



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 01, 2008

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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 (CA) has, as its primary purpose, the protection of children from abuse and neglect.

The safety of children is the administration's top priority. Only when the safety of children is adequately addressed can the necessary services and supports be applied toward the preservation and improved well-being of the families of which those children are a part.

Several federal, state, and judicial mandates govern the administration's services delivery system and require the regular reporting of performance outcomes through this and other documents. In addition, the Children's Administration conducts internal assessments and employs strategies to continually improve the statewide service delivery system.

This report, the eleventh 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 2007 from July 1, 2006, through June 30, 2007, 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**
- **Supporting client outcomes**

In Fiscal Year, 2007 the Administration administered a statewide workload study to determine the manageability of work for Children's Administration employees and to gain a better sense of the type of demands they face.

The administration continues to pursue ways to balance the priority areas within the context of competing demands upon our existing workforce. When demands compete, safety always remains the agency's top priority. The administration is also striving to both improve efficiencies to benefit our existing workforce and to increase the size of the workforce to respond to increasing demands.

The administration is currently addressing program and practice improvement strategies identified in the **Child and Family Services Review (CFSR)**, The **Braam Foster Care Lawsuit**, and the **Governor's Government Management Accountability and Performance (GMAP)** program.

Children's Administration recognized the need for improved statewide consistency in child welfare practices. Agency personnel and key stakeholders throughout the state organized to thoroughly research and adopt a statewide **Practice Model**. This new model, when fully implemented, will raise standards, mobilize resources, and better prepare staff for the work of intervening on behalf of vulnerable children.

In addition, in an effort to provide an integrated information management system, the administration has embarked upon a three year process of acquiring and implementing a new **Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS)**.

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES REVIEW

The Child Family Services Review (CFSR) has seven outcome areas related to the safety, permanence and well-being of children and families, and seven (7) related to systemic factors. The CFSR also has six (6) data indicators with national performance standards.

In February 2004 the CFSR review determined that Washington State had met none of the seven (7) outcome standards related to safety, permanence and well-being of children, and only four (4) of the seven related to systemic factors.

Overall Accomplishments

The Children's Administration (CA) has successfully completed its two-year Program Improvement Plan (PIP). By September 30, 2006, the end of the PIP period, CA met 23 out of the 23 case review performance measures, six out of the seven outcome areas related to safety, permanence and well-being and all seven indicators related to systemic areas. CA was one percent short on the 7th outcome area; however compliance with this outcome was not required until September 2007. As of September 2007 this outcome was also met.

In addition to the PIP performance measures and outcome areas, CA and its partners completed over 100 action steps – strategies designed to achieve our performance targets.

Safety - Major Accomplishments

- Implemented the **24 hour and 72 hour response time** to provide a more immediate response to CPS reports.
- Provided **refresher training** on Safety and Risk assessments for all CA staff and supervisors.
- Implemented **Family Team Decision Making** meetings to engage families, relatives and providers to make the best decisions and plans to keep children safe.
- Developed the **Child Protective Services/Child Welfare Services (CPS/CWS Redesign)** model to support child safety and the earlier engagement of families in services.

Permanency - Major Accomplishments

- Implemented the **Kinship Care Framework** (Initial License, Relative Home Study, Relative Search, Respite, etc.) laying down the foundation for working more effectively with relatives.
- Developed the **Visitation Guide** to support parent/child and sibling visits.
- Implemented the **Shared Planning** policy which emphasizes the inclusion of parents, children and foster parents in the decision making process. Strengthened policies to **improve engagement with fathers and absent parents**.

Well-Being - Major Accomplishment

- Implemented **monthly visits** for children whose case is established as an in-home dependency as well as for young children placed with relatives.
- Implemented the **Child Health and Education Tracking (CHET)** policy and guide to improve health care and education outcomes for children.
- Improved **education support** for children by implementing protocols with 126 school districts to improve communication, collaboration and coordination. Also implemented the Educational Advocacy program to provide assistance and advocacy for school age children and youth.
- Provided **training** regarding educational advocacy to 1,400 social workers.
- Developed **Educational Advocacy Guides** for caregivers and **Practice Guide to Education** for social workers.
- Developed a **video for adolescents** in the foster care system to explain their rights, how the system works and how their voice can be heard.

Additional Systemic Accomplishments

- Established **Chemical Dependency Counselors in local CA offices** to help screen and support families through the substance abuse assessment and treatment process.

- Introduced ***Evidence Based Practices*** including Multi-Dimensional Treatment Foster Care, Functional Family Therapy, and Parent Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT).
- Conducted a formal ***contract review process*** to help maximize resources and support better outcomes.

BRAAM FOSTER CARE LAWSUIT

In July of 2004, a settlement was reached in the Braam Foster Care lawsuit that included numerous provisions for improving the well-being of children in the custody of the administration's Division of Children and Family Services. A key component of the settlement agreement was the establishment of an oversight panel the members of which would develop benchmarks and monitor the Department's progress on implementation of the settlement.

