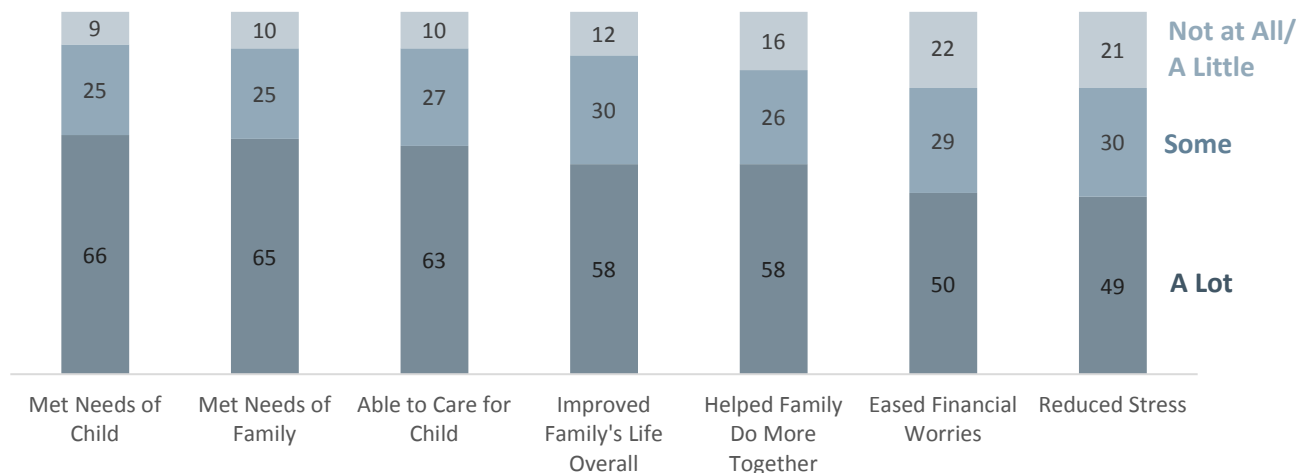
Demographics	% Survey Respondents
<b>Educational Eligibility Category</b>	
Autism Spectrum Disorder	70.8%
Severe Multiple Impairments	21.7%
Cognitive Impairment	6.2%
Unreported	1.3%
<b>Time in Program</b>	
1-12 months	12.2%
13-24 months	11.2%
More than 24 months	72.9%
Unreported	3.7%
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	76.7%
Female	22.8%
Unreported	0.5%
<b>Taxable Income Level</b>	
\$19,999 or less	49.1%
\$20,000-\$44,999	32.2%
\$45,000-\$60,000	12.1%
Unreported	6.6%
<b>Race</b>	
White	63.4%
Black/African American	19.0%
Asian/Pacific Islander	7.0%
American Indian/Alaska Native	1.3%
Other	9.3%

