



CA Children's Administration

Report to the Legislature

Children's Services Annual Quality Assurance Report

Child Welfare Services
RCW 43.20A.870 and RCW 74.13.031(5)

January 17, 2007

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Executive Summary

Protecting the children of Washington State from abuse and neglect is the administration's top priority.

The Washington State Department of Social and Health Services Children's Administration works to provide quality services to vulnerable children and families, and to maintain accountability to those who use the administration's services, those who fund the administration's services, and the community at large.

Protecting the children of Washington State from abuse and neglect is the administration's top priority. Additionally, the administration strives to provide stable and permanent homes for vulnerable children, and to partner with families and communities to promote the well-being of children and their families.

This report, the tenth annual **Children's Services Annual Quality Assurance Report**, details performance outcome data in compliance with RCW 43.20A.870 and RCW 74.13.031(5), in order to demonstrate progress in the following specific service areas:

Child Protective Services (CPS) response time

The administration responds quickly to allegations of abuse or neglect and implements safeguards to protect children who have been abused or neglected from further abuse or neglect at the hands of their caregivers.

Children's health and safety in out-of-home care

The administration monitors children in out-of-home care, performs health and safety checks on licensed facilities, and works to provide safe placements to children who have been removed from their families due to abuse or neglect so they are not abused or neglected in licensed care.

Adherence to permanency planning guidelines

The administration works toward placing children in permanent homes as quickly as possible and tracks progress with reference to reunification within 12 months and adoption within 24 months.

Children's length of stay in out-of-home placement

The administration seeks to limit the amount of time children spend in out-of-home care prior to reunification or other permanency plan completion.

Data in this report is for Fiscal Year 2006 from July 1, 2005, through June 30, 2006, except where specifically noted.

The administration monitors many additional performance measures which are detailed in the **Children's Administration Performance Report**. Together, these reports include information on performance outcomes for the agency's four priority areas of safety, permanency, well-being, and supporting client outcomes.

Child and Family Services Review

The administration is working to complete the two-year Program Improvement Plan (PIP) developed in 2004 as a result of the federally mandated Child and Family Service Review (CFSR). The CFSR serves to strengthen and improve child welfare services by evaluating states across numerous safety, permanence, well-being, and systemic measures.

The PIP consists of 96 action steps and 20 performance targets to support systemic change and address deficiencies identified through the CFSR. At the end of Fiscal Year 2006, the administration had fully completed 72 action steps and achieved 14 targets, including all safety targets. Work is substantially complete on the remaining 24 action steps, and the state is close to meeting its six remaining performance targets (four for permanency and two for well-being). The administration expects to complete all action steps and meet all performance targets by the end of the PIP period on September 30, 2006.

As a result of the CFSR, the administration has improved its services to children and their families by meeting PIP goals in areas such as:

- Improving the timeliness of child abuse and neglect investigations.
- Increasing the stability of foster care placements and improving permanency planning for children in out-of-home care.
- Increasing support for foster families.
- Improving response to the educational and health care needs of children.
- Increasing the quality and frequency of visits between children, parents, and siblings.
- Increasing early and ongoing involvement of stakeholders including children, parents, tribes, and foster families.
- Increasing the quality and frequency of social worker contact with children, parents, and caregivers.

Braam Foster Care Lawsuit

In July of 2004, a settlement was reached in the Braam Foster Care lawsuit that included several provisions for improving the conditions and treatment of children in the custody of the administration's Division of Children and Family Services. In December of 2005, the administration gave the Braam Oversight Panel its first report on compliance for the time period from July 24, 2004 through December 31, 2005.

The panel subsequently released its implementation plan for monitoring the administration in February of 2006, and in March the panel released its first monitoring report for the period of July 24, 2004 through December 31, 2005. Through the end of Fiscal Year 2006, the administration was working closely with the panel in informal technical sessions to develop baseline measurements for all performance measures developed for the settlement, as well as new compliance

plans for areas where the panel found the administration's work during the first monitoring period to be incomplete.

Government Management Accountability and Performance

During Fiscal Year 2006, the administration gave the Governor three Government Management Accountability and Performance (GMAP) presentations on vulnerable children. GMAP allows the administration to present and discuss performance measures and workload data that inform the Governor on where the administration is doing well, where the administration needs to improve performance, and where further resources are needed in order to best serve Washington's vulnerable children and their families.

