

Institute for Human Services Research

*Montana Assisted Guardianship
Title IV-E Waiver Demonstration Project
Fourth Annual Report*

Montana Child & Family Services Division
Department of Public Health & Human Services
State of Montana

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Introduction

The Montana Child and Family Services Division of the Department of Public Health and Human Services applied for and received a Title IV-E waiver to develop a subsidized guardianship program for children in foster care. The waiver was initially for children twelve and over for whom reunification and adoption were not possible. The waiver was later expanded to include children in sibling groups if one of the children was at least twelve years old. During the third year of program operation, the age requirement was eliminated. The waiver is available for IV-E eligible children in the State and Tribal systems. Although the waiver was approved in the fall of 1998, there was a considerable period of time between conceptualization and implementation. A program evaluator was contracted in October 2000. The experimental/control assignment process was finalized in early 2001 and the names of the first group of potential participants were put through the assignment process in May 2001.

The first guardianship was put into effect on June 21, 2001. As of September 30, 2004, 159 children have gone through the random assignment process. Of these, 26 were assigned to the control group and 133 to the experimental group. Guardianship was established for 47 of the children in the experimental group. On September 30, 2004, 113 children remain active in the program. Of these, 16 are in the control group, 37 have a guardianship established and 60 remain in the experimental group but without guardianship. Participation has ended for 46 children; 29 because they aged out and 17 for other reasons.

This report analyzes the fourth year of the project and covers the period from October 1, 2003 through September 30, 2004. The increase in the number of program participants permitted a more in-depth review of the data although analysis at a sub-level is still not possible because of the small numbers in each cell. The fourth year report provides an understanding of the program through analysis of surveys and interviews with Child and Family Services staff, youth and caregivers/guardians.

Data Collection for this Report

Evaluation staff conducted on-site interviews with children and caregivers in the control and experimental groups during June and July 2004. The families were selected randomly although the pool was stratified to assure that two experimental and two control cases were pulled from each region and each participating tribe. Alternates were also randomly selected. Some regions/tribes could not support a full complement because of the participation levels.

In September, interviews were conducted with the Montana Children and Family Services Division (CFSD) permanency placement specialists, social worker supervisors and social workers. Interviews were conducted with the Demonstration Project Manager and the ICWA Specialist.

The interview tools used for families and for staff are unchanged from last year's report.

Changes in the Project Design

No changes in the project design occurred during the fourth year but several are being contemplated.

One issue is how to include families that move out of state. The terms and conditions require an annual visit once guardianship is established. Currently if an experimental group youth moves out of state, participation in the demonstration ends because of inability to perform the required on-site interview. A waiver amendment to change that requirement is being considered.

As children are assigned to either the control or experimental group there have been instances when the best interests of the child are put in jeopardy by assignment to the control group. At this time, Montana does not have an exception process in place. A waiver amendment to permit an exception to control group assignment is being considered.

Currently state administrative rules require that the guardianship subsidy be negotiated with the guardians and that the amount must not exceed the amount of the foster care maintenance payment for which the child is eligible at the time the guardianship is established. State policy currently results in guardianship subsidy payments terminating when the child reaches age 18 even if the youth is still attending high school. A change in the Terms and Conditions is under consideration that would allow the guardianship subsidy to continue to be paid using the same age-related payment logic as that applied to foster care.

Participant Demographics

Demographics

The following tables show various characteristics of the youth population in the study. There are 81 males and 78 females in the study. More youth are over the age of 12. This most likely reflects the initial requirement that only youth aged 12 and older (and their siblings) could be considered for the subsidized guardianship program as well as the propensity to consider guardianship a good option for older children while considering adoption the best option for younger children (if reunification is not possible).

Age in Years as of 9/30/04	Number of Youth
1	1
3	3
5	2
6	4
7	3
8	2
9	9
10	5
11	5
12	13
13	11
14	12
15	18
16	17
17	22
18	10
19	13
20	7
21	2
Total	159

In terms of ethnicity, Caucasian youth number 78, American Indians 77, African American 2 and 2 youth whose ethnicity was listed as “Unknown” in the CAPS system. Approximately 50% of the American Indians are youth who live on the reservation while the other 50% do not.

Ethnicity	Number of Youth
American Indian	77
African American	2
Caucasian	78
Unknown	2
Total	159

Region	Number of American Indian Youth Not Living On Reservations
Eastern	2
North Central	17
South Central	13
Southwestern	2
Western	5
Total	39

A more detailed breakdown of ethnicity appears in the three tables below where the ethnicity by region/tribe is broken down for the control group, the group that has established guardianship, and those in the experimental group who have not had established guardianships. There are equal numbers of American Indian and Caucasian youth in the control group. However, the percentage of American Indian youth and Caucasian youth who have established guardianships differs greatly. Of the 64 American Indian youth in the experimental group, 16 (25%) have established guardianships. Of the 65 Caucasian youth in the experimental group, 33 (50%) have established guardianships. American Indians living outside the reservation are much more likely to have guardianship established than those living on the reservation. One of the African-American youth has an established guardianship and the other does not (both are in the experimental group).

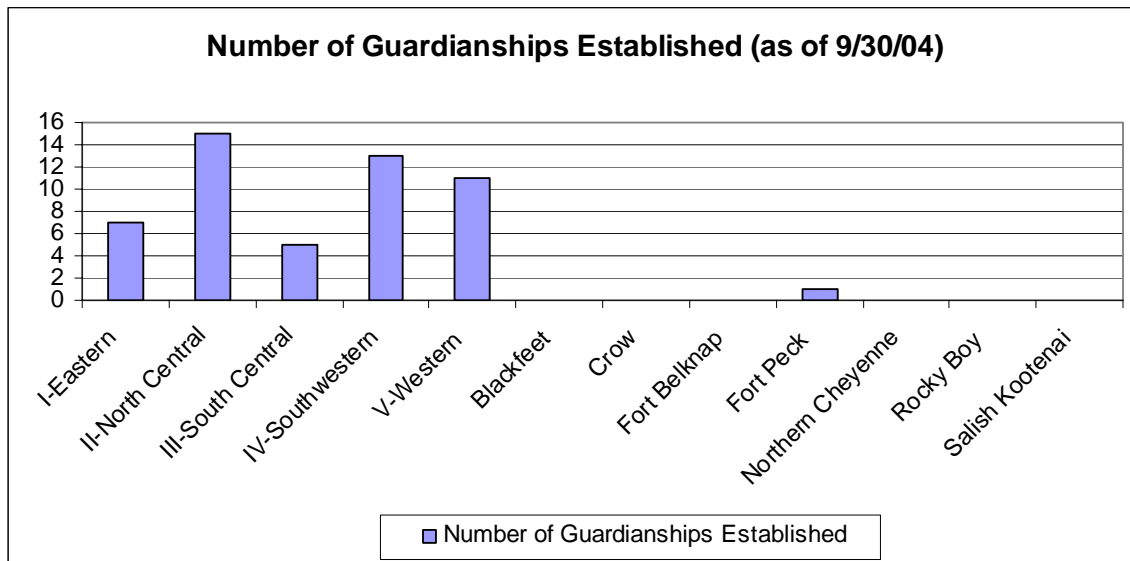
Ethnicity Data for Control Group					
Region/Tribe	American Indian	Black	Caucasian	Unknown	Total in Control Group
I-Eastern	0	0	3	0	3
II-North Central	3	0	0	0	3
III-South Central	3	0	2	0	5
IV-Southwestern	1	0	4	0	5
V-Western	0	0	4	0	4
Blackfeet	0	0	0	0	0
Crow	0	0	0	0	0
Fort Belknap	0	0	0	0	0
Fort Peck	2	0	0	0	2
Northern Cheyenne	4	0	0	0	4
Rocky Boy	0	0	0	0	0
Salish Kootenai	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	13		13		26

Ethnicity Data for Established Guardianships					
Region/Tribe	American Indian	Black	Caucasian	Unknown	Total with established guardianships
I-Eastern	2	0	5	0	7
II-North Central	6	0	7	2	15
III-South Central	3	1	1	0	5
IV-Southwestern	0	0	13	0	13
V-Western	4	0	7	0	11
Blackfeet	0	0	0	0	0
Crow	0	0	0	0	0
Fort Belknap	0	0	0	0	0
Fort Peck	1	0	0	0	1
Northern Cheyenne	0	0	0	0	0
Rocky Boy	0	0	0	0	0
Salish Kootenai	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	16	1	33	2	52

Ethnicity Data for Experimental Group without Established Guardianships					
Region/Tribe	American Indian	Black	Caucasian	Unknown	Total
I-Eastern	0	0	3	0	3
II-North Central	8	0	2	0	10
III-South Central	7	1	5	0	13
IV-Southwestern	1	0	9	0	10
V-Western	1	0	13	0	14
Blackfeet	3	0	0	0	3
Crow	0	0	0	0	0
Fort Belknap	0	0	0	0	0
Fort Peck	11	0	0	0	11
Northern Cheyenne	8	0	0	0	8
Rocky Boy	0	0	0	0	0
Salish Kootenai	9	0	0	0	9
Totals	48	1	32	0	81

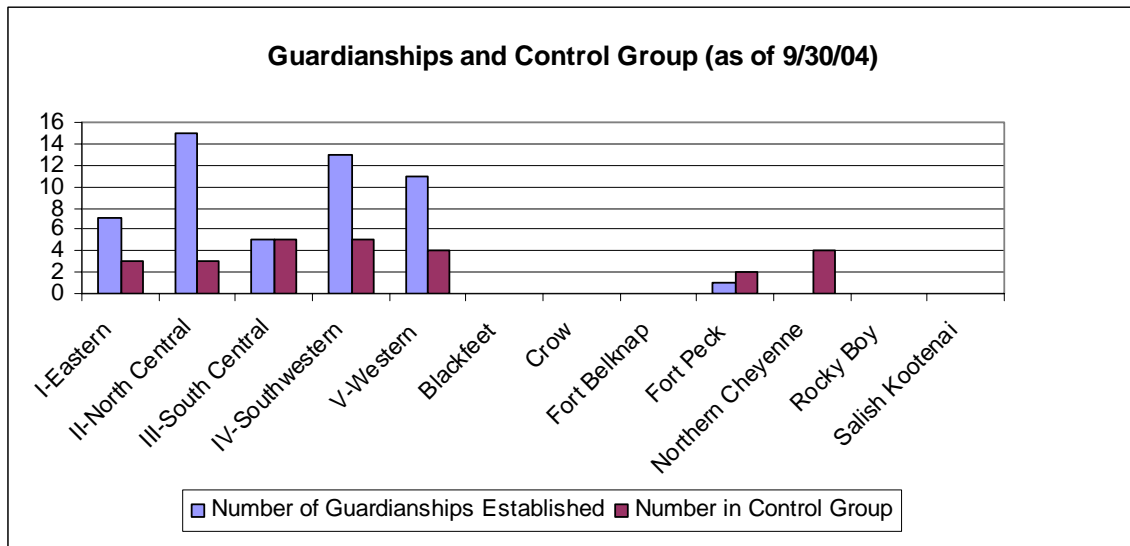
Participation in the Demonstration

The following graph and table display the number of guardianships established by region and tribe.



