

Pathways to Progress: Economic Supports Impact Report

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Executive Summary

The Pathways to Progress Economic Supports Pilot Program was launched in 2025 to help families participating in Family Treatment and Recovery Courts (FTCs) by providing flexible economic supports for housing, transportation, essential items, and parent–child bonding activities. Ten FTCs participated, supporting **52 families and 90 children** and delivering approximately **600 concrete supports**, with an average investment of **\$2,442 per family**.

Evaluation results indicate that these supports were associated with reduced stress, increased stability, and improved ability to participate in treatment and court expectations. Court professionals reported higher confidence in identifying and using supports, and families described moving from crisis toward greater stability and capability.

Families entering FTCs often face material hardship—housing instability, transportation challenges, and unmet daily needs—which research shows are associated with difficulties in sustaining treatment participation and navigating child welfare requirements (Berger et al., 2015; Brown et al., 2019; Puls et al., 2021). While Pathways to Progress was not designed to prevent child welfare involvement, the supports (sometimes referred to as concrete, financial, or economic supports) were provided as a possible avenue to help reduce practical barriers that contribute to extended case timelines.

Key findings include:

- Supports most often addressed housing, transportation, essential items, and visitation needs.
- Families reported decreased daily needs strain and increased stability.
- Staff reported higher confidence in FTCs and a strong desire for continuing economic support for families after witnessing their efficacy.
- Courts observed improved case progression and increased engagement with families.

Recommendations:

1. **Sustain and expand** the program, given the positive associations observed.
2. **Maintain flexible funding** so courts can respond quickly to urgent needs.
3. **Offer ongoing training** to support consistent implementation across FTCs.
4. **Strengthen coordination** with housing, childcare, Medicaid, and transportation systems.
5. **Continue data collection** to assess longer-term associations with engagement and case progress.

Overall, early findings suggest that flexible economic supports are associated with improved stability and engagement among families in FTCs. These supports may help create conditions that allow parents to participate more effectively in treatment and court

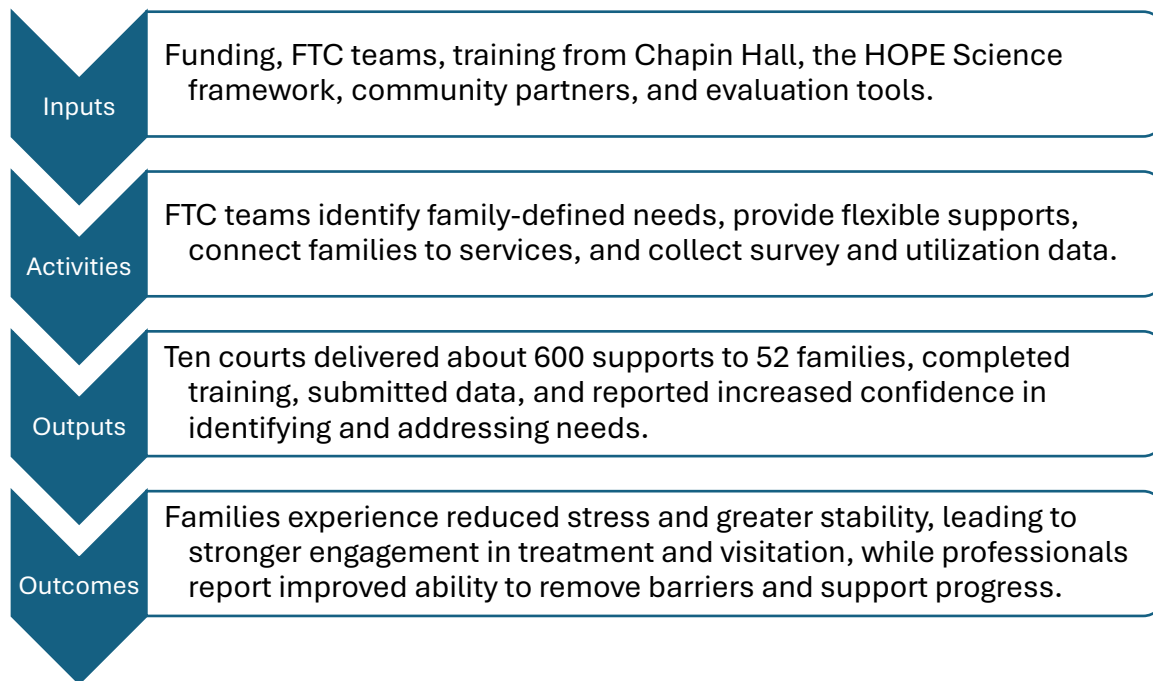
ordered services, offering a relatively low-cost strategy for supporting family progress and court operations across Washington.

