

At birth, Jesse had a few minor problems but nothing that indicated his life would be an ongoing ordeal. He stayed in the hospital a bit longer than other newborns because of low blood sugar and some other minor medical difficulties...difficulties which his birth parents were not able to address. Within weeks, Jesse was placed into foster care, both because his parents demonstrated that they could not keep him safe and because they could not meet his many medical needs.

In a matter of months, Jesse's foster mother noticed that he did not seem to be progressing. At a year old, Jesse could not sit up or crawl, had a hard time eating and had not developed any language. By the time Jesse was four, doctors had confirmed their earlier suspicions that he was autistic.

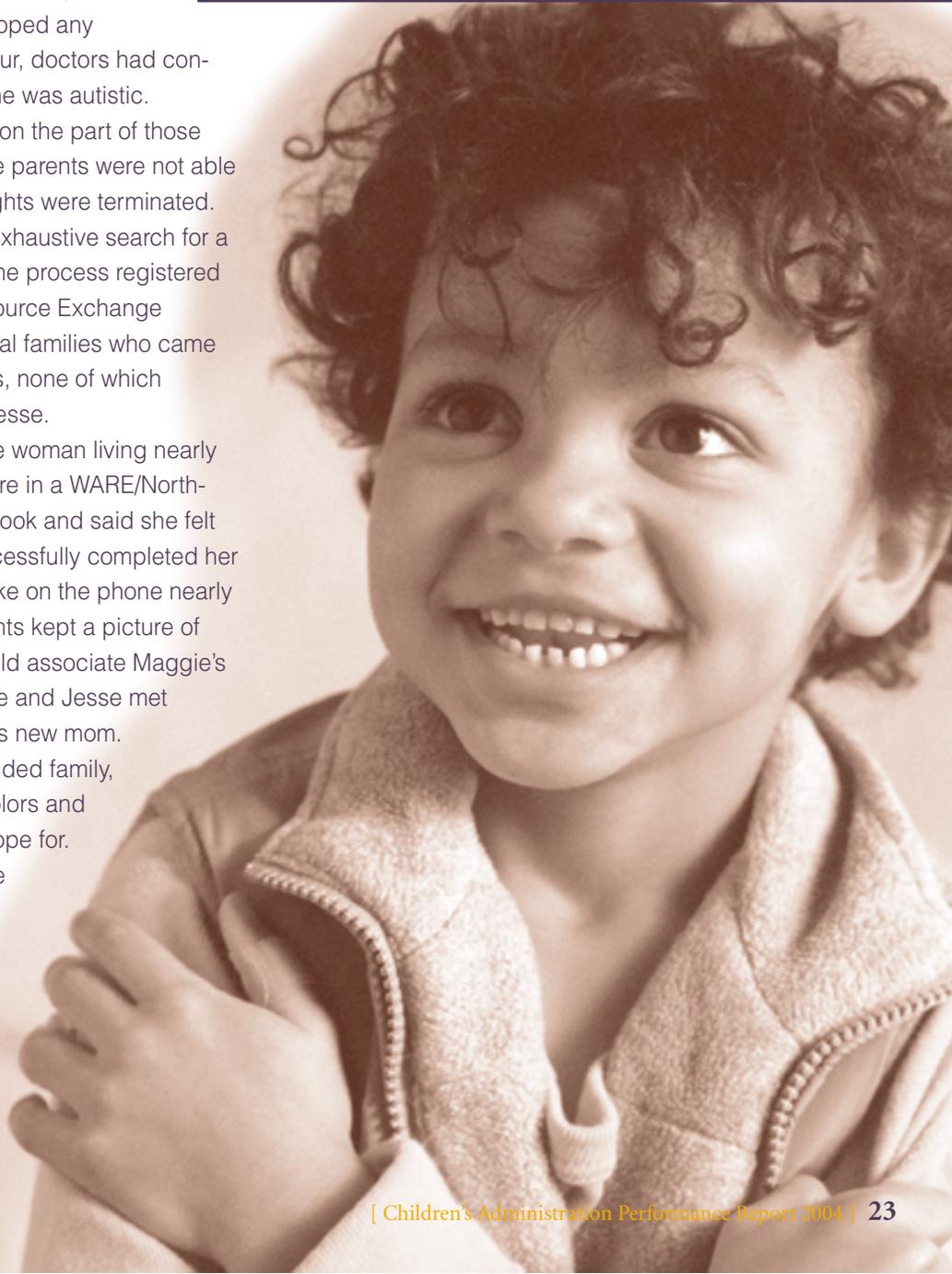
Eventually, despite every effort on the part of those involved, it became clear that Jesse's parents were not able to care for him and their parental rights were terminated.