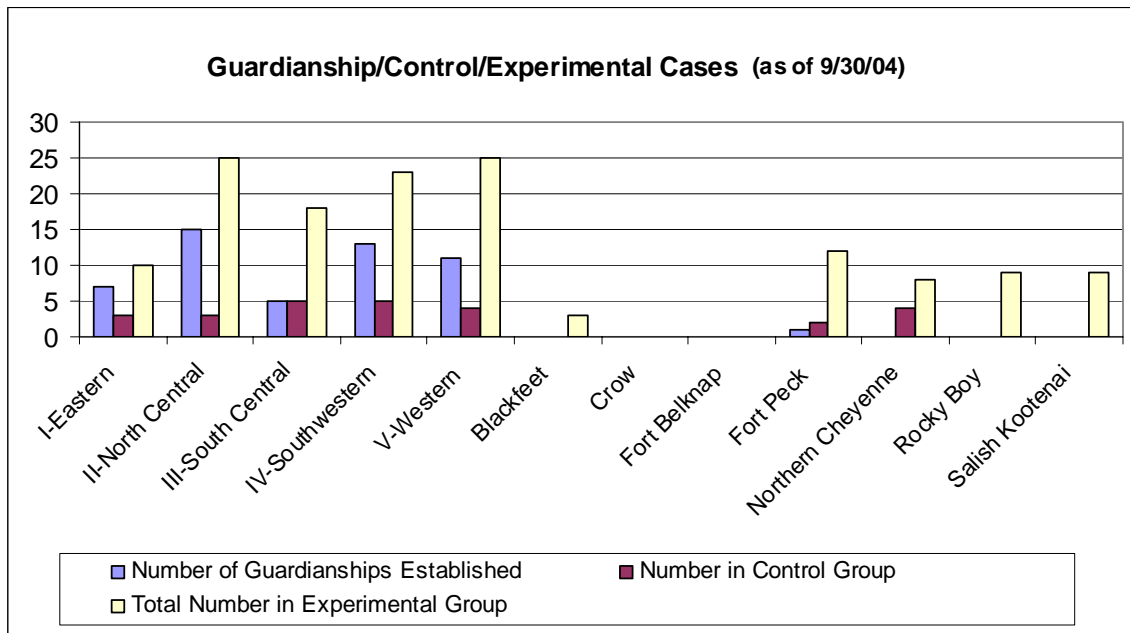
Region/Tribe	Number of Guardianships Established
I-Eastern	7
II-North Central	15
III-South Central	5
IV-Southwestern	13
V-Western	11
Blackfeet	0
Crow	0
Fort Belknap	0
Fort Peck	1
Northern Cheyenne	0
Rocky Boy	0
Salish Kootenai	0
Totals	52

The following graph and table display the number of guardianships established by region and tribe and the corresponding number of children in the control group.



Region/Tribe	Number of Guardianships Established	Number in Control Group
I-Eastern	7	3
II-North Central	15	3
III-South Central	5	5
IV-Southwestern	13	5
V-Western	11	4
Blackfeet	0	0
Crow	0	0
Fort Belknap	0	0
Fort Peck	1	2
Northern Cheyenne	0	4
Rocky Boy	0	0
Salish Kootenai	0	0
Totals	52	26

The following graph and table display by region and tribe the total number of children in the experimental group, the number with guardianships established and the number in the control group. Note that the number in the experimental group includes those with guardianship established and those for whom guardianship has not been established.



Region/Tribe	Number of Guardianships Established	Number in Control Group	Total Number in Experimental Group
I-Eastern	7	3	10
II-North Central	15	3	25
III-South Central	5	5	18
IV-Southwestern	13	5	23
V-Western	11	4	25
Blackfeet	0	0	3
Crow	0	0	0
Fort Belknap	0	0	0
Fort Peck	1	2	12
Northern Cheyenne	0	4	8
Rocky Boy	0	0	0
Salish Kootenai	0	0	9
Totals	52	26	133

Dates Guardianship Established by Region and Tribe

The following table displays the dates guardianship was established for children within the regions. Sibling groups are noted. The third column displays the date the random assignment took place. In many instances there is considerable gap in time between the dates the random assignment occurred and the actual effective date of the guardianship. The average for this year is higher than last year's average of 227 days.

Region/Tribe	Number of Youth in Placement Group	Date Randomly Assigned	Effective Date of Guardianship	Days Elapsed from Random Assignment to Guardianship Established
I-Eastern	1	5/18/2001	11/1/2001	167
	1	5/18/2001	12/19/2002	580
	1	5/18/2001	12/19/2002	580
	1	7/10/2002	12/12/2002	155
	1	3/6/2003	7/22/2003	138
	2	12/23/2003	5/10/2004	139
II-North Central	1	5/18/2001	2/21/2002	279
	3	5/18/2001	11/13/2001	179
	3	5/18/2001	6/21/2001	34
	1	5/18/2001	11/15/2001	181
	1	1/31/2002	9/3/2002	215
	4	3/6/2003	6/25/2003	111
	1	6/6/2003	7/23/2003	47
	1	2/4/2004	3/11/2004	36
III-South Central	1	5/18/2001	4/30/2002	347
	3	4/9/2002	3/1/2003	326
	1	7/1/2003	12/11/2003	163
IV-Southwestern	1	5/18/2001	2/8/2002	266
	1	5/18/2001	12/4/2001	200
	1	7/10/2002	2/18/2003	223
	1	5/18/2001	4/12/2002	329
	1	5/18/2001	11/5/2001	171
	1	10/10/2001	2/6/2004	849
	1	7/17/2002	12/13/2002	149
	3	12/20/2002	8/6/2003	229
	3	9/9/2003	3/30/2004	203
	V-Western	1	10/10/2001	3/20/2002
1		1/31/2002	6/3/2002	123
2		4/9/2002	11/1/2002	206
1		4/9/2002	4/23/2004	745
1		12/12/2002	9/11/2003	273
1		1/30/2003	10/28/2003	271
2		1/30/2003	5/1/2004	457
1		3/28/2003	11/18/2003	235
1		3/28/2003	1/13/2004	291
Fort Peck	1	5/18/2001	1/10/2002	237
Average Days Elapsed per Youth = 234 days				

Surveys

Youth Status Reports, Youth and Caregiver/Guardian Surveys

Since September of 2002, when youth first entered the program a survey was sent to the social worker, called the Youth Status Report (YSR). Also, on the anniversary date¹ for each youth and when a youth's participation in the program was ended, a set of surveys was sent to three people for completion: a YSR was sent to the social worker, a survey was sent to the youth (if the youth was 12 years of age or older) and a survey was sent to the youth's caregiver. When these were returned, the responses were entered into a database for analysis.

All surveys received to-date were analyzed. The response rates were quite low, ranging from about 33% for youth and caregiver surveys to 50% for the worker-completed YSR (through the end of September 2003 when the last annual report was prepared, these rates were better: 50% for youth and caregiver surveys and 70% for the YSR).

The questions on the surveys were placed into five categories:

- *Stability and Well Being*
- *Academic and Vocational Performance and Attendance*
- *Safety and Behaviors*
- *Services, Support and Satisfaction*
- *Quality of Life*

Not all of the survey types cover all five categories. For example, the youth were not asked about their performance and attendance, or about their safety and behavior, while the social workers were not asked about the youth's quality of life.

To facilitate analysis of the responses, each survey that was received was given a score for each of the five categories, based on the responses to the questions in the categories. Each question was given a score with 0 being the worst response and 1 being the best. Responses in between were given a score proportionally

¹ For youth in the control part of the program, this date was based on the date of random assignment. For youth in the experimental part of the program, this date was also based on the date of random assignment unless placement with the guardian was more than five months after the date of random assignment; in this case the date was based on the date of placement with the guardian. So, for example, if a youth was assigned to the control group on 6/15/2002 that is the date used to calculate the anniversary date. The same is true if the youth had been assigned to the experimental group and guardianship became effective within five months, or guardianship never became effective. However, if the youth was assigned to the experimental group on 6/15/2002 but the guardianship did not become effective until 2/12/2003 (more than five months after random assignment), then 2/12/2003 was the date used when calculating the anniversary date.

between 0 and 1; for example, if the question had four possible answers, the scores assigned were 0, 0.33, 0.67, or 1. Then the scores for all questions in a category were summed and divided by the number of questions answered, giving a score for the category. All questions were given equal weight and only questions answered were included in the score. If no questions in a category were answered, the category was not scored.

Overview

Figure 1 shows how many surveys were scored in each of the categories.

Figure 1

Number of Surveys Scored												
	Stability and Well Being			Performance and Attendance	Safety and Behaviours			Services, Supports and Satisfaction			Quality of Life	
Group	YSR	Youth	Care Giver	YSR	YSR	Care Giver	YSR	Youth	Care Giver	Youth	Care Giver	
Control	19	7	7	17	20	5	19	7	7	7	6	
Experimental	99	37	35	90	104	34	99	37	34	37	35	
Total	118	44	42	107	124	39	118	44	41	44	41	

Number of Surveys Scored												
	Stability and Well Being			Performance and Attendance	Safety and Behaviours			Services, Supports and Satisfaction			Quality of Life	
Years In Project	YSR	Youth	Care Giver	YSR	YSR	Care Giver	YSR	Youth	Care Giver	Youth	Care Giver	
0	38	0	0	32	38	0	38	0	0	0	0	
1	45	30	27	43	48	25	45	30	27	30	27	
2	20	7	8	19	23	8	20	7	8	7	8	
3	15	7	7	13	15	6	15	7	6	7	6	
Total	118	44	42	107	124	39	118	44	41	44	41	

The first part of Figure 1 is broken down by surveys for youth in the experimental group and youth in the control group. The second part of Figure 1 is broken down by surveys submitted when youth first entered the program, those submitted after one year, those submitted after two years and those submitted after three years.

Surveys have been completed for one and one-half (1½) years, so some youths have more than one completed survey of any one type. YSRs were completed by social workers when youth entered the program or after they had been in the program for a year. The youth and caregiver surveys were completed only after the youth had been in the program for a year. Therefore, there are more YSR scores than youth or caregiver survey scores (up to 118 for the YSR; 44 for the youth survey; and up to 42 for the caregiver survey).

Figure 2 shows the average score for each of the cells in Figure 1.

Figure 2

Average Score											
Group	Stability and Well Being			Performance and Attendance	Safety and Behaviours		Services, Supports and Satisfaction			Quality of Life	
	YSR	Youth	Care Giver	YSR	YSR	Care Giver	YSR	Youth	Care Giver	Youth	Care Giver
Control	0.889	0.843	0.786	0.859	0.950	0.900	0.763	0.871	0.829	0.886	0.933
Experimental	0.862	0.776	0.803	0.834	0.949	0.947	0.704	0.781	0.874	0.859	0.874
Total	0.866	0.786	0.800	0.838	0.949	0.941	0.714	0.795	0.866	0.864	0.883

Average Score											
Years In Project	Stability and Well Being			Performance and Attendance	Safety and Behaviours		Services, Supports and Satisfaction			Quality of Life	
	YSR	Youth	Care Giver	YSR	YSR	Care Giver	YSR	Youth	Care Giver	Youth	Care Giver
0	0.879			0.859	0.945		0.679				
1	0.853	0.787	0.811	0.837	0.942	0.952	0.722	0.773	0.859	0.863	0.889
2	0.820	0.771	0.725	0.816	0.957	0.913	0.730	0.814	0.900	0.843	0.825
3	0.933	0.800	0.843	0.823	0.973	0.933	0.753	0.871	0.850	0.886	0.933
Total	0.866	0.786	0.800	0.838	0.949	0.941	0.714	0.795	0.866	0.864	0.883

The scores for the control group and experimental groups combined (total row) range from a low of 0.714 for Services and Supports on the YSR to a high of 0.949 for Safety and Behaviors on the YSR. The differences in the scores within each of the categories are remarkably small: the largest difference observed is for Services, Supports and Satisfaction where the average for the YSR is 0.714, 0.795 for the youth survey and 0.866 for the caregiver survey. The other categories have differences of 0.080 or less.

The pooled-variance t test reveals that none of the differences between the experimental and control groups is significant at the 95% confidence level. Also, comparing the initial YSR scores with the scores with those measured at one, two and three years, combined, reveals no significant differences and comparing the two- and three-year YSR scores with the initial and one-year results, combined, also shows no significant differences. Similarly, comparing the two- and three-year Youth and Caregiver scores with the one-year results shows no significant differences.

Looking at data collected on the YSR, youth survey and caregiver survey, there is no significant difference between the experimental group and the control group and no difference in scores over time.

Experimental compared to Control

Figure 3 again shows how many surveys were scored in each of the categories.

Figure 3

		Number of Surveys Scored												
		Stability and Well Being			Performance and Attendance		Safety and Behaviours			Services, Supports and Satisfaction			Quality of Life	
Status	Years In Project	YSR	Youth	Care Giver	YSR	YSR	Care Giver	YSR	Youth	Care Giver	Youth	Care Giver		
Control	0	6	0	0	5	6	0	6	0	0	0	0		
	1	6	2	2	6	6	1	6	2	2	2	2		
	2	4	2	2	3	5	2	4	2	2	2	2		
	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	2		
Experimental	0	32	0	0	27	32	0	32	0	0	0	0		
	1	39	28	25	37	42	24	39	28	25	28	25		
	2	16	5	6	16	18	6	16	5	6	5	6		
	3	12	4	4	10	12	4	12	4	3	4	4		
Total		118	44	42	107	124	39	118	44	41	44	41		

Figure 3 is broken down by surveys for youth in the experimental group and youth in the control group. It is further broken down by surveys submitted when youth first entered the program, those submitted after one year, those submitted after two years and those submitted after three years.