Program Overview

In 2025, the Pathways to Progress Economic Supports Pilot Program (“the Program”) launched as a grant-funded initiative designed to strengthen Family Treatment and Recovery Courts (FTCs) by providing targeted, flexible financial assistance to families working toward recovery and reunification. Ten FTCs across the state applied and were selected as subawardees, representing a diverse range of communities and court structures (Clallam, Clark, Grays Harbor, Island, Pierce, San Juan, Skagit, Snohomish, Whatcom, and Yakima). Each participating court committed to integrating concrete supports into their existing FTC model as a research-based strategy to reduce barriers to treatment, improve parental engagement, and support timely case progress (Monahan et al., 2023; Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families [DCYF], 2023).

Figure 1: Logic Model

Below is a figure that shows how the Pathways to Progress Pilot transforms funding and supports into increased stability, reduced stress, and stronger engagement for families in Family Treatment Courts.



Implementation Process

To support consistent and equitable implementation across the ten participating FTCs, the program followed a structured but flexible process for identifying and delivering supports. FTC teams routinely asked parents about their most pressing needs during staffings, check-ins, and treatment reviews, and these needs were documented and reviewed by the

team. Once a need was identified, supports were purchased directly by the court to avoiding reimbursement-based models that can disadvantage families with little or no disposable income. All sites were expected to align decisions with the program guidelines emphasizing family voice, urgency, and equitable access while tracking each support for evaluation purposes.

All subawardee courts participated in initial mandatory training. This training, provided by Dr. William Schneider, Faculty Director for the Children and Family Research Center at the University of Illinois, introduced research findings from Chapin Hall and other leading child welfare researchers linking material hardship to case delays, treatment disruptions, and extended court involvement (Monahan et al., 2023; Puls et al., 2021; Johnson Motoyama et al., 2022; Kovski et al., 2022). The training emphasized how economic supports can be used intentionally and equitably to stabilize families, reduce crisis-driven case dynamics, and strengthen treatment engagement by allowing them to complete and benefit from traditional services (Monahan et al., 2023).

All courts participated in an evaluation process. Professionals and parents completed pre- and post-implementation surveys to assess:

- Changes in stress
- Stability
- Treatment engagement
- Staff confidence
- System navigation

Professional surveys measured knowledge, attitudes, and implementation confidence around economic supports, while participant surveys captured parents' experiences of daily stressors, stability, hopefulness, and perceived support from the court. These data, combined with program utilization and qualitative feedback, form the basis of this impact report (Monahan et al., 2023; DCYF, 2023).

Figure 2: Each Family Received About 12 Separate Supports



Sites participating in the pilot were instructed to have a coordinated, needs-responsive approach to families experiencing financial hardship and have the dedicated FTC/FRC Team ask them about their most pressing concerns. Resources were then matched to those needs, with the aim of reducing parenting stress and supporting overall mental well-being. As such, the Program delivered swift, flexible support to families, using their voices to address the practical barriers that often impact whether parents can fully participate in treatment, visitation, employment, and other court expectations. Across 52 families and 90 children, the program funded roughly 600 concrete supports with an average investment of \$2,442 per family. These supports frequently prevented setbacks that could have disrupted treatment or delayed reunification.

