

FY2019

Family Support Subsidy Annual
Report





Report Prepared By:
DaSha Stockton, Senior Research & Evaluation Specialist
Center for Health Equity Practice
2479 Woodlake Circle
Okemos, MI 48864



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Family Support Subsidy Program

History

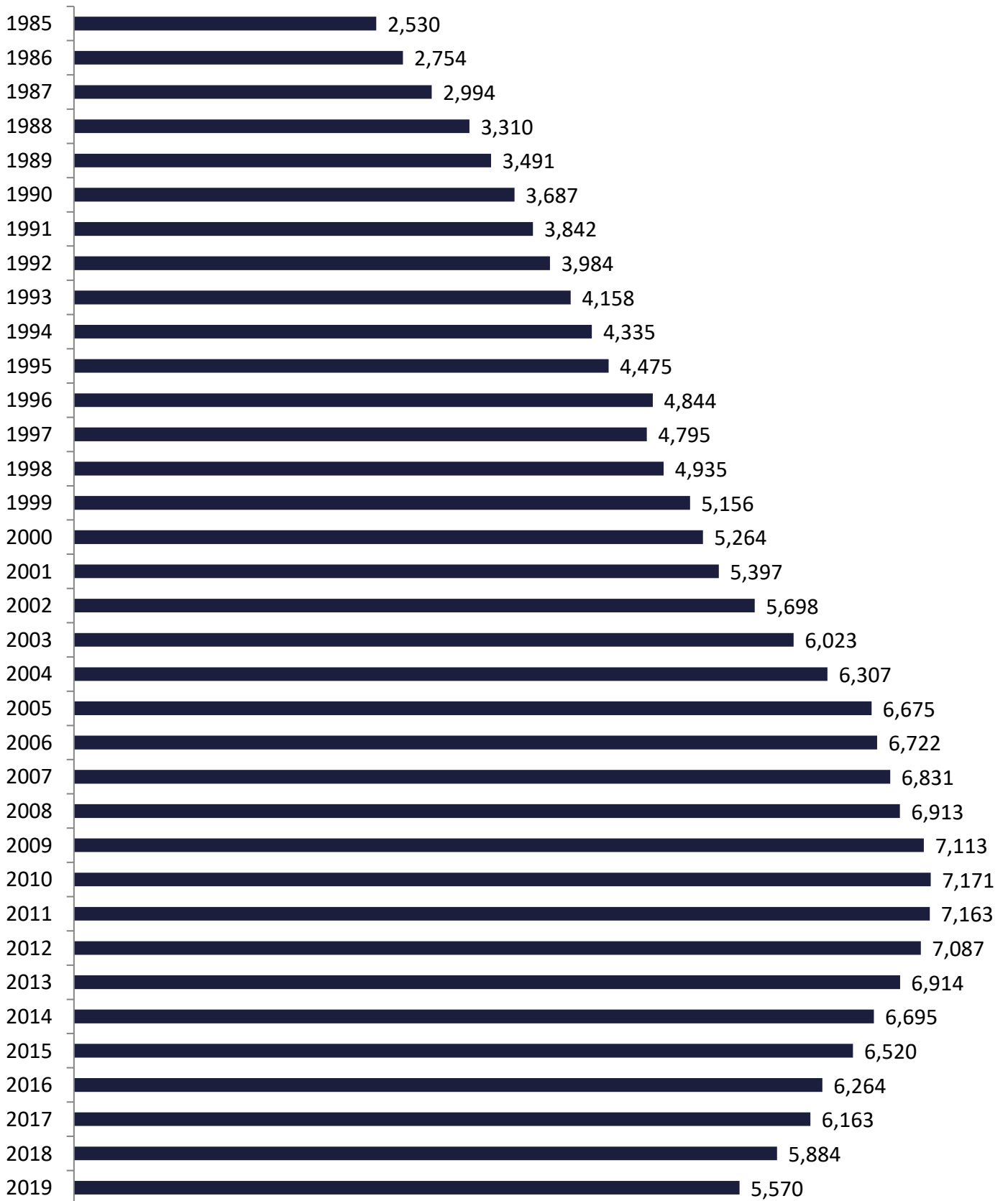
Supporting families is a priority of Michigan's public mental health system, as evidenced by the Family Support Subsidy Program (FSSP). Michigan's philosophy is that children with intellectual and developmental disabilities, like all children, need loving and enduring family relationships. The policy of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) is 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 intellectual and developmental disabilities. The FSSP provides vital monetary support for families of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities essentially to assist with the extraordinary expenses associated with raising them.

Children with severe intellectual and 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 intellectual and developmental disabilities incur many expenses that other families do not. The FSSP 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.

On the next page, 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



Eligibility Requirements

Families may be eligible for this program if: 1) their Michigan taxable income does not exceed \$60,000, as shown on their most recent state of Michigan tax return, 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.

Our daughter is on specialized foods that our insurance doesn't fully cover, and our family doesn't qualify for diapers through insurance, so the subsidy helps us in the monthly cost of these items.

~Parent from Missaukee County

The program is advertised on the MDHHS website at https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/0,5885,7-339-71550_2941_4868_7145_81705---,00.html. 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[®], local MDHHS offices, public health agencies, physician offices, hospitals and more.

The application process was designed to be simple, logical and include documents already available to families. The application form must be substantiated by a copy of the child's birth certificate to verify age, a copy of the family's most recent Michigan income tax return to verify taxable income, and verification from the local school district of an eligible special educational category. Although it is not a requirement for eligibility, it is strongly encouraged that the family provides the child's Social Security number. Upon receipt of the completed application, the CMHSP verifies the family's eligibility. Coverage in the program begins the month following the CMHSP's receipt of the completed application and supporting documentation. Each year, in the birth month of their child, the family is required to complete an annual renewal to re-verify eligibility for the program.

