

Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA)

How recent legislation and Multisystemic Therapy can
play an important role in keeping families together



MST[®]
Services

Proven Results
for Families and Communities

Taking a New Approach to Foster Care & Out-of-Home Placement

The U.S. is beginning to face a crisis in the foster care system. From 2012 onwards, the number of American children entering foster care has been steadily climbing¹; in 2016, over 430,000 children were part of the child welfare system, yet over half of U.S. states have seen their foster care capacity decrease during this same time period². With an increase in child intake and a shortage of resources, the foster care system is feeling the pressures of adequately caring for children in out-of-home placements. The federal government has typically responded to child welfare challenges by increasing funding for foster care, yet in February of 2018, policymakers took a different approach: instead of lending more resources to the foster care system, new legislation is focused on preventing children from entering the foster care system in the first place.

This new policy is called the Family First Prevention Services Act³, commonly referred to as the Family First Act or FFPSA. Passed as a part of the Bipartisan Budget Act and signed on February 9, 2018, the Family First Act alters the way policymakers view child welfare and shifts governmental focus to proactive prevention services rather than solely providing treatment after children are removed from their home. Though foster care is an important resource for children experiencing child abuse and neglect, it can be difficult to live away from one's family, often leading to lower academic achievement in school and the development of physical and mental health issues later in life.

The Family First Act hopes to keep children out of the foster care system by working with at-risk families to create safer, more supportive home environments. To incentivize the creation of more programs that work with at-risk families across the nation, the Family First Act modifies resources traditionally reserved for foster care. Beginning in October 2019, states can use federal funds to establish programs – **such as Multisystemic Therapy (MST)** – that provide mental health treatment, parental training, substance abuse therapy and other necessary services to households and caregivers that have been identified by local child welfare services.

430,000+
children involved
in the child welfare
system

**Multisystemic
Therapy** meets the
requirements and
is a well-supported
program under the
FFPSA

 Research-supported

 Evidence-based

 Trauma-informed

Multisystemic Therapy: Keeping Families Together

What makes MST such an effective program for families?

Multisystemic Therapy (MST) is a scientifically proven intervention for at-risk youth and families. One of the defining features of MST is that it is delivered in the natural environment of the youth and family—including the home, school and wider community. Visits can be in the family home, in the youth's school, or in the community, depending on what needs to be accomplished. The treatment itself is not cookie cutter—it is specifically tailored to the strengths and needs of each individual youth and family, with family members playing an integral role in helping design and implement the treatment plan.

Therapists work with families on an ongoing and intensive basis. Sessions are scheduled as frequently as necessary to achieve observable and measurable changes. Because of the nature of home-based therapy, sessions are often scheduled outside of typical working hours. Therapists are on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Caseloads are kept between four and six per therapist, with an average of five, to ensure that each family receives the attention they deserve and need. This family- and home-based approach helps overcome barriers to accessing services, increases the likelihood that families will stay in treatment, and provides them with a comprehensive, trauma-informed set of services.

MST's BUILT-IN SUITE OF SERVICES

- family therapy
- marital therapy
- social skills training
- adult drug and alcohol intervention
- youth drug and alcohol intervention
- parenting skills training
- financial management assistance
- parental career planning
- adolescent educational and vocational support
- adult mental health services
- youth mental health services
- household management training
- time management skills training
- parent and youth peer management
- parent-community relationship training



MST is an evidence-based treatment

MST is an evidence-based program and has been shown in rigorous scientific tests to be superior to other treatments for at-risk adolescents and families. MST is also proven to be a cost-effective program that reduces out-of-home placements and keeps families together. But crucial to these findings is that strong adherence to the model is correlated with strong case outcomes. To ensure adherence to the model, training is intensive and ongoing. Clinicians go through a week of introductory training, weekly consultation, weekly on-site clinical supervision and quarterly training update sessions. MST is delivered with consistency, and represents a low investment risk for communities.

With 74 studies, over 140 peer-reviewed journal articles and over 50,000 families included across all studies, MST features the largest body of evidence, by far, of successful interventions for high risk youth. Furthermore, MST is the only intervention for high risk youth where results have been repeatedly replicated by independent research teams. Alternative treatment models have an average completion rate of just 50 percent. MST has a much higher rate, with 90 percent of families, on average, successfully completing the program.