The oversight panel released the implementation plan in February of 2006, and issued its First Monitoring Report in March of the same year for the period of July 24, 2004 through December 31, 2005. The Department submits semi-annual progress reports in August and February. The panel issued Decision Reports in June, September, and December of 2006, and in August of 2007. The panel also issued its second monitoring report in September 2006, third monitoring report in April 2007 and fourth monitoring report in October of 2007.

In its Third Monitoring Report the panel issued its first review of the Department's progress on achieving the benchmark targets, issuing findings on 28 of the 52 benchmarks due during the monitoring period. In the 4th Monitoring Report, issued October 4, 2007, the Panel found that the Department had completed 42 of 82 Action Steps set forth in the implementation plan. The Department will issue its second Performance Data Report in December of 2007.

GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTABILITY AND PERFORMANCE (GMAP)

The administration provided four Government Management Accountability and Performance (GMAP) presentations related to vulnerable children in Fiscal Year 2007.

The GMAP process provides a venue in which the administration discusses performance measures and workload data directly to the Governor. These reports address the areas in which the administration is doing well, making progress, or needs to improve performance, and where additional 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.accountability.wa.gov/>

During the GMAP reporting process, the Governor and a panel of executive staff respond to administrations, ask challenging questions and make recommendations for performance improvement. Where necessary, they may also leverage existing resources or work toward the allocation of additional funds to increase resources.

At the end of Fiscal Year 2007 Governor Christine Gregoire commended the Children's Administration, for reducing the incidences in which children who had

previously been abused were again abused by their parents following CA intervention. This improvement is attributed to the increase in timely social worker responses to referrals alleging the abuse or neglect of children.

PRACTICE MODEL

The Children's Administration is in the process of implementing a Practice Model which will provide an overarching framework for child welfare practice in Washington State.

The development and implementation of a comprehensive Practice Model involves the following over the next 3-5 years:

- Identification of a clinical model of practice which has been applied in a child welfare setting and focuses on engagement with families (Completed 3/06-12/06)
- Identification of the clinical skills and practices Children's Administration staff can use in working in partnership with families in assessment and engagement in services to address identified goals (Completed 6/06-3/07)
- Development of family assessments and case planning tools, placement resources, adolescent approach, and intake framework consistent with and supportive of the clinical model, and the integration of these tools in the new FamLink management information system (6/06 - 12/07)
- Review and revision as needed of all policies and procedures in support of the clinical model (4/07 & ongoing)
- Review of statute and WAC to identify and recommend changes in support the clinical model (1/06 & ongoing)
- Re-writing of training curriculum, procedures, and practice guides to integrate the model of practice (4/07- 3/08)
- Training and coaching of staff in developing and increasing clinical skills which build on family strengths and support engagement while, at the same time, making decisions about child safety (2/08 & ongoing)
- Ongoing review of all facets of the Children's Administration, including organization, structure, staffing, and contracts to maximize the effectiveness of the model (9/07 & ongoing)

The major component of the Practice Model is the implementation of a clinical approach to practice known as Solution Based Casework (SBC). SBC provides a family centered philosophy and theory of practice that gives a unifying direction to the day-to-day practice and policies of the agency. It builds upon solution focused interventions developed in mental health and substance abuse treatment and applies them in a child welfare setting. Social work is conducted within the context of the family's developmental stage, focusing on the daily life tasks of the family and helping the family to normalize their challenges. SBC also utilizes techniques developed in substance abuse treatment to prevent relapse. Training and in-field coaching of staff is expected to begin in the winter of 2008 and continue through 2009. Ongoing training and coaching will be provided by a core of seven staff funded through legislative appropriation.

STATEWIDE AUTOMATED CHILD WELFARE INFORMATION SYSTEM (SACWIS)

FamLink is the name given to Children's Administration's (CA) new Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS). The new name reflects the integrated support FamLink will give to our work providing services to children, their families, service providers, and our many other child welfare partners.

FamLink will provide automated tools to:

- Increase social workers' productivity by making relevant information easily accessible for more informed and timely decisions.
- Increase compliance with required and new program and practice activities such as those in the Braam settlement agreement.
- Support managers and financial specialists by giving them tools to establish budgets and hold staff accountable to those budgets.
- Provide managers with meaningful data to evaluate the effectiveness of the CA service programs.

All of these tools support our primary goals for children--safety, well-being, and permanency.

Major Accomplishments

Representatives from all 6 regions and headquarters—social workers, licensors, supervisors, clerical, program managers, and business analysts—have completed an innovative 8-week “Boot Camp” to thoroughly learn the new SACWIS. This experience provided a solid knowledge base for system design planning and for demonstrating the system to their peers.

A streamlined decision-making process is now in place to facilitate the many decisions regarding FamLink's impact on CA's business practices. Utilizing SharePoint communication tools, the executive Project Advisory Group and the field Intelligence Team can rapidly review change recommendations, gather input from a broad cross-section of the agency, and easily record their comments and decisions.