Subsidy Payments

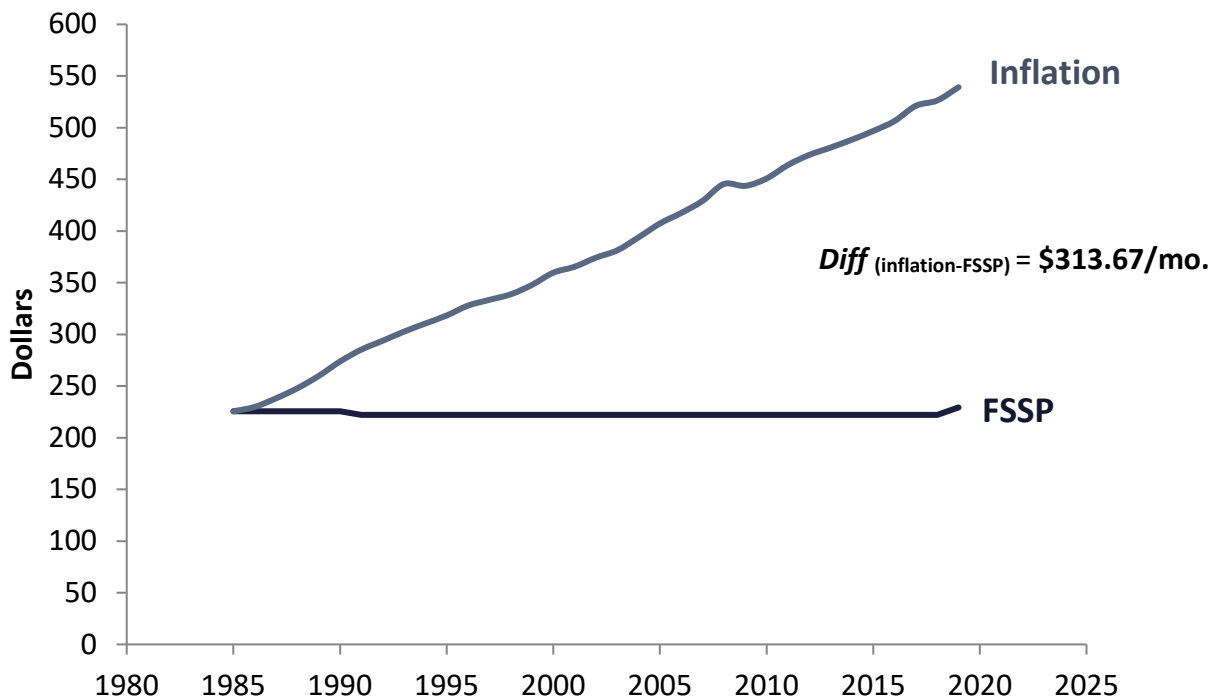
The subsidy is paid to the parent or legal guardian on behalf of the child. Checks are disbursed to families monthly. The subsidy income is not taxable and families may use the subsidy for any purpose that helps them care for their child. Payments were \$229.31 per month in Fiscal Year 2019. The original 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 percent 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.

The subsidy has helped my family drastically by helping provide transportation, groceries, clothes and shelter for my family on a month-to-month basis.

~Parent from Wayne County

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 27 years. The MDHHS budget conference committee workgroup from the Bureau of Budget Financial Operations Administration inquired about increasing the FSS amount for FY 2019. Effective October 1, 2018, the Family Support Subsidy increased the subsidy amount by \$7.20, bringing the monthly payment to \$229.31, which is reflected in the current FY 2019 report. The overall purchasing power of these dollars has declined over time (see Figure 2). In 2019, \$539.21 was needed to have the same buying power as \$229.31 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 (\$531.33 in 2019).

Figure 2. Family Support Subsidy amount has not kept pace with inflation



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 Family Support 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 FSSP database, and (4) a family questionnaire sent to parents annually.

Who Receives the Subsidy?

In Fiscal Year 2019, 5,570 families received the subsidy in Michigan. Demographic characteristics of subsidy families are reported in Table 1. The majority of children receiving the subsidy were white (56.95 percent), male (74.5 percent), from the lowest income level (72.9 percent), and had autism spectrum disorder (74.8 percent).

There has been noticeable growth in the proportion of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, mirroring the increase in this diagnosis in the United States. According to the Michigan Department of Education, there was an increase of more than 1,500 students enrolled in Michigan schools who met eligibility as a student with autism spectrum disorder between the 2017-2018 school year (20,595) and the 2018-2019 school year (22,455).² Figure 3 shows the geographic distribution of these families across the state, by CMHSP.

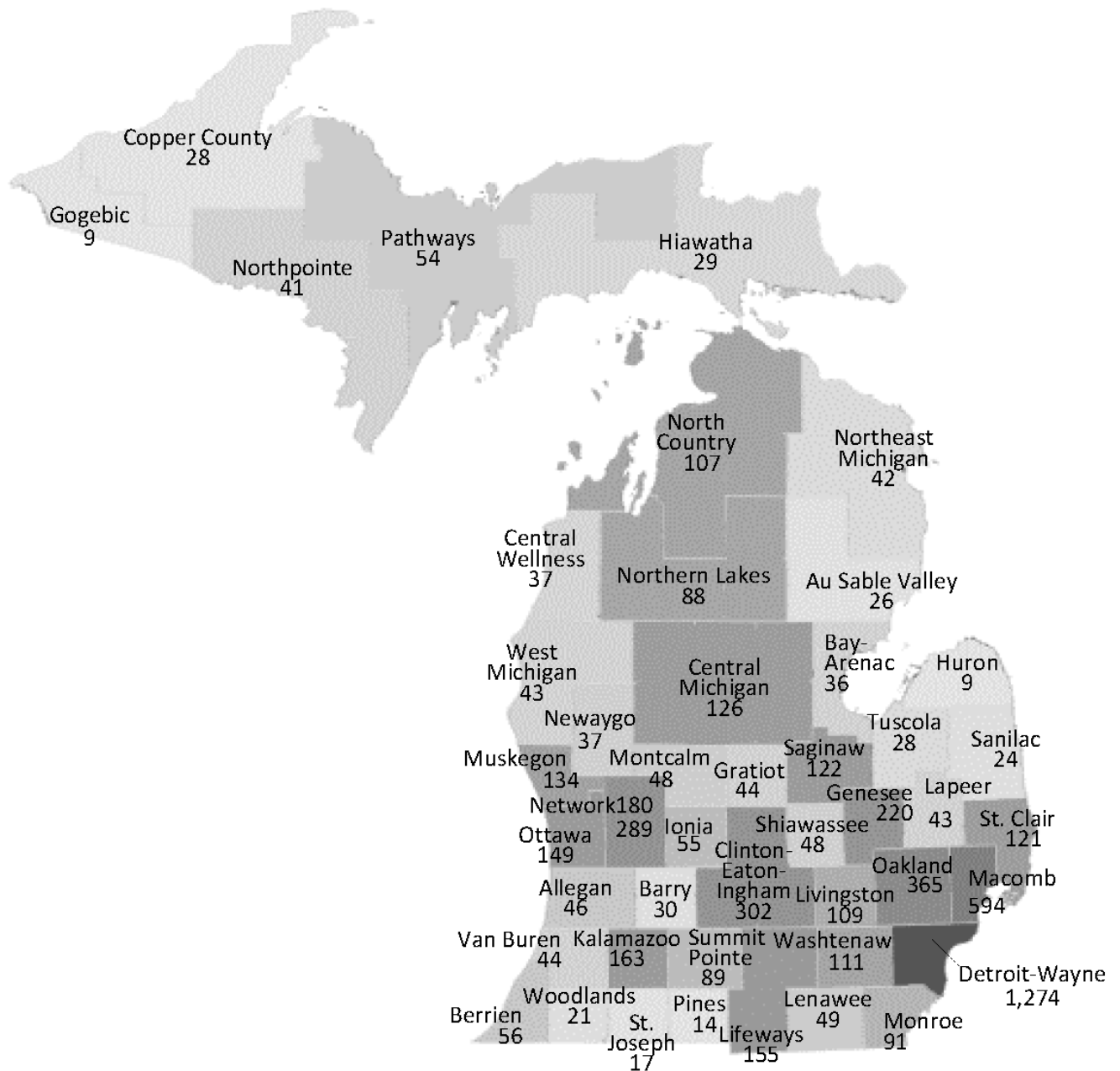
Table 1. Program recipients are predominantly white, male, autistic and low- income