The contents of the administration's presentations are available on the Governor's GMAP website: <http://www.governor.wa.gov/gmap/>

Performance Measures in This Report

The administration has created and continues to refine a series of performance measures designed to assess key areas of service delivery and the impact the administration's interventions are having on the quality of life of Washington's children. The administration must continually examine policies and practices so that our work ultimately results in improved lives for children and families. This report details the administration's performance on several measures:

- For each quarter of Fiscal Year 2006, the administration surpassed the September 2006 program improvement goal of seeing 90 percent of children in emergent CPS referrals within 24 hours of referral receipt.
- Having met the 80 percent goal for September 2005, we are on track to meet the September 2006 goal of seeing 90 percent of children in non-emergent CPS referrals within 72 hours of referral receipt.
- The administration continues to explore ways to reduce the number of children who experience additional founded allegations of abuse or neglect within six months of a previous finding. The recurrence rate did not meet the federal target in Federal Fiscal Year 2005.
- The percent of children in licensed care with founded allegations of abuse or neglect in Federal Fiscal Year 2005 was better than the federal standard.
- The administration continues to exceed the state requirement of monitoring a minimum of 10 percent of foster homes annually.
- Throughout Fiscal Year 2006, the administration met the initial program improvement goal of visiting 90 percent of children in out-of-home care every 90 days at the home or facility where they are placed.
- The administration has initiated a phase-in plan to increase social worker visits with children from every 90 days to every 30 days. We have begun with our most vulnerable population, and now require 30-day visits for children who are dependents of the state, but are

living with their parents. Our compliance with this new requirement increased from 32.3 to 56.4 percent between March 2006 and September 2006.

- The administration performed better than the federal standard for timely reunification of children, and met the federal standard for the timely adoption of children for the first time.
- The percent of children in out-of-home care for more than 2 years in Fiscal Year 2006 rose from an all-time low in Fiscal Year 2005, but the median number of days that children spend in care did not change.
- The percent of children who reenter out-of-home care within 12 months of reunification with their families continues to decrease, but still does not meet the federal standard.
- The proportion of both African American and Native American children in out-of-home care increased in Fiscal Year 2006.
- For the sixth year, the percent of children for whom meaningful familial ties have been preserved through relative placements has increased.

The administration either met or continued to meet federal standards and program improvement goals in several areas related to child safety and permanency in Fiscal Year 2006. We continue to examine those areas in which performance measures fail to meet federal and internal targets, specifically in the areas of recurrence of abuse or neglect, reentry into out-of-home placement, and the overrepresentation of minority children in long-term care.

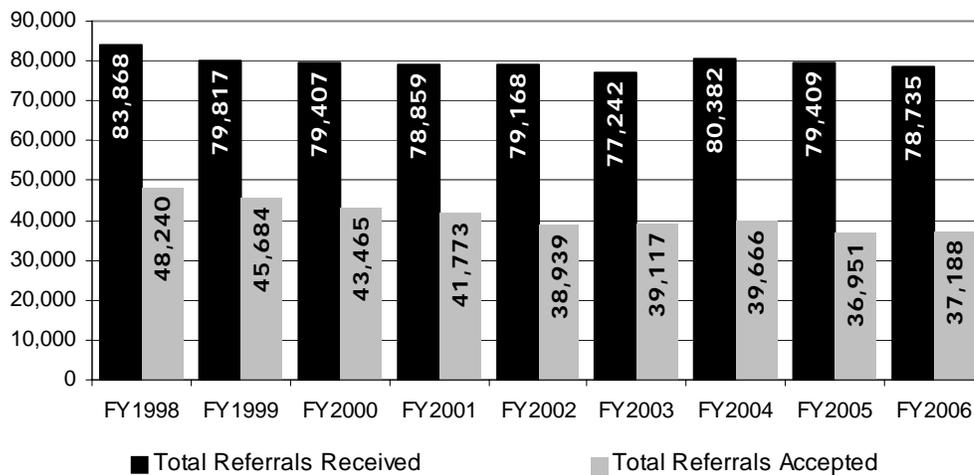
Safety

Goal: Children will be safe from abuse and neglect

The Children's Administration's main priority is ensuring that children are safe from harm. The administration depends upon the caring, conscientiousness, and moral action of relatives, neighbors, schoolteachers, doctors, and concerned community members to inform Child Protective Services (CPS) when they suspect that a child is being abused or neglected.

A concerned citizen may act on behalf of a vulnerable child simply by placing a call to CPS. When a call comes in to CPS, the social worker receiving the report must decide to investigate or refer a family for services based upon the information provided. More than 78,000 referrals of suspected abuse or neglect were reported in Fiscal Year 2006. Of those, more than 37,000 referrals met the legal definition of abuse or neglect and were investigated by the administration.

Child Protective Services (CPS) Referrals*



More than 7,300 families with children deemed at low to moderately low risk of harm were offered alternative intervention services in Fiscal Year 2006. Of these, over 2,400 families were referred to the Alternative Response System (ARS). Families directed to the ARS program are typically referred to CPS for neglect issues, and have had little to no contact with CPS in the past. ARS services are delivered by community-based agencies that are contracted to serve families in the least intrusive manner that is reasonably likely to improve family cohesiveness, prevent re-referrals of the family for alleged child maltreatment, and improve the health and safety of children.

*Number of referrals received per fiscal year. Includes Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and Division of Licensed Resources (DLR) Child Protective Services referrals. Source: EMIS report.