Figure 4 shows the average score for each of the cells in Figure 3.

Figure 4

		Average Score												
		Stability and Well Being			Performance and Attendance		Safety and Behaviours			Services, Supports and Satisfaction			Quality of Life	
Status	Years In Project	YSR	Youth	Care Giver	YSR	YSR	Care Giver	YSR	Youth	Care Giver	Youth	Care Giver		
Control	0	0.900			0.880	0.933		0.750						
	1	0.883	0.950	0.850	0.933	0.967	1.000	0.800	0.900	0.850	1.000	1.000		
	2	0.850	0.850	0.750	0.733	0.980	0.950	0.725	0.800	0.800	0.850	0.950		
	3	0.933	0.767	0.767	0.800	0.900	0.800	0.767	0.900	0.833	0.833	0.850		
Experimental	0	0.875			0.856	0.947		0.666						
	1	0.849	0.775	0.808	0.822	0.938	0.950	0.710	0.764	0.860	0.854	0.880		
	2	0.813	0.740	0.717	0.831	0.950	0.900	0.731	0.820	0.933	0.840	0.783		
	3	0.933	0.825	0.900	0.830	0.992	1.000	0.750	0.850	0.867	0.925	0.975		
Total		0.866	0.786	0.800	0.838	0.949	0.941	0.714	0.795	0.866	0.864	0.883		

The pooled-variance t test reveals that none of the differences between the experimental and control groups is significant at the 95% confidence level. Comparing the average initial YSR scores for the control group with the average initial scores for the experimental group shows no significant differences; and comparing the average YSR scores measured at one, two and three years, combined for the control group with the average YSR scores measured at one, two and three years, combined for the experimental group shows no significant differences. The same is true for the youth surveys and the caregiver surveys.

Looking at data collected on the YSR, youth survey and caregiver survey, there is no significant difference between the experimental group and the control group either at the time of assignment into the program or after up to three years after assignment into the program.

Guardianship compared to No Guardianship

Figure 5 and Figure 6 show counts and average scores just for the experimental group. The goal at the time of random assignment to the experimental group is for the youth to have a guardianship established.

However, for a variety of reasons, this goal is never achieved for many youth. In these two figures, the counts and average scores are broken down by those who had a guardianship established (guard) and those who did not (no guard).

Figure 5 shows how many surveys were scored by each of the categories.

Figure 5

Experimental Group		Number of Surveys Scored										
		Stability and Well Being			Performance and Attendance	Safety and Behaviours		Services, Supports and Satisfaction			Quality of Life	
		Status	YSR	Youth	Care Giver	YSR	YSR	Care Giver	YSR	Youth	Care Giver	Youth
Guard	45	16	16	40	47	16	45	16	15	16	16	
NoGuard	54	21	19	50	57	18	54	21	19	21	19	
Total	99	37	35	90	104	34	99	37	34	37	35	

		Number of Surveys Scored											
		Stability and Well Being			Performance and Attendance	Safety and Behaviours		Services, Supports and Satisfaction			Quality of Life		
		Status	Years In Project	YSR	Youth	Care Giver	YSR	YSR	Care Giver	YSR	Youth	Care Giver	Youth
Guard	0	15	0	0	12	15	0	15	0	0	0	0	0
	1	19	13	13	17	21	13	19	13	13	13	13	13
	2	4	0	0	4	4	0	4	0	0	0	0	0
	3	7	3	3	7	7	3	7	3	2	2	3	3
NoGuard	0	17	0	0	15	17	0	17	0	0	0	0	0
	1	20	15	12	20	21	11	20	15	12	15	12	12
	2	12	5	6	12	14	6	12	5	6	5	5	6
	3	5	1	1	3	5	1	5	1	1	1	1	1
Total		99	37	35	90	104	34	99	37	34	37	35	

The first part of Figure 5 is broken down by surveys for youth in the experimental group who had a guardianship established and those who did not. The second part of Figure 5 is further broken down by surveys submitted when youth first entered the program, those submitted after one year, those submitted after two years and those submitted after three years.

Figure 6 shows the average score for each of the cells in Figure 5

Figure 6

Experimental Group		Average Score										
		Stability and Well Being			Performance and Attendance	Safety and Behaviours			Services, Supports and Satisfaction			Quality of Life
Status		YSR	Youth	Care Giver	YSR	YSR	Care Giver	YSR	Youth	Care Giver	Youth	Care Giver
Guard		0.896	0.781	0.831	0.830	0.947	0.944	0.716	0.756	0.847	0.850	0.894
NoGuard		0.833	0.771	0.779	0.838	0.951	0.950	0.694	0.800	0.895	0.867	0.858
Total		0.862	0.776	0.803	0.834	0.949	0.947	0.704	0.781	0.874	0.859	0.874

		Average Score										
		Stability and Well Being			Performance and Attendance	Safety and Behaviours			Services, Supports and Satisfaction			Quality of Life
Status	Years In Project	YSR	Youth	Care Giver	YSR	YSR	Care Giver	YSR	Youth	Care Giver	Youth	Care Giver
Guard	0	0.940			0.875	0.947		0.700				
	1	0.863	0.762	0.815	0.788	0.919	0.931	0.716	0.723	0.823	0.838	0.877
	2	0.825			0.850	1.000		0.600				
	3	0.929	0.867	0.900	0.843	1.000	1.000	0.814	0.900	1.000	0.900	0.967
NoGuard	0	0.818			0.840	0.947		0.635				
	1	0.835	0.787	0.800	0.850	0.957	0.973	0.705	0.800	0.900	0.867	0.883
	2	0.808	0.740	0.717	0.825	0.936	0.900	0.775	0.820	0.933	0.840	0.783
	3	0.940	0.700	0.900	0.800	0.980	1.000	0.660	0.700	0.600	1.000	1.000
Total		0.862	0.776	0.803	0.834	0.949	0.947	0.704	0.781	0.874	0.859	0.874

The pooled-variance t test reveals several of the differences between youth who had a guardianship established and those who did not are significant at the 95% confidence level. Looking at all surveys submitted for the experimental group, the average score for the stability and well being category for both the YSR and caregiver survey was significantly higher for the group that eventually had a guardianship established (0.896 and 0.831) compared to the group that did not have a guardianship established (0.833 and 0.779).

Looking at just the surveys submitted at the time of assignment, the average score for the stability and well being category for the YSR was significantly higher for the group that eventually had a guardianship established (0.940) compared to the group that did not have a guardianship established (0.818).

Comparing the average scores for the surveys at the one, two and three year combined for youth who had a guardianship established and those who did not, reveals one difference that is significant at the 95% confidence level (combined values not shown on second part of Figure 6): The average score for stability and well being for the caregiver survey is higher for the group that eventually had a guardianship established (0.831) compared to the group that did not have a guardianship established (0.779).

Looking at data collected on the YSR, youth survey and caregiver survey, there is a significant difference between the scores for youth who at some point have been placed in a guardianship and the scores for youth in the experimental group who, at the time of this analysis, have not been placed in a guardianship. Stability and well being scores are often higher on the YSR and caregiver survey for those who are placed in a guardianship than for those who do not. And this is also true looking only at the scores at the time of assignment: Those with higher stability and well being scores on the YSR at the time of assignment tend to be the ones who eventually are placed in a guardianship.

Tribes compared to Regions

In Montana, many Native Americans are under Tribal jurisdiction. Their cases are handled by Tribal agencies rather than State agencies. Non-native American cases are handled by the state agency organized

into five regions. Figure 7 and Figure 8 show counts and average scores for each of these tribes/regions.

Figure 7 shows how many surveys were scored for each of the tribes/regions.

Figure 7

Status	Number of Surveys Scored										
	Stability and Well Being			Performance and Attendance	Safety and Behaviours		Services, Supports and Satisfaction			Quality of Life	
	YSR	Youth	Care Giver	YSR	YSR	Care Giver	YSR	Youth	Care Giver	Youth	Care Giver
Eastern	7	1	1	4	8	1	7	1	1	1	1
North Central	26	7	7	23	26	6	26	7	7	7	7
South Central	25	16	18	25	26	17	25	16	18	16	18
Southwestern	15	9	9	15	17	8	15	9	9	9	8
Western	19	5	4	18	21	4	19	5	4	5	4
Blackfeet	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fort Peck	13	1	1	12	13	1	13	1	0	1	1
Northern Cheyenne	8	4	1	7	8	1	8	4	1	4	1
Salish Kootenai	5	1	1	3	5	1	5	1	1	1	1
Total	118	44	42	107	124	39	118	44	41	44	41

Figure 8 shows the average scores for each of the tribes/regions.

Figure 8

Status	Average Score										
	Stability and Well Being			Performance and Attendance	Safety and Behaviours		Services, Supports and Satisfaction			Quality of Life	
	YSR	Youth	Care Giver	YSR	YSR	Care Giver	YSR	Youth	Care Giver	Youth	Care Giver
Eastern	0.857	0.800	0.800	0.825	0.913	1.000	0.786	0.900	0.500	1.000	0.900
North Central	0.942	0.857	0.843	0.878	1.000	1.000	0.708	0.857	0.986	0.900	0.957
South Central	0.792	0.750	0.778	0.864	0.954	0.947	0.624	0.750	0.878	0.831	0.889
Southwestern	0.807	0.778	0.800	0.700	0.924	0.925	0.693	0.822	0.756	0.833	0.850
Western	0.863	0.800	0.775	0.861	0.905	0.800	0.732	0.800	1.000	0.920	0.700
Blackfeet	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fort Peck	0.854	1.000	0.900	0.800	0.938	1.000	0.869	1.000	0.900	1.000	1.000
Northern Cheyenne	0.950	0.775	0.800	0.943	0.975	1.000	0.725	0.750	0.900	0.825	1.000
Salish Kootenai	0.940	0.700	0.900	0.800	0.980	1.000	0.660	0.700	0.600	1.000	1.000
Total	0.866	0.786	0.800	0.838	0.949	0.941	0.714	0.795	0.866	0.864	0.883

Using one-way ANOVA, differences in average scores for tribes/regions are significant at the 95% confidence level for the YSR for all four categories that the YSR measures (stability and well being; performance and attendance; safety and behaviors; and services, supports, and satisfaction). Comparing average scores for pairs of regions/tribes, using the Tamhane test, for stability and well being South Central's average score (0.792) is significantly lower than North Central's average score (0.942) and Northern Cheyenne's average score (0.950). For safety and behaviors, South Central's average score (0.954) is significantly lower than North Central's average score (1.000). For services, supports and satisfaction, Fort Peck's average score (0.869) is significantly higher than the average scores for North Central (0.708), South Central (.0624) and Southwestern (0.693). Average scores for other pairs of tribes/regions for these categories are not significant; average scores for pairs of tribes/regions for the performance and attendance category are also not significant. Further, differences in average scores for tribes/regions are not significant at the 95% confidence level for the youth survey and the caregiver survey.

Figure 9 and Figure 10 show counts and average scores after grouping all tribes into one group and all regions into another.

Figure 9 shows how many surveys were scored by each of the categories.

Figure 9

Number of Surveys Scored													
		Stability and Well Being			Performance and Attendance	Safety and Behaviours			Services, Supports and Satisfaction			Quality of Life	
Group	YSR	Youth	Care Giver	YSR	YSR	Care Giver	YSR	Youth	Care Giver	Youth	Care Giver		
Region	92	38	39	85	98	36	92	38	39	38	38		
Tribe	26	6	3	22	26	3	26	6	2	6	3		
Total	118	44	42	107	124	39	118	44	41	44	41		

Number of Surveys Scored													
		Stability and Well Being			Performance and Attendance	Safety and Behaviours			Services, Supports and Satisfaction			Quality of Life	
Status	Years In Project	YSR	Youth	Care Giver	YSR	YSR	Care Giver	YSR	Youth	Care Giver	Youth	Care Giver	
Region	0	32	0	0	27	32	0	32	0	0	0	0	
	1	37	26	26	35	40	24	37	26	26	26	26	
	2	15	7	8	15	18	8	15	7	8	7	8	
	3	8	5	5	8	8	4	8	5	5	5	4	
Tribe	0	6	0	0	5	6	0	6	0	0	0	0	
	1	8	4	1	8	8	1	8	4	1	4	1	
	2	5	0	0	4	5	0	5	0	0	0	0	
	3	7	2	2	5	7	2	7	2	1	2	2	
Total	118	44	42	107	124	39	118	44	41	44	41		

Figure 10 shows the average score for each of these categories.