The Needs

Families and staff consistently shared the same story: when families can meet basic needs, they can show up for treatment, visits, work, and parenting. As one court professional explained, “Stress inhibits growth and change... Stress is a trigger for relapse. When we provide economic supports, we are supporting the entire family to succeed simply by reducing stress.” This program didn’t just help families, it made court work more feasible, more humane, and more effective.

This program was developed using the national research from Chapin Hall, which states that meeting concrete needs is tightly linked to better safety and recovery outcomes for families in the child welfare system (Monahan et al., 2023; Farrell et al., 2018). Economic supports reduce the stressors that prolong cases and impede treatment. For example, parents with SUD who lack childcare, stable housing, or the ability to meet basic needs face significantly higher risk of CPS involvement and prolonged cases (Monahan et al., 2023). Housing insecurity is repeatedly shown to be a major predictor of child welfare investigations, removal, and delayed reunification—for example, families likely to face foreclosure have a 70% higher likelihood of a CPS investigation (Berger et al., 2015). These findings reinforce why FTCs benefit from pairing treatment services with flexible economic supports: they address the root sources of instability that make it difficult for families to meet rigorous timelines and service expectations. For parents working toward recovery, unstable housing and financial hardship undermine treatment engagement, increase relapse risk, and make it more difficult to follow through on case plan requirements (Monahan et al., 2023; Farrell et al., 2018). Economic supports that stabilize housing, utilities, transportation, and other essential needs directly strengthen recovery efforts and help families sustain progress in Family Treatment Courts (Monahan et al., 2023; DCYF, 2023).

Families participating in Family Treatment Courts often face co-occurring substance use disorder (SUD) and material hardship—unstable housing, limited childcare, food and utility insecurity, transportation barriers, and insufficient cash for emergencies (Monahan et al., 2023; DCYF, 2023). Economic stability strengthens recovery and reduces the need for re-entry into the child welfare system. Stable housing, reliable childcare, access to

healthcare (including Medicaid expansion), and cash supports and tax credits all reduce stressors that can derail recovery or destabilize newly reunified families (Brown et al., 2019; Johnson Motoyama et al., 2022; Kovski et al., 2022; Puls et al., 2021; Farrell et al., 2018). For FTC participants, addressing these supports can increase treatment attendance, reduce relapse risks, and strengthen long-term reunification (Monahan et al., 2023; Farrell et al., 2018).

Equity

Critically, expanding economic supports within FTCs advances equity. Chapin Hall emphasizes that Black, Latino, and Native American families disproportionately experience material hardship rooted in structural inequities and historic racism, contributing to over-representation and longer, more intrusive cases (Dettlaff & Boyd, 2020; Monahan et al., 2023). Addressing concrete needs—safe housing, reliable childcare, transportation, food and utility security—reduces reliance on punitive or high-surveillance responses and enables families to meet treatment and parenting goals on equitable footing (Dettlaff & Boyd, 2020; Monahan et al., 2023). By reducing economic stressors that can trigger relapse or non-compliance, FTCs can accelerate case progress, support timely reunification, and decrease re-entry, thereby narrowing racial disparities in system outcomes (Monahan et al., 2023).

Cost and Benefits

Compared to the costs of extended foster care placements, additional hearings, and prolonged case management, targeted supports (e.g., funding for rent arrears, deposits, transportation passes, childcare slots, utility catch-up) are far less expensive and prevent downstream expenditures by shortening case duration and reducing re-entries (Monahan et al., 2023; Farrell et al., 2018). This cost relationship is well documented: modest, well-timed investments in stability can reduce the intensity and duration of system involvement, creating both fiscal savings and better outcomes for children (Monahan et al., 2023; Puls et al., 2021). FTC professionals benefit as well: when families' concrete needs are met, caseloads become less crisis-driven, staff can focus on therapeutic engagement and behavior change rather than emergency stabilization, and staff burnout and turnover risks decline. Coordinated resource linkage—across child welfare, housing, Medicaid, early childhood/childcare, and public benefits—improves treatment retention and task completion, making FTCs more effective and sustainable (Cartier et al., 2020).

