

# **PART II: Final Report for Fiscal Years 2000-2004**

## **(1) Accomplishments and Challenges**

**Children's Administration  
Department of Social and Health Services**

## Final Report for FY 2000-2004: Accomplishments and Challenges

Children's Administration's goals and objectives are annually outlined in our Strategic Plan, which is included in this Plan as Part III (1). Strategic Plan goals and objectives not only mirror the three key federal goals, but also address organizational issues:

- Child Safety: Children will be safe from abuse and neglect
- Child and Family Health and Well Being: Help families and communities improve the well-being of children in their own homes and in out-of-home care.
- Permanency: Provide stable, nurturing, and permanent placements as quickly as possible for children who are placed into out-of-home care.
- Supporting Client Outcomes: Continuously improve the organization's capacity to achieve better outcomes for children and families.

Many of the specific action steps in the Strategic Plan reflect Department of Social and Health Services Secretary Dennis Braddock's *Kids Come First Action Agenda*, launched in 2000. New tools for assessing risk of harm, improved training for both social workers and foster parents, and reduced caseloads for social workers are among the improvements made through *Kids Come First*.

In addition to detailing the specific strategies planned for reaching our goals (Chapter 4: Goals, Objectives, Strategies and Performance Measures), the Strategic Plan outlines the numerous programs within our child and family service system (Chapter 2: The People We Serve) and reviews the challenges we face (Chapter 3: Environmental Context).

The accomplishments and progress on our goals and objectives are also charted in our annual Performance Report, most recently published in December 2003. Depending upon the specific measure, data reaches as far back as 1996 so trends can be readily seen. The latest data in the 2003 Performance Report reflects the period from July 01, 2002, through June 30, 2003, unless otherwise noted. Data is drawn from two primary sources: the Case and Management Information System (CAMIS), a fully automated system which stores information regarding referrals, case related activities,

contracts, licensing actions and other case-specific data, and regional quarterly reports on outcomes related to measures that the administration perceives are crucial but for which there is not currently an automated data collection system.

While data lag complexities prevent the inclusion of accurate up-to-the-minute reporting on all measures in this report, we can offer an annualized estimate based upon the most current data available as of December 2003 for a limited number of safety and permanency measures. Those estimates are charted beginning on page 5 of this section.

The 2003 Performance Report is attached as an appendix to this plan. Some of the long term child welfare trends described in this document are noted below.

In FY 03 less than 5,000 children in out of home care were returned to birth parents; in FY 1997, 7880 children were reunited with birth parents. The most striking feature of this decline in reunifications is the lack of yearly fluctuations with fewer reunifications compared to the year before in every fiscal year since 1996.

The steady decline in reunifications is largely accounted for by the reduction in children entering out of home care, as noted by the May 2004 Washington State Institute for Public Policy's report on the "Decline in Washington's Family Reunifications: What Influenced this Trend?" This report also concludes that

"The remaining 14 percent of the decline is explained by changes in the caseload mix, in favor of cases less likely to reunify (e.g., more infants in care, more children placed for neglect or parental substance abuse, more children placed with relatives). However, controlling for case characteristics, the likelihood of reunification did not change over time."

It is important to note that the yearly decline in reunifications began in this state and other states prior to implementation of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997, although ASFA may have accelerated this trend.

In June 03, there were almost 200 fewer children in care for 60 days or longer than in June 1996. This is one of the more hopeful pieces of data in this report, given the difficulty that child welfare systems around the country have had in stopping the growth in the numbers of children in out of home care.

Total CPS referrals have remained at the same level (79,000+) since 1997. There was a small decline (5%) in accepted CPS referrals in FY 02.

Neglect referrals have steadily increased in both absolute numbers and in the percentage of accepted referrals since 1990. Recent referral data indicates that almost 75% of accepted CPS referrals are being classified at intake as either physical neglect or medical neglect. In mid 1995, approximately 55% of accepted CPS referrals were classified as neglect.

The decline in sex abuse referrals is as dramatic as the increase in neglect referrals. Recent data indicates that sex abuse is currently 6-7% of accepted referrals; in the early 1990s, this percentage was in the 15 -20% range. The decline in sex abuse cases is a nationwide phenomenon.

The single most encouraging long term trend is the steady reduction in the percentage of chronically referring families with open CPS cases. This percentage has dropped from almost one fourth of CPS cases in FY 1998 to 16.6% in FY 03.

Another positive data element is that the re-entry into care within 12 months of return home rate has declined from almost 20% in FY 1997 to about 14% in FY 03.