Social Workers conducted an exhaustive search for a permanent home for Jesse and in the process registered him with Washington Adoption Resource Exchange (WARE). There were several potential families who came forward over the following two years, none of which resulted in a permanent home for Jesse.

This past year, Maggie, a single woman living nearly 2,000 miles away saw Jesse's picture in a WARE/Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE) book and said she felt strongly drawn to him. Maggie successfully completed her homestudy. Maggie and Jesse spoke on the phone nearly every night and Jesse's foster parents kept a picture of Maggie by the phone so Jesse would associate Maggie's face with her voice. In 2004, Maggie and Jesse met and Jesse finally went home with his new mom. Jesse was greeted by a huge extended family, his own room painted with bright colors and all the love and support he could hope for. After all he has been through, Jesse finally has a family and a home all his own.

# Permanency

Goal: Provide stable, nurturing, and permanent placements as quickly as possible for children who are placed into out-of-home care



# Permanency Overview

The administration recognizes that children who have been removed from their homes due to abuse and neglect can be further impacted by the experience of moving from one home to another. Placement stability and permanency are priorities when considering the needs of children who come into state foster care.

Over the course of the past decade, the issues impacting children and the families from which they come have become increasingly complex. Maternal alcohol abuse during pregnancy and resultant organic childhood disorders, the pervasive impact of methamphetamines, prenatal exposure to this and other drugs, mental illness, fragmented family systems and economic hardships all take a toll on children. These issues often manifest themselves in a variety of

challenging behaviors that have been unconsciously cultivated by children as a means of self-preservation, yet are very difficult for their adult caregivers to address. These issues must be safely resolved before children can be reunified with their families. When they cannot be reunified, it can be challenging to find appropriate adoptive homes.

The Children's Administration continuously works to provide adequate support to children in out-of-home care and to their caregivers and to seek permanent plans for children that assure safety and prioritize child well-being.

The administration maintains permanency objectives including: increase permanency for children in out-of-home care; decrease length of stay without increasing re-entry; increase stability for children in out-of-home care; decrease over-representation of minority children in care; and increase

relative placements and preserve connections with parents, siblings, and other significant people.

In an effort to monitor the administration's progress regarding these objectives, the following performance measures are utilized:

- Children returned to their parents, adopted or placed in guardianships
- Children adopted within 24 months of placement
- Children reunified with their families within 12 months of placement
- Length of stay for children in care
- Children re-entering care
- Children with no more than two placements
- Minority children in care longer than two years
- Children placed with extended family members
- Children visiting with their parents and siblings

Children in Out-of-Home Care\*



\*Count of children in out-of-home care without a permanent plan completed, who remain in care for more than 60 days, excluding children in legal custody of tribes or private agencies.

# Children Wait . . .

In Washington state and across the nation, thousands of children are waiting for homes and families. These are children representing every racial and ethnic background, every age and every level of ability; boys and girls with hopes and dreams who have no other choice but to wait.

Here are just a few of the children who are waiting for homes and families.\*

**Derek**, a 15 year old boy has been waiting for four years

**Zykhirea**, a 10 year old little girl has already waited a year

**Robert** is a 12 year old boy who has been waiting for two years

**Heather** is a 15 year old girl who has waited for seven years

**Andres** is a 10 year old boy who has been waiting for almost four years

**Bishop** and **Quincy** are 9 and 10 year old brothers who have waited a year

These children aren't waiting for the world, they aren't asking for anything beyond what any child wants. Their wants are really pretty simple, here are some of the things that waiting children have said they want in their lives.