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



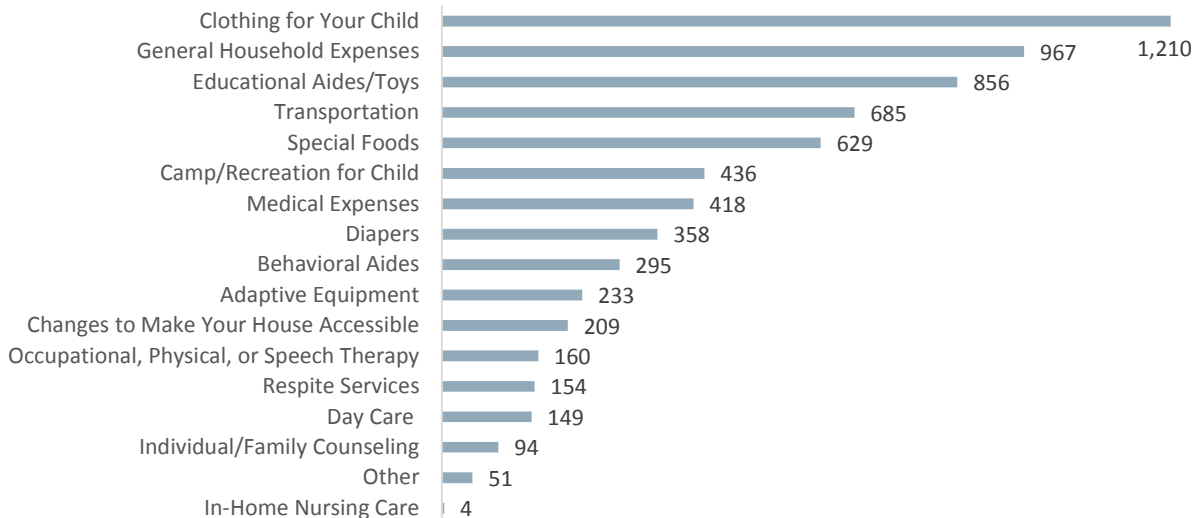
The subsidy had a moderate impact on achieving a better quality of life, reducing overall stress, or easing financial worries. Average satisfaction and impact scores were calculated and used to compare ratings across different family demographic characteristics. Average satisfaction scores did not significantly vary across race, income or diagnosis groups. Average impact scores did significantly vary by race (non-black minority families reported higher impact than white families) and income (families reporting the lowest income rated higher impact than the highest income group).<sup>2</sup>

**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). **Families reported using their subsidy for an average of 4.5 different services** (ranging from 0 to 15 services reported).

**FIGURE 8. FAMILIES USED MANY DIFFERENT SERVICES WITH THEIR SUBSIDY**



<sup>2</sup> Non-black minority families (*Mean*=2.51, *Standard Deviation*=.64); white Families (*Mean*=2.37, *Standard Deviation*=.71;  $F(2,1506)=4.12, p=.016$ ). \$19,999 or less (*Mean*=2.45, *Standard Deviation*=.69); \$45,000-\$60,000 (*Mean*=2.30, *Standard Deviation*=.73;  $F(2,1418)=3.39, p=.034$ ). Post-hoc Bonferroni correction used for group comparisons.

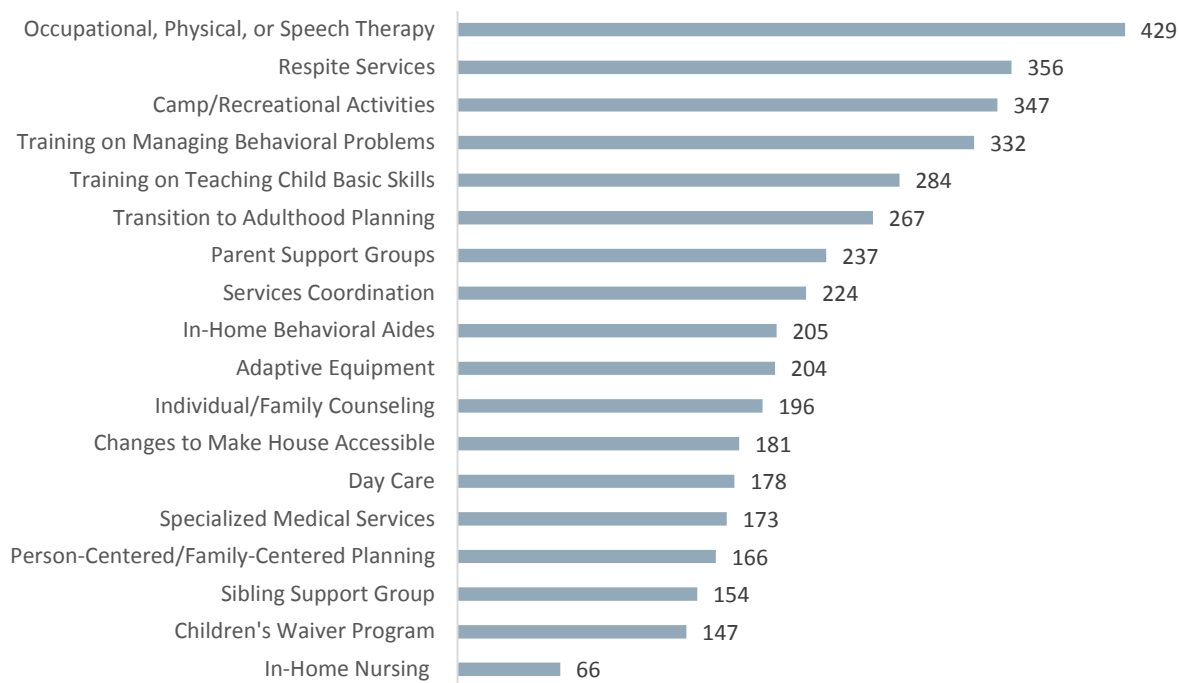
Given the growing number of subsidy children diagnosed with autism (see Table 1, page 4), it is interesting to note that these families report significantly different rates of use of several service categories depending on their child’s diagnosis (see Table 3). Only those services found to be significantly different by group are reported.<sup>3</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 (highlighted in bold in Table 3).