LARGEST BODY OF EVIDENCE



74
STUDIES



\$75M+
RESEARCH FUNDING



140+
PEER-REVIEWED
JOURNAL ARTICLES



57,000
FAMILIES INCLUDED
ACROSS ALL STUDIES

PROVEN RESULTS



AT THE CLOSE OF TREATMENT

What are the goals of the Family First Prevention Services Act?



The Family First Act’s goals are to keep families together, prevent abuse and neglect, and support cost-effective, research-supported services for families. Multisystemic Therapy works towards these same goals with an individualized treatment program for every family.

Making necessary funding adjustments

While the Family First Act was only a section of the 2018 Bipartisan Budget Act, it represents an important, long-lasting intervention in the field of child welfare and foster services. Before the Family First Act was passed, federal funding in the realm of child welfare was funneled largely to out-of-home placements, adoption and support for children exiting foster care and re-entering their homes. Though the 1980 Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act mandated that states were to make “reasonable efforts” to keep children in their homes before removing them and placing them in foster care, this mandate wasn’t backed with funding. Instead, states struggled to fund the preventative services that would allow them to keep children safe in their homes, and foster care intake rates remained static. But the core value of the child welfare system has always been the same: safely keep families together whenever possible. The hope of the Family First Act is to make that goal more possible by funding effective, research-supported preventative services before out-of-home placement becomes necessary.

Foster care is not the only answer

The Family First Act reflects decades of research demonstrating that foster care— while an integral safety net for children in unsafe homes— can be a traumatic and damaging experience for children. Forcibly separating children from their families, particularly young children, can add even more trauma and stress to the experience of child abuse or neglect. It can also be incredibly confusing for children, leaving them to wonder how they’re supposed to feel about their parents. A myriad of studies have shown that separation from one’s family can threaten a child’s wellbeing: youth in the

Child Protective Services system who are removed from their homes demonstrate higher rates of delinquency, higher rates of PTSD and lower future earnings than children who receive in-home services and remain with their families. Though out-of-home placement is a necessary option for children who are unsafe at home, funding in-home services and treatments for at-risk families is the first step to avoiding foster placement while ensuring children are well cared for.

The Family First Prevention Services Act encourages states to fund and implement more effective, sustainable solutions to child abuse and neglect — solutions such as **Multisystemic Therapy (MST)**.

How MST and the FFPSA Can Work Together

Investing in what works

The Family First Act makes it clear: states should begin searching for, and investing in, preventative programs for at-risk families. Per the legislation, these programs can provide services in three different areas— mental health treatment, substance abuse therapy and in-home parental skills training. *Multisystemic Therapy (MST) is the only program under review that has been approved for more than one area of treatment under the FFPSA: mental health treatment and substance abuse therapy.* Yet not all programs that address these issues qualify under the Family First Act; to receive a 50% federal funding match, states must invest in high quality, research-supported solutions that provide effective services to families. To be funded by the FFPSA, programs must be either "promising," "supported," or "well-supported." "Promising programs" are backed by at least one independently validated study, "supported" programs have at least one study showing that positive effects were sustained for at least six months after treatment, and "well-supported" programs show success beyond a year after treatment. *MST is a "well-supported" program, the top rating, with long-term success reported in several studies. In addition, MST is the only "well-supported" program approved for substance abuse treatment.*



By starting MST programs, states can receive a **50% federal funding match.**



Communities can save up to **\$200k per youth** by implementing MST.