Demographics	% Enrolled Families
Educational Eligibility Category	
Autism Spectrum Disorder	74.8
Severe Multiple Impairments	18.9
Cognitive Impairment	6.3
Taxable Income Level¹	
\$19,999 or less	72.9
\$20,000-\$44,999	21.5
\$45,000-\$60,000	5.6
Gender	
Male	74.5
Female	25.1
Unreported	0.4
Age	
0-3 years	3.5
4-6 years	14.2
7-9 years	21.2
10-12 years	22.1
13-15 years	22.6
16-18 years	16.4
Race	
White	56.9
Black or African American	24.5
Asian	1.9
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.7
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.1
Other	4.6
Unknown	11.3

¹ Five families reported earning over \$60,000 (0.09% of all FSS recipients)

² For additional information go to: <https://www.mischooldata.org/historical-special-education-enrollment/>

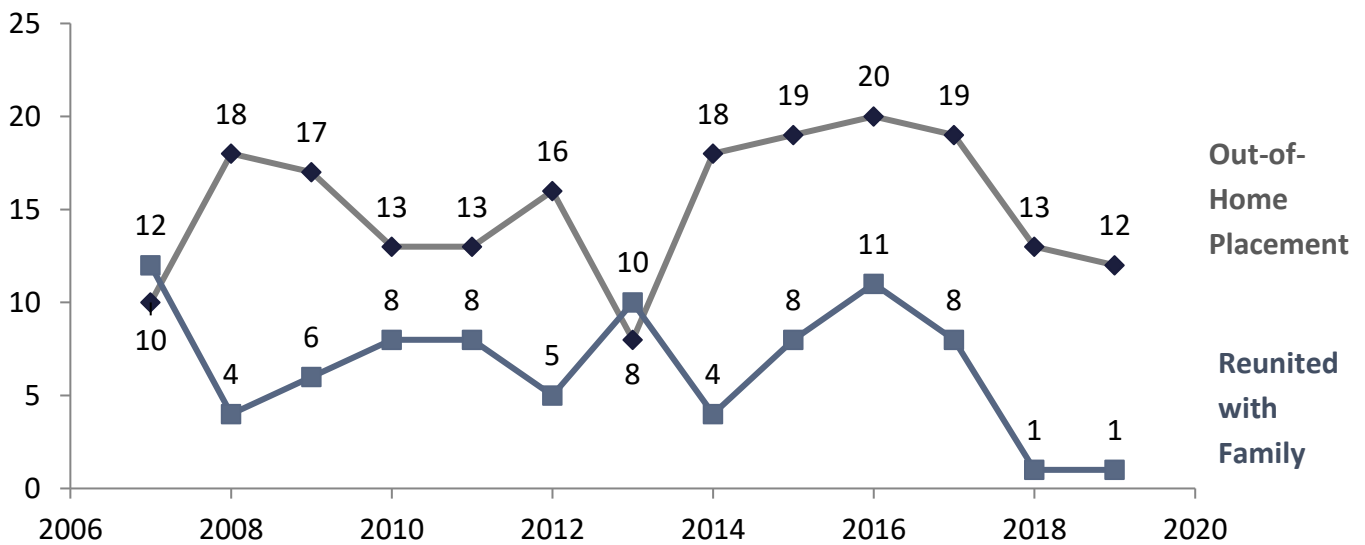
Figure 3. Total number of subsidy families by Community Mental Health Services Program



Program Impact: Reducing Out-of-Home Placements

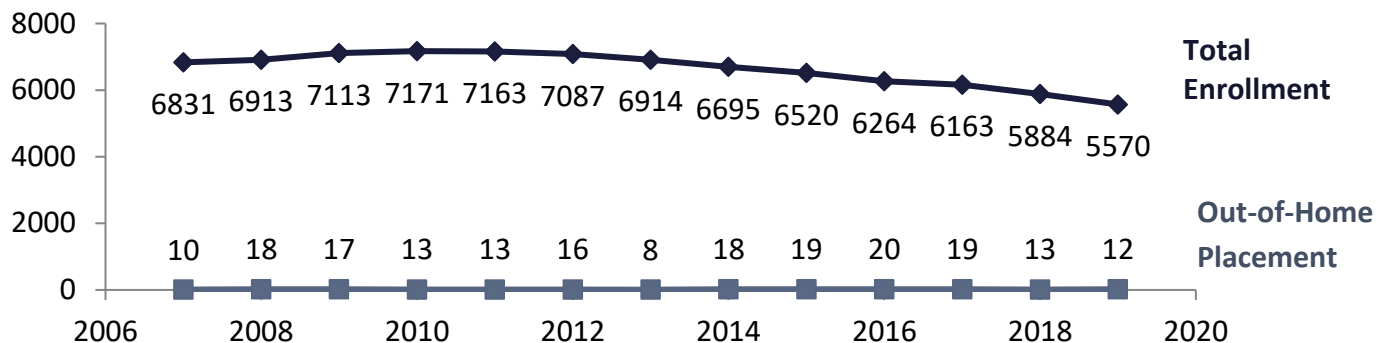
Follow-up at the end of the fiscal year indicated that 12 children (less than 0.5 percent of all children in the program) were placed out of home during Fiscal Year 2019. The number of children enrolled in the subsidy program who have been placed out-of-home has dropped from a high of 45 in Fiscal Year 1986. No families qualified for the one-time double subsidy payment (provided to assist in a child’s return to home from placement). One child went home to his/her family, 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 percent of all children in the program) impacted by out-of-home placement. This reflects 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 family support subsidy program. In Fiscal Year 2019, 873 families responded to the annual family survey (15.7 percent response rate compared to last year 10.9 percent response rate).

Demographic characteristics of survey respondents were comparable to all subsidy families (see Table 2).

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 with only 44 percent “Very Satisfied.”³ Families do report being “Very Satisfied” with the application process (77.7 percent), information they received about the program (71.5 percent), and their overall experiences with the program (74.7 percent). 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 (56.6 percent), meet their family’s needs (55.3 percent), and be able to care for their child (53.2 percent). Parallel to lower satisfaction rates with subsidy amount, families report the least impact of the subsidy on reducing stress (45.2 percent) and easing financial worries (41.7 percent).⁴ One family indicated that their child returned home from an out-of-home placement within the year, however the subsidy did not influence that decision.