"A mom, a dad, a brother and a place to play outside."

"I am ready to be part of a family."

"A loving mom and dad."

"A family that will be there for me, love me and keep me even if sometimes I make a mistake and blow it. A place to call home."

"A mommy, a daddy and a big sister."

"Cool parents who will hang in there with me over the rough spots."

"To belong and to be loved."

The Children's Administration along with regional and national partners are working together to find homes that meet the needs of specific children. If you are interested in making a difference in the life of a child who is still waiting, please contact one of the organizations listed below:

Catalyst for Kids [www.catalystforkids.com](http://www.catalystforkids.com)

Washington Adoption Resource Network [www.nwresource.org](http://www.nwresource.org)

Northwest Adoption Exchange [www.nwae.org](http://www.nwae.org)

Families Like Ours [www.familieslikeours.org](http://www.familieslikeours.org)

Adopt U.S. Kids [www.adoptuskids.org](http://www.adoptuskids.org)

\*Information about waiting children included on this page is excerpted from the Northwest Adoption Exchange Website.

# Permanency

## Objective **Increase permanency for children in out-of-home care** Measured by **Children adopted**

### Progress

- Joined the national “Adopt US Kids” ad campaign in an effort to better inform communities about waiting children and the need for adoptive families.
- Introduced an adoption specialty training track through the Children’s Administration Training Academy.
- Succeeded in matching children having the most challenging placement needs with families through continued child-specific recruitment efforts.
- Received federal adoption incentive award for finalizing a record number of adoptions in Fiscal Year 2003.

“Permanency” is a term used to encapsulate the notions of safety, security, stability and nurturing that are inherent in many loving families but are often evasive to children in the nation’s foster care systems. If questioned, most children who have spent any measure of time in foster care will describe permanency as “a real mom and dad”, “my forever family”, or “a house and a room and my very own dog.” Permanency means much more to a child than exiting from state foster care; it means a sense of both ownership and belonging.

Most children will say that their preference for permanency is to go home, even if “home” has been a frightening and unsafe place. For many of these children, painful familiarity is preferable to the uncertainty of out-of-home placement. Yet, the reality is that it simply is not in the best interest of every child to return them to their families of origin. When reunification ceases to be an option, adoption is most often the chosen permanent plan.

The administration strives to find caring, compassionate and capable families that are aware of and responsive to the needs of children who have spent time in foster care.

While the number of adoptions finalized has shown some fluctuation over the past four years, the adoption trend over time demonstrates an increasing number of children adopted since 1997.

Over the past eight years, more than 8,000 children have found their “forever families” through the Washington State Children’s Administration.

### Adoptions\*



\*The number of children placed in out-of-home care with an accomplished permanent plan of adoption. This measure is reported as point in time at the end of the indicated fiscal year, thus adoption data may vary over time.

**Objective Increase permanency for children in out-of-home care**  
**Measured by Children adopted within 24 months of placement**

One of the unfortunate axioms for children in foster care systems nationwide is that the longer a child remains in state care, the less likely it is that a suitable permanent home will be found for that child.

In terms of permanency and specifically in the case of adoption, time is of the essence. While the administration pursues reunification as the primary permanency option, it is not in the best interest of every child. Dual track or concurrent planning is undertaken to provide for a child so that regardless of whether the child is reunified or adopted, a permanency plan is in place. In these cases, specialized foster to adopt families are often recruited to care for children for the length of time they are in care and to commit to those children as permanent families if the children's birth parent's rights are eventually terminated.

The national standard or goal for this measure is that 32 percent or more of all children adopted will be adopted within 24 months of their placement into out-of-home care. Washington state has made continual progress toward the federal standard.

