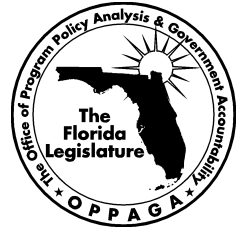




The Florida Legislature

OFFICE OF PROGRAM POLICY ANALYSIS AND
GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY



RESEARCH MEMORANDUM

Locally-Focused Community-Based Care Replaced the Family Builders Program

May 22, 2009

Summary

As requested, OPPAGA examined whether changes should be made to ss. 39.311 – 39.318, *Florida Statutes*, which created the Family Builders program.¹

The 1990 Florida Legislature created the Family Builders program to expand family preservation services.² The program provided a prescribed set of services intended to keep families safely intact when their children were at risk of imminent out-of-home placement and to reunite families whose children were recently placed in foster care. However, the state's transition to a community-based child welfare system, as begun by the 1998 Legislature, gradually supplanted state-operated programs such as Family Builders. By April 2005, the department had outsourced child protective services statewide and eliminated funding and contracts for the Family Builders program. As a result, the provisions of ss. 39.311 – 39.318, *Florida Statutes*, are no longer relevant and the Legislature should consider repealing these sections of statute.

Purpose, Organization, and Responsibilities

The 1990 Florida Legislature created the Family Builders program to expand the Department of Children and Families' family preservation services for families involved with the child welfare system. Family Builders services were designed to assure the safety of children and allow them to remain with their families instead of entering out-of-home care, such as shelter and foster care, as a result of abuse or neglect. The program also offered short-term reunification services to return children to their families when the children had recently entered foster care. The department contracted with 28 nonprofit community agencies throughout the state to provide a set of short-term, intensive, in-home crisis intervention services to teach skills and provide supports to achieve long-term changes within at-risk families.³ Family Builders agencies provided clinical services such as comprehensive assessments, family therapy, counseling, and parenting and crisis training; and support services such as financial assistance, homemaker and childcare services, food, and help with accessing community resources.

¹ Sections 11.901-11.920, *F.S.*

² Ch. 1990-306 (s. 66), *Laws of Florida*.

³ The Legislature did not directly appropriate funding for the Family Builders program.

Gary R. VanLandingham, Ph.D., Director

Community-based care supplanted the Family Builders program

The 1998 Legislature directed the Department of Children and Families to outsource Florida's child welfare services, including family preservation, to community-based entities known as lead agencies.⁴ A major goal of the outsourcing was to redesign the state child welfare system to give communities more control over service design and delivery. Instead of having state-designed and operated child welfare programs such as Family Builders, lead agencies and their community stakeholders now design, develop, and administer service delivery networks to meet the unique needs of local communities. During the transition to community-based care, the department gradually discontinued contracting with agencies that provided Family Builders services and instead gave funding and responsibility for family preservation to the lead agencies. By April 2005, the department had outsourced child protective services statewide and eliminated funding and contracts for the Family Builders program.

Options for Legislative Consideration

Community-based care replaced state-designed and operated programs, such as Family Builders, with local service delivery networks intended to meet the unique needs of communities. As a result, the department discontinued all funding for the Family Builders program by 2005. As the provisions of ss. 39.311 – 39.318, *Florida Statutes* are no longer needed, the Legislature should consider repealing these sections of statute.

⁴ Community-based care lead agencies are required to provide a comprehensive array of protective services to eligible children and families including family preservation, emergency shelter, foster care, and adoption services with the goal of ensuring the safety, well-being, and permanency of children and families. The department remains responsible for program oversight and some functions such as operating the abuse hotline, performing child protective investigations, and providing Children's Legal Services.