

Ten-year-old Tawnie and four-year-old Terrell came to the attention of the Administration after the school filed a Becca Bill report on Tawnie for school absences.

When social workers first met with Tawnie and Terrell it was clear that the children were well-rehearsed in providing explanations for the visible injuries they displayed or for the neglect they were experiencing. When Terrell accidentally answered wrong or reported that he forgot how he had obtained a certain bruise, Tawnie would coach him, saying, "Don't you remember? You fell down."

It wasn't long before family secrets came to light and the Administration worked diligently to support the family in caring for their children. The father, Troy, and Mother, Rae disclosed a long history of domestic violence. The father reported that he had struggled with drugs and had been clean for two years but had relapsed and couldn't seem to straighten out again. Not surprisingly, the abuse and neglect corresponded with the relapse. In addition Rae suffered from debilitating anxiety which was worsened by Troy's relapse. Rae often kept Tawnie out of school due to her own fears and her inability to parent Terrell as the result of her mental illness.

The Administration worked closely with the family and despite Troy's attempts at treatment, the parents were simply unable to care for their children.

The Administration placed the children temporarily with an aunt and then sought permanent placement with the children's' grandmother. It soon became apparent that the Grandmother's own health issues prevented her from being a permanent placement option for the children.

The Administration secured a foster home for the children reflective of their own racial background and in the community where they lived.

Tawnie has been attending school regularly and has had some dental problems addressed that had been neglected for far too long. Terrell is thriving in Preschool and both children who at one time suffered from persistent lice and poor hygiene, have been clean, healthy, and doing well in their out-of-home placement.

Troy and Rae have continued to work toward healthier lifestyles and the children are able to have supervised visitations with their parents. The grandmother who was unable to care for the children full time now has the health and energy to be available to her grandchildren when they visit.

Although Tawnie and Terrell's parents are not currently able to parent them, the children are in a safe and stable home and still have meaningful connections to the family they love.

OUR GOAL:

Help families and communities improve the well-being of children in their own homes and in out-of-home care.



Foster Parent Survey

In FY 2007, in cooperation with the Braam Oversight Panel, the Children's Administration (CA) enlisted Washington State University to conduct a survey of foster parents.

The Braam Foster Parent/Caregiver Benchmark Survey was an independent survey developed and conducted by the Washington State University Social and Economic Sciences Research Center.

The questionnaire included 150 questions and is likely one of the most comprehensive and valid surveys of its kind. Foster Parents voluntarily responded to the telephone survey at a rate of 80 percent.

The results show a very strong and positive working relationship between CA and caregivers. Caregivers gave CA high marks on the support, training, and information they receive from the Administration.

- **88.6 Percent** of foster parents report that they receive adequate training.
- **86 Percent** of licensed foster parents report that they are accessing the mental health services they need in a timely manner.
- **85 Percent** of all caregivers report that they are treated professionally and with respect by their social worker.
- **77.9 Percent** of licensed caregivers who care for medically fragile children report that those children are connected to appropriate and ongoing medical care.
- **76.3 Percent** of licensed caregivers report that they receive adequate support for their role responsibilities.

In Washington State and throughout the country there is ongoing work to secure qualified foster homes for children who must be placed in out-of-home care. The challenge of recruiting and retaining qualified, caring foster parents is not unique to Washington.

The Children's Administration is working diligently to engage current foster parents in discussions about how to better support them in the work they are doing. In addition, we are working with national consultants toward finding the most qualified and culturally diverse families to care for children in the communities where they are most needed.

The Children's Administration has implemented several strategies designed to assess foster parent satisfaction and to help support them in caring for children. The foster parent survey (see box) administered in Fiscal Year 2007 showed that while foster parents feel adequately supported in many areas, there are still areas which need improvement. Specifically, foster parents expressed that social workers did not visit children in their placements often enough and that siblings in separate placements were not able to visit with one another frequently enough. They also reported that they don't always experience adequate communication. The Administration is implementing monthly social worker visits in stages and is working to improve staffing patterns to support that outcome. In addition, new legislation requires the Administration to consult with the Foster Parent Association of Washington, foster and relative care providers every quarter at the regional and statewide levels.