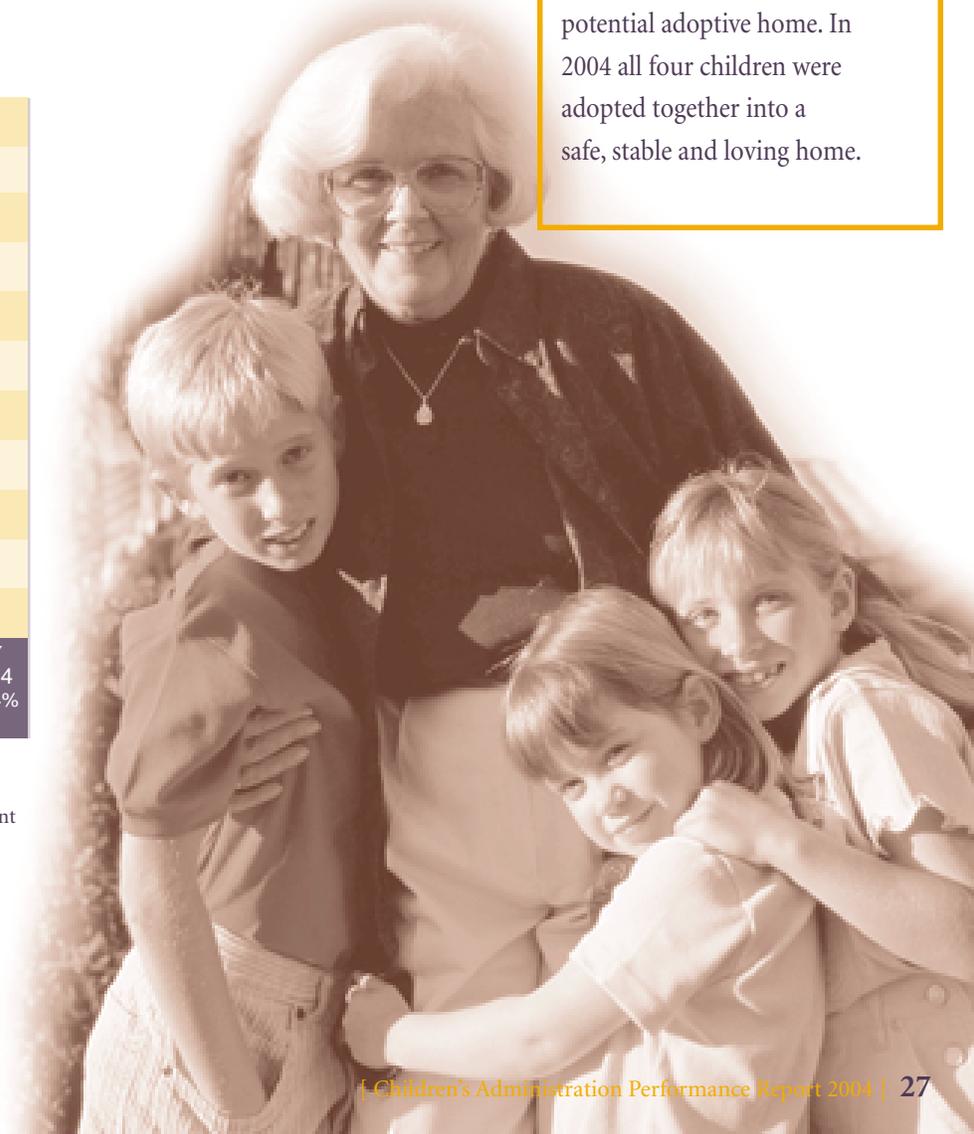
One Child

Four children ages 5, 7, 8 and 12 came into care due to physical and medical neglect and abuse amid parental drug manufacturing and use. One child nearly drowned when left unsupervised in a bathtub just days after sustaining a broken clavicle from falling off of a counter. For years the mother complied only marginally with goals established to help her regain custody of her children. Parental rights were finally terminated and the children were placed into a potential adoptive home. In 2004 all four children were adopted together into a safe, stable and loving home.