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

Service	Autism	Severe Multiple Impairments or Cognitive Impairment
Special Foods	<b>43.5%</b>	35.2%
Camp or recreation	<b>33.2%</b>	17.1%
Behavioral aides	<b>22.0%</b>	13.1%
Individual or family counseling	<b>7.3%</b>	3.1%
Diapers/Pull-ups	20.5%	<b>31.5%</b>
Adaptive equipment	11.2%	<b>26.1%</b>
Changes to make house accessible	11.1%	<b>19.7%</b>
Transportation	40.6%	<b>54.9%</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>3</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.

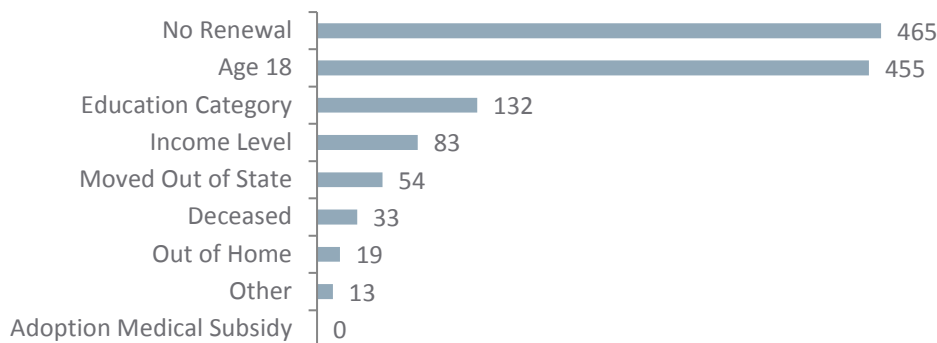
Finally, families were asked to provide any feedback about the program which overwhelmingly revolved around three main themes (specific parent comments organized around these themes are available on page 12):

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

## FAMILIES LEAVING THE PROGRAM

In Fiscal Year 2015, **1,254 families left the subsidy program**. Children leave the subsidy program for several reasons (Figure 10). Families not renewing enrollment is the most frequent reason for leaving the program (37.1%), followed by turning age 18 (36.3%).