Objective: Initiate timely investigations
Measured by: Children seen face-to-face by a social worker following a referral accepted for investigation

When responding to any allegation of abuse or neglect, an intake social worker must determine the best course of action based upon the information provided. Social workers rely upon community members for information about the nature of suspected abuse or neglect, and to provide adequate information that will aid investigators in identifying and locating the child or children.

When an intake social worker determines that a referred child is at moderate to high risk of harm, Child Protective Services (CPS) staff accepts the referral for investigation. The level of severity and urgency of the situation are assessed, and the referral is determined to require an emergent or non-emergent response to assess child safety. In Fiscal Year 2005, the Governor required that the Children's Administration decrease social worker response time for making face-to-face contact with children in both emergent and non-emergent referrals.

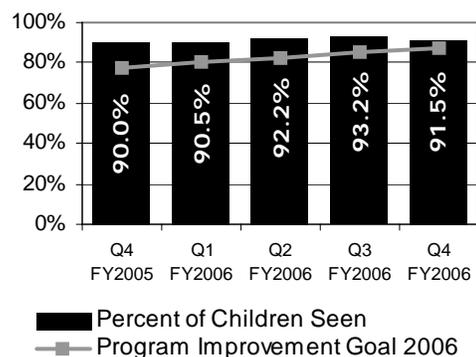
Effective April 29, 2005, when children are assessed to be at risk of imminent harm, social workers must make face-to-face contact within 24 hours of the administration receiving the referral. In the past, social workers were required to initiate investigations within 24 hours, and make face-to-face contact with children as soon as possible within ten working days of receiving referrals.

Effective August 8, 2005, the face-to-face contact response time for non-emergent referrals where children are assessed not to be at imminent risk of harm decreased from ten working days to within 72 hours of receiving referrals.

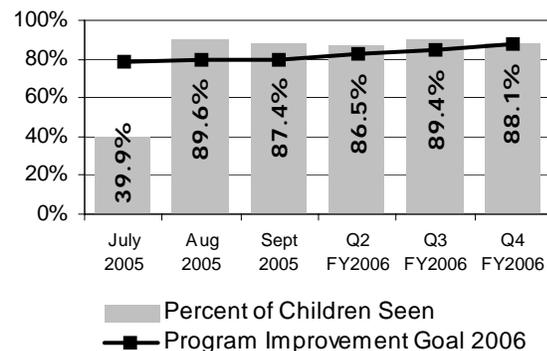
The federal program improvement goal for timely investigations is for social workers to make face-to-face contact with children within required response times at a rate of 80 percent by September 2005, and 90 percent by September 2006.

The administration met the 2005 goal for both emergent and non-emergent referrals. We surpassed the 2006 goal in every quarter of Fiscal Year 2006 for emergent referrals, and at 88.1 percent as of the end of the fiscal year, we are on track to meet this goal for non-emergent referrals as well.

Children in Emergent Referrals Seen Within 24 Hours*



Children in Non-Emergent Referrals Seen Within 72 Hours**



*Percent of children in emergent referrals seen or attempted within 24 hours. Excludes Division of Licensed Resources (DLR) CPS referrals. The federal Program Improvement Plan goal is 80 percent by September 2005, and 90 percent by September 2006. Source: October 2006 CAMIS download.

**Percent of children in non-emergent referrals seen or attempted within 72 hours. Excludes Division of Licensed Resources (DLR) CPS referrals. The federal Program Improvement Plan goal is 80 percent by September 2005, and 90 percent by September 2006. Source: October 2006 CAMIS download.

Objective: Reduce recurrence of abuse or neglect
Measured by: Children who are re-abused

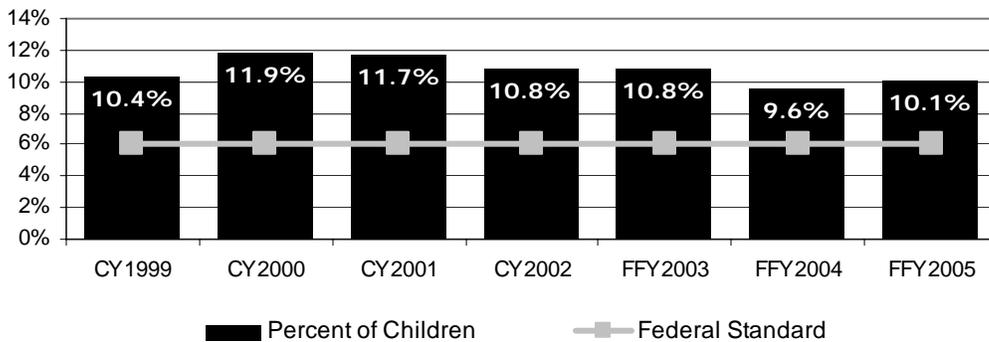
Any child who experiences a founded allegation of abuse or neglect within six months of a previous founded incident of abuse or neglect is considered to be a victim of re-abuse.