**Children Adopted Within 24 Months of Placement\***



\* The percent of all children adopted who were adopted within 24 months of placement into out-of-home care. National standard is 32 percent. Data in this chart is based on federal fiscal year data submitted to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS).



# Permanency



## Objective **Increase permanency for children in out-of-home care** Measured by **Children returned to their parents (reunification)**

The Children's Administration must consider family preservation while remaining committed, first and foremost, to child safety. State law requires that whenever it is safe and in the best interest of a specific child, that child must be reunified with his or her family as expediently as possible.

Over the past eight years, there has been a continual decline in the number of children reunified with their families annually. The Washington State Institute for Public Policy studied the factors that reduce family reunifications in Washington and concluded that "most of the reduction has occurred because the number of out-of-home placements has dropped, not because of any significant change in the rate of reunification." According to the study, "the drop in out-of-home placements accounts for 86 percent of the decline in reunifications. The decline in placements was primarily among a lower-risk population for whom no dependency case was filed. Nearly all children in such placements reunify with families."<sup>1</sup>

The rise in complex family issues such as prenatal substance abuse and mental health issues often make it difficult for families to reunify. However, the administration continues exploring ways of keeping children safe while offering community-based supports to families in an effort to return children home whenever possible.

Reunifications\*



\* Children placed in out-of-home care who were reunified with their parents during the fiscal year. Numbers are slightly larger than reported in the 2003 Performance Report because they include reunifications that were recorded after the end of the fiscal year.

<sup>1</sup> Excerpted from Washington State Institute for Public Policy, May 2004, *Decline in Washington's Family Reunifications: What Influenced This Trend?* Document Number 04-04-3901 <http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/rptfiles/04-05-3901.pdf>

## Objective **Increase permanency for children in out-of-home care** Measured by **Children reunified within 12 months of placement**

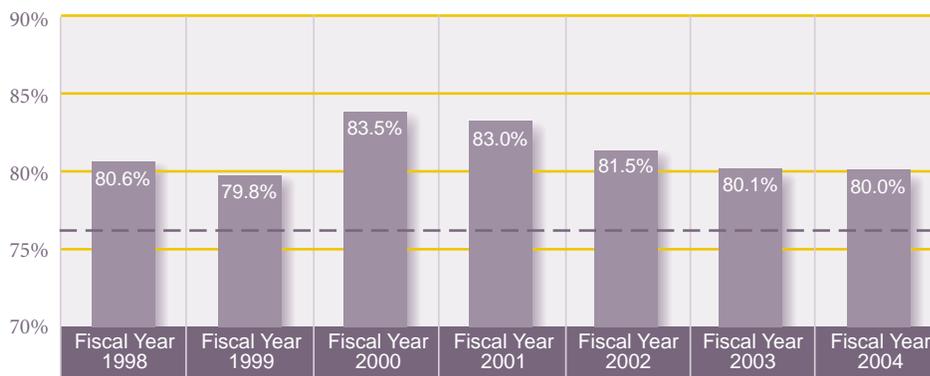
Throughout the permanency planning process, the administration strives to determine and achieve the best possible permanency plan as expediently as is prudent in a specific case.

When it becomes clear that reunification is the permanency option best suited to meet the needs of a particular child or sibling group, the administration makes every effort to return that child or group of children to their parents as quickly and safely as possible. CA evaluates progress with reference to timely reunifications by examining the percent of children reunified within 12 months of placement.

A number of safeguards must be implemented prior to reunification including safety assessments, transition and safety plans, reunification plans and appropriate linkage between the family and community-based resources and supports.

The federal performance standard for this measure requires that the percent of children reunified with their families within 12 months of placement is equal to or greater than 76.2 percent. Washington state has met or exceeded the standard for this measure since tracking began.

**Reunifications in Less than 12 Months\***



\* Percent of children reunified with their parents within 12 months of placement into out-of-home care. Based upon federal fiscal year as reported to the federal Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). National standard is 76.2 percent or higher.