Figure 10

Average Score													
		Stability and Well Being			Performance and Attendance	Safety and Behaviours			Services, Supports and Satisfaction			Quality of Life	
Group	YSR	Youth	Care Giver	YSR	YSR	Care Giver	YSR	Youth	Care Giver	Youth	Care Giver		
Region	0.857	0.784	0.795	0.836	0.947	0.936	0.693	0.797	0.872	0.861	0.874		
Tribe	0.900	0.800	0.867	0.845	0.958	1.000	0.785	0.783	0.750	0.883	1.000		
Total	0.866	0.786	0.800	0.838	0.949	0.941	0.714	0.795	0.866	0.864	0.883		

Average Score													
		Stability and Well Being			Performance and Attendance	Safety and Behaviours			Services, Supports and Satisfaction			Quality of Life	
Status	Years In Project	YSR	Youth	Care Giver	YSR	YSR	Care Giver	YSR	Youth	Care Giver	Youth	Care Giver	
Region	0	0.878			0.856	0.938		0.650					
	1	0.841	0.788	0.812	0.823	0.935	0.950	0.719	0.777	0.858	0.869	0.885	
	2	0.813	0.771	0.725	0.827	0.967	0.913	0.680	0.814	0.900	0.843	0.825	
	3	0.925	0.780	0.820	0.850	1.000	0.900	0.775	0.880	0.900	0.840	0.900	
Tribe	0	0.883			0.880	0.983		0.833					
	1	0.913	0.775	0.800	0.900	0.975	1.000	0.738	0.750	0.900	0.825	1.000	
	2	0.840			0.775	0.920		0.880					
	3	0.943	0.850	0.900	0.780	0.943	1.000	0.729	0.850	0.600	1.000	1.000	
Total	0.866	0.786	0.800	0.838	0.949	0.941	0.714	0.795	0.866	0.864	0.883		

The pooled-variance t test reveals that only one of the differences between the average scores for regions and tribes (first part of Figure 10) is significant at the 95% confidence level: The average score for services, supports and satisfactions on the YSR is higher for tribes (0.785) than it is for regions (0.693). Differences between averages for stability and well being, performance and attendance, safety and behaviors, and quality of life are not significant at the 95% confidence level.

Comparing the average scores for the initial YSR (year 0) for regions and tribes (second part of Figure 10)

again shows that only the average score for services, supports and satisfactions on the YSR is significantly different at the 95% confidence level: It is higher for tribes (0.833) than it is for regions (0.650). Differences between averages for stability and well being, performance and attendance, safety and behaviors, and quality of life are not significant at the 95% confidence level.

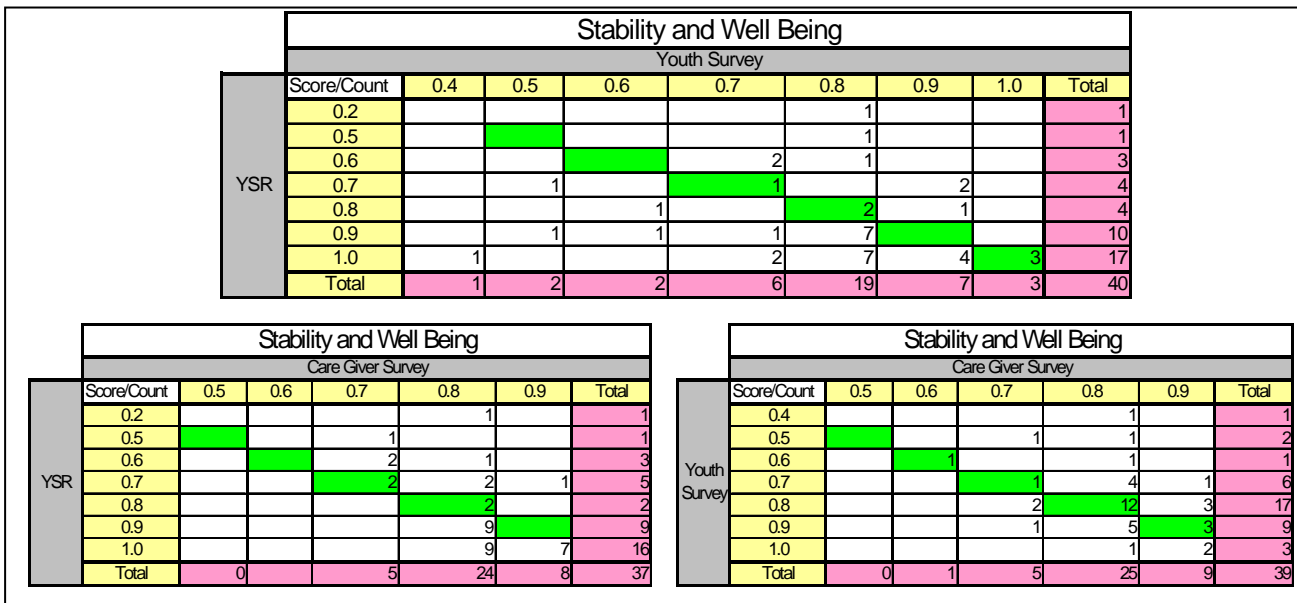
Comparing the average scores for the surveys at the one, two and three year combined for regions and tribes (combined values not shown on second part of Figure 10) shows that only the average score for quality of life on the caregiver survey is significantly different at the 95% confidence level: It is higher for tribes (1.000) than it is for regions (0.873). Differences between averages for stability and well being, performance and attendance, safety and behaviors, and services, supports and satisfaction are not significant at the 95% confidence level.

Looking at data collected on the YSR, youth survey and caregiver survey, there is a significant difference between the scores for tribal youth compared to non-tribal youth. Tribal youth tend to have higher scores for services, supports and satisfaction at the time of assignment into the program. The significance of this difference disappears after the youth have been in the program for a year or more.

Comparing Results From the Various Tools

To get a sense of how the various surveys did when attempting to score the same attribute, we did a series of cross tabs. Figure 11 is a set of three cross tabs of the scores in the Stability and Well Being category. It shows scores for the same youth and period from pairs of surveys for the category. The first part shows scores from the YSR and youth survey. The second part shows scores from the YSR and the caregiver survey. The third part shows scores from the youth survey and the caregiver survey. The cells show how many youth had the scores for the respective row and column. If the surveys were perfectly consistent, each youth would have the same score from each of the surveys. These are the cells that are shaded in green.

Figure 11



The first part of Figure 11 shows that few of the surveys for the same youth, same period received the same score in the Stability and Well Being category on both the YSR and youth survey: Only 8 of 40 youth are

counted in the green shaded cells. However, many of the cells with numbers are only one or two cells from a green shaded cell, meaning there is a fair amount of consistency. There are more scores below the green shaded cells than above, though, meaning that the workers on the YSR tended to give higher scores for Stability and Well Being than the youth did on the corresponding youth surveys. This is further illustrated in Figure 2, which shows the average score on the YSR (0.866) is higher than the average score on the youth survey (0.786) for the Stability and Well Being category.

The second part of Figure 11 shows a similar situation when comparing scores from the YSR with the scores from the caregiver survey for the Stability and Well Being category: Only 4 of 37 youth are counted in the green shaded cells.

However, the third part of Figure 11 shows a somewhat different picture: 17 of 39 youth are counted in green shaded cells for the Stability and Well Being category. Apparently the youth and their caregivers have similar opinions in this area. This is further illustrated in Figure 2, which shows the average score from the youth survey for the Stability and Well Being category (0.786) is similar to the average score from the caregiver surveys (0.800).

Figure 12 is a cross tab of YSR scores and caregiver survey scores for the Safety and Behaviors category. It shows scores for the same youth from pairs of surveys for the category. The cells show how many youth had the scores for the respective row and column. If the surveys were perfectly consistent, each youth would have the same score for each of the surveys. These are the cells that are shaded in green.

Figure 12

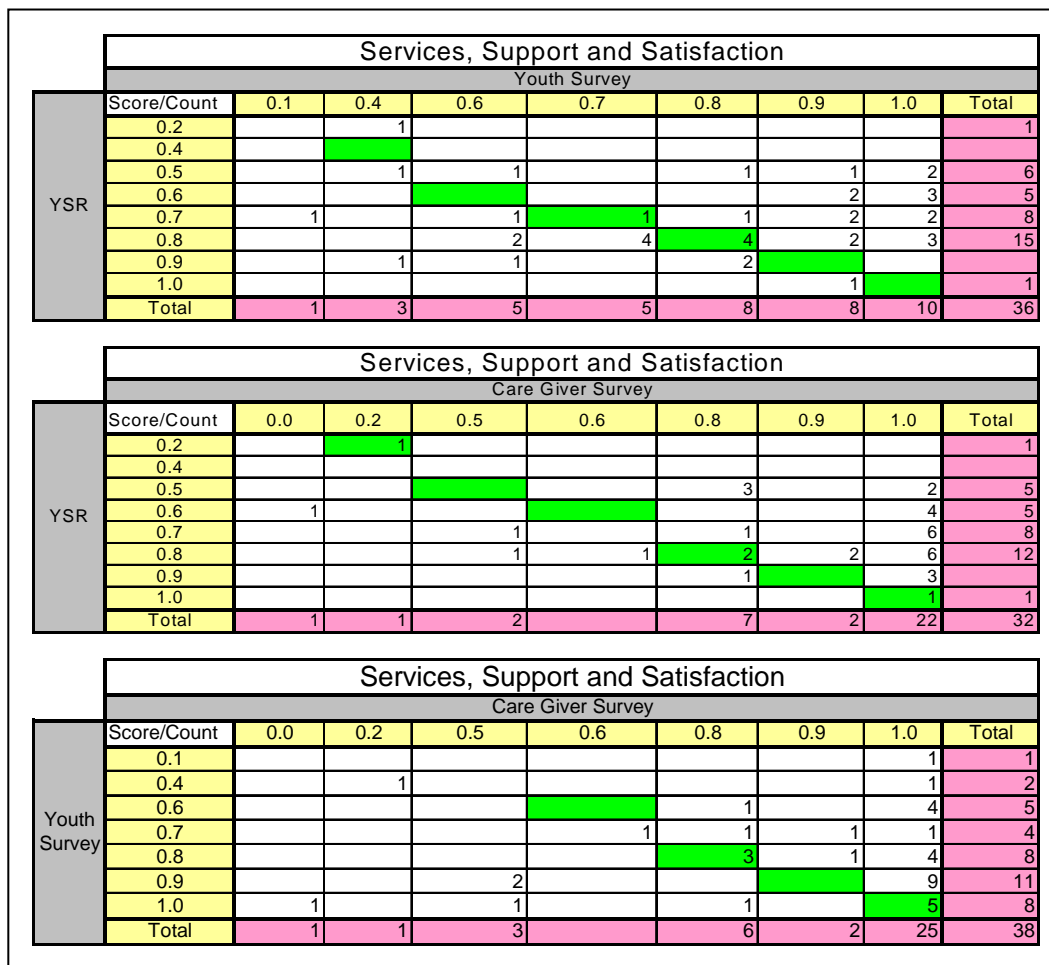
		Safety and Behaviours						
		Care Giver Survey						
YSR	Score/Count	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.8	0.9	1.0	Total
	0.5	1						1
	0.6		1					0
	0.7			1				0
	0.8				1		1	2
	0.9					1	4	7
	1.0						2	25
Total		1	1	1	7	27	37	

Figure 12 shows that many of the surveys for the same youth received the same score in the Safety and Behaviors category on both the YSR and caregiver survey: Thirty of 37 youth are counted in the green shaded cells. And where they are not in the green shaded cells, all are only one cell from a green shaded cell, meaning there is a lot of consistency. This is further illustrated in Figure 2, which shows the average score from the caregiver survey (0.941) is similar to the average score from the YSR (0.949) for the Safety and Behaviors category. Twenty-five of Twenty-seven youth scores were as high as possible (1.0) in both the caregiver survey and YSR and the one youth who received a score of 0.5 on the YSR also received a 0.5 on the caregiver survey for the Safety and Behaviors category. The scores were in general high and consistent.