Families that have experienced multiple founded allegations of abuse or neglect warrant additional monitoring and involvement on the part of the Children's Administration. These families have demonstrated that despite increased efforts to support them in creating safe and stable homes, they are unable to secure the safety of the children within their care.

The federal standard requires that no more than 6.1 percent of children who have been the victims of abuse or neglect will experience an additional founded allegation of abuse or neglect. The recurrence rate in Washington State has failed to meet the federal standard throughout the seven-year tracking period.

The administration has worked toward improving practice so that fewer children experience additional incidents of abuse or neglect at the hands of their caregivers, while also examining data tracking and reporting methods in an effort to make statistical reporting more congruent with federal methods.

Children Who are Re-Abused*



*Percent of children with a founded referral of abuse or neglect who experienced an additional founded referral of abuse or neglect within six months of the initial referral. "Founded" means that an investigation concluded that the maltreatment 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. The federal standard is 6.1 percent or less. In 2002, the federal government changed the required reporting period from calendar year to federal fiscal year. Source: federal fiscal year data submitted to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS).

Objective: Improve safety for children placed in out-of-home care

Measured by: Children who are abused or neglected in out-of-home care

Foster parenting can be incredibly rewarding. It is also a challenging role: families wishing to foster children must undergo detailed background checks, attend training, and demonstrate competencies in a variety of areas associated with caring for children.

In addition, the homes or facilities where children in state care live must meet strict licensing standards. The buildings and surrounding grounds must be free of health and safety hazards and must offer children adequate personal space and privacy. The administration takes great care to prevent children who have been harmed in their own homes from being harmed in out-of-home care.

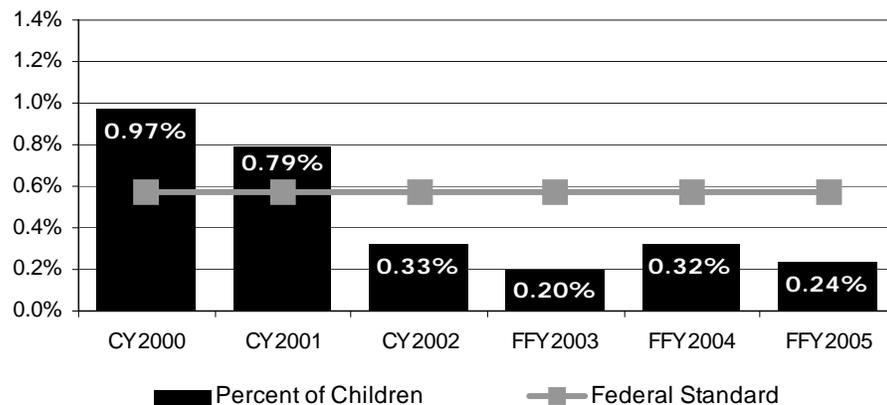
It is never acceptable for children to be abused or neglected in state care, and the administration has demonstrated considerable progress toward reducing the percent of children who experience abuse or neglect in licensed care. The federal standard requires that less than .57 percent of children in licensed care experience abuse or neglect while in out-of-home placement.

Washington State's performance has been significantly better than the federal standard for the past four years. The administration has placed greater emphasis upon risk assessment and has improved training for foster parents and social work staff on caring for children in licensed care.

In Federal Fiscal Year 2005, Children's Administration staff investigated over 1,600 allegations of child abuse and neglect in licensed foster homes and group care. The rate that children in care were found to be the victims of substantiated child abuse and neglect dropped from 0.32 percent to 0.24 percent of children in placement between Federal Fiscal Years 2004 and 2005.

The administration strives to protect all children entrusted to our care and has implemented a more thorough screening process as one means by which an even greater reduction in the percent of founded allegations of abuse in licensed care may be seen in the long term future.

Children Abused or Neglected While in Out-of-Home Care*



*Percent of children in out-of-home care with a founded referral of abuse or neglect. The federal standard is .57 percent or less. Source: federal fiscal year data submitted to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) and the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS).

Objective: Improve safety for children placed in out-of-home care

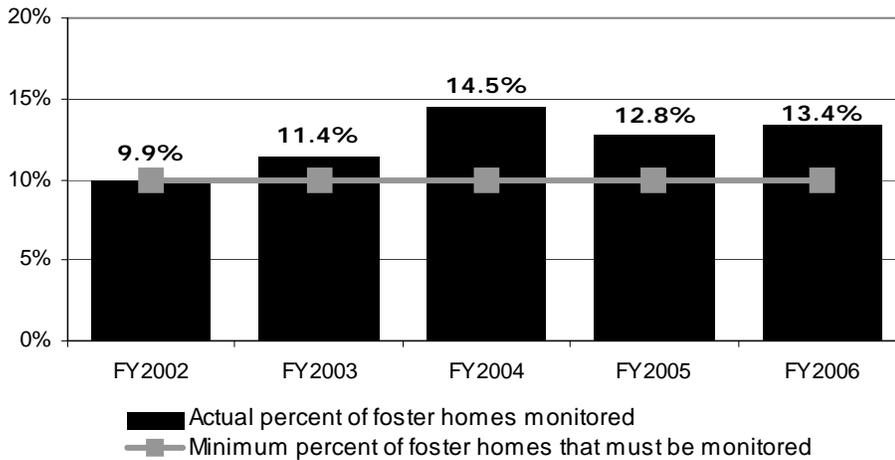
Measured by: Foster homes receiving health and safety checks