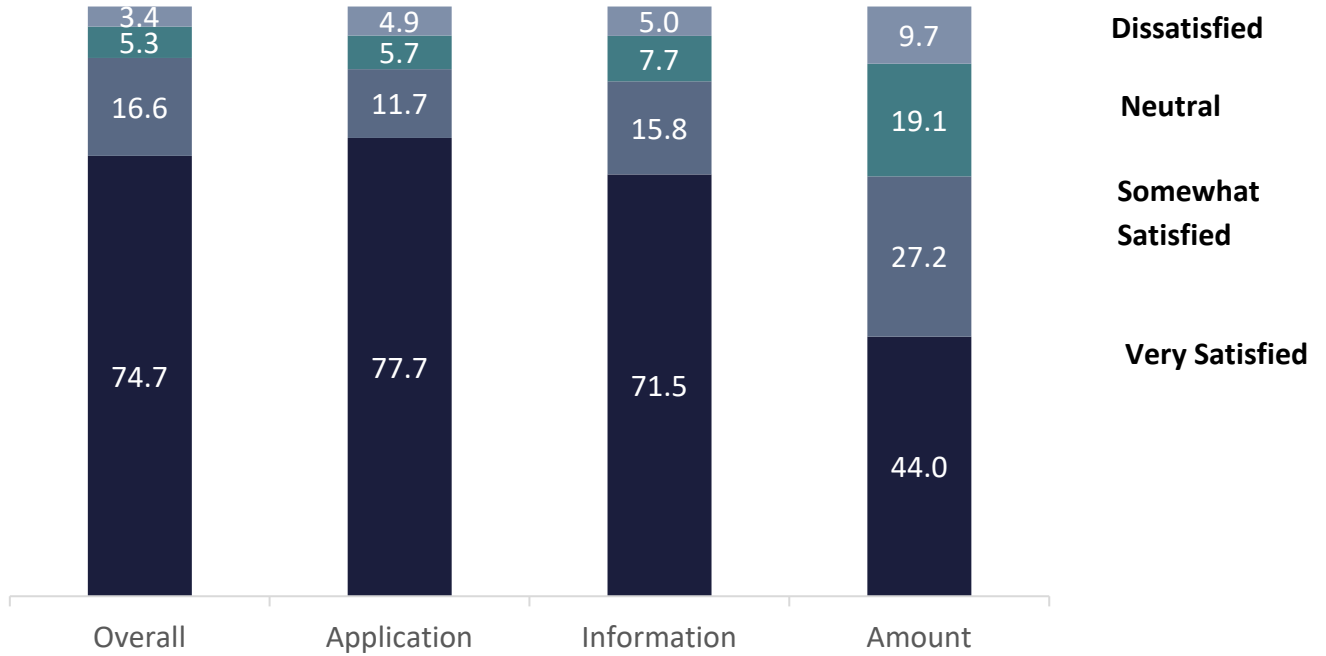
Table 2. Survey respondents had similar demographics compared to all FSSP families

Demographics	% Survey Respondents
Educational Eligibility Category	
Autism Spectrum Disorder	75.0
Severe Multiple Impairments	16.7
Cognitive Impairment	7.8
Unreported	0.5
Time in Program	
1-12 months	13.4
13-24 months	13.9
More than 24 months	71.8
Unreported	0.9
Gender	
Male	74.0
Female	23.3
Unreported	2.7
Taxable Income Level	
\$19,999 or less	51.9
\$20,000-\$44,999	29.2
\$45,000-\$60,000	13.7
> \$60,000	0.6
Unreported	4.6
Race/Ethnicity	
White	60.1
Black/African American	19.0
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.8
American Indian/Alaska Native	1.5
Hispanic	6.8
Multi-racial or other	8.6
Unreported	3.2

³ Figure 6 reports valid percent (not including % missing). Ns range from 863-870.

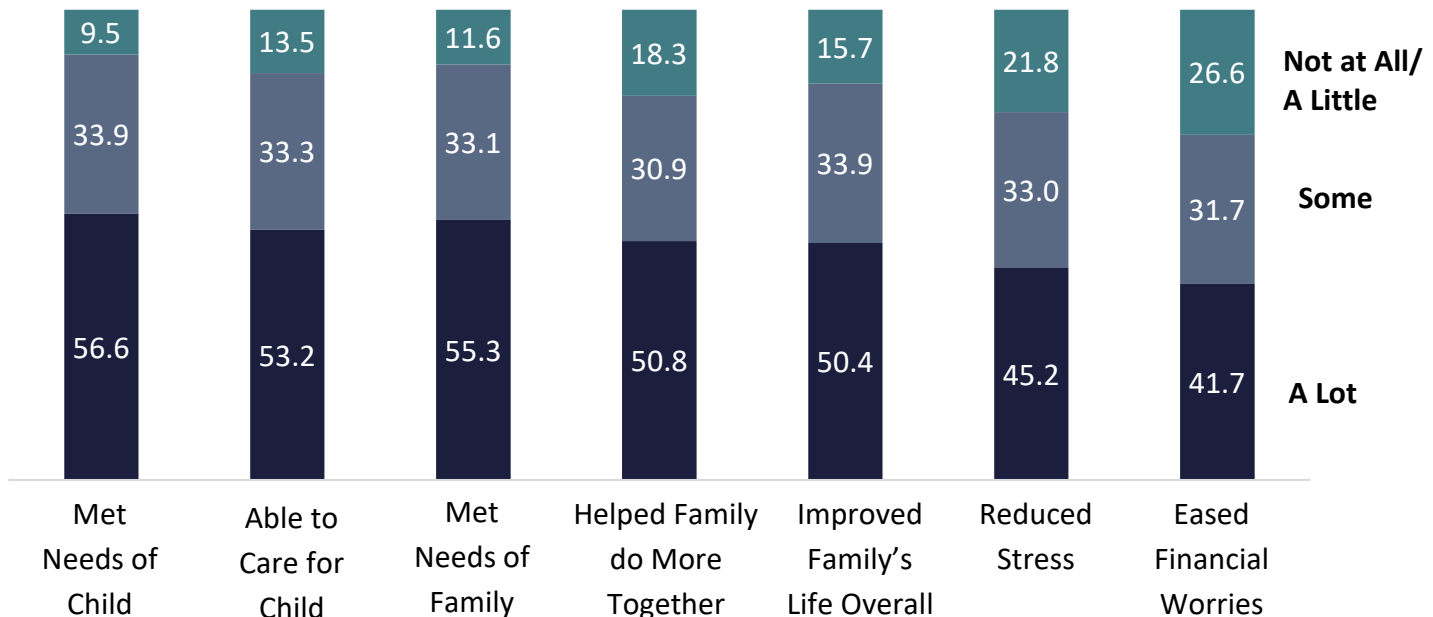
⁴ Figure 7 reports valid percent (not including % missing). Ns range from 866-871.