Figure 13 is a set of three cross tabs of the scores in the Services, Support and Satisfaction category. It shows scores for the same youth and period from pairs of surveys for the category. The first part shows scores from the YSR and youth survey. The second part shows scores for the YSR and caregiver survey. The third part shows scores for the youth survey and caregiver survey. The cells show how many youth had the scores for the respective row and column. If the surveys were perfectly consistent, each youth would

have the same score for each of the surveys. These are the cells that are shaded in green.

Figure 13



The first part of Figure 13 shows that few of the surveys for the same youth received the same score in the Services, Support and Satisfaction category on both the YSR and youth survey: Only five of 36 youth are counted in the green shaded cells. Further, many of the cells with numbers are more than one or two cells from a green shaded cell, meaning there is little consistency. There are more scores above the green shaded cells than below, though, meaning that the YSR tended to have lower scores for Services, Support and Satisfaction than did the corresponding youth surveys. This is further illustrated in Figure 2, which shows the average score from the youth survey (0.714) is lower than the average score from the YSR (0.795) for the Services, Support and Satisfaction category.

The second part of Figure 13 shows a similar situation when comparing the YSR scores with the caregiver scores for the Services, Support and Satisfaction category: Only four of 32 youth are counted in the green shaded cells.

Further, the third part of Figure 13 also shows a similar situation when comparing youth scores with caregiver scores: Only eight of 38 youth are counted in the green shaded cells for the Services, Support and Satisfaction category. The youth surveyed and their caregivers have differing opinions in this area also. This is further illustrated in Figure 2, which shows the average score from the youth survey (0.795) is lower

than the average score from the caregiver surveys (0.866) for the Services, Support and Satisfaction category.

Figure 14 is a cross tab of youth survey scores and caregiver survey scores for the Quality of Life category. It shows scores for the same youth and period from pairs of surveys for the category. The cells show how many youth had the scores for the respective row and column. If the surveys were perfectly consistent, each youth would have the same score for each of the surveys. These are the cells that are shaded in green.

Figure 14

		Quality of Life					
		Care Giver Survey					
Youth Survey	Score/Count	0.6	0.7	0.8	0.9	1.0	Total
	0.5	1				1	2
	0.6	1		1			2
	0.7	1	1			2	4
	0.8	1		1	2	3	7
	0.9	1		1	4	6	12
	1.0	1	1	1	4	6	13
Total		5		4	13	16	38

Figure 14 shows that some of the surveys for the same youth received the same score in the Quality of Life category on both the youth survey and caregiver survey: Eleven of 38 youth are counted in the green shaded cells. And where they are not in the green shaded cells, many are only one or two cells from a green shaded cell, meaning there is some consistency. This is further illustrated in Figure 2, which shows the average score from the youth survey (0.864) is similar to the average score from the caregiver surveys (0.883) for the Quality of Life category. Six of the 38 youth scores were as high as possible (1.0) in both the caregiver survey and youth survey. The scores were in general somewhat high and consistent.

Family Interviews

From June 28th through July 2, 2004, and on September 9, 2004, 36 caregivers and 22 youth were interviewed to give impressions about 26 cases in the Montana IV-E subsidized guardianship demonstration project. These interviews covered youth from four reservations (Blackfeet, Fort Peck, Northern Cheyenne and Salish Kootenai) and all five CFSD regions (Eastern, North Central, South Central, Southwest and Western). The evaluators were welcomed into their homes and they spoke easily about their experiences. This was the second and third time to interview many of these families and they seemed more at ease with the evaluation process.

The youth were in three different evaluation groups: guardianship completed, guardianship in process, and control (foster care). The interviews reviewed 26 separate cases with each case being a family unit consisting of one or more youth. Of these 9 cases were in the guardianship-completed group, 8 in the guardianship in process², and 9 in the control group. These totals become somewhat intriguing when broken down by region and tribe. Within the five regions, 18 family units were interviewed and of these, 9 were in the guardianship-completed group, 8 were in the control group and 1 was in the guardianship in process (and has actually returned to her biological mother). Within the 4 tribes, 1 family unit is in the control group and 7 are in the guardianship in process group.

The following table shows some information about the cases. All of the numbers represent individuals except the final line in the first table, which reflects cases; i.e., family units.

² One of the youth in the guardianship in process list left her placement just prior to the interviews and is living with her biological mother. Parental rights have been terminated. This youth will be removed from the demonstration project and not be reported on in future reports.

		Eastern	North Central	South Central	Southwestern	Western	Blackfeet	Fort Peck	Northern Cheyenne	Salish Kootenai	Total
Guardianship Completed		2	4	1	4	2					13
Guardianship in Progress				1			1	2	2	2	8
Control		3	3	1	3	1			4		15
Sex	F	2	3	3	5	1		2		2	18
	M	3	4		2	2	1		6		18
Relation K=Kin N=NonKin	K	4	3	2	6	1			1	1	18
	N	1	4	1	1	2	1	2	5	1	18
Caregivers interviewed		6	6	4	4	6	2	3	3	2	36
Youth interviewed		3	4	2	4	3	0	2	2	2	22
Total family units		4	4	3	4	3	1	2	3	2	26

A distribution of the ages of the youth in the case study is illustrated in the table below.

Age	Eastern	North Central	South Central	Southwestern	Western	Blackfeet	Fort Peck	Northern Cheyenne	Salish Kootenai	Total
3	1									1
6		1								1
7	1	1								2
9				1				1		1
10								1		0
11				1						1
12		1		1	1			1		3
14	1			1			1	2		2
15			1	1	2					4
16	1	3	1				1	1	2	5
17		1	1	2		1				4
18	1									1

Cases were designated for the case study by randomly choosing two control assignment groups³ and two experimental assignment groups from each region/tribe. Two control assignment groups and two experimental assignment groups from each region/tribe were designated as alternates. If there was not four control or experimental assignment groups in a region or tribe, the two primary places were filled first, if possible, and the two alternate places next, if possible. An alternate assignment group was interviewed if a primary assignment group was unavailable to be interviewed.

The designation as a primary assignment group or alternate assignment group for the case study is permanent for the life of the project. The next time case studies are conducted; the same assignment groups will be interviewed, where possible. If an assignment group is unavailable, the first alternate will be used. As assignment groups leave the project, if there are undesignated assignment groups available in the same region/tribe, they will be randomly designated as primary or alternate assignment groups to replace those that left. If there are no undesignated assignment groups available, alternate assignment groups will be changed to primary. As new assignment groups enter the project, they will be given random seed numbers that determine the order in which they may be chosen to replace primary and alternate assignment groups leaving the project.

Once the primary and alternate assignment groups were selected, their locations were plotted throughout the state. IHSR staff contacted primary assignment groups first and scheduled interviews in as logical a travel sequence as possible. An alternate assignment group was contacted only if the primary assignment group could not be reached or refused to participate. Twenty-three primary assignment groups (of a potential 27) agreed to the interview. Three alternates agreed to an interview. One interview with a guardian and youth had to be cancelled at the request of the social worker because of increasing behavior problems and hospitalization of the youth. The guardianship has since been terminated. An alternate was interviewed. Several of the regions/tribes had limited or no control groups. As a result, if the primary group could not be scheduled, there was no alternate. If all regions and participating tribes had the full complement of control and experimental groups, a total of 36 family groups would be interviewed. Because of the actual numbers of primary and alternate control and experimental groups, 26 family groups were interviewed out of a possible 27.

The interviewers gave the caregivers the choice of doing the interviews at their homes or at some other location selected by the caregiver. Of the above 26 cases, 22 were done in the caregivers home, 2 in a restaurant and 2 at the caregiver's work site. The interviews began with a brief description of the purpose and use of the evaluation and how the interview information would be used. The interviewer described the process and limits of confidentiality inherent to the interviews and answered any questions the respondents might have. In general, the interviews for caregivers and youth were conducted separately. The youth were present for 2 of the caregiver interviews and in 2 of the 22 youth interviews the youth requested that the caregiver be present. One family unit with a recently completed guardianship requested that a family interview be conducted. In the other 19 youth interviews the caregiver was not present.

³ An assignment group generally consists of a sibling group that will be assigned to the same foster parents or enter the same guardianship. In instances where siblings are not all assigned to the same foster parents or are not all to be considered for the same guardianship, the sibling group is divided into two or more assignment groups, each of which will be assigned to a foster parent or guardianship.

The interviews began with some follow-up questions on how things had been going for the past year. The second set of questions asked about accomplishments and outcomes for the youth over the past year. This included school, friends, safety, behavioral health, security, behavior, community involvement, and satisfaction. In each of these categories there were several standard questions and then the interviewer would follow up on items discussed. The next set of questions asked the caregiver and youth about any challenges or problems they were encountering with the foster care or guardianship process. The final set of questions was about any recommendations the interviewee had.

Reasons for Subsidized Guardianships

Overall caregivers and youth interviewed gave seven different reasons why guardianship could be a good idea compared to adoption or long-term foster care.

1. For older youth with a tie to their biological family or their name, guardianship let them have a permanent situation without breaking this bond.

One youth commented, "It is my name and my family and I don't want to give that up. This is good, I know I can stay."

Another youth said, "This way I have a home and the family stays together."

A youth explained: "Once the guardianship was done I knew I could stay. I don't trust CFSD."

2. It can provide stability when adoption is not possible or in the best interest of the child.

One guardian explained, "His mother is in Mexico and we could not adopt."

Another guardian supported, "The parents are never bad enough to make the court let us adopt, but they (the parents) agreed to this."

3. For some caregivers other family considerations make adoption a less desirable choice.

One guardian stated, "We live on a family farm and do not want to create an inheritance problem with our children."

Another guardian explained, "We have a blended family with kids on both sides, we cannot adopt the step-kids and to adopt a foster child would make them [step-kids] feel like second class family members."

Another guardian was concerned that "This child has a lot of problems and if we were to adopt him, you could not count on the state to follow through."

4. It can be good for youth and families that have strong family bonds when the parents are not able to be primary caregivers. It gives a way for family members who would not otherwise be able to afford to keep the child to maintain family bonds.

One guardian explained, "It gives us the legal rights so they know they are secure but they are still part of the original family and will have two families when they are eighteen."

One control foster mom who had applied for guardianship complained, "Her mother never follows through but keeps telling her she is working to get her back. The girl never knows what to expect and is always worrying about it. I wish they had let me do it [guardianship]."

5. It can provide the official sanction that lets the caregiver become a parent.

One guardian explained, "This finalized who is the caregiver, who makes the decisions, which has let us be closer as a family and make decisions together."

A guardian reported that: "She ran away several times before the process was complete but seems more responsible now."

6. It can be a way for parents to be given more time to deal with physical infirmities, legal issues, and substance abuse while giving the child a sense of permanency.

One guardian noted, "As my daughters physical condition has changed, the children visit her more or less. We were able to make our own decisions and the children feel more in control."

Another set of guardians reported, "We know when there are unsafe people around and can go and get the kids and have them here. This means that when they [the parents] are doing well they [the children] can be with their parents. As guardians, we decide."

7. It can be a good option for Native American children from tribes who do not believe in severance of parental rights.

One caregiver explained: "The Tribe does not believe in adoption and this way the child stays in the Tribe and has the peace of mind of knowing she can always stay with us."

Advantages. Respondents talked about the advantages of assisted guardianship over long-term foster care. The most frequently listed advantage was the guardian's ability to make decisions. Caregivers and youth reported that it decreased the "fear" of moving again. Youth reported that it was great to have a family and not be a "foster kid" anymore. "The best thing is not having a social worker." Youth reported that they felt like "normal kids" when they no longer have a worker. It also lets or sometimes forces families to work out their issues. When the social worker was involved families reported they would not compromise but make the social worker decide. When the guardianship was established they had to work it out for themselves. Comments also included that it made it a lot easier to travel and be spontaneous which led to doing more things together and with other family members and friends.