Washington State requires ongoing monitoring of licensed foster homes. "Monitoring shall be done by the department on a random sample basis of no less than ten percent of the total licensed family foster homes licensed by the administration on July 1 of each year," and reported annually. (RCW 74.13.260; RCW 74.13.031(5))

Licensors assess the condition of homes and facilities to make sure that no hazards have arisen since a license was issued and all licensing standards continue to be met.

The administration has exceeded the state requirement of ten percent of homes monitored for the past four years.

Division of Licensed Resources (DLR) Foster Homes Monitored Annually*



*Percentage of Division of Licensed Resources (DLR) foster homes with a health and safety check completed by the Division of Licensed Resources annually. Source: September 2006 CAMIS download.

Objective: Increase worker visits with children
Measured by: Children visited every 90 days by their social worker

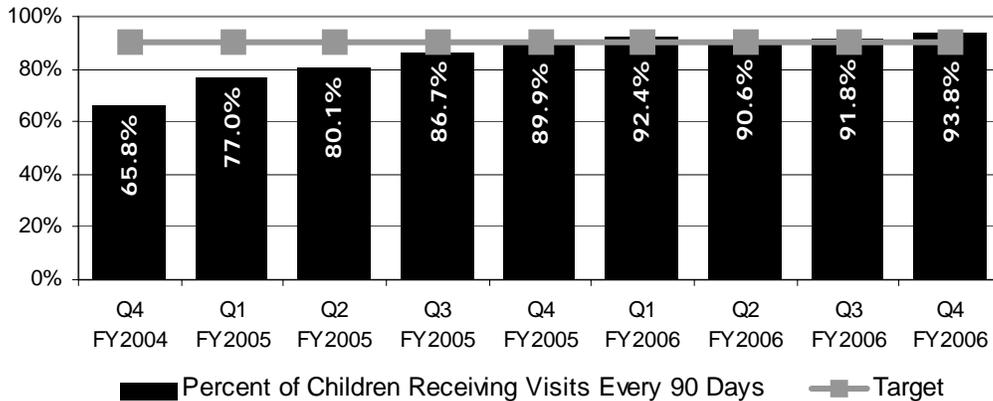
In order to monitor the health and safety of children in out-of-home care, social workers must make contact with children on a regular basis.

Social workers interact with children on their caseloads through telephone contact, attendance at meetings, and appointments related to a child's case. In addition, social workers are required to visit each child in person at the child's out-of-home placement a minimum of once every 90 days. These visits allow the social worker to assess the child's physical surroundings, as well as the child's adjustment to his or her placement, and to determine whether or not the placement is meeting the child's needs.

We are in the process of hiring and training additional social workers as part of our phase-in plan to increase the requirement for these visits to once every 30 days for all children. We have begun by focusing on our most vulnerable children, and now require 30-day visits for children who are dependents of the state, but are living with their parents. The administration's compliance with this new requirement increased from 32.3 to 56.4 percent between March 2006 and September 2006.

The initial target for this measure is that 90 percent of children in care be visited in their placement every 90 days. The administration has demonstrated significant progress on this measure, improving from 65.8 percent in the last quarter of Fiscal Year 2004 to exceeding the 90 percent target throughout Fiscal Year 2006.

Social Worker Visits With Children in Out-of-Home Care



*Percent of children in out-of-home placement who are seen face-to-face by their social worker in their caregiver's home at least once within the last 90 days. Source: September 2006 CAMIS download.

Permanency

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

Objective: Increase permanency for children in out-of-home care

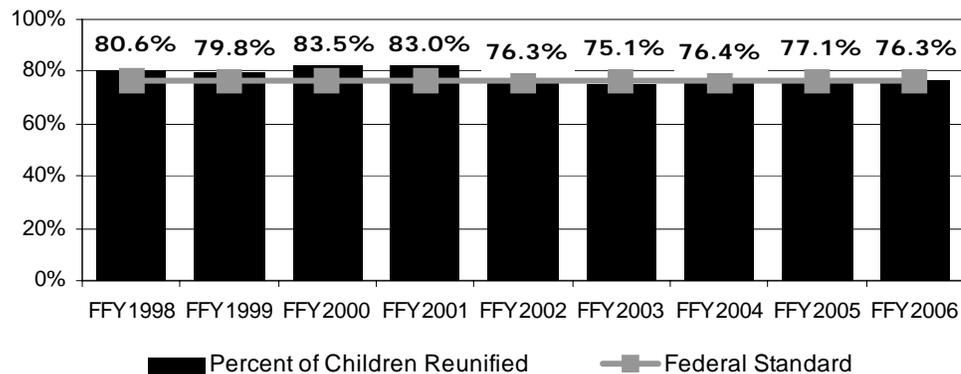
Measured by: Children reunified within 12 months of placement

Whenever it is safe and in the best interest of the child, the Children's Administration works to reunify children with their families, following a reunification and safety assessment and thorough transition planning.