The Administration tracks licensed resources available to care for children through the following measures:

- Licensed foster homes available for children.
- Availability of minority foster homes.
- Foster care licensing applications which take more than 90 days to complete.



OBJECTIVE: Adequate, quality resources are available for foster care, behavior rehabilitation services, and adoption

MEASURED BY: Licensed foster homes available for children

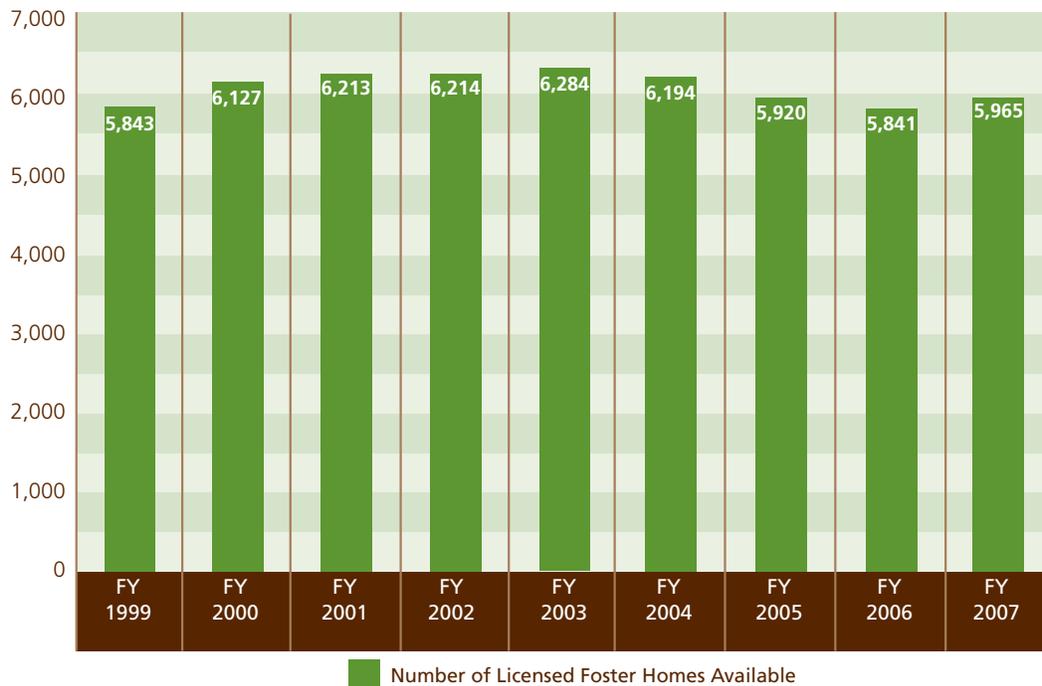
In Fiscal Year 2007, there were more children in out-of-home care than at any time in reporting history.

Washington State, like nearly every other state in the union, has struggled to keep up with the need for quality foster homes. Even within the context of tremendous need, licensors can never compromise thorough investigation and screening to ensure that a family is adequately safe, skilled, and caring to provide for children.

The Administration has been working closely with local partners and national experts in strategizing new ways to engage and retain qualified foster families. Often foster parents themselves are our greatest source of information in knowing how to access new foster parents and what resources and supports they need in order to continue providing care.

Following a four-year decline, the Administration demonstrated an increase in the number of licensed homes available to care for children during the most recent reporting period.

Licensed Foster Homes*



*Number of Division of Licensed Resources (DLR) and private agency foster homes licensed to provide care as of the end of the fiscal year. Source: September 2007 CAMIS download.

OBJECTIVE: Adequate quality resources are available for foster care, behavior rehabilitation services, and adoption

MEASURED BY: Availability of minority foster homes

One young foster youth so poignantly said, “I love what I am and I don’t really want to be something else because I just love what I am.” What she was referring to was her Mexican heritage and what she was seeking was a home in which her culture would be honored.