Disadvantages. There were also disadvantages reported. The loss of funding when the youth becomes 18 even though he/she has not finished high school was a potential disadvantage. The loss of funding for post-secondary education and independent living was seen as a big disadvantage for guardianship starting before age 16. The loss of some of the extra services available for children with special needs, loss of respite and transportation, clothing and school allowances were all seen as disincentives for some potential guardians. This was especially true for children with complex challenges.

Outcomes

Permanency. The most frequently cited potential outcomes of subsidized guardianship, were permanence and stability for the youth and caregiver. These were also two of the three outcomes listed as significantly improved by all caregivers. Both caregivers and youth reported that as soon as the papers were signed, they felt attached and better trusted the stability of the placement. Interestingly several of the "control" caregivers and youth reported that committing to the subsidized guardianship even though they ultimately were not able to do it made a big difference. Foster parents and youth reported that they felt a commitment

was made by applying for the guardianship. Three of the control families reported that once they signed up for guardianship they were being treated as a guardianship even though in the control group. Those that were in the experimental group noted an increased attachment when the initial papers were signed and an even greater attachment once the guardianship was finalized. Unfortunately some in the control group express concern that permanency is lacking and there is a fear that the placement might be terminated despite the strong established relationship.

One youth reported, "When they said they would go to court to have me, I knew they would stick by me."

A guardian reported, "She always seemed on edge before we did the guardianship. Now she seems to know this is her home."

From a second youth, "Every court day was a horror until the court said I could stay."

Another youth explained further, "As a foster kid I had no roots. Now this is my home."

A youth in the control group reported, "When they told me they wanted to be my family I knew it was OK."

A guardian reported, "She had nightmares about leaving but these quit after the court hearing."

One youth and guardian both noted that there has been a definite change in the relationship since the guardianship was legally established. From the adult, "This is his place. He feels more stable. He went from 'mine, mine, mine' to 'ours'." From the youth, "I've gotten closer with my Uncle since the guardianship was established. We do more stuff together – fishing, hunting, the basics."

A control group foster parent reported, "We are her guardians, we just didn't go to court."

Control group foster parents expressed frustration with the program. They had hoped to adopt their young foster children but the biological father, who is currently in prison, still has parental rights. They saw the guardianship program as a way of assuring family stability. "We're really tired of the runaround we're getting from the social workers and the foster care system, especially the tribal system."

Well Being. The other most frequently cited positive outcome for all youth and caregivers was an enhanced feeling of well being. This was reported as the result of being able to make decisions, control their own destiny, permanence and stability. Interestingly, several youth in the control group reported an improved sense of well being based on the commitment made to try to do the guardianship.

One guardian reported, "After two years he is more confident and has made friends who are quality people."

One youth explained: "I don't have a worker and don't have to ask permission. I can hold my head up."

Another control foster parent says, "The youth often plays us against her mother and the social worker and the social worker continues to stir the pot. The social worker seems to like to create drama that decreases the wellbeing of the child."

One youth in the control group says, "Now that we have decided to stick together (guardianship commitment), I don't worry so much."

Another youth reported, "This is my family and I am here to stay."

Family Contact. Most caregivers expressed willingness to support the child's desires to maintain contact with their parents. Some guardians still worried that biological parents might be a bad influence on the

youth or might try to take the money the youth has saved, but still supported family contact. The biggest differences seemed to be that when the youth were still in foster care the decisions on visitation were made by the social worker but when the guardianship was established the decisions were made by the guardian and youth. Guardians seemed to assume more responsibility and would make decisions based on their relationships and knowledge with the parents and extended family. There was a consistent concern from foster parents that if something happened the children might be removed from their care. In addition, there was concern that if the child visited, they might not come back. Furthermore, the process of getting approval for visits decreased spontaneity and seemed to lead to decreased visitation. These fears were diminished when guardianship was established.

Almost universally (but with some strong exceptions) and regardless of the type of placement, youth with family contact commented that they wished they could have more contact with their birth family.

One youth explained, "I was always worried they might make me go back. My mom was always telling me stuff that made me worry more. That is better now and I can visit and it is easier to be there."

One guardian reported, "He used to be worried all the time that his mother was going to get him back. Now he feels safe and is more comfortable visiting with her."

Another guardian explained, "It is easier to spend time with his brothers and sisters because we can decide on the spur of the moment."

One guardian reported that, "He is with a church camp now and that would have been a big deal before."

Another guardian stated, "Her mother has been doing better [clean and sober] so I let her visit more."

One grandmother (guardian) reports that, "It [the guardianship] has worked because she and her daughter can talk to the kids and together they decide on the visits."

Safety. There were three areas of questions about safety that were asked through the interviews (safety in the home, safety from others, and safety in the environment). Across Montana there are some very different levels of risk. In some communities there are very high rates of substance abuse and violence. Safety was more related to where the child and family lived than to guardianship status. There may be safety advantages to guardianship in that the guardians know more about the day to day status of the family and can make more informed decisions about the safety of situations. Several guardians commented they were more responsible for decisions.

One guardian explained, "We know when it is safe to be with his family and can act accordingly."

One youth with a guardian noted that she now has lots of food and gets good balanced meals. She explained, "Before we often did not have any food in the house."

One guardian explained that the youth's friends are monitored and an intervention occurs if a relationship is not appropriate. "He knows he has someone to answer to and he is responsible for his actions."

One foster mother noted, "Living out in the country really helps especially with kids who run. It's a good environment but also would really take planning to leave; there are no impulsive runaways."

Community Involvement. All of the caregivers expressed some efforts at getting youth involved in events in the community. This varied by location and availability of activities, but clearly youth in the guardianship program were more involved in community activities for several reasons. The restrictions on

foster kids made it hard to share rides, stay at other kids' houses, and respond spontaneously to opportunities to participate. In addition, the stigma of "checking everyone out" made youth reluctant to get involved. Not only do youth become involved in the community, but, in many instances, the community becomes involved with the youth.

One guardian described how her adult children and her church friends stepped in to care for the children when she fractured her femur.

Several guardians reported they had taken the youth on additional vacations because it was easier now. Families had gone to Disneyland, Canada, Indian celebrations across Montana and even out of state.

One control youth reported that he was able to go to Europe on a 16-day band trip. The foster parents felt he was given more freedom since they had committed to the guardianship even though it did not happen.

Another youth reported that after the guardianship, "I knew I was going to stay so I made more friends. This is my town."

One control youth reported, "I wanted to play basketball but did not want them to check-out my friend's mom."

Another youth reported, "Now I just ask my mom [guardian] and I can go when people call."

Another youth reported, "Now I get to camp out for Indian Days and we have gone on other camping trips."

Education and Risky Behaviors. In most of the interviews, respondents reported that the youth had maintained school performance or had shown improvement in the past year or two. A small minority reported that there had been increasing problems with behavior over that period of time and that the grades had begun to slip with the increasing problems. The youth who showed the most improvement were in the guardianship group.

One guardian reported, "Since she has been settled her grades have gone from Cs until now she is on the honor roll."

Another guardian reported, "Before guardianship I was having trouble controlling her behavior now she is making A/B's, national honor society and placed in a speech tournament."

Another guardian: "I let him home school a year although the social worker had been against it. He did okay and now is going back to school. I think letting him decide helped him."

Another guardian reported, "I was able to let him spend the summer with another uncle on the reservation so he could get a job."

Another guardian said, "He maybe has FAS [Fetal Alcohol Syndrome] and as long as his placement was in limbo, he had a short attention span. Now that is settled and he is doing better in school."

Intrusiveness. One of the primary potential differences between foster care and guardianship is the intrusiveness and amount of responsibility that is transferred from the social worker to the guardian. Caregivers and youth saw this as a major reason for doing the guardianship. Self esteem increased for youth no longer in foster care. The ability to take responsibility and trust in the future was important. The reduction in paper work, court reports and appearances was seen as a real positive. In several of the control

cases interviewed, the amount of contact has decreased significantly after they committed to the guardianship even though guardianship is not going to occur.

Three of the control group foster parents reported they only saw the worker once a year since they had applied for the guardianship. Two thought the workers had established guardianship anyway.

One foster parent reported that she was glad that the guardianship had not been approved because she was getting support from the social worker several times a month.”

One guardian still calls the social worker several times a month for advice.

One youth reported, “The best thing about guardianship is no social worker. It was so weird to have them around.”

Another youth reports, “My mom [guardian] now lets me make decisions about who to see. It is great.”

Needs. The respondents reported on some needs they have:

- In many of the regions it is very difficult to find a dentist to provide dental care for Medicaid (this is a general problem for guardians and foster parents).
- The turnover of social workers was a challenge to several of the families interviewed.
- Some of the guardianship families were upset about loss of scholarship possibilities.
- The loss of the clothing and school allowances was a problem for some of the guardianship families.
- The loss of support at 18 for youth that are still in school was also seen as a problem by families affected by the loss.
- Several guardians expressed difficulty getting insurance so the youth could drive because the insurance companies did not recognize the legal status of guardianship.
- Youth in foster care and their families indicated that the youth couldn't get their driver's license until age 18 unless a parent will sign for them.
- A concern listed by a few guardians was the loss of support services (respite, transportation, and funds for memberships in clubs).
- A control group foster care mom of tribal children noted that she keeps a very low profile because, although she is Native American, she is not of the same tribe as the children. Tribal social services has already removed the children once for placement with a tribal family and the children were only returned after substantiated abuse occurred. Although she would prefer either guardianship or adoption, she will continue the current course and not rock the boat.
- Several of the tribal families interviewed expressed frustration with the tribal social services and court system in their failure to complete the guardianship. One foster parent waiting for activity on the guardianship stated, “I know the process is slow, but the standstill is frustrating.” Another stated, “We have been waiting for guardianship and pretty soon it will not matter because [child] will be 18.

Field Interviews

Social worker, Permanency Placement Specialist, and Supervisor Interviews

From September 27th through September 30th 28 social workers, 12 supervisors, 4 permanency placement specialists (PPS), and 1 Regional Administrator were interviewed to give impressions about the Montana IV-E subsidized guardianship program. These interviews covered staff from one reservation (Ft. Peck) and five CFSD regions (Eastern, North Central, South Central, Southwestern and Western). The table below shows some information about these staff.

Region	Social workers	Supervisors	Permanency Placement Specialists	Regional Administrator
Eastern	9	2	1	
Fort Peck			1	
North Central	6	3	1	
South Central	6	3	1	
Southwestern	2	1		
Western	6	3		1

The interviews were done in the offices and meeting rooms of the staff. Most interviews were combination interviews with all available staff attending. Three interviews were done separately. This was the third time evaluators had met with CFSD staff so many in attendance had been interviewed previously. The interviews began with a brief description of the purpose and use of the external evaluation of the subsidized guardianship project and how the interview information would be used. The interviewer described the process and limits of confidentiality inherent to the interviews and answered any questions the respondents might have. The interviews began with some general questions about the experience the staff had with the subsidized guardianship project. This was followed by discussion as to the reasons they might consider using subsidized guardianship as an option. This included asking them to describe the potential advantages and disadvantages of subsidized guardianship compared to long term foster care and other permanency options.

The next sets of questions asked them to describe the process for identifying and selecting children and potential guardians for subsidized guardianship. This was followed by discussions of implementation of the subsidized guardianship process. During this process the interviewer also asked about contextual factors that might be influencing implementation.

The next sets of questions asked about outcomes of the process for emotional stability, permanence, education, availability and access to services, safety in the home and community, risky and harmful behaviors, community involvement, and satisfaction. In each of these categories there were several standard questions and then the interviewer would follow up on items discussed. The final set of questions was about any recommendations the interviewee had.