The federal standard requires that at least 76.2 percent of children for whom reunification is the best permanent outcome be reunified within 12 months of out-of-home placement. This standard reflects the importance of early and timely permanency for children.

Washington State has historically done well with reference to this measure, having met the standard for all but one year of the nine-year period documented.

Reunification Within 12 Months of Placement*



*Percent of children reunified with their parents within 12 months of placement into out-of-home care. The federal standard is 76.2 percent or higher. Source: federal fiscal year data as of June 2006 submitted to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS).

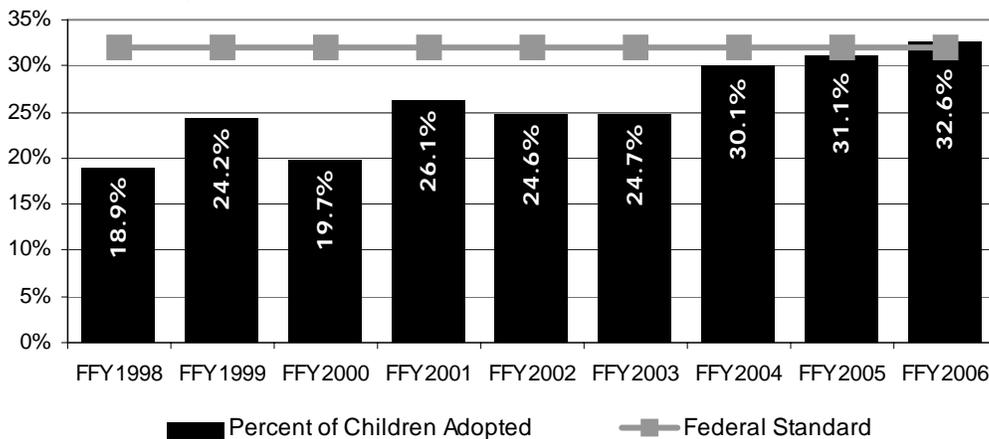
Objective: Increase permanency for children in out-of-home care

Measured by: Children adopted within 24 months of placement

The older children get, the more difficult it is to find an appropriate family to meet their needs. Thus, older children tend to stay longer in foster care while additional recruitment options are explored. Like all children, these children want a loving family to call their own. Like all children, they deserve to have a loving family.

The federal practice standard for timely adoptions is for at least 32 percent of children with an identified permanency goal of adoption to be adopted within 24 months of placement into out-of-home care. Thanks to the commitment of social work staff to best practice and involvement with community partners, Fiscal Year 2006 marks the first time Washington State has met this standard.

Children Adopted Within 24 Months of Placement*



*Percent of children with a permanency plan of adoption who were adopted within 24 months of placement into out-of-home care. The federal standard is 32 percent or higher. Source: federal fiscal year data as of June 2006 submitted to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS).

Objective: Decrease length of stay without increasing reentry

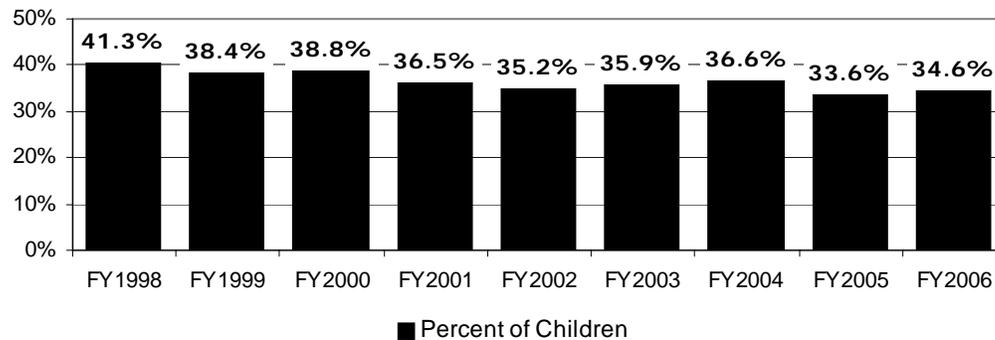
Measured by: Length of stay for children in care

Whenever children must be placed into out-of-home care to provide for their safety, the Children's Administration makes every effort ensure that their temporary placement is stable and that a permanent home is secured as quickly as possible.