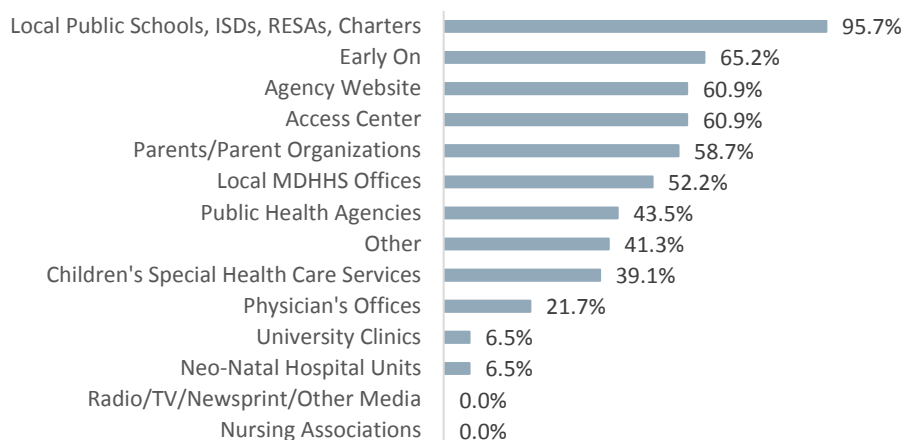
**FIGURE 10. 1,254 FAMILIES LEFT THE PROGRAM IN 2015**



## CMHSP OUTREACH EFFORTS

Outreach efforts to encourage program participation were reported by 46 CMHSPs for Fiscal Year 2015. Agencies reported reaching out to an average of 5.5 other organizations (range from 1 to 11). The vast majority (95.7%) of agencies direct efforts to local schools (see Figure 11). Comments about program issues were mostly concerning logistics in getting children enrolled and communication with schools about eligibility.

**FIGURE 11. CMHSP REACH OUT TO MANY DIFFERENT TYPES OF ORGANIZATIONS**



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## CONCLUSIONS

The main purpose of the FSSP is to provide financial support to families who have a child with developmental disabilities to assist families in keeping 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 affected 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 (86%), information received (85%), and overall experience with the program (89%). 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 4.5 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 impairments 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 Fiscal Year 1985 had kept up with inflation, families should be receiving \$496.81 in 2015 to cover the same expenses. Families 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

We want to say thank you. We GREATLY appreciate the Family Support Subsidy Program. Although our little guy's financial needs are great, this helps us out a lot. *Saginaw County*

The Family Support Subsidy is a huge help, and we are so appreciative of this. *Ottawa County*

This subsidy has been such a blessing to our family. I have been out of work for three years now in order to care for my daughter. The subsidy is something we know we can count on each month without any hassle. We appreciate it so much and are so grateful. *Lifeways*

I am grateful for any help emotionally, physically and financially. I recently lost my job of 11 years so now I am unemployed and this subsidy is the only income my family has currently. *Lapeer County*

The subsidy program is very much appreciated. It has helped my family tremendously. Thank you. *Detroit Wayne*

We are very thankful this program is available. Every month it seems to help with something different but always something very much needed for this family. It is hard to come up with enough money every month for things that are needed. *Montcalm County*

Thank you for all that you give to us. It has eased our burdens and given an opportunity to better care for our daughter. Your assistance is greatly appreciated. *Livingston County*

We are so very appreciative of the subsidy program. It allows us to do things as a family. Things can sometimes be overwhelming financially so it really is a blessing to us. *Saginaw County*

On behalf of my family, I thank you so much for helping my child out this year with extra funds. It's helped me and my child so much that words can't explain. *Detroit Wayne*

This is a wonderful grant that has helped me and my child tremendously, and I sincerely appreciate it. It has helped me provide for my child's needs. Thank you! *Lifeways*

Just want to express my gratitude for the subsidy. Financially it helps us immensely. No words can truly reflect the relief when our child receives his monthly check. It is a Godsend, and I believe that the government does not owe us anything. We as parents decided to have children, therefore we should be responsible to provide for them. Yet not one of us expects to have a sick child with needs beyond our means. *network180*

## SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF HOW THE MONEY WAS USED

I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you! We are finding new challenges with our child and this subsidy helps with therapy and medications.