FamLink is now entering the design phase. Design and development teams are established with a close working relationship between vendor and state staff. A technical boot camp is in progress to help each state developer become an expert in their area of responsibility.

CA business partners can expect opportunities to learn about the new system, ask questions, and make comments. Additional presentations are planned to keep stakeholders informed and prepare for the coming changes.

FamLink will be released statewide in late **September, 2008**.

For more information about FamLink email FamLink@dshs.wa.gov.

Performance Measures in This Report

Children's Administration has developed and continues to create new, or refine existing performance measures designed to assess service delivery and examine how the actions undertaken by the administration impact the quality of life

experienced by children in Washington State. 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 2007, 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. In the last two quarters of FY 2007, the administration saw more than 95 percent of children within the target time frame.
- The administration exceeded the September 2006 program improvement goal of seeing 90 percent of children in non-emergent CPS referrals within 72 hours of referral receipt in all four quarters of fiscal year 2007.
- While the recurrence rate did not meet the federal target of 93.9 percent of children will **not** experience recurrence of abuse in Federal Fiscal Year 2006, the state demonstrated the best rate of preventing recurrence since tracking and reporting of this measure began.
- The percent of children in licensed care who were free from founded allegations of abuse or neglect in Federal Fiscal Year 2006 fell slightly below the new federal standard. Historically, the federal standard was 99.43 percent; however, a recent change in that standard to 99.68% caused Washington state to miss the target for the first time in four years.
- The administration continues to exceed the state requirement of monitoring a minimum of 10 percent of foster homes annually. In FY 2007, the administration matched the previous year's monitoring percentage of 13.4.
- The administration exceeded the 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 in every quarter of fiscal year 2007.
- 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 37.0 percent at the end of FY 2006 to 70.9 percent at the end of FY 2007.
- The administration fell slightly below the federal standard for timely reunification of children, and did not meet the federal standard for the timely adoption of children.
- Both the percent of children in out-of-home care for more than two years and the median number of days children spent in care increased in FY 2007.

- The percent of children who reenter out-of-home care within 12 months of reunification failed to meet the federal standard. However, the re-entry rate matched the previous reporting period, the lowest rate of re-entry since tracking and reporting this measure began.
- The proportion of African American in long term care decreased markedly in FY 2007 while the percent of Native American children in out-of-home care increased for the same period.
- For the seventh consecutive year, the percent of children for whom meaningful familial ties have been preserved through relative placements has increased or remained at a percentage above performance standards.

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 2007.

In those areas where performance fell short of federal standards, the administration continues to pursue policy and practice strategies design to protect children and support families.

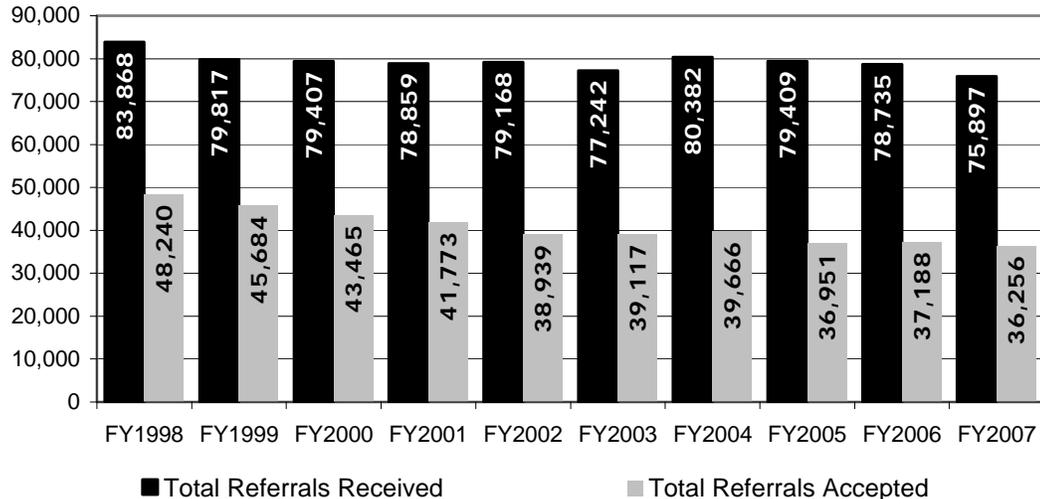
Safety

Goal: Children will be safe from abuse and neglect

The Children's Administration's main priority is ensuring that children are safe from harm. Without the attentiveness and quick action of concerned community members, the administration cannot intervene on behalf of children who are potentially in harm's way.

Teachers, doctors, caregivers, neighbors, and relatives can all make the difference in a child's life by calling Child Protective Services. When a call comes in to CPS, the social worker receiving the report must make a determination about whether or not the referral must be investigated or refer a family for services based upon the information provided and specific legal criteria. In Fiscal Year 2007, the administration received more than 75,000 referrals of suspected abuse or neglect. Of those, more than 36,000 referrals met the legal definition of abuse or neglect and were investigated by the administration.