Reasons for Subsidized Guardianships

There was a general consistency of the rationales for the use of assisted guardianships by the permanency workers, supervisors, and social workers that were considering the option. Everyone agreed that all options for reunification had to be explored first and that adoption was preferable to guardianship when possible. There are workers who feel that subsidized guardianship should be avoided because of the requirement of the control group. Some of the permanency specialists and social workers are developing a decision tree to aid in working through the available permanency options (once reunification and adoption are ruled out). The three options that they described considering were:

- *Permanent Legal Custody*
- *Non-Subsidized Kinship Guardianship*
- *Subsidized Guardianship*

Permanent legal custody is easier to complete for blood relatives and if eligible the family can get TANF. This gives them stability and the authority to travel and make medical decisions. CFSD retains responsibility for the child/youth finances. This is only for relatives but there is no control group, so many workers prefer it to subsidized guardianship as a way to provide financial support. (Note: It is possible that the workers were actually referring to non-subsidized guardianship and not permanent legal custody. Relatives who are guardians can obtain TANF assistance. TANF assistance is not available if CFSD is making foster care payments. There are some non-relatives who have become guardians when youth have other sources of income, e.g. SSI, Social Security death benefits, etc.)

If the caregiver were willing to take the child without financial support, non-subsidized guardianship would be the choice. This offers some permanency without the need to sever parental rights.

Subsidized Guardianship is considered for the following reasons:

- *The youth or caregiver does not want adoption but is willing to make a long-term commitment.*
- *Extended family participation is a factor.*
- *Severance of parental rights is unlikely or will be protracted and the parents agree to this alternative.*
- *Tribes do not support severance of parental rights so subsidized guardianship is a good option for tribal children.*

Advantages

Respondents talked about the advantages of assisted guardianship over long-term foster care. The most frequently listed advantage was providing permanence and stability for children and youth. Having guardianship gives real emotional commitment plus a legal bond. Staff also saw a benefit for the guardians'

ability to make decisions. Workers also talked about the improvements in well being for these youth, particularly in their sense of independence from the child welfare system.

Disadvantages

Respondents expressed some concerns or disadvantages to the use of assisted guardianship. These would be reasons not to pursue the guardianship option:

Respondents felt it had a lower desirability than adoption and some feared that it might keep children and youth from being adopted. Some felt it placed children at risk because if parental rights are not severed there may be continual cycles of parents trying to get kids back. There was some concern that children with significant mental health or behavior problems would not receive the support they need (easier to get if in system). There was concern that resources and supports are not available after age 18 for these young adults. The loss of resources after the age of 18 (e.g., the guardianship subsidy for youth still in high school, independent living resources and continuing education grants), were the areas of most current concern. Adverse impacts of lesser concern include the loss of respite care, day care, clothing and transportation allowances.

Overall Impressions of Assisted Guardianship

Every person interviewed reported that assisted guardianship could be a good option for some youth and an important addition to the continuum of possible placement options for children in the child welfare system in Montana. The three consistent concerns were: one, it not be used as an easy alternative when adoption was a more appropriate option. This included aggressively pursuing adoption and that workers would not do the same level of preparation to give guardians the information given to adoptive parents. Second, there is a growing concern about the impact on youth, as they become 18. The loss of subsidy for high school students, educational grant opportunities, and independent living support are creating disincentives to subsidized guardianship. Finally, the issue of the control group has made subsidized guardianship not available for a substantial (but unknown) number of the IV-E eligible children and youth in the Montana foster care system because some staff are put off by the possibility of control group placement and stated that they will not submit names. The “lottery” is considered the primary reason that some staff will not pursue a subsidized guardianship for a youth who otherwise meets the criteria. Other workers note that the control group is a real disincentive but would not prevent name submission. If adoption were ruled out, guardianship would be preferable to long-term foster care as long as stability is established.

Outcomes

Staff had simply not spent enough time with or collected the required status information on enough youth to have any objective information on outcomes. The general impression is that the outcomes were generally good. The surveys collected and reported in an earlier section provide a collective overview of outcomes. The discussion that follows provides the worker perspective provided in interviews.

Field Interview Details

Training

Most staff initially heard about the assisted guardianship option through policy training and this was the only formal training any worker reported receiving. Workers also reported getting assistance from the region's permanency placement specialist (PPS). Guardianship is usually identified as the preferred placement option during a permanency meeting. It is at that time that most workers are introduced to the process. Most of the PPS use a preassembled packet containing the guardianship forms to advance the process. Some also use a task sheet with dates and responsibilities. The social workers generally learn by doing. Most of the social workers noted that the second time was much easier although some commented that if much time has elapsed since the first time, the worker had to relearn the process.

Most of the staff interviewed did not understand one or more of the basic components of the program even though the program and any program changes have been presented at policy training and are contained in the CFSD policy manual. Misunderstandings included:

- *Believing that guardianship could only be used after parental rights had been severed.*
- *Not knowing that the age limit had been eliminated.*
- *Not knowing that subsidized guardianship impacted eligibility for continuing educational grants and participation in the independent living program. Some knew there was an impact but did not know that if the guardianship is effected at age 16 or later, the youth is eligible.*
- *Unfamiliarity about the IV-E eligibility process.*
- *Not knowing the subsidy rate and how it compares to the foster care payment.*
- *Belief that the family had to be agreeable to guardianship as an option before the name can be submitted for random assignment. (This was initially true but the process was changed very early in the program. Random assignment may be done prior to the time participation in the demonstration is discussed with the youth or with the prospective guardian. This change was made in recognition of the disappointment experienced by families when they learned of their control group status.)*
- *Belief that the process and forms have changed during the preceding 12 months. (The process has not changed and the only forms that were altered are not normally used by social workers.)*

Training, Support and Resources for Families

Last year respondents had five suggestions for how to better prepare families. Almost all respondents noted a need for a brochure that explains the assisted guardianship process and the reasons one might choose (or not choose) this option. Workers are still hopeful that a brochure will be made available for work with families. In particular, the workers hope that a brochure will clearly explain some of the incentives and disincentives identified within the guardianship program. The financial picture in particular needs to be well explained. According to the demonstration project manager, a group of workers and PPS have drafted a pamphlet that is currently under review by the Management Team. It is unknown whether the pamphlet will provide specifics on the demonstration project that will be useful to workers in the field.

One worker noted that his office uses the policy manual material during the guardianship process. The manual material is very clear and is used to walk the prospective guardians through the process. The worker commented, “*You really need to work the process to understand it.*”

Many of the respondents who had experience with guardians also suggested that a simple manual that described potential future issues experienced during the guardianship and that could be used by the guardians as a reference manual would be good.

More than half recommended some specialized training in issues around guardianship. Some asked if the packet used by some offices during the process could be posted in the Department’s public folders. The demonstration project manager responded that the packet could be added to the public folders and noted that all of the required forms are already in the public folders.

Another suggestion from the field was that the state office provide periodic email reminders about both IV-E and guardianship. The demonstration project manager has spoken with the training bureau about doing so. The bureau already uses email to remind workers about other department policies and practices.

Age of Eligibility

Most of the respondents felt that opening the age limit up to younger children was a good idea. Almost all respondents working with Native American children felt it was important since the reservations do not believe in terminating parental rights. Workers noted that adoption is the preferred option for almost all younger children. There is a small concern that guardianship might be used for younger children only because it was easier. Workers noted that on a case-by-case basis having the flexibility to consider guardianship for younger children is an important change. One worker commented, “Eliminating the age limit has made a big difference in making guardianship more available as an option.” Most were aware the age range had been changed and 34 children under the age of 12 are now part of the demonstration. With the exception of one staff member who was upset about control group placement, all staff interviewed thought the change in the age limit as a good idea.

Control Groups

For the most part staff was selected for interview based on the premise that they had a child in the program, although a few other staff attended as well. Through direct questioning with staff, supervisors and PPS, it became apparent that some staff do not participate (fully or partly) in the program because of the control group. The non-participating staff seek other permanency options, including non-subsidized guardianship,

or are leaving the children and youth in foster care.

Clarification that a family unit meeting the criteria can go through the random assignment process before approaching the family about guardianship may alleviate this situation since many of the workers expressed dread about offering the option only to have to later tell the family that it would not be available to them as a result of the random assignment process.

Documentation and Process

Social workers and supervisors reported problems with the documentation process. Supervisors complained that staff was not completing all the reports needed for the families and that they (social workers) did not believe they should do all the required information (very similar to the adoption paperwork). In addition, staff complained that the paperwork requirements had been changed again and they had no information on requirements for annual visits. From the lack of data, it appears many are not completing the required annual visit.

The demonstration project manager noted that the paperwork requirements for social workers had not changed in the past year. The annual visit to family units in the guardianship program is a requirement of the demonstration waiver. Completion of the YSR is normally done during the annual visit and is the primary population-wide data collection for the evaluation. The annual visit (and completion of the YSR) is affected by staffing issues and changes in either the address or placement for youth in guardianship. One consequence of the requirement for an annual visit is that out-of-state subsidized guardianships cannot occur unless the family lives adjacent to Montana.

The court process is working more smoothly now that the court officers and judges have gained experience with the process. Judges like the guardianship option. Delays are still possible but they are the type of delays that would be experienced regardless of program.

Fidelity

Guardianship for many of the children in the experimental group has not been established. For the youth that have been in guardianship for more than a couple of months, there have been changes in the role and duties of the social workers. The extent of the change is often dependent on whether there are other foster care children in the guardianship home. In these cases the only change seemed to be the need for the guardian to get permission for travel, family visits, school activities, and medical procedures. For the most part, social workers were no longer attending school meetings although some continued family support activities. In many cases, social workers were having little or no contact with guardians and youth. Of note is that visits for some control families has decreased even though the family was not selected for guardianship.

Experimental Designation that Does Not Lead to Established Guardianships

There were several reasons provided regarding why a case that met criteria for the guardianship program has not yet resulted in the establishment of a guardianship. A few of the reasons are:

- *The initial placement broke down after the name was submitted. (In this event, the child remains in the demonstration project and data is gathered on all placements. In some instances, the subsequent placement proves stable and a guardianship is*

eventually established. In other cases, the child remains in foster care.)

- *The guardianship is delayed because of internal process problems such as a delay in doing the paperwork or court delays.*
- *Sometimes the adults who initially liked the idea of guardianship become concerned over liability potential and change their minds.*
- *Staff turnover affects progress toward guardianship.*
- *Especially in times of staff shortage there is a crisis orientation. The children awaiting guardianship activity are in a stable environment and therefore not a top priority.*
- *Financial considerations not initially considered become important and it is determined that long term foster care is in the best financial interest of the family.*
- *Some families want to proceed with guardianship but the youth's behavior is unstable at this time. More services are available if they stay in foster care. The guardianship will proceed once stability is achieved.*
- *During the early years, older children's names were submitted and because the process was not well understood, many children aged out before the guardianship could be established.*

Implementation Problems

Respondents discussed some of the challenges that impacted implementation. There were six concerns that seem to be having a significant impact on the waiver program implementation.

1. The loss of "benefits" at age 18 is a significant disincentive to placing children in subsidized guardianship. These "benefits" include:
 - a. Loss of the subsidy payment for youth at 18 while the youth is still in high school,
 - b. Loss of eligibility for financial assistance through the Montana Foster Care Independence Program, particularly
 - c. Loss of eligibility for the Education and Training Voucher component.⁴
2. The loss of supplemental services for children with significant needs. The Medicaid case management plan allocates four sessions per month. For children in foster care with significant needs this can be supplemented. Children and youth in guardianship are being told they are not eligible for this supplement.
3. In rural areas when workers are on extended leave the other workers cover for them instead of having "relief" staff. During these periods staff seem to "hunker" down and deal with safety and crisis issues. Follow-up visits and work on permanency options is delayed during these times.
4. Staff does not have full information about the different permanency options. The message given to families about permanency options cannot be consistent because staff does not have a consistent understanding of the process and materials for parents (brochures and training) have not been disseminated.

⁴ The youth remain eligible for the independent living program and for the continuing education vouchers if the guardianship begins at age 16 or later.

5. Outcome data for the study and information about the use of staff resources (time study) are not being consistently gathered which decreases the value of the findings of the IV-E Waiver study.
6. The issue with the control group is causing validity concerns for the study in two areas. First, in some cases reviewed, staff treats control cases similarly to experimental cases. Second, because of staff aversion to the control group, some families are not being offered subsidized guardianship.

Bottlenecks were also discussed. The bottlenecks may slow the process or eventually result in a stalemate. The following were identified as bottlenecks. These may occur in one, several or all regions.