Figure 6. Families are least satisfied with the amount of the subsidy (%)



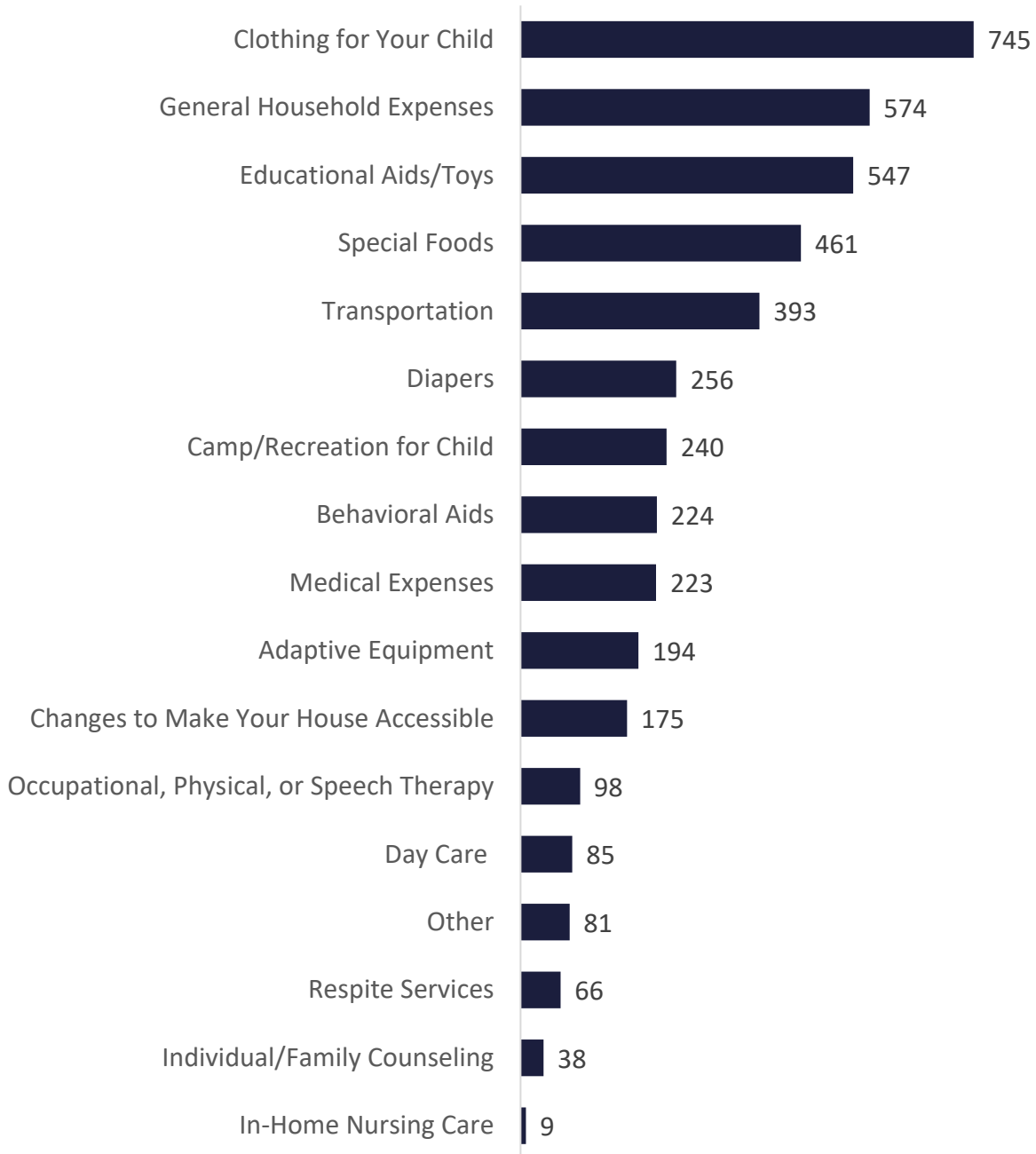
The subsidy had a moderate impact on achieving a better quality of life, reducing overall stress, or easing financial worries. Average satisfaction and impact scores were calculated and used to compare ratings across different family demographic characteristics. Average satisfaction and impact scores did not significantly vary across race, income or diagnosis groups.

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 five different services (ranging from 0 to 15 services reported).

Figure 8. Families accessed many different services with their subsidy



Given the growing number of subsidy children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (see Table 1, page 9), it is interesting to note that depending on their child’s diagnosis, these families report significantly different rates of use of several service categories (see Table 3). Only those services found to be significantly different by group are reported.⁵ Children with autism spectrum disorder were more in need of a wider range of services, including behavioral aids, recreational activities, counseling, and therapies. Alternatively, families with children with severe multiple impairments or cognitive impairments were more likely to need physical supports such as diapers and adaptive equipment (highlighted in bold in Table 3 for each diagnosis).