Child Protective Services (CPS) Referrals*



More than 8,500 families with children deemed at low to moderately low risk of harm were offered alternative intervention services in Fiscal Year 2007. Of these, over 2,200 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

Social workers are tasked with the difficult work of determining which referrals warrant investigation and which do not based upon the information provided by a referent and specific legal criteria.

If a social worker determines that a child is at moderate to high risk of harm, Child Protective Services (CPS) staff accepts the referral for investigation. Once a referral is accepted, a level of severity and urgency is assessed to determine the time frames within which an investigating social worker must make or attempt to make face-to-face contact with a vulnerable child.

Governor Christine Gregoire mandated in 2005 that Child Protective Services speed up the time in which social workers respond to referrals of suspected child abuse or neglect.

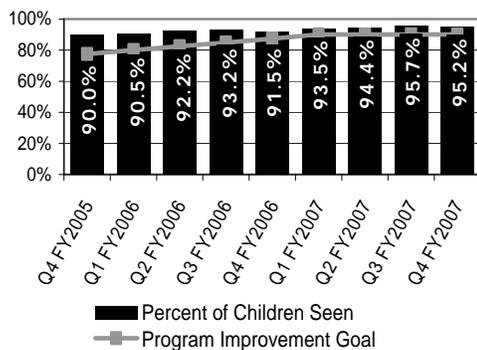
Historically social workers were required to initiate investigations where children were at risk of imminent harm within 24 hours, and make face-to-face contact with children as soon as possible within ten working days of receiving referrals. As of April 29, 2005 social workers must make face-to-face contact within 24 hours of the administration receiving an emergent referral.

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 72 hours of receiving referrals.

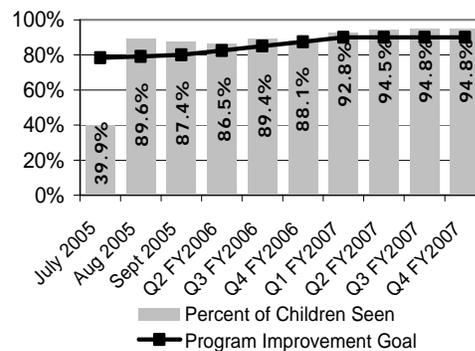
The federal program improvement goal for timely investigations is for social workers to make face-to-face contact with children within required response times at a rate of 90 percent by September 2006.

The administration surpassed the 2006 goal in every quarter of Fiscal Year 2007 for emergent referrals as well as for non-emergent referrals.

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 was 90 percent by September 2006. Source: October 2007 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 was 90 percent by September 2006. Source: October 2007 CAMIS download.

Objective: Reduce recurrence of abuse or neglect
Measured by: Children who do not experience re-abuse

Re-abuse is defined as any child who experiences a founded allegation of abuse within six months of a previous founded allegation of abuse.

The administration closely monitors and strives to implement supports and strategies for those families who have multiple founded allegations of abuse so that vulnerable children are protected from further abuse.

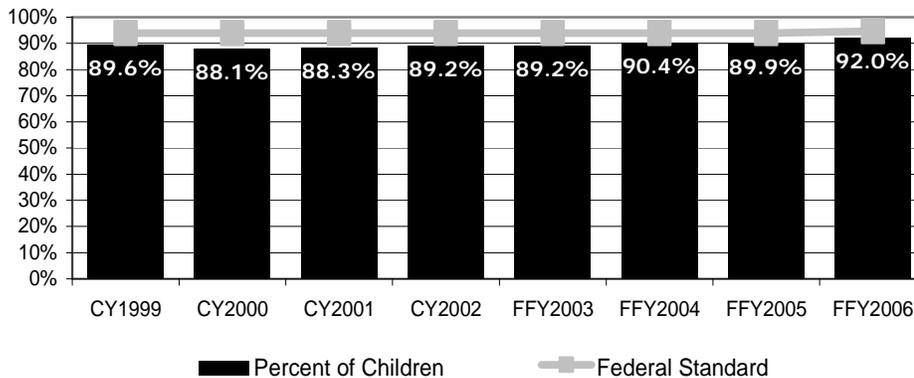
The federal standard requires that, at a minimum, 94.6 percent of children who have been the victims of abuse or neglect will be protected from any additional founded allegations of abuse or neglect. This is an increase from the previous federal standard of 93.9 percent. The rate of children free from additional abuse in Washington State has failed to meet the federal standard throughout the seven-year tracking period; however has made consistent improvement since 2001.

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.

In recent years, the federal government changed the emphasis to children who DO NOT experience incidents of re-abuse. Children’s Administration is reporting this measure accordingly to remain consistent with federal reporting standards.

In Fiscal Year 2007, more children in Washington State were protected from repeat abuse than in any year since data tracking began.