Length of stay statistics for children in care 60 days or longer have been flat for the past few years, suggesting that CA has hit a performance plateau in permanent planning. Disproportionality for African American and Native American children has changed little in recent years despite the concern within CA and among child advocates with this issue.

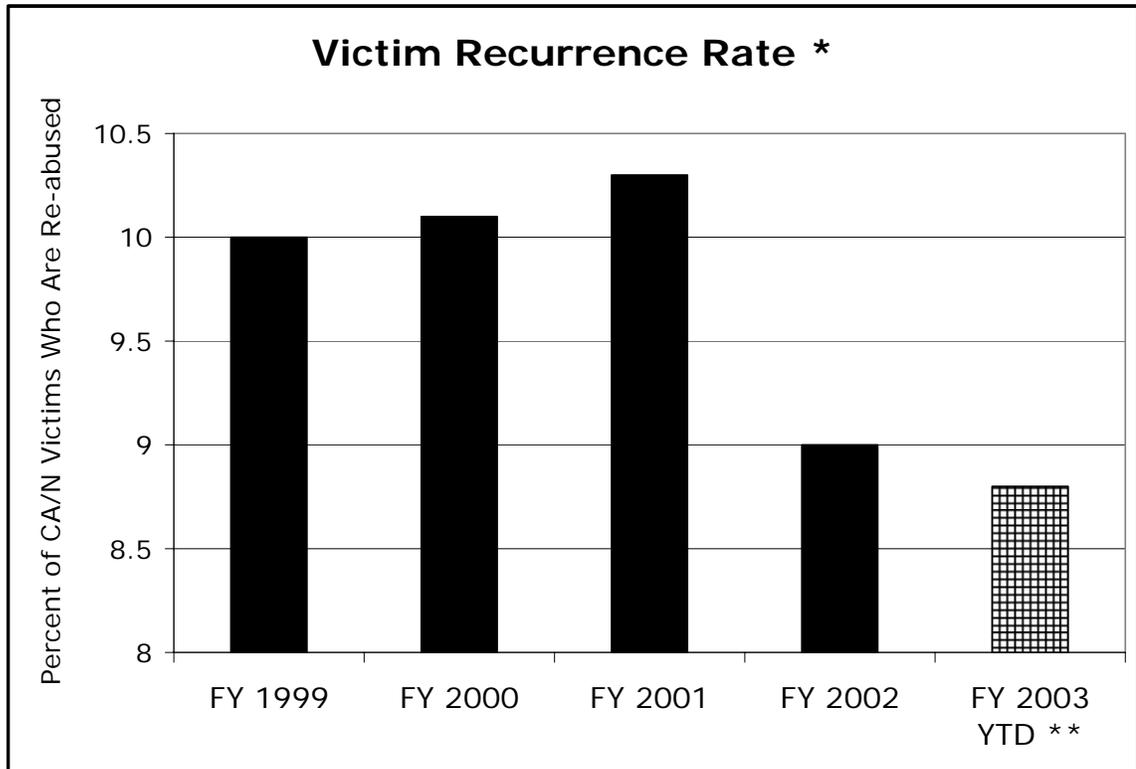
The number of licensed foster homes in the state has changed very little over the past few years despite significant recruitment and retention efforts. The kinship care rate, on the other hand, has increased to approximately one third of children in out of home

care, suggesting that CA offices are finding it much easier to find relatives for children needing placement than to find and maintain foster homes.

It is plausible that several of these long term trends are connected; the large increase in neglect cases, the reduction in children experiencing brief out of home care, the decline in reunifications, the increase in kinship care may be different aspects of a single phenomenon, i.e., the transformation of the child welfare system into a means of coping with poverty related family breakdown. Given this perspective, it is extremely encouraging that CA offices have made a marked improvement on the agency's chronicity measure, an indication that CA staff take chronicity of CA/N seriously.