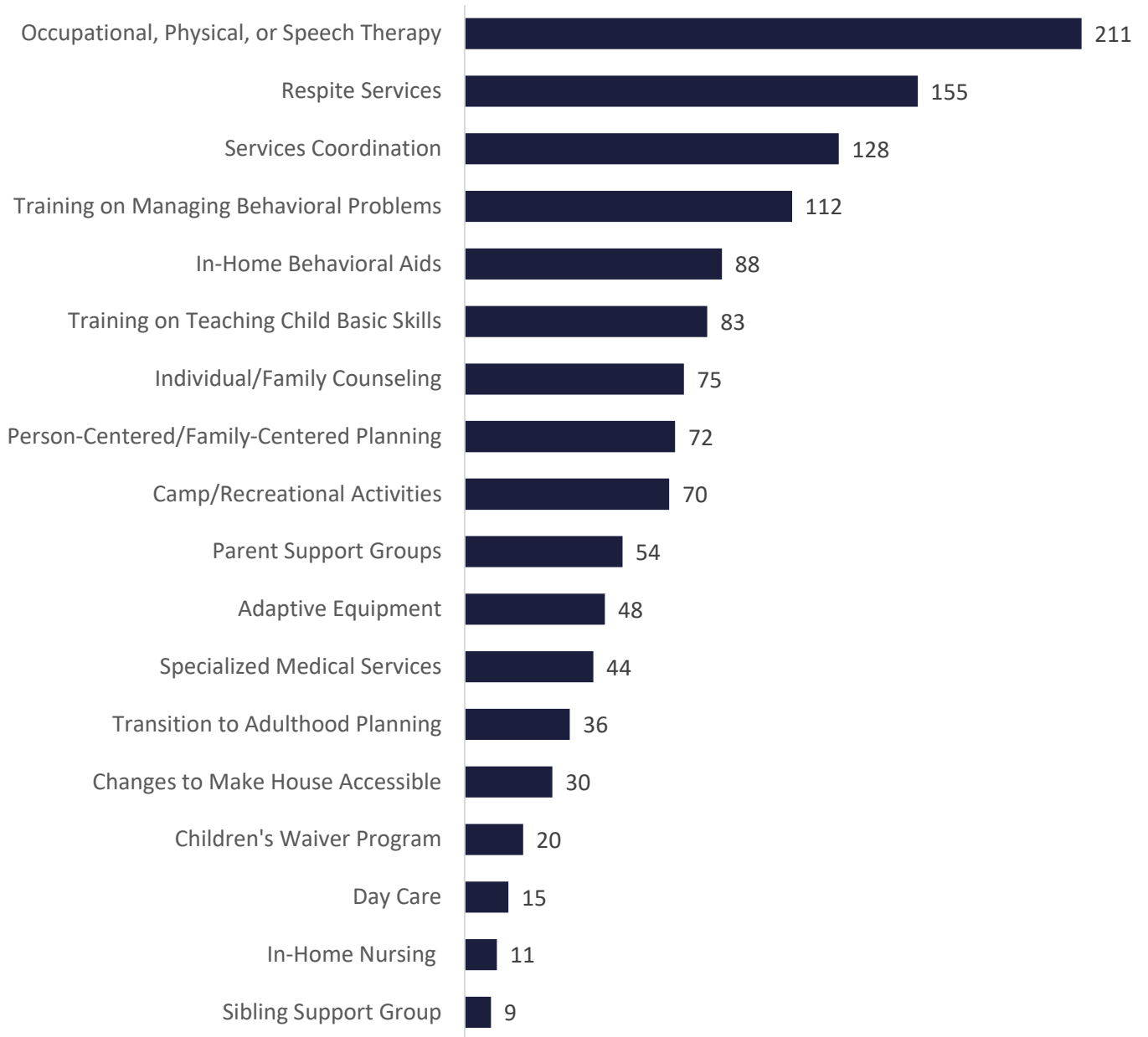
Table 3. Families use the subsidy for different services by diagnosis

Service	Autism Spectrum Disorder	Severe Multiple Impairments or Cognitive Impairment
Diapers	25.8%	40.2%
Adaptive equipment	18.3%	34.6%
Behavioral aids	28.5%	17.3%
Camp or Recreation	30.1%	19.6%
Individual or Family Counseling	5.5%	0.9%
Occupational, Physical, or Speech Therapy	13.3%	4.7%
Special Foods	56.8%	40.7%

Questions regarding services not purchased with the subsidy were also given to families. First, families were asked about other services received from their CMHSP in the past 12 months to support their child with disabilities. From a list of 18 services, therapies (occupational, physical, or speech), respite services, coordination of services, and behavioral management were most frequently reported (see Figure 9). Next, families were shown a list of the services that they had not checked and asked to select the top three services they were most interested in receiving that they did not already list as receiving. Occupational, physical, or speech therapy (71.6 percent of families), respite services (51.7 percent of families), and coordination of services (48.5 percent of families), were listed as the top three unmet needs (see Figure 9 for total numbers across each category). However, overall, few families (2.5 percent) designated anything as an unmet need suggesting that families were accessing the services they needed.

⁵ Chi-square tests were used. Seventeen tests were performed and the p-values for statistical significance was set at .003 in order to correct for the number of tests conducted.

Figure 9. Services received from CMHSP not paid for with the subsidy



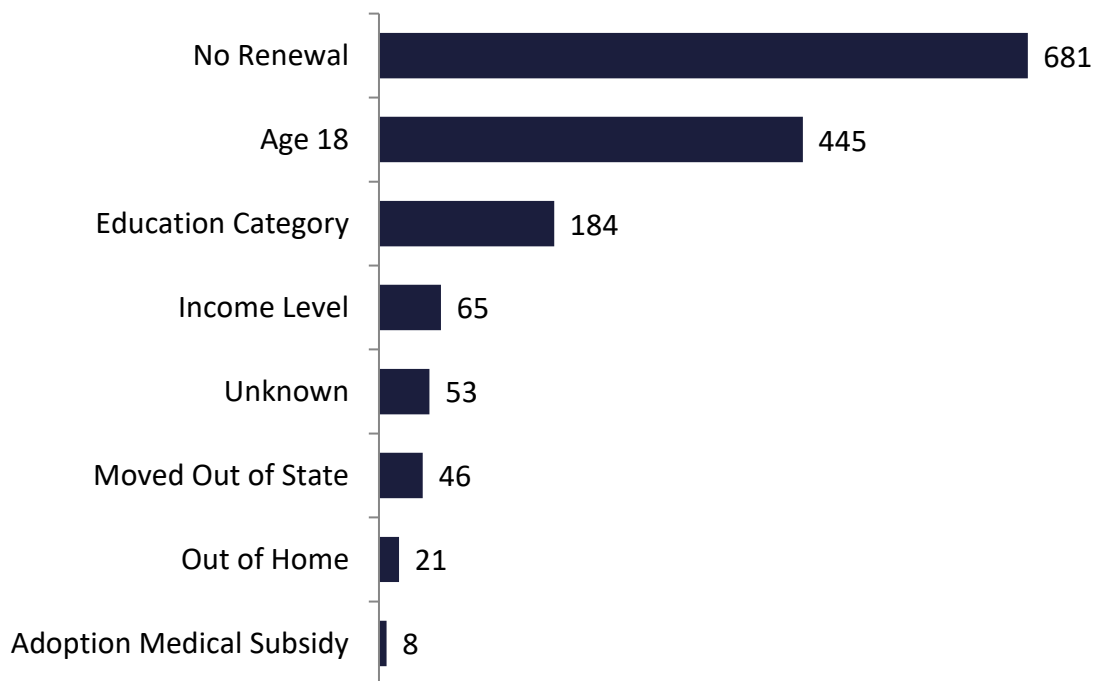
Finally, families were asked to provide feedback about the program which focused on four main themes (specific parent comments organized around these themes are available on page 20):

- 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 observing that the needs are greater than the amount the subsidy covers

Families Leaving the Program

In Fiscal Year 2019, 1,503 families left the subsidy program. Children leave the subsidy program for several reasons (Figure 10). Families not renewing was the most frequent reason for leaving the program (64.3 percent), followed by children turning 18 years old (29.6 percent).