Children Who Did Not Experience Re-Abuse*



*Percent of children with a founded referral of abuse or neglect who were free from 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 93.9 percent or more children will be free from additional founded allegations of abuse. In 2002, the federal government changed the required reporting period from calendar year to federal fiscal year. In 2007, the federal government required that states report the percent of children free from additional allegations of abuse rather than those who were re-abused. 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 free from abuse or neglect in out-of-home care

Those interested in becoming caregivers for children who have been abused or neglected must demonstrate the ability to provide a safe and stable environment and to meet the physical, mental, and emotional needs of vulnerable children. The process of becoming a foster parent is neither easy, nor meant to be taken lightly. Those pursuing the role of substitute caregiver must invest tremendous thought, energy, and time into attending training and readying themselves for a life-changing experience. The experience is life-changing not only for the foster children but for the parents and families who are forever touched by the courage, resilience, and love of children who are placed in their homes.

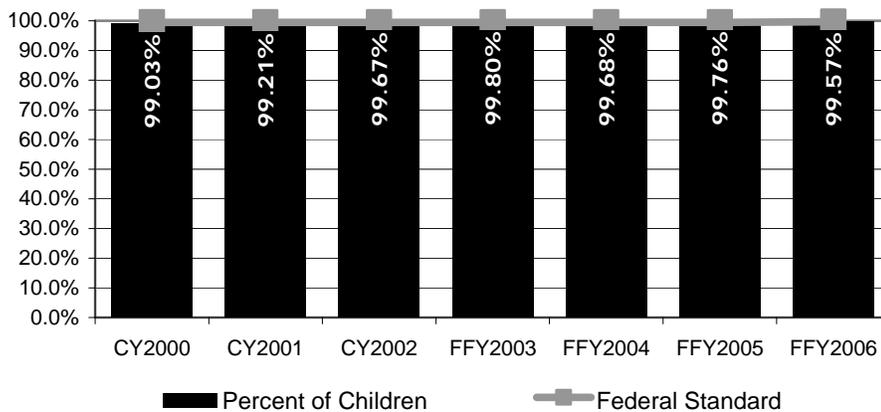
Not only must families be prepared but the homes, facilities, and properties where children in state care live must meet strict licensing standards. The buildings and surrounding grounds must be free of health and safety hazards and must offer children sufficient personal space and privacy. The administration takes great care to prevent children who have been harmed in their own homes from being harmed in out-of-home care.

The Washington state Children’s Administration embraces the notion that if even one child is abused in licensed care, it is one too many. A new federal standard requires that a minimum of 99.68 percent of children in out-of-home care will be free from founded allegations of abuse or neglect. This is an increase from the previous federal standard of 99.43 percent.

Washington State’s performance was significantly better than the federal standard from 2003 until 2005. In the most recent reporting period, however the administration showed a slight decrease in the percent of children in out-of-home care who were free from abuse or neglect, failing to meet the federal standard.

The administration continues to explore ways to evaluate potential foster homes, closely monitor licensed homes, support foster families, and maintain contact with children in out-of-home care in an effort to increase the number of children who are safe and stable in foster care.

Children Free From Abuse or Neglect While in Out-of-Home Care*



*Percent of children in out-of-home care with a founded referral of abuse or neglect. The new federal standard is 99.68 percent or more. 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 statute requires that "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))

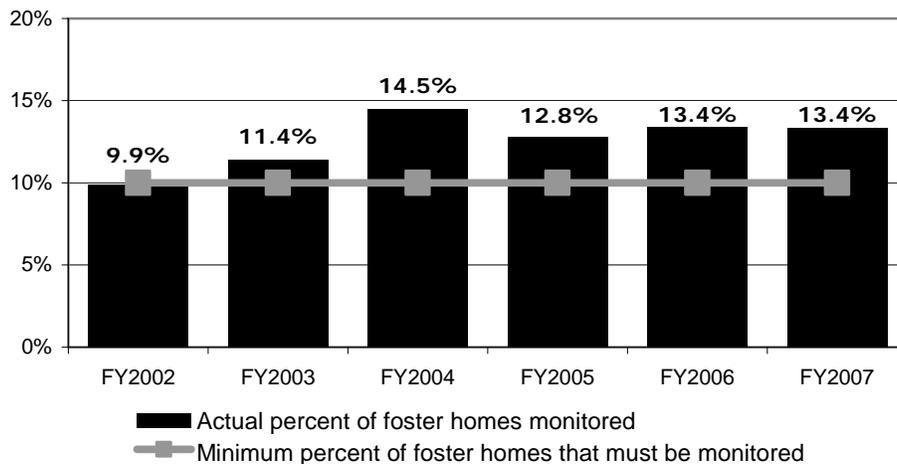
The Children's Administration works to ensure that children who must be placed into out-of-home care are with caregivers who are able to meet their needs.