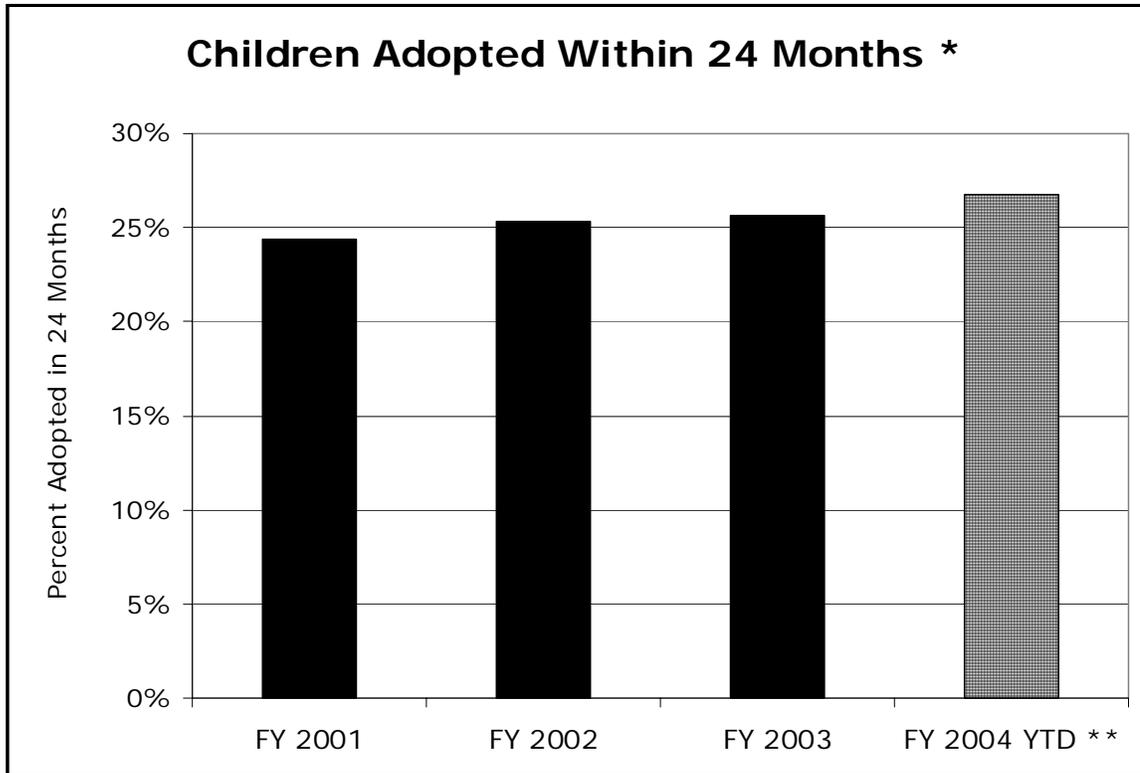
Annualized estimates based upon the most current data available as of December 2003 have been created for the following safety and permanency measures. The latest data point in each chart will likely change when annualized.

*Safety Objective: Reduce Recurrence of Maltreatment  
Measured by: Children who are re-abused*



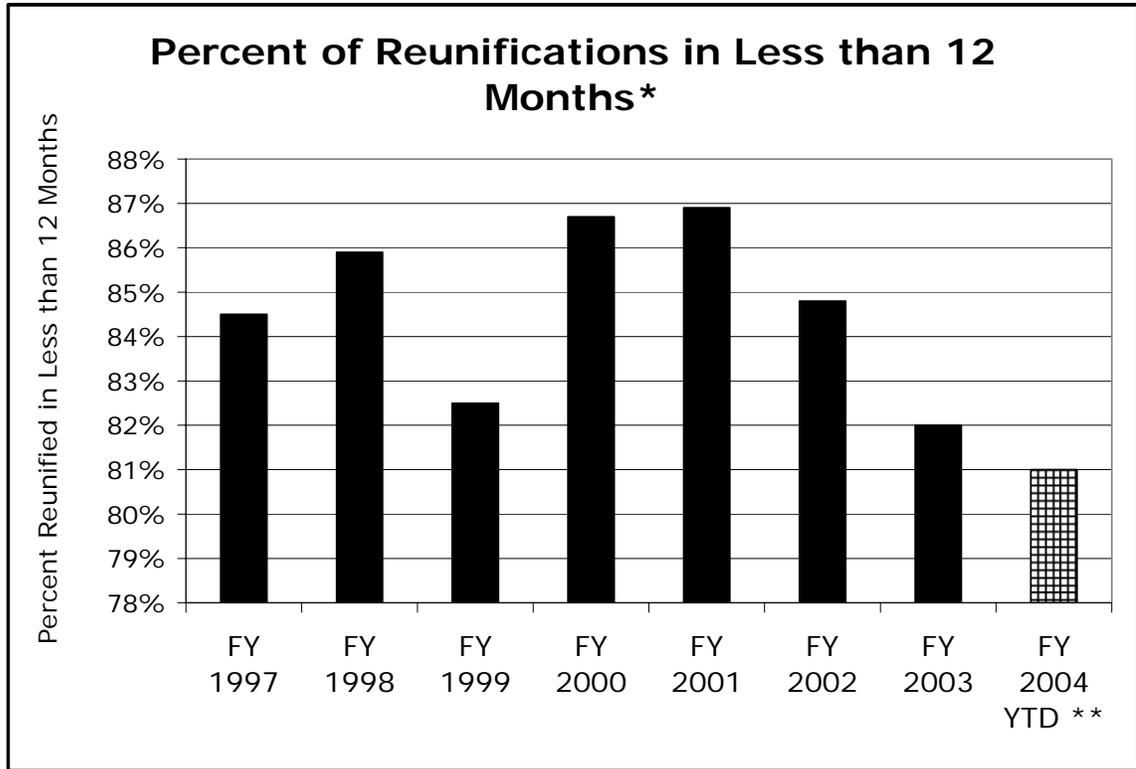
- \* The proportion of children with a founded referral of abuse that have a subsequent founded referral within six months of the initial referral. "Founded" means that an investigation concluded that the event was more likely than not to have occurred. For referrals with multiple allegations, the referral is considered "founded" if any of the allegations are founded.
- \*\* Data is taken from the FY2003 Annual Report with the exception of the final data point which represents the most current data available as of March 2004. This data point will likely change when final data is available.