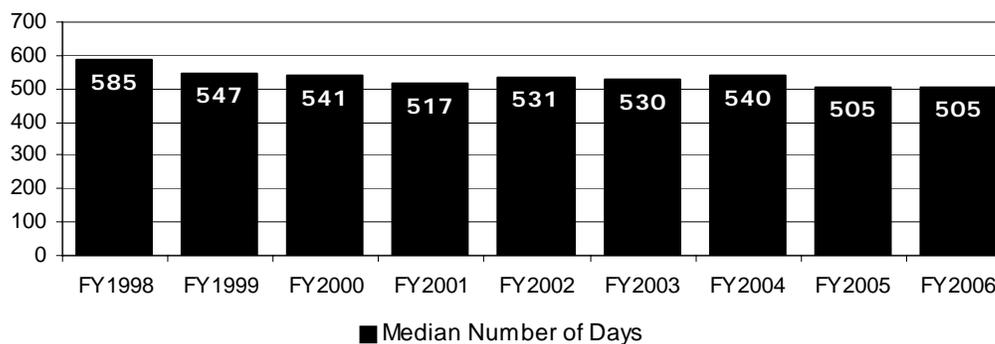
The percent of children who have been in care longer than two years has decreased from 41.3 percent in Fiscal Year 1998 to 34.6 percent in Fiscal Year 2006.

The median number of days children spend in out-of-home care has ranged from a high of 585 days in Fiscal Year 1998 to a low of 505 in Fiscal Years 2005 and 2006.

Children in Care for More Than 2 Years*



Median Number of Days Children are Placed in Care**



*Percent of children in the administration's custody in out-of-home care for more than 60 days, who have a cumulative time in care during their current placement episode of more than two years. Source: September 2006 CAMIS download.

**Median cumulative time in care for all children in care for more than 60 days. This measure is calculated based upon the population of children in care for more than 60 days to more clearly depict the status of children for whom the administration is actively conducting permanency planning. Sixty days was the chosen "cut off" point because children who stay in care at least 60 days must have a permanency plan completed at this point. If children placed for very short periods of time were included in this measure, it would inaccurately skew the understanding of the percent of children who are placed for much longer periods of time. Source: July 2006 CAMIS download.

Objective: Decrease length of stay without increasing reentry
Measured by: Children reentering care

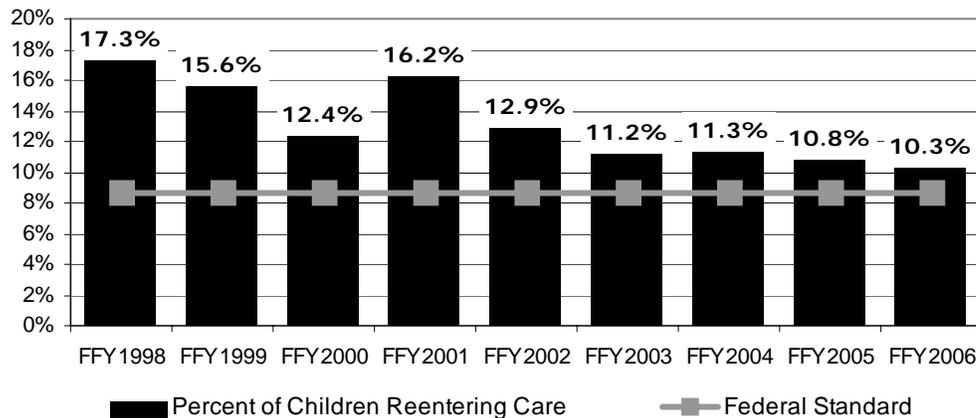
The Children’s Administration seriously considers the decision to recommend the removal of children from their homes and families. Likewise, the decision to return children home is made with careful consideration, and requires specific supports and safeguards to see to it that the actions resulting in a child’s removal do not occur again.

The administration supports the successful reunification of families through the development of transition and safety plans. On-going social worker contact with families ensures that transition and safety plans are followed, and that parents adhere to the conditions required to have their children returned to them. Even when great care is taken, there are children who will be placed into out-of-home care again due to new allegations of abuse or neglect following reunification with their families.

The federal standard requires that no more than 8.6 percent of children reenter out-of-home care within 12 months of reunification.

Washington State has struggled to meet this standard, and has been unable to do so throughout the nine years that this measure has been tracked. Progress has been made in the past five years, with Fiscal Year 2006 marking the lowest reentry rate in nine years. This progress is due in part to the administration’s requirement that formal reunification assessments be done for all dependent children less than 12 years of age and in care for more than 60 days due to child abuse or neglect, starting in 2002. However, the state performance rate still exceeds the federal standard by nearly 2 percent.

Children Reentering Care Within 12 Months of Reunification*



*Percent of children who reentered out-of-home care within 12 months of reunification with their parents, regardless of length of stay. The federal standard is 8.6 percent or less. Source: federal fiscal year data as of June 2006 submitted to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS).