Foster parents must meet licensing standards and so must the physical structures in which children are placed. Often these homes demonstrate safety measures and emergency preparedness beyond what might be found in an average home. Foster homes with fireplaces or wood stoves must have them completely surrounded by safety fences. Two-story houses are required to demonstrate safe methods of exit in case of fire. Medications are locked, first aid kits are well-stocked, and foster parents must be trained in First Aid, CPR and safe response to Blood-borne Pathogens.

Licensors thoroughly inspect and evaluate the condition of homes and facilities to make sure that no hazards have developed since a license was issued or since a previous health and safety check.

The administration has exceeded the state requirement of ten percent of homes monitored since Fiscal Year 2003.

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 2007 CAMIS download.

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

It is imperative that Children’s Administration personnel have a good understanding of how children in care are fairing in their out-of-home placements.

Social workers may maintain contact and communications with the children for whom they are responsible through various means. Telephone calls with youth, contact with foster parents, school staff, medical practitioners, and counselors, attendance at staffings and child related meetings all help social workers know how a child is doing.

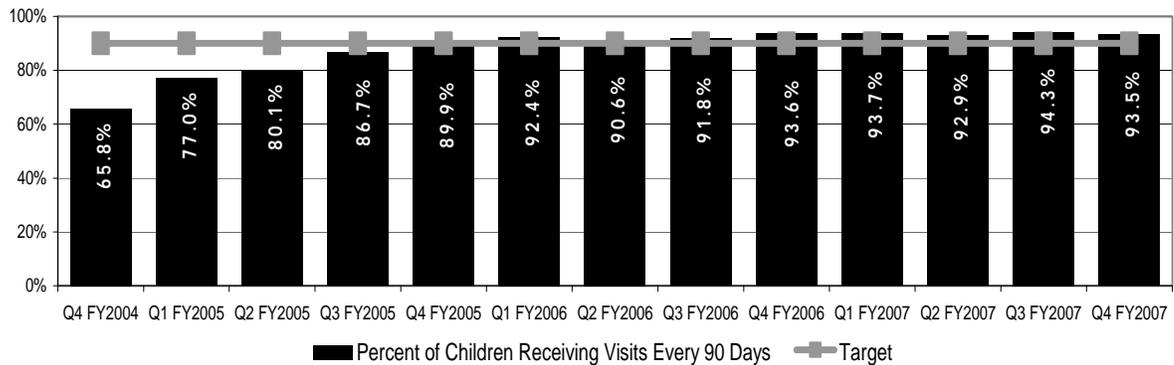
However, in order to get the best sense of a child’s well-being social workers must make face-to-face contact with children in the homes in which they are placed on a regular basis. This allows them to observe a child’s interactions both with the caregivers and with other children in the home. It provides the opportunity to see if a child has his or her own space and belongings that are age appropriate.

Currently 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; however, statewide efforts are underway to make these visits more frequent.

Children who are under the care of the department but placed back into the homes from which they were removed must be seen in their homes at least once every 30 days to ensure their safety.

The administration requires that a minimum of 90% of children in out-of-home care will be seen in their placements at least once every 90 days. The administration has performed better than required in every quarter of FY 2007.

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 2007 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

The Children's Administration works with families and communities to return children to their homes whenever to do so is safe and in the best interest of the child or children concerned.

In Fiscal Year 2007, the Children's Administration embarked upon a Child Protective Services (CPS) and Child Welfare Services (CWS) redesign in an effort to improve safety and permanency outcomes for vulnerable children.

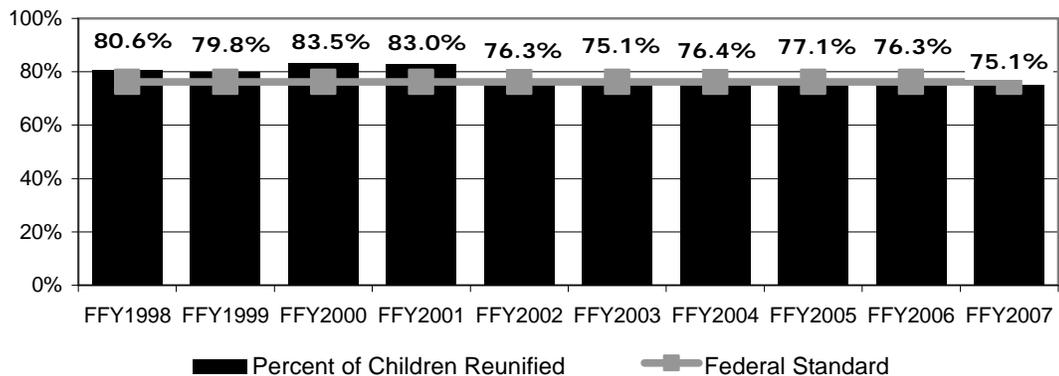
This increased emphasis upon safety included enhancements to safety planning, reunification assessment and transition planning, and improved decision-making processes with reference to returning children back to homes from which they had been removed for reasons of abuse or neglect.