Hope Science

The Pathways to Progress Pilot Program was also intentionally aligned with Washington's HOPE Science framework, which draws on research demonstrating that hope increases when stress is reduced and pathways toward goals become clearer (FYJP, 2024; Chen,

2021). Scientists who study hope theory emphasize that when individuals experience fewer daily barriers, their cognitive capacity for planning, self-regulation, and sustained engagement improves (Chen, 2021; Sparks et al., 2021). Consistent with this evidence, the Pathways to Progress Pilot Program was associated with a reduction in key stressors—such as instability in housing, transportation, and basic need-creating conditions in which parents could envision progress and take concrete steps toward recovery (FYJP, 2024; Chen, 2021).

Washington’s HOPE Science model also emphasizes that hope is relational and grows through experiences of support, safety, and predictable access to resources (FYJP, 2024; Chen, 2021). In practice, the economic supports provided through this program strengthened these protective factors by decreasing uncertainty, increasing predictability in daily routines, and reinforcing families’ belief that progress was possible (FYJP, 2024; Sparks et al., 2021).

Importantly, HOPE Science applies not only to families but also to the professionals who serve them. Research also shows that professionals experience higher levels of hope and efficacy when they have meaningful tools that allow them to reduce barriers, take effective action, and witness family progress (Chen, 2021; Sparks et al., 2021). Consistent with these findings, professionals in this program reported increased confidence, reduced frustration, and greater optimism about families’ ability to meet expectations when concrete supports were available.

In this way, Pathways to Progress advanced both sides of the HOPE equation, reducing stress and increasing pathways to hope for families and for the professionals working alongside them, reflecting the growing body of evidence that strengthening hope strengthens outcomes (Chen, 2021; Sparks et al., 2021).

Key Outcomes

- Staff reported increased confidence in identifying and providing appropriate supports.
- Participants described movement from crisis and uncertainty toward stability and forward momentum.
- Stress and daily-needs strain indicators decreased.
- Engagement-enabling supports (housing, transportation, essentials) were most frequently used.
- Staff strongly endorsed continued funding and expansion.

Program Reach and Investment

Over the reporting period, the program invested \$127,000 to stabilize families’ immediate needs. Supports covered food, essential household items, transportation, visitation and

bonding activities, housing, clothing, and communication access. Staff repeatedly emphasized the importance of this range. As one put it, “A client was able to make critical vehicle repairs that helped her continue to get to work.”

Families described similar experiences. One participant explained, “I’m still super worried about my rent past due and I’m stressing getting to court.” Another shared the difficulty of re-entry with basic needs unmet: “Mainly establishing the start of basic necessities now that I’m out of jail/rehab... getting my transportation figured out.”

These experiences reflect national evidence that the most common drivers of missed treatment, delayed visitations, and stalled case plans are solvable logistical barriers — not lack of motivation or unwillingness to comply (Monahan et al., 2023; DCYF, 2023).

Why Economic Supports Are Necessary

Family Treatment/Recovery Court requires parents to meet demanding expectations while navigating early recovery, trauma, instability, and poverty. As one staff member summarized, “Parents are typically in active substance use, lost housing or about to be evicted, and jobless. Economic supports help parents secure housing and meet basic needs while they are in crisis. This allows them to focus on services and reunification.”

“If they are spending their time figuring out how to get enough money to get the bus... they are not able to focus on their internal work.”

- Court Professional

Participants described this same dynamic from the inside. One parent said, “I feel like my momness has been stripped from me... I’m still super worried about my rent past due.”

The program’s purpose is straightforward: **remove practical barriers so therapeutic and behavioral change can take hold**. Research in behavioral science and recovery consistently shows that when families are stabilized, their cognitive load decreases, their capacity to follow through increases, and treatment interventions are more effective (Monahan et al., 2023; Chen, 2021).