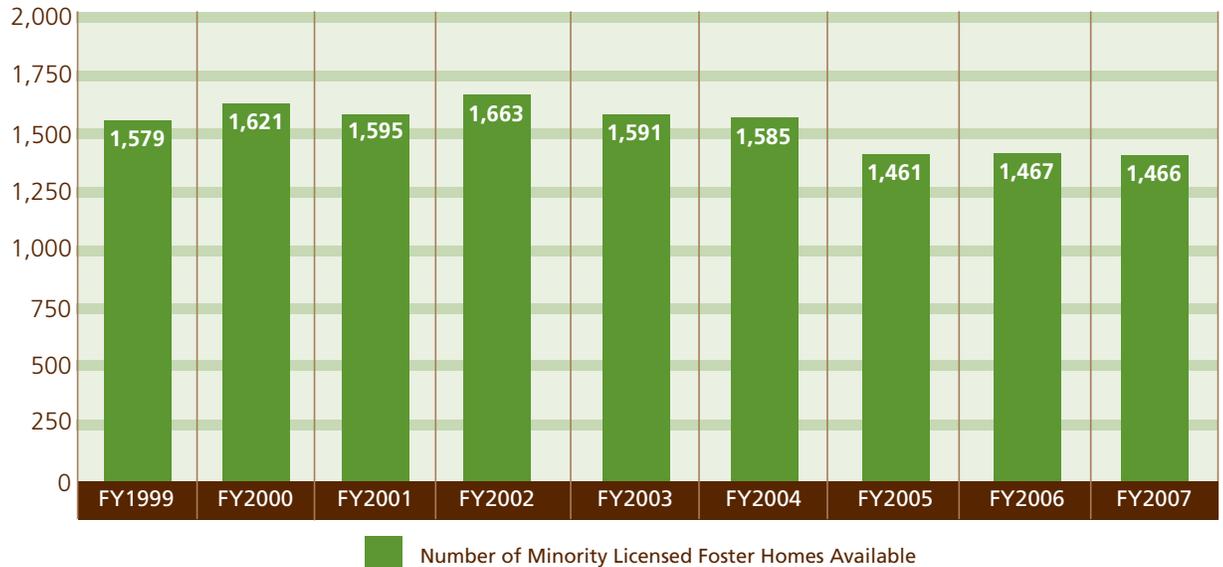
She spoke of listening to Mexican music, watching Spanish speaking channels on television, attending events that celebrated the holidays and customs of her nationality.

These simple things; language, music, food, and celebrations meant comfort for her as they do for so many children removed from their homes due to abuse or neglect. The sense of identification with a new family can also do much to help children connect with their caregivers and adjust to their new surroundings.

The Administration continually seeks to secure homes in which foster families are similar in race, nationality, or cultural heritage to the children placed in their care.



Minority Homes Available*



*Number of Division of Licensed Resources (DLR) and Private Agency minority foster homes licensed to provide care. Source: September 2007 CAMIS download.

OBJECTIVE: Adequate, quality resources are available for foster care, behavior rehabilitation services, and adoption

MEASURED BY: Foster homes that take more than 90 days to fully license

Prospective foster families must demonstrate their desire and ability to care for abused and neglected children. In addition to completing paperwork, every individual over the age of 16 in a potential foster home must pass a background check.

In Fiscal Year 2007, new more stringent background check requirements were enacted for every adult in a home licensed to care for children as well as any adult that will have unsupervised access to a child. All foster parents, adoptive parents and planned placements with unlicensed relatives still require a search in the Children’s Administration database for child abuse or neglect referrals as well as a complete background check. New regulations also require these individuals to submit to an FBI and Washington State Patrol fingerprint check and out-of-state records check on any adult who has lived outside of Washington State during the preceding five years. In the case of emergent placements, the caregivers must submit to a National Crime Database Center search prior to a child’s placement in their home.

While both licensors and new foster families are often eager to finalize the licensing process, it can sometimes meet with delays. The Administration must rely upon outside agencies for fingerprint results and background checks.

In recent years, the Administration has met with consultants to help expedite the foster home licensing process while continuing to maintain child safety as its top priority.

In Fiscal Year 2007, the Administration demonstrated a decrease in the percentage of licensing delays for the second consecutive year.



Foster Homes That Took More Than 90 Days to Fully License*



■ Percent of Foster Homes That Took More Than 90 Days to Fully License

*Percentage of fully licensed foster homes for whom it took longer than 90 days for a full license to be issued. Source: September 2007 CAMIS download.