How MST meets the goals of the FFPSA

Under the FFPSA, MST is approved as a "well-supported" program for both substance abuse therapy and mental health treatment.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE THERAPY

To target drug and alcohol problems, MST therapists assess substance abuse by "Finding the Fit," a multi-faceted assessment done with a family which usually involves understanding the impact of substance use on the family's life; determining the frequency, duration and intensity of use; finding out where, when and with whom the youth or family member uses; figuring out what triggers the urge for using; and understanding which consequences have or haven't worked to treat the use. By "Finding the Fit," a family and their MST therapist can then work together to create effective, personalized intervention strategies such as objective mechanisms for detecting use (e.g. urine or blood screening); reducing family conflict that may trigger use; or establishing powerful incentives to keep the user clean. MST understands that families may face barriers and setbacks, so therapists are trained to help them predict and plan for relapses, and can facilitate their appropriate medical care, such as detox, when needed. MST's long-lasting outcomes are a result of the program's ability to empower families to redirect their associations with substance-using peers, focus on their strengths throughout treatment, and develop skills to say no to temptation.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE OUTCOMES⁴



83%
reduced the use of substances after MST



81%
had no arrests during treatment



64%
reduction in drug-related arrests of MST youth

How MST and the FFPSA Can Work Together

How MST meets the goals of the FFPSA (continued)

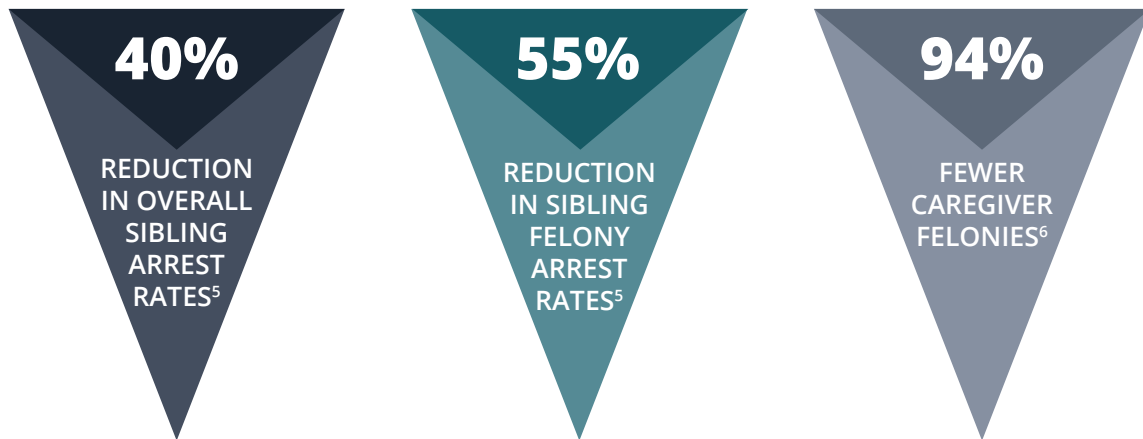
MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT

Research shows that behavior is multi-determined from factors across an individual's social network. Thus, treatment must have the capacity to address a broad range of problems. MST therapists are trained to work with youth and/or family members who have experienced trauma, severe emotional disturbances, externalizing behaviors (such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, conduct disorder, aggression, impulsivity, etc.) and internalizing behaviors (depression, fear, social withdrawal, negative self-talk, etc.). MST has been scientifically proven to reduce psychiatric symptoms in mothers, fathers, and children/adolescents.

KEEPING FAMILIES TOGETHER AT HOME

Multisystemic Therapy services are targeted to families with youth at risk for out-of-home placement in foster care, group homes, residential treatment, or correctional facilities. The treatment plans are designed jointly with family members and are family-driven rather than therapist-driven, and are provided in the context of a family's values, beliefs, and culture. MST therapists have small caseloads, allowing them to flexibly schedule visits to a family's home and provide services on-call. MST programs focus on interventions that have the most immediate and powerful impact on families at risk by building on individual, family, school, and community strengths. This strength-based approach is key in promoting positive change in a family's natural environment.

BETTER OUTCOMES FOR THE ENTIRE FAMILY



MST SAVES
UP TO
\$8000
PER FAMILY
MEMBER⁷

References

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- 4 MSTI Data Overview Report, 2018. <https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/295885/MST%20Redesign/Marketing%20Collateral/Marketing%20Kit%20Collateral%20Digital%20Files/Case%20Study%20and%20Reports/Report%20-%20MST_Data_Report_2018.pdf>
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Additional information on our proven results and research outcomes can be accessed by downloading our "Research at a Glance" document online at

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