- *A misunderstanding of eligibility determination for human services or SSI. The human services eligibility issues were resolved early in the demonstration but at least one Social Security office is continuing to use incorrect criteria for determining the child's SSI eligibility.*
- *Local community politics can interfere. Judges are reluctant to terminate parental rights if they know the family or the attorney. (Rights do not need to be terminated for guardianship but termination activity may be underway and delay guardianship processing. The fact that parental rights do not have to be terminated may significantly speed the process up for some cases.)*
- *It may be difficult to get the potential guardian to training. If it is a relative, they may think that attending training is silly.*
- *The need for a home study may delay the process, especially if the home is not already licensed for foster care.*
- *The IV-E eligibility determination takes a week or two and that may hold things up.*
- *Court cases are on the front burner and may delay guardianship processing.*

Tribal Information

A new demonstration project tribal liaison, Janet Kracher, was appointed in early 2004 when the previous liaison left to take a new position. The new liaison is the ICWA Specialist and the IV-E tribal contract person for the Child and Family Services Division. She was interviewed on June 30, 2004 and had just begun taking an active role in the guardianship program. During our discussion it was decided that she, the CFSD subsidized guardianship project manager and the evaluator's Native American subcontractor would visit with each of the tribes during the latter quarter of 2004 and beginning of 2005 to determine why the tribes are not more actively participating and what can be done by the CFSD to encourage further participation. (Their planning meeting occurred on September 17, 2004.) A full report of the visits to each tribe and progress made will be reported in the fifth annual evaluation report.

In general, Ms. Kracher noted that there are a few communication problems between the state agency and the tribes. The turnover is high for tribal staff. At times, email and phones are not operating largely due to the rural and remote areas of a few of the reservations. While the tribal social services staff are wonderful, dedicated people, they wear multiple hats and have much work to juggle.

CFSD Project Manager Interview

The CFSD project manager, Betsy Stimatz, was interviewed during both site visits to Montana. Interviews took place on June 29, 2004 and on September 27, 2004. Additionally, questions that arose during the site visits or later were discussed with the CFSD project manager via email or telephone.

Ms. Stimatz stated that most of the implementation barriers have been worked through. Staff has gained a better understanding of the process. Referrals are now coming regularly from all of the regions although this is impacted by staff changes, especially when a PPS departs. Once a referral is made, the process moves more quickly toward guardianship establishment. Although some staff is still unfamiliar with the process, Ms. Stimatz feels confident that each region's PPS and many of the supervisors now fully understand the process and are able to train staff as needed.

Current issues under discussion include how to accommodate out-of-state families who wish to establish guardianships. The terms of the waiver require that an on-site interview occur each year and this is not possible with out-of-state families unless they reside near the Montana border. Some situations seem ideal for the guardianship program so this has been a source of frustration. Submitting a waiver change is under consideration so that in certain circumstances, the face-to-face interview can be waived.

The control group continues to be an issue for local CFSD staff and for the tribes. An exception process is being drafted. Ms. Stimatz believes that a waiver change might be needed to implement an exception process.

Ms. Stimatz raised a question with ACF regarding the termination of the subsidy at age 18 when the youth is still in high school. The response seemed to indicate that it is possible to continue the subsidy just as it would be continued if the youth were in foster care. Ms. Stimatz intends to address this possible change with CFSD administration.

Overall Impressions

The youth and families who have completed the guardianship process report significant benefits in a number of areas, including overall well being, emotional health, better social and family relationships, increased stability and permanence, and improved involvement in community activities and life.

On the other hand, there are some significant challenges regarding the use of the subsidized guardianship program. Youth over age 18 who choose to remain in foster care can continue to receive financial support until they graduate from high school. This is not true for youth for whom guardianship has been established. Financial support (subsidy) for these youth ends on their 18th birthday. This means financial support comes to an end for many youth months (and sometimes many months) before it would have if they had remained in foster care. For caregivers who need the subsidy to provide long-term support for these youth, this is a substantial penalty. This financial issue is becoming a deterrent to subsidized guardianship for some families and some social workers.

In addition youth age 16 and older who are in foster care are eligible for services through the Montana Foster Care Independence Program. In the past year, funds to assist youth with the cost of financing eligible post-secondary education (Education and Training Vouchers) have become available. These funds are not available to youth in subsidized guardianship (just as they are not available to youth in subsidized adoption) unless the guardianship was established after the youth reached age 16. Prior to the addition of the ETV funds for continuing education, the financial assistance available through the MFCIP for independent living support was not enough to seriously impact the guardianship program. The possibility of ETV assistance has made both families and social workers consider whether or not guardianship is in the best financial interest of the youth particularly for those in the middle teens. If the guardianship is not established until after the youth reaches age 16, the youth is eligible to apply for assistance, including ETV funds, through the MFCIP. As a result of the availability of ETV funds, consideration of guardianship as a permanency option has an added layer for reflection. In cases where continuing education is a likely prospect for a youth, social workers and permanency specialists may bypass a particular youth for subsidized guardianship consideration or counsel the family away from guardianship at least until the youth turns 16. Similarly, if the youth will not complete high school until well past age 18, consideration of guardianship must be balanced with the financial needs of the family.

Aside from the financial issues, permanency specialists and social workers have largely embraced subsidized guardianship as an important addition to the continuum of permanency choices. CFSD staff is focused first on reunification and then on adoption. When these two options are not possible or in the best interest of the child for a variety of reasons, subsidized guardianship has become a viable permanency option. In some areas, supervisors and permanency specialists have developed informal decision trees that guide the decision making process.

For many staff, the age of children being considered has decreased. Initially, there was a “back-log” of older youth who had been in the system for a while. Almost all of the initial children were over 16 when the guardianship process began. Now workers are considering more youth 3 to 16 years of age. While most

workers are still more cautious about subsidized guardianship for young children, subsidized guardianship is considered on a case specific basis for very young children and on a general basis for school-aged children.

For some workers, however, there is less support for assisted guardianship. In addition to the fiscal disincentives described above, there continue to be some very strong sentiments about the control group. Some workers and supervisors reported they would not consider or offer the option to any families because of the potential for assignment to the control group. One worker refused to come to the interview and then, when required by a supervisor, refused to answer any questions about the process because she was so upset about the control group. Many workers are under the misconception that the family must agree to seek a guardianship before the youth's name can be submitted for random assignment. While this was true at the very beginning of the demonstration, the process was changed early on so that workers can submit the names of youth that meet the criteria for guardianship before discussing the option with the family. By doing so, a family randomly assigned to the control group will not be approached about guardianship and therefore not disappointed by the control group assignment. Unfortunately, many workers complete the paperwork for guardianship prior to the random assignment process. This results in both worker and family disappointment if the youth is part of the control group.

To compound the issues described above, many staff interviewed were not well informed about the process. Many were not aware of the financial disincentives of the program and could not adequately advise families. A brochure to give to families describing the process, including the financial issues, has been in process for over two years and is not yet ready for distribution. Although some permanency specialists and supervisors had developed decision trees for guiding the permanency process, many social workers had misinformation about the process.

Tribal participation is very low. Only four of the seven tribes have children identified for the demonstration project. Only one child has a guardianship established. There are multiple reasons for this but primary among the reasons is the presence of the control group and the continued changes within tribal social services. An effort begun in 2004 and continuing into 2005 will focus on meetings with the tribes and what can be done to encourage and assist in fuller participation with the subsidized guardianship project.

During the past year there have also been some "system" victories. In Fort Peck, the Tribal Council finally passed, in June 2004, the code to make subsidized guardianship legal. This was a concentrated effort of the CFSD Attorney, Permanency Specialist, Tribal Attorney and Tribal social services staff. In a related vein, while the court system remains a bottleneck for some of the tribes, in the CFSD regions, the courts are embracing the guardianship concept. The process through the court system is becoming smoother as attorneys and judges gain experience with the process.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Montana subsidized guardianship program continues to mature. Subsidized guardianship is considered a positive placement option along the permanency continuum. Many workers feel more comfortable with identification of suitable candidates and with the process to effect guardianship. The court process is working more smoothly in most areas, especially non-tribal, as the courts embrace the concept of guardianship and gain experience with the process. More children are being considered for guardianship as a result of the removal of the age limitation. A renewed effort is underway to engage the tribes in order to increase tribal participation, enhance identification of candidates for guardianship, and to increase the number of guardianships completed.

Some concerns such as the control group and the elimination of the subsidy when the youth reaches age 18 continue. New issues have arisen such as the financial disincentive for youth under the age of 16 who will lose post high school continuing educational grant funds that have recently become available.

The following recommendations are suggested based on recommendations made in previous reports and on the information gathered during the past 12 months in surveys and face-to-face interviews with families, tribal staff and CFSD staff.

1. Extend the guardianship subsidy through high school completion even if the youth reaches age 18 prior to high school completion
2. Finalize the packet of information that can be used by social workers and post the packet in the Department's public folders. Disseminate the availability of this information to the local offices via email.
3. Develop a pamphlet specific to the IV-E demonstration project that is to be used to talk through the guardianship option with families. Be sure to include a discussion of the financial considerations. The booklet that was developed does not include any information specific to the demonstration project.
4. Propose to HHS an exception process for children placed in the control group. There are children for whom placement in the control group is absolutely not in the best interest of the child. Workers who think guardianship is the best permanency option hesitate to discuss guardianship with the family because of the chance the child will be in the control group once the name is submitted. An exception process could alleviate the concern and assure that in those instances when control group placement is detrimental to the child and family, placement in control could be waived. A draft of an exception process is attached to this report.
5. Begin now to consider methods to change the experimental design if the waiver is renewed for an additional five years.
6. Address the comments from workers regarding areas of misconception and focus training on clearing up these misconceptions. In particular, be sure that all workers are aware that the child's

- name can be submitted for random assignment before the family is approached regarding guardianship. This should help temper disappointment when the child is selected for the control group.
7. Evaluation staff will work with the demonstration project director to develop ways to increase the survey response rate since this is now the only method used to capture population-wide data. This should include having PPS or delegated staff complete the YSR even when a home visit is not possible; e.g., when the family moves out of state.

Attachment 1

Draft Control Group Exception Process

Exception Criteria for Control Group Assignees Montana IV-E Subsidized Guardianship DRAFT

Since the inception of the Montana IV-E Subsidized Guardianship Program, children in foster care who met certain criteria have been assessed for appropriateness of the subsidized guardianship option. For purposes of evaluating the IV-E guardianship program, those children who meet the criteria are randomly assigned to either an experimental group or control group on a 3 to 1 ration for children in State custody and a 4 to 1 ratio for children in tribal custody. Children in the control group are not eligible for the IV-E subsidized guardianship or the state subsidized guardianship program. There have been instances over the three years of the program when control group assignment was not in the best interest of the child or the program. In recognition that there are situations where it would be appropriate to either bypass the random assignment process or to grant an exception to assignment to the control group, these criteria are put in place.

Criteria for an automatic exception

1. Children for whom guardianship has been established under the state subsidized guardianship program but who are subsequently found to be eligible for IV-E will not go through random assignment and instead will be automatically placed in the experimental group.

Criteria for a request for exception

2. The child resides with a relative or has lived with the prospective guardian for more than two years and the emotional health of the child would be enhanced as a result of the legal action to establish the guardianship. The review of the control group status would have to include a conclusion that remaining in foster care could have an adverse effect on the child's emotional health.
3. The youth is a teen-ager whose preparation for independent living will be enhanced by the establishment of a guardianship. For example, the lack of public transportation and the rural nature of Montana make driving the only transportation option for most people. Department staff may not consent to a youth obtaining a driver's license. Foster parents may only consent if the department has permanent legal custody unless the youth's birth parent will provide written consent to the youth obtaining a driver's license. If guardianship were established, the guardian would have authority to consent and the youth could obtain their driver's license. The ability to drive would enhance employment options.
4. Other, non-specified situations exist that are determined by a permanency team to support granting an exception. (The permanency team has already determined that guardianship is in the best interests of the child prior to referring the child to the demonstration project.)

Requesting an exception

Social workers may request an exception by fully documenting the reasons for an exception and why establishment of guardianship is in the best interest of the child. Requests should be reviewed by the Permanency Planning Specialist and, if there is concurrence with the request, forwarded to the CFSD Program Officer for approval or denial. If approved, the status will be changed from control group to experimental group and the worker will be notified of the change.