*Livingston County*

Our family appreciates the Family Support Subsidy program. These resources allowed us to begin job skills training while in high school for our son (not made available at school). It also helps us pay for high co-pays for needed speech and occupational therapies, special needs in-home childcare as well as psychology services. Thank you very much.

*Central Michigan*

Thank you, thank you, thank you! This money has helped our autistic son have a happier life. We were able to purchase items that have helped him with hand/eye coordination, an iPod for music that soothes him and music therapy classes with a private instructor. These things would not have been possible without the subsidy. We are currently saving up to get him an adult tricycle. I appreciate this support so much! I only wish we would have known about it sooner! Thanks again.

*Lifeways*

The subsidy has helped greatly to provide my child with things she needs - pull-ups, learning tools, visual aids, headphones, etc.

*St. Joseph County*

The subsidy has helped us with transportation (handicap plates), specific drink and eating utensils, educational toys, transportation, equipment like her wagon, and most recently helped pay for her new wheelchair ramp. This subsidy has been greatly appreciated.

*St. Clair County*

We are so thankful for the subsidy. Our son has been able to enjoy more camping and recreation because of it which is something that we could never afford before. We've also purchased things that challenge him and test his skills. We got him a bike that is adapted for him, some toys that he is actually interested in, and we've been able to take him bowling! He loves it! Thank you.

*Lapeer County*

This program helps my son and our family out so much. We have put our son in after-school activities and pay for his medications with the subsidy.

*Allegan County*

We appreciate the help through this program. It allows us to spend more family time together going to places we can all enjoy. The subsidy also affords my son to go to the school he has always attended by helping with the daily transportation costs, as we do not qualify for appropriate busing. Thank you so much for this program, it does make a difference in our lives.

*Clinton-Eaton-  
Ingham*

It helps pay for the deductibles for all of his different therapy services (occupational therapy, physical therapy and now applied behavior analysis). It also helps to cover supplements for Autism Spectrum Disorder as well as apps on the home Kindle and iPad.

*Northern Lakes*



## COMMENTS ABOUT SUBSIDY AMOUNT

I am grateful for the amount we receive although it only puts a dent in the dietary needs (gluten and dairy free diet) and the tactile (clothing, weighted blanket, etc.) issues we have. Very grateful for this program.	<i>network180</i>
This program has been very beneficial to my son/family. I feel the amount is insufficient to meet all the needs.	<i>St. Joseph County</i>
The subsidy is useful but the amount could be higher.	<i>network180</i>
Please don't get me wrong all assistance received is greatly appreciated! I am able to provide MORE with the subsidy; however the amount barely scratches the surface.	<i>Central Michigan</i>
I'm very thankful for this program even though it's not much money. But every little dollar helps. Thank you for doing what you do and God bless.	<i>Detroit Wayne</i>
I'm not sure how the amount of the subsidy was calculated but with the rising costs of food, over-the-counter medicines, prescriptions and clothing, the subsidy should be increased to help offset these expenses. I must say it's better than not receiving any assistance at all. So thank you.	<i>network180</i>
I just want to say how much my son and I truly appreciate this program. It helps us in so many ways in our lives. I wish it was more, but I'm very grateful for what we receive.	<i>Oakland County</i>
I appreciate the subsidy. Obviously it would always be helpful if the subsidy were to increase but I am grateful to get anything at all. I am hopeful this will at least continue at the present level for some time to come.	<i>network180</i>
I appreciate the subsidy because every little bit helps. My child's needs far outweigh what the subsidy provides monthly, but I am grateful for it. Thank you.	<i>Oakland County</i>
Even though FSS doesn't cover a lot of my child's needs, please don't take it away.	<i>Ottawa County</i>
Autism Spectrum Disorder is not considered a disability so a lot of services we need are out-of-pocket expenses. Therapies such as occupational speech and music cost so much money for 30 minutes. A yearly increase would help.	<i>Oakland County</i>
Although the money doesn't go very far, I am very grateful for the help we receive.	<i>Oakland County</i>