What was Funded?

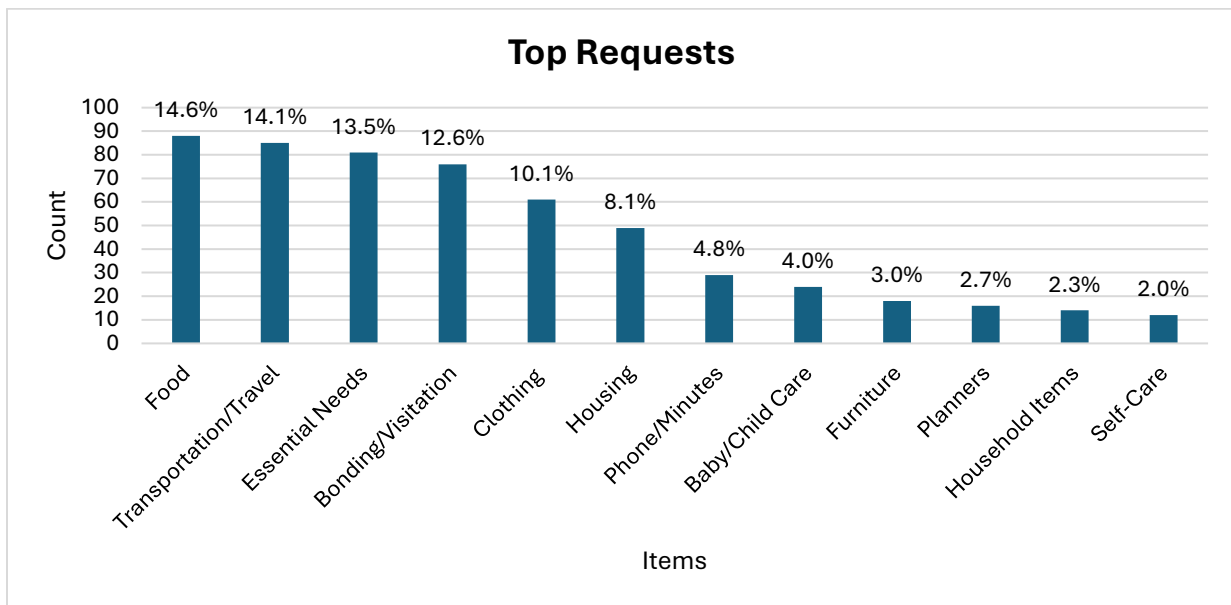
Concrete supports addressed the realities that shape whether parents can follow through on court requirements. Figure 2, shows the distribution of funds by category calculated by the invoices submitted by the sites. Food and daily essentials were the most common

supports, followed by transportation—often the determining factor in whether parents attended treatment or visitation. One professional stated, “If barriers are removed... parents can focus on their services, focus on healing & not stress about basic needs. In this process their confidence & skills build...”

Housing supports—rent, deposits, eviction prevention—were another critical component. Participants described the constant instability: “Worried about finding an adequate long-term residence for our family.” Others explained the change afterward: “Ability to maintain stable housing” was one of the most meaningful outcomes.

Visitation and bonding supports protected the parent–child relationship. As a professional said, “By reducing stress for families and assisting parents in meeting their familial needs,” concrete goods “ultimately increased stability in the home” which added to the “success in maintaining the family unit.” Another said help with, “prosocial family activities... lead to healthier, stronger, successful families.”

Figure 3
What was requested by families during the pilot?