## One Child



A 2 1/2 year old girl was taken to Harborview Hospital by her mother and mother's boyfriend when the little girl exhibited breathing problems, coughing and lethargy.

The hospital concluded that the toddler had a partially healed brain injury. The mother and maternal grandparents were genuinely concerned while the boyfriend appeared nervous and defensive.

Initially, none of the child's family could imagine the boyfriend had harmed the toddler. An emergency hospital hold was placed on the little girl and she was transported to a foster home within the week. As evidence mounted, the child's mother conceded that her boyfriend had likely abused the little girl and filed an order of protection.

The mother agreed to all of the conditions suggested by CPS. She completed parenting classes, a psychological assessment and attended a domestic violence support group. Regular visitation was implemented and the little girl spent time with her mom and her grandparents.

The mother moved in with her parents and a bedroom was redecorated for the little girl. After a reunification assessment was completed and a transition and safety plan was in place, the toddler got to go home to her mom, her grandparents and her new pink room.

Several follow-up visits revealed a healthy and stable little girl in a safe home with a loving family.

## Objective **Increase permanency for children placed in out-of-home care** Measured by **Children placed in guardianships**

### Do you know

- 1 What are some of the issues which have caused permanency planning to be more challenging over the past several years?
- 2 Why might a guardianship placement be the best permanency outcome for a specific child?
- 3 Which committee has been formed to address issues concerning relative placements?

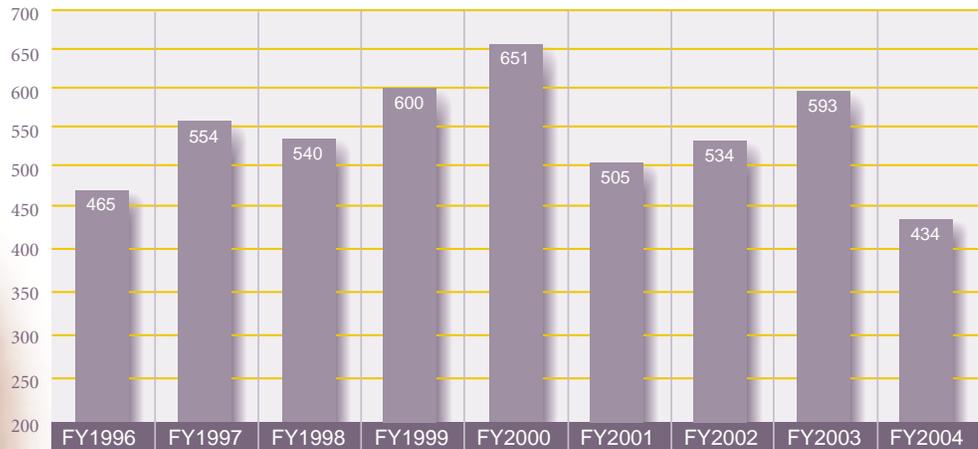
(1) Maternal drug use, prenatal exposure to substances, mental illness, economic hardships pg. 24 (2) If the child is older or has connections to family or for religious or cultural reasons pg. 30 (3) Kinship Oversight Committee pg. 35

A guardianship placement is one in which the caregivers have made a commitment to care for a child on a permanent basis.

Reunification and adoption are the most sought after permanency options for children placed into out-of-home care. There are certain circumstances in which a guardianship, rather than another permanency plan, is in the best interest of a particular child. Older children often opt to maintain connections to their families of origin or feel a sense of identity that they may not want changed as the result of adoption. There are a number of cultural factors that must be considered when determining the most appropriate permanent plan, for example, termination of parental rights and adoption may actually be contrary to a child's cultural or religious mores.

For these children and others whose specific needs are given consideration within the permanency planning process, a guardianship placement may often be the plan of choice as was the case for 434 children and youth for whom new guardianships were established in Fiscal Year 2004.

**Guardianships\***



\* The number of children placed in out-of-home care with an accomplished permanent plan of placement in a guardianship arrangement granted through either the Superior Court or Juvenile Court system.