Figure 10. 1,503 families left the program in 2018

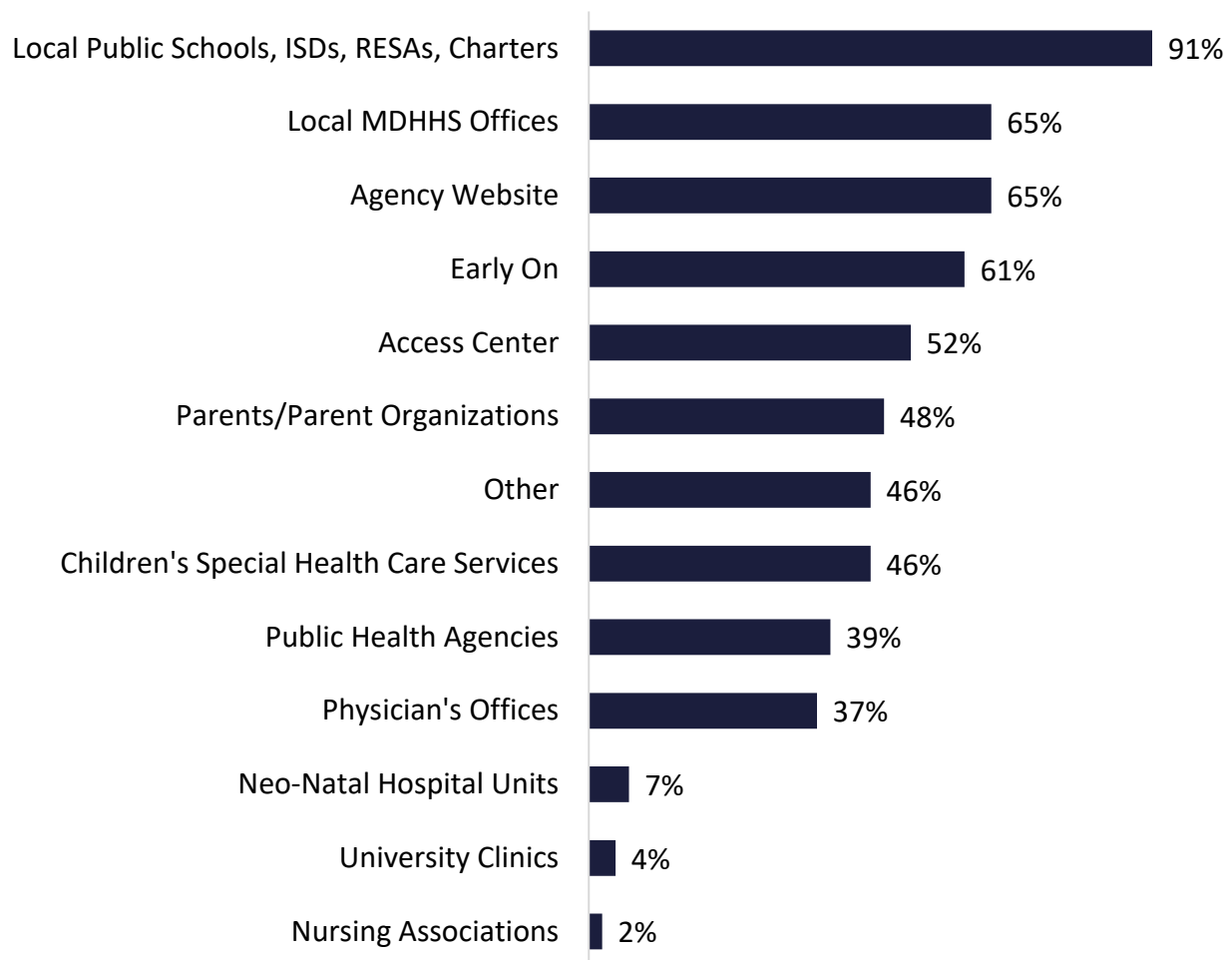


CMHSP Outreach Efforts

Outreach efforts to encourage program participation were reported by all 46 CMHSPs for Fiscal Year 2019. Agencies reached out to an average of 5.6 organizations (range from 1 to 10). The majority (91 percent) direct efforts to local schools (see Figure 11). Most comments about program issues concerned confusion by parents regarding FSSP eligibility through their public school district. Examples include children with autism spectrum disorder receiving applied behavioral analysis (ABA) therapy instead of educational programming through their public school district and children being diagnosed by a psychologist or physician outside of the school system. Children are eligible for FSSP if recommended by their public-school district’s MET only (see page 6 section on *Eligibility Requirements* for more information). Although the former is an issue that has

been consistently reported over the last five years, it is of note that there continues to be a gap in communication between local school district and CMHSPs working in the respective region. CMHSPs must receive documentation to process FSS applications, however the process is typically delayed due to not having reliable contacts within schools. This in turn can significantly delay the initial FSS payment to families which can negatively impact the dynamics between CMHSPs and families applying for the FSS (for direct parent quotes, see the Additional Parent Comments section on page 20).

Figure 11. CMHSP reach out to many different types of organizations



Conclusions

The main purpose of the FSSP is to provide financial support to assist families who have a child with intellectual and developmental disabilities in keeping their children at home and provide them with the additional supports and services they need. Results of the evaluation validate 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 less than 0.5 percent of all subsidy children.
Families report high satisfaction with the subsidy overall. Families are satisfied with the application process (77.7 percent), information received (71.5 percent), and overall experiences with the program (74.7 percent). Most families reported that the subsidy supported their quality of life, ability to care for their child, and assisted them in meeting their child's needs.
- **Families use the subsidy for a wide range of services.** Families reported using an average of five different services last year with their subsidy. The top five services across all families were: clothing, general household expenses, educational aids or toys, special foods, and transportation. Families with children with autism spectrum disorder are more likely to 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; therefore it does not cover as many services as it once did nor is the amount enough to meet families' real needs.** The subsidy payment increased from \$222.11 to 229.31 in FY2019, an increase that has not occurred since 1991. If the original payment of \$225.54 in Fiscal Year 1985 had kept up with inflation, families would be receiving \$539.21 in 2019 to cover the same expenses. Families report lowest satisfaction levels with the amount of the subsidy, with less than 50 percent of families reporting the subsidy helps ease financial worries or reduces stress substantially. It should be noted that 72.9 percent of families receiving the subsidy have a taxable income of \$19,999 or less.

Additional Parent Comments

Deep Gratitude and Appreciation

Thank you so much for your generosity, it means the world! Our son is severely autistic and needs large motor sensory pressure. Also needs light decreased in summer to sleep enough. We were able to go to the jump park (\$16/person for 1 hour) in the winter time. Summer we bought a black privacy tent for his bed at \$49. It also helps with food, clothes, shoes, wipes, apps, etc.)

Muskegon

I am a single mother of two autistic children with very little to no help from my children's father. We were really struggling before receiving subsidy. I am very thankful for this program. It has helped provide everything from new shoes to diapers for my children.