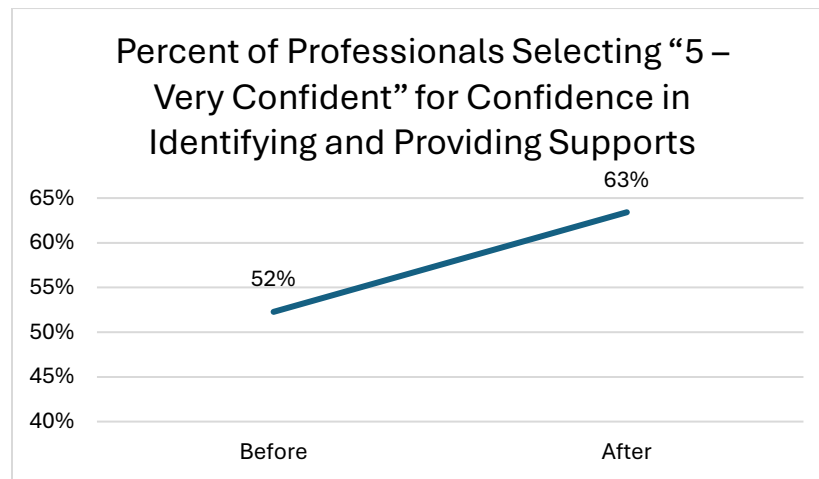


The distribution of funded supports mirrors national trends showing that the most impactful economic supports are those that secure housing, ensure transportation reliability, address daily necessities, and preserve parent–child relationships — all core conditions for treatment engagement and reunification (Monahan et al., 2023; Farrell et al., 2018; DCYF, 2023).

Professionals' Outcomes

Professionals were already strongly supportive (ceiling effect), but post-surveys show a meaningful shift where it matters most operationally: implementation confidence. “Highest confidence” (5s) increased in identifying needed supports: 52.3% → 63.4%.

Figure 4



Belief in the importance of economic supports stayed extremely high. In the pre-survey, all professionals agreed or strongly agreed that economic supports are essential for reunification (84% selected “Strongly Agree”). In the post-survey, agreement remained nearly universal at 98%, however, only 76% selected “Strongly Agree.” This small shift from “Strongly Agree” to “Agree” appears to reflect staff gaining a more grounded understanding of the real-world constraints families face—especially the limited availability of stable housing and other essential resources. One professional stated, “I continue to see the challenges faced by families with lack of stable housing & long waitlists.” The overall pattern shows that staff continued to view economic supports as essential, while also recognizing the practical limits that shape families’ progress.

In the surveys, professional narratives further explain why economic supports matters. Statements like “Civil dependencies require actions and changes in a short period of time... Stress makes decision making hard. Stress is a trigger for relapse” and “Economic supports help parents stabilize so they can engage meaningfully in treatment” indicate that professionals see concrete supports as necessary for recovery AND as behavior support.

They also see concrete supports as something that creates stability which helps services work, “Parents are typically in active substance use, lost housing or are about to be evicted, and jobless... Economic supports may help parents secure housing and meet basic needs while they are in crisis. This will allow more time for parents to receive and focus on their services... resulting in trial return home and reunification.”

Professionals see concrete supports as an operational tool for courts, “If barriers are removed... parents can focus on their services, focus on healing & not stress about basic needs. In this process their confidence & skills build...”

Professionals also see concrete goods as a way to increase Hope, “Some people have no one in their life for support. Treatment courts create hope because they let parents know people care. Once you know someone cares for you, you open your heart to the world. Dark skies turn blue. No one can be successful without hope. Hope is the key.”

These observations are consistent with national findings showing that when frontline staff have access to flexible economic supports, engagement improves, crises reduce, and cases progress more efficiently (Chen, 2021; Sparks et al., 2021). This shift not only benefits families but also improves staff wellbeing and reduces burnout, contributing to a more sustainable FTC workforce.

Professionals also noted system-level impact:

Two professionals stated that they experienced an increase in interest and enrollment in their FTC programs. Professionals also note that it saves money, “Families that can stay together through minor economic help can prevent costly litigation in future dependency cases” and another professional states, “It’s proven to save money in the long run.”

Family Outcomes

Participant post-survey responses were fewer (n=7 vs pre n=19), so results should be interpreted cautiously. Even so, the direction of responses aligns with both the professional survey themes and participant narratives.

