

# *The Rachel Foundation for Family Reintegration*

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*Your Children Will Return...*

*Jeremiah 31:17*

December 7, 2008

## **Defining Outcomes: A Preliminary Analysis**

*Since its inception, Rachel Foundation has worked with 39 families – 44 parents and 59 children – to rebuild bonds that had been broken or severely damaged as a result of abduction or severe alienation in high-conflict success. Programs largely were successful. We note, though, that the success of Rachel Foundation families in the long run depends to a large extent on the degree to which local authorities establish and enforce conditions for children to adapt to changed environments after they return home.*

Rachel Foundation provides reintegration programs for children who have been alienated or estranged from a parent by abduction or by alienation in high-conflict divorce. At first, programs were based solely on the as-yet unproven hypothesis that it is possible to overcome severe alienation between a parent and child by providing a secure, structured home environment in which they could rebuild their relationship. This approach was based on a few known successful cases; no research existed that would back up the hypothesis. Rachel Foundation would be a living laboratory for family reintegration; data would emerge over time.

Defining outcomes in a parent-child relationship is problematic because a parent's perceptions of success may differ from those of professionals. To minimize subjectivity, the Executive Director defined a list of concrete and observable parent and child behaviors. On the basis of behaviors observed when the family departed Rachel Foundation, he defined three levels of measurement: success, mixed and failure (see Table 1 for definitions).

**Table 1:  
Criteria for Success**

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| Success | After entering a Rachel Foundation program typically fearful, resistant and hostile, the child departs at least on speaking terms with the target parent, able to work through conflicting viewpoints constructively using non-threatening techniques, and knows how to manage group activities through family meetings. The parent has regained enough parental authority to be able to return home to a reasonably normal family setting in which the child is safe and secure. |
| Mixed   | The family shows some of the signs of success, but still needs work on others.  |
| Failure | At the end of the program, the child is just as hostile as he/she was at the beginning.   |

To apply these criteria, we listed each of the cases that passed through Rachel Foundation intensive programs from 2000 through 2008. We coded each to reflect the results defined in Table 1 with regard to each parent and child.

Thirty-nine families – 44 parents and 59 children – have attended intense Rachel Foundation programs. In our early programs, we worked with families in residential settings both at Rachel House and in other residential surroundings such as the families’ residences. Our tabulation of overall outcomes includes both types of programs (Table 2).

**Table 2:  
Outcome of Rachel Foundation Cases Overall**

|         | <b>Parents</b> |                | <b>Children</b> |                |
|---------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|
|         | <b>Number</b>  | <b>Percent</b> | <b>Number</b>   | <b>Percent</b> |
| Success | 35             | 80             | 40              | 68             |
| Mixed   | 5              | 11             | 15              | 25             |
| Failure | 4              | 9              | 4               | 7              |
|         | 44             | 100            | 59              | 100            |

In time, we learned that “away” programs were less effective than those conducted at Rachel House. This is because at Rachel House we controlled the environment and because the families were on “on duty” all day every day in supportive surroundings. We conduct our programs in a home environment, in effect providing a laboratory for family life at home. Our programs include intense work with the family, combining tools and educational resources from multiple sources. In addition, we assign chores that we expect to be done each day and plan outings in the surrounding

area. All of these activities are planned to provide as many opportunities as possible for activity and communication between family members.

In addition, we find that we must work not only with children, but also with parents: many parents who come to Rachel House have parenting skills that are rusty and need honing. Some can be classified as “impaired” in some way, a state usually exacerbated by the separation from a beloved child. In short order, many parental impairments quickly fall away as parent and child rebuild their relationship.

To illustrate the effectiveness of these residential programs, we separated them from the list described above. The results of these cases are in Table 3.

**Table 3:  
Outcome of Rachel House Residential Cases**

|         | <b>Parents</b> |                | <b>Children</b> |                |
|---------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|
|         | <b>Number</b>  | <b>Percent</b> | <b>Number</b>   | <b>Percent</b> |
| Success | 19             | 83             | 26              | 87             |
| Mixed   | 3              | 13             | 4               | 13             |
| Failure | 1              | 4              | 0               | 0              |
|         | 23             | 100            | 30              | 100            |

In the longer term, we have learned that these results deteriorate if the courts do not impose strict measures to control inappropriate or problematic behavior by any parent, family member or acquaintance. The children’s emotions already are fragile. They face many challenges; like, for example, becoming accustomed to living in a different home or, sometimes, getting acquainted in a new school. The success of Rachel Foundation families in the long run depends to a large extent on the degree to which local authorities establish and enforce conditions in which children can adapt to changed environments after they return home.