Allegan

With the subsidy, I am able to work part time hours every other week without worrying about short checks. It helps to keep buying diapers as well.

Montcalm

Some may say the support subsidy may not be much money, but it surely comes in handy!

Oakland

My son was able to go out more and interact with people and have fun. I think this helps him the most.

St. Clair

The subsidy has helped a lot. Taking my daughter places, buying her the things she really needed. Thank you so much!

Ingham

I am thankful to have the little extra money to buy special foods or clothes. Our family is very thankful. Thank you!

Manistee

It has put some ease in our minds when we receive the check each month. We know we are able to go stock up on diapers or food for the month. Or put it towards medication expenses or medical bills. Thank you!

Ottawa

It takes a lot of stress off of me because I use to have to save for his clothing, special foods. So yes, I am very much thankful for this, it really helps a lot!

Jackson

I've had a difficult time finding jobs to work around the schedule of my son's ABA/schooling, therefore I always worry about finances and being able to provide my son with everything he needs. The subsidy helps me provide him the things he needs so we can enjoy our time together with a little less stress.

Lapeer

This program has allowed me to provide more food and clothing and even catch up on bills. I've never felt so blessed. Words can't express the pressure that I was relieved from. I can't say thank you enough! Thank you all for understanding that life is different when you have a child with special needs.

Wayne

I am so grateful and blessed this program has helped me so much financially the past years. I am able to do recreational things with my son he really loves Skyford, so we go every month.

Saginaw

Specific Examples of How the Money Was Used

Subsidy pay program has allowed for my son social skills to improve tremendously. Making it affordable to venture out to big events where he is learning to casually speak and hold general conversations and interact with others of all ages.

Wayne

My daughter has needed daily (M-F) speech, occupational, physical, music & ABA therapies and being a single mom with these costs along with everything else has been very challenging. The FSS has been very helpful for me and my daughter. The therapies that she has had have helped her learn to communicate and continue to help her as she gets ready to begin.

Ingham

With the generous money received, we were able to have our daughter in a special needs swim program at our local aquatic center. Where she learned basic lifesaving water skills and losing her fear of the water.

Ottawa

My subsidy checks have made up the rent, paid phone bills, bought clothes and shoes, cleaning supplies, food, gas, haircuts, field trip money and anything related to school, toy educational and regular toys, games and game systems, he loves those. This check has come through on tight occasions and I appreciate mine and so does my family. Thank you all so much, a little can go a very long way.

Unknown

We spend a lot of money on special foods, toys and clothing for our child because what most people eat, play with or wear, he will not! Subsidy helps us afford the things he likes.

St. Clair

The subsidy has allowed us to sign our son up for a special needs' soccer program.

Oakland

Music therapy is the best therapy we have tried. My son responds best to music. I did not have to worry about the cost each month because this would cover it. Plus, I was able to get him other things he needed such as a weighted vest and weighted blanket has helped with everyday life.

Jackson

Having this money to help us not only just get the essentials but also being able to take him out to socialize and have recently started learning to ride a bike and behaves on trips with helpful learning toys to keep his mind on track is appreciated.

St. Clair

It has helped a lot! I got my son a jacket for winter, and food. I'm very grateful for everything.

Sanilac

My son and family getting this subsidy has helped us by allowing us to have a bit extra, like a wheelchair accessible van, it is used but is a huge help for our child. We're able to take him to doctors' appointments, stores and even Game Stop. It has made it, so we do not choose to eat or pay van payments, like everyone, I wish it was more but we're very grateful we qualified for this program. Thank you!

Montcalm

My son uses his subsidy to purchase transportation, meals (in restaurants). It has given him independence.

Houghton

The subsidy has enabled our family to purchase educational items for our son to assist him with comprehension, math and reading. It has also assisted with reinforcement items and activities which costs money but keeps him motivated.

Benzie

It has helped me to purchase rewards for good behavior at school.

Crawford

My child has medications he takes. Nutritional supplements to counter his appetite suppression from his meds and frequent doctor/therapy visits.

Wayne

We are a low-income family. This subsidy has helped me buy food for our family many times. Thank you!	<i>Jackson</i>
It has helped a lot to meet the needs of buying depends and pull ups for my daughter. They are very expensive, and I have to have them for home and the school.	<i>Newaygo</i>
The subsidy has allowed us to sign our son up for a special needs' soccer program.	<i>Oakland</i>
It is helping us pay for his new wheelchair when insurance wouldn't cover everything. It also is helping us purchase a communication device in the summer.	<i>Jackson</i>
My son lost a hearing aid and insurance wouldn't replace it. We were able to make payment from his subsidy to get it paid for.	<i>Montcalm</i>
I have a child that receives therapy and the gas prices and food I have to provide him with is expensive. Therefore, when we receive the money it helps to keep his schedule regular.	<i>Wayne</i>
The greatest help is being able to pay someone to come in and sit with him to give me a break. Even if it is just to take a nap. Also being able to buy modified toys or equipment is a huge help.	<i>Van Buren</i>

Comments Reflecting Growing Needs Relative to FSS Amount

CMH approached me about the program after I had lost my job because school kicked out my older autistic child. I was a mess, no money, no job, single mom. The subsidy program made it possible for me to get back on my feet with my family intact. So grateful always for this program.	<i>Shiawassee</i>
This subsidy is a godsend to families like mine. Sometimes it is the difference between having enough gas to make it to the bazillion therapy appointments or being stranded on the side of the freeway (that happened at least twice in the last year). It is the difference between having enough money to get the "correct" food or praying that the brand you can afford is ok. It's the difference between having enough to pay for the adaptive swim class and the gas to get there, or not.	<i>Wayne</i>
It has helped me meet the needs and wants of my child. And also helped with the financial aspect of our lives. Especially with moving into a new apartment.	<i>Kent</i>

We live check to check. Many months this subsidy check arrives just in time to pay a bill to avoid shut off to that service. Whether it be as simple as trash pick-up or as important as consumers, this check has saved us many times. It has also helped with clothing expenses as he outgrows everything as soon as I get it, it seems.

Jackson

This subsidy is keeping our family together. Truly, a vast majority of it goes directly to groceries. It is so incredibly difficult to meet the complex needs of our family. I don't know that we could survive without it.

St. Clair

This program helps us because we do not receive food stamps so this money can be used towards food in our house.

Wayne

While very grateful for the subsidy, with having a child with autism in a single parent home, it simply is not enough to financially make an impact in our day by day expenses. It has helped with the things like clothing and activities for my child.

Wayne

Knowing I will have that little bit extra eases the burden on worrying about feeding my growing teenager. I don't make much right now because his behaviors have gotten so challenging, so I rely on that amount for basic life needs--groceries, clothing, and occasional treats like crayons or car rides.

Kent

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