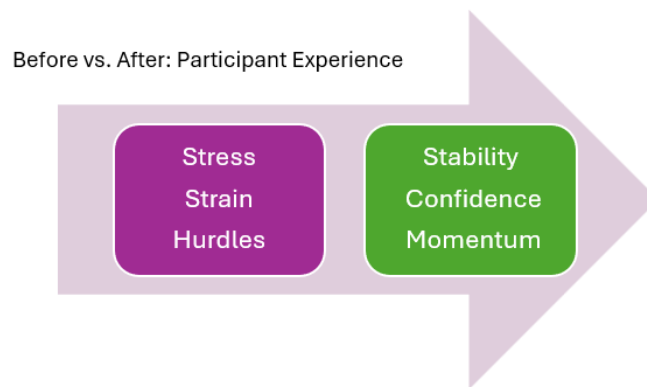
- Stress/strain items decreased (less overwhelmed, daily needs less challenging, less feeling of not providing enough)
- Confidence increased
- Hope remained high at both times

Participants reported feeling understood by the program even while still wrestling with whether “the court” prioritizes their needs (important systems insight, not a program failure).

Before receiving support, families in the pre-survey often described being overwhelmed and uncertain. One parent stated, “I feel like my momness has been stripped from me... and I’m stressing getting to court.” Another said, “Living on an island where everything is so expensive... it’s challenging to provide fully.” Another said, they struggled with “establishing the start of basic necessities now that I’m out of jail/rehab... clothes, furniture... the startup stuff... getting my transportation figured out.”

After supports were provided, narratives shifted toward stability and capability, “I feel less like I’m grasping at straws and barely making it and more on my way to being a stable productive adult.” Another said, “I have received so much help from the courts and it has helped me become more stable.” And when asked what support helped, one participant said, it helped with “Everything—transportation—housing—recovery.”

Figure 5



These shifts reflect what the evidence shows: that reductions in daily instability increase treatment engagement, improve executive functioning, and allow families to focus on recovery and parenting tasks rather than crisis management (Monahan et al., 2023; Farrell et al., 2018; Chen, 2021).

Observed Program Effects

Across staff and participant data, the same mechanisms show up repeatedly:

1. Removing “one bad day” barriers: A single breakdown—flat tire, overdue rent, no phone minutes—can trigger missed visits, missed treatment, missed work, and setbacks that compound. “A flat tire can create so many barriers... preventing visitation, treatment... These funds have wiped away so many barriers.” *Mechanism aligns with evidence on logistical barriers and engagement* (Monahan et al., 2023).
2. Stabilizing basic needs so treatment can land: Families can’t absorb treatment and parenting change while in constant crisis. “If they are spending their time figuring out how to get enough money to get the bus... they are not able to focus on their internal work.” *Consistent with research on cognitive load, self-regulation, and stress reduction* (Chen, 2021; Sparks et al., 2021).
3. Supporting normalcy and bonding (protecting the parent–child relationship): Visitation and bonding supports are not fluff—they are relational stability and motivation. “A house isn’t a home without necessities... By providing stability for the parent, they can provide stability for the child...” *Aligned with prevention and*

reunification evidence in housing/visitation contexts (Farrell et al., 2018; Monahan et al., 2023).

4. Strengthening court effectiveness (systems impact): Concrete supports make court expectations achievable and reduce churn. “The expectations remain the same on the family... Often what parents need are financial supports.” *Supported by findings on resource linkage and case progress* (Cartier et al., 2020; Monahan et al., 2023).