The high percentage of neglect cases where issues may take longer to resolve can delay permanency. In some cases, the time invested in improving safety for children may also impact reunification timeframes.

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 timely permanence for children.

Washington State has historically done well with reference to this measure; however, the most recent reported period shows a slight drop in the percent of timely reunifications, falling below the federal standard for the first time in four years.

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 September 2007 submitted to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). Prior to FFY 2007, data was based upon June counts as in most cases, September data was not available at the time this report was submitted.

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

Measured by: Children adopted within 24 months of placement

Children who enter care when they are older than age five and children of color as well as those who are members of sibling groups or who have special needs often stay in foster care longer than individual healthy very young children.

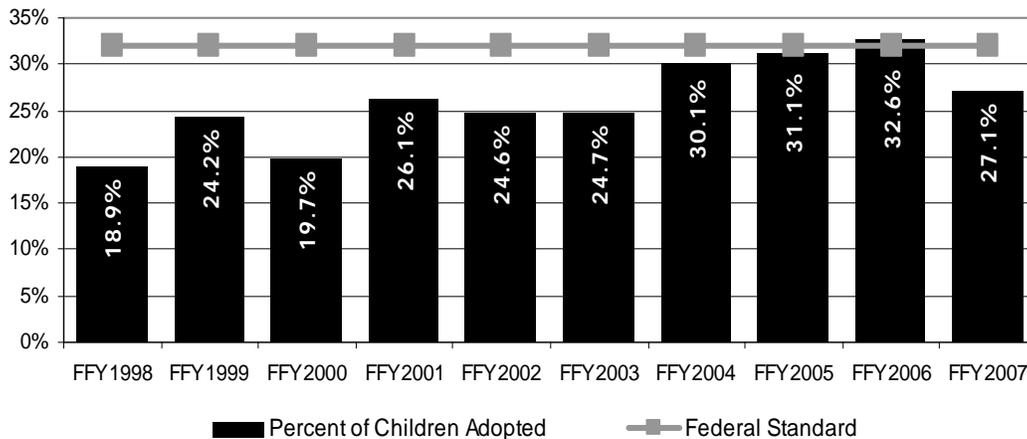
In Washington state and throughout the nation, efforts are underway to prevent any child from spending a long period of time in foster care. Through a process called "concurrent planning" social workers begin looking for adoptive families while working to support birth parents in the hope that they may be able to regain custody of their children. Concurrent planning allows children to be placed with an adoptive family prior to becoming legally available for adoption. This promotes permanency for children/youth who are not able to be reunited with their birth parents by placing them with a suitable family earlier in the dependency process.

As the number of children in out-of-home care with complex needs continues to increase, the timeliness of adoptions may continue to decrease.

Washington state has historically failed to meet the federal target with reference to this measure. After reaching the target for the first time in Federal Fiscal Year 2006, the state rate of timely adoption fell in the most recent reporting period.

Additionally, whenever there is a gap between available resources and work required, safety takes precedence and permanency may lag.

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 September 2007 submitted to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS).

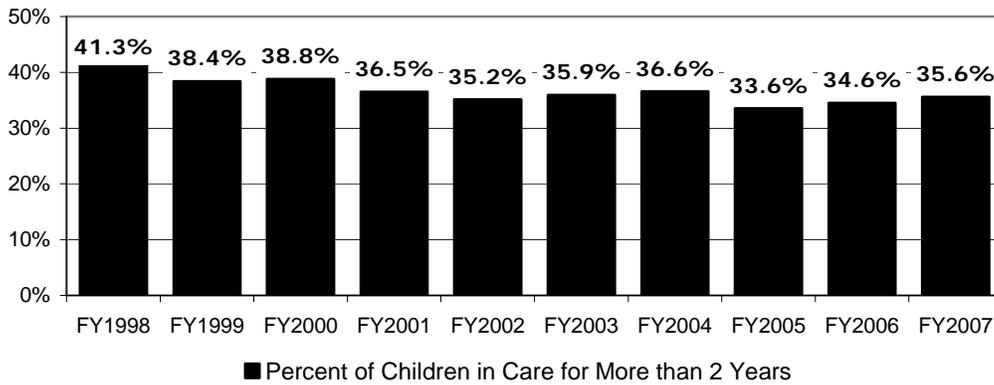
Objective: Decrease length of stay without increasing re-entry
Measured by: Length of stay for children in care

Children’s Administration staff must pursue stable and permanent homes for the children in their care while keeping safety at the forefront of every decision. As increased emphasis is placed upon safety planning, reunification assessment and transition planning for children returning home and home studies and background checks for potential adoptive homes, the time children spend in out of home care may increase.