Objective: Decrease over-representation of minority children in care

Measured by: Minority children in care for more than two years

Throughout Washington State and across the nation, there are disproportionate numbers of African American and Native American children in out-of-home care in comparison to the general population. These children also tend to stay in care for longer periods of time than other racial and ethnic groups.

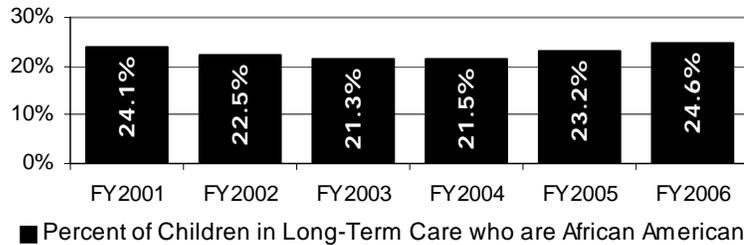
The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) states that, "Nationally African-American children are four times as likely and American Indian children about 3.5 times as likely as white children to be in protective custody." In addition, CWLA states that nationwide, "Children of color are likely to stay in foster care for longer periods of time and are less likely to be either returned home or adopted."¹

The Children's Administration has tracked disproportionality in Washington State since 2001, and established the Office of African American Children's Services in King County in an effort to address system issues and improve practice with reference to African American children and their families.

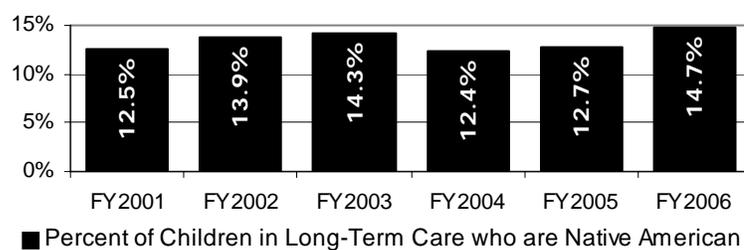
The administration has also worked toward increasing consultation and collaboration with Tribes statewide, in order to improve compliance with Indian Child Welfare Act mandates and improve outcomes for Native American children.

The number and proportion of African American and Native American children in care for longer than two years increased in Fiscal Year 2006. This reinforces the need for continuing and sustained efforts to address this issue.

African American Children in Care for More Than 2 Years*



Native American Children in Care for More Than 2 Years**



¹Child Welfare League of America, Disproportionality, Facts about Children of Color in Foster Care <http://www.cwla.org/programs/culture/disproportionate.htm>

*Percent of children who have been placed in out-of-home care for two years or longer who are not in their permanent home and are African American. Source: September 2006 CAMIS download.

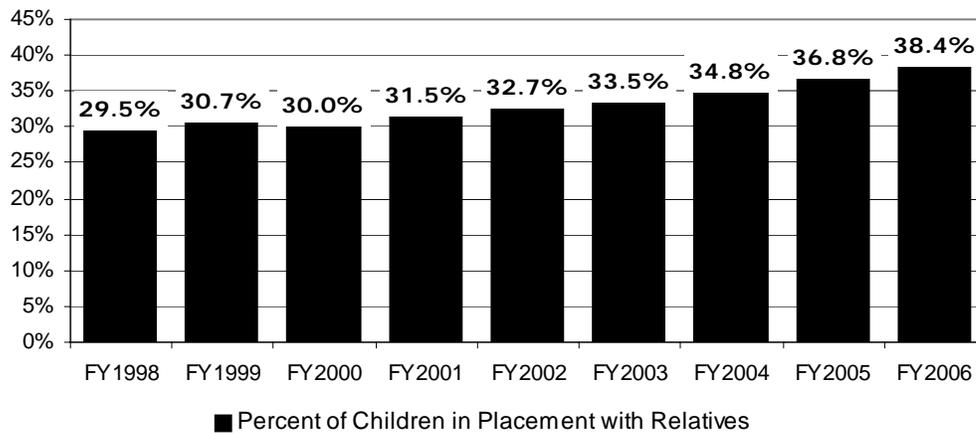
**Percent of children whom have been placed in out-of-home care for two years or longer who are not in their permanent home and are Native American. Source: September 2006 CAMIS download.

Objective: Increase relative placements
Measured by: Children placed with relatives

Children who must be removed from the homes of their parents due to abuse or neglect often benefit greatly from maintaining ongoing relationships with their extended families of origin. When it is safe and in the best interest of the child, the Children's Administration seeks out extended family members as potential placement options for children who cannot go home temporarily, or who require new homes permanently.

The administration has significantly increased the percent of children placed with extended family members from 29.5 percent at the end of Fiscal Year 1998 to 38.4 percent at the end of Fiscal Year 2006.

Children in Placement With Relatives*



*The percent of children in placement with a relative on the last day of the fiscal year. Source: July 2006 CAMIS download.