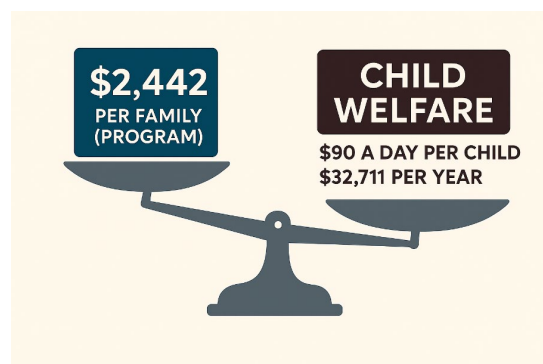
Across all data, four mechanisms appeared consistently. The program prevented small problems from becoming large setbacks. It stabilized daily needs so recovery could take hold. It sustained parent–child bonds. And it made court expectations realistic rather than aspirational.

Funding Justification and Sustainability Case

The program may help reduce barriers with modest investment. Staff strongly supported continuing and expanding the program: “More training and opportunities to secure future funding so we can continue to support families.”

With an average cost of \$2,442 per family, the Pathways to Progress Pilot Program provides targeted stabilization that supports parents’ engagement in treatment and helps them progress through required services more efficiently. According to Chapin Hall’s 2024 national cost analysis, child welfare involvement averages \$90 per day, or \$32,711 per child annually. Although these concrete supports are not intended to prevent child welfare involvement, they help minimize the practical barriers that often prolong cases, thereby reducing the amount of time families spend in systems that are substantially more expensive to operate (Monahan et al., 2023). In this context, even relatively small investments can produce meaningful improvements in recovery timelines and overall system efficiency.

Figure 6



Lessons Learned About Survey Design

A key insight from this pilot was that traditional pre-surveys were not an appropriate tool for asking parents about their hope, stress, or confidence during the early stages of their engagement with Family Treatment Courts. In dependency cases, parents are participating in the court process while separated from their children or while working toward conditions for reunification. This context is uniquely sensitive. In dependency cases, asking parents to quantify their hope or readiness during early engagement is not appropriate given what they are navigating.

Because early-stage engagement in dependency cases often includes grief, loss, and significant emotional disruption, requesting that parents numerically rate their hopefulness or sense of direction can place additional emotional burden on them. For that reason, collecting these measures during the early part of their FTC participation was not aligned with trauma-aware, family-centered practice.

To better honor the lived experience of parents in dependency proceedings, future evaluation cycles will use a retrospective pre/post design completed after the support period. This approach allows families to reflect on their starting point once they have had time to stabilize and meaningfully engage with the supports offered—without requiring them to quantify personal emotions during one of the most difficult phases of the process.

This shift strengthens the evaluation by:

- reducing emotional burden during early engagement in dependency cases
- ensuring assessment practices are sensitive to the realities of parent–child separation
- aligning data collection with HOPE Science and trauma-responsive practice

This adjustment supports both respectful practice and more meaningful evaluation.

Conclusion

The Pathways to Progress Economic Supports Program’s preliminary results may indicate that when basic needs are met, families can move out of crisis and into meaningful engagement with treatment and court expectations. As one participant said, “Overall as a parent and adult I feel less like I’m grasping at straws and more on my way to being a stable productive adult.” And a staff member captured the program’s core value: “Concrete supports don’t replace treatment—they make treatment possible.”

Small, timely investments prevented major disruptions, strengthened conditions for reunification, and increased the court’s effectiveness. The program is a practical, research-aligned strategy that delivers real stability for families and should be sustained and expanded. It is aligned with Hope Science – reducing stress, increases stability and hope. Concrete supports can be part of the pathway to recovery (FYJP, 2024; Chen, 2021; Sparks et al., 2021). “Hope is the key.”

Figure 7 Thematic Shifts



The data shows qualitative impact, positive professional perception changes, and signs of program uptake. There are promising early results, especially in professional practice change, referral patterns, and perceived efficiency. Perceived improvements matter, especially if court professionals are observing that parents seem more engaged. As research indicates, shifts in professional perception often accompany meaningful changes in engagement and case-flow, signaling that underlying conditions for family progress are improving (Monahan et al., 2023; Cartier et al., 2020). More rigorous evaluation is needed to assess outcomes and establish the program’s impact with greater confidence. Continued monitoring of program performance will be important to build stronger evidence over time.

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