*Permanency Objective: Increase Permanency for Children Placed in Out-of-home Care*  
*Measured by: Children Adopted Within 24 Months*



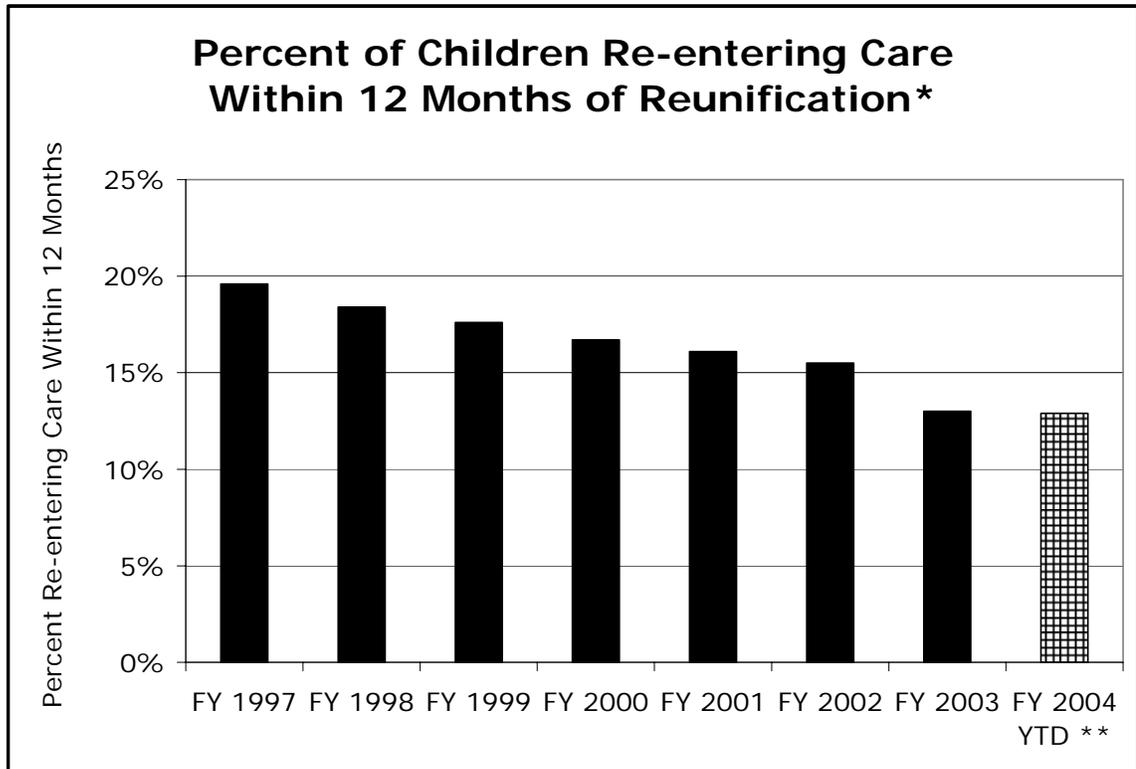
- \* Children adopted within 24 months of placement into out-of-home care, as a percentage of all children adopted.
- \*\* Data is taken from Interactive Spreadsheets. The final data point represents an annualized estimate based upon the most current data available as of December 2003. This data point will likely change when final data is available.

*Permanency Objective: Decrease length-of-stay without increasing re-entry*  
*Measured by: Length of time to achieve permanency goal of reunification*



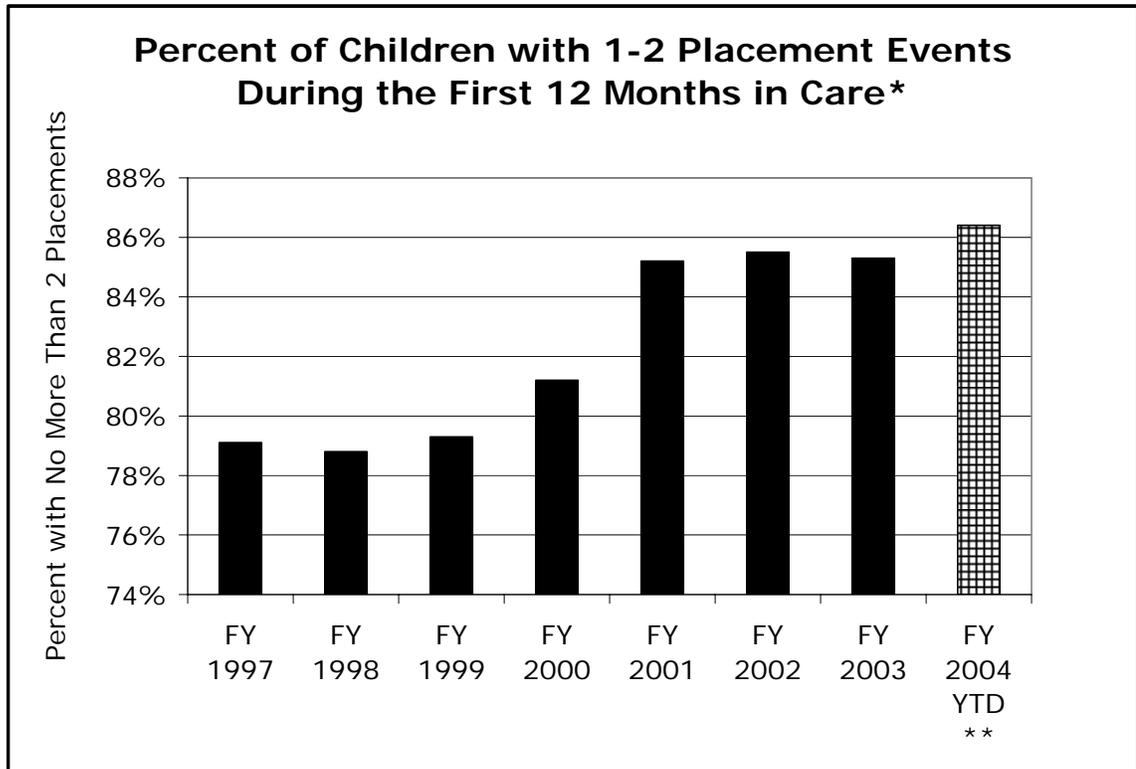
- \* Percent of children reunified with their parents within 12 months of placement into out-of-home care.
- \*\* Data is taken from the FY2003 Annual Report with the exception of the final data point which represents an annualized estimate based upon the most current data available as of December 2003. This data point will likely change when final data is available.

*Permanency Objective: Decrease length-of-stay without increasing re-entry*  
*Measured by: Children Re-entering Care*



- \* Percent of children who re-enter out-of-home care within 12 months of reunification with their parents, regardless of length-of-stay. Based upon federal calculation standards.
- \*\* Data is taken from the FY2003 Annual Report with the exception of the final data point which represents the most current data available as of December 2003. This data point will likely change when final data is available.

*Permanency Objective: Increase Stability for Children in Out-of-Home Care*  
*Measured by: Children with no more than two placements*



- \* The percent of children in DCFS custody who have only one or two principle places or homes of residence (placement events) during their first 12 months in care (or exiting from care within 12 months), excluding respite care, juvenile detention, hospital stays, on-the-run, and similar types of placements which do not represent a change of residence.
- \*\* Data is taken from the FY2003 Annual Report with the exception of final data point which represents the most current data available as of December 2003. This data point will likely change when final data is available.

While CA has made significant, positive changes in our service delivery, we continue to face major challenges in both our external and internal environments. Please see Chapter 3 of our Strategic Plan (section III (1) of this larger Child and Family Services Plan) for a more detailed explanation of the environmental context within which CA operates.

Our initial Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) was held in November of 2003. Results of that review are summarized in Chapter 5 of our Strategic Plan (Organization Assessment Summary). Since Washington did not meet all the federal standards in our CFSR, we are in negotiations with the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families on a Program Improvement Plan (PIP). Specific strategies for improving outcomes for children and families are being developed within the PIP and will launch CA into Phase II of the Kids Come First agenda, with an emphasis on engaging and supporting families and on consistency of practice across the state that will improve outcomes for children and families.