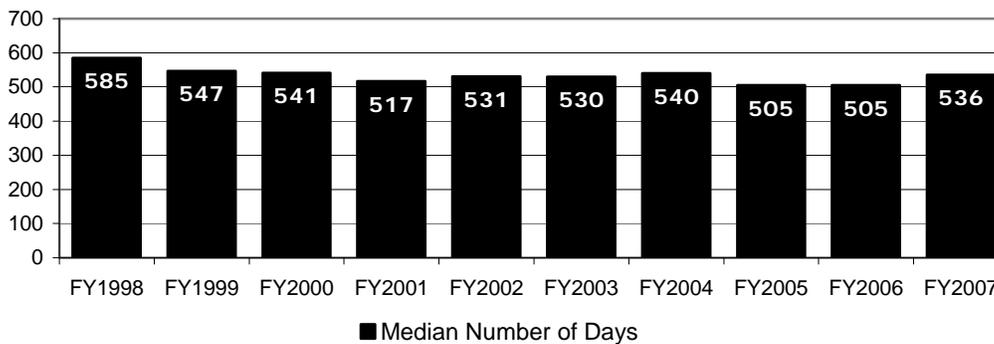
While the percent of children who have been in care longer than two years has decreased significantly from 41.3 percent in Fiscal Year 1998, there was a slight increase in length of stay in the most recent reporting period.

The median number of days children spent in out-of-home care also increased in the most recent period.

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 2007 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 2007 CAMIS download.

Objective: Decrease length of stay without increasing re-entry
Measured by: Children re-entering care

Significant thought, care, and effort go into the decisions made on a child's behalf at every stage of the dependency process.

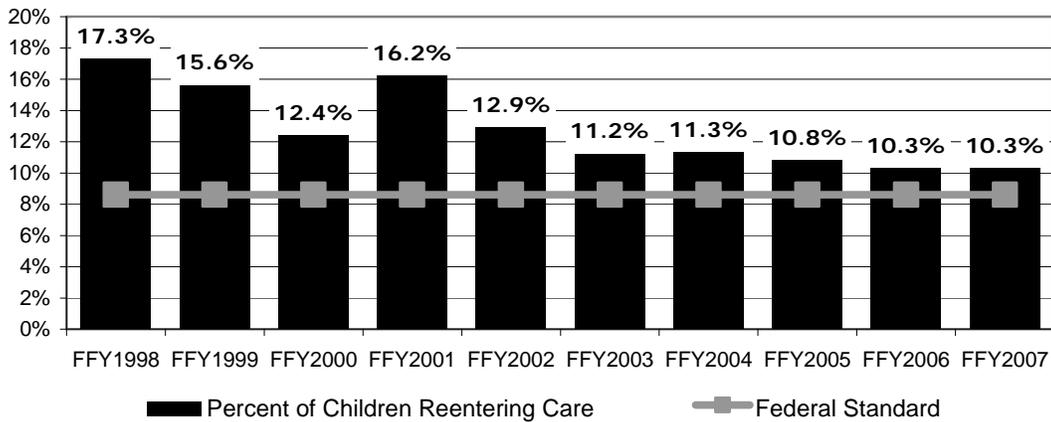
The decision to remove a child from their home and family is not one that is taken lightly and the administration does not act alone in such cases. The authority of Child Protective Services (CPS) extends only as far as recommending to the courts that a child would likely be safer in the home of a substitute caregiver than in their own home. Courts, not CPS, have the ultimate authority to remove children from their parents.

Likewise, the decision to return children to the homes from which they have been removed is serious and much effort must go into assessing a family's readiness for a child to return home, implementing safety planning, and following up with a family for months after a child returns home.

The administration implements safety strategies and family supports designed to keep children safe so they will not need to come back into state care following reunification with their families.

The federal standard requires that no more than 8.6 percent of children who have been returned home will come back into care for reasons of abuse or neglect. Washington state has never met the federal standard in the ten years reported. The administration has demonstrated the lowest rate of re-entry on record for the past two consecutive years.

Children Re-entering 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 2007 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

Children of African American and Native American heritage come into state care at higher rates than Caucasian children and tend to stay in care for longer periods of time.

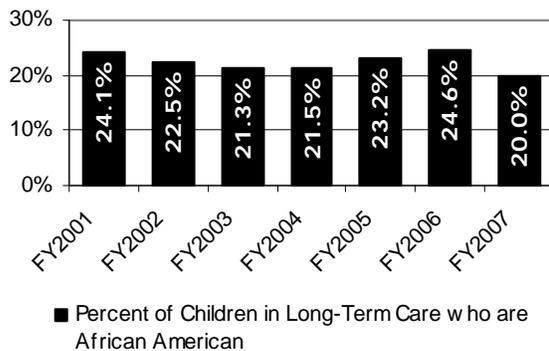
This trend toward over-representation of minority children in out-of-home care is not just an issue in Washington but throughout the United States.

A recent Report to the Chairman of the United States Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives submitted by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) showed that nationally, "blacks make up about 15 percent of the childhood population, yet account for 34 percent of children in foster care. Black children on average stay in foster care nine months longer than white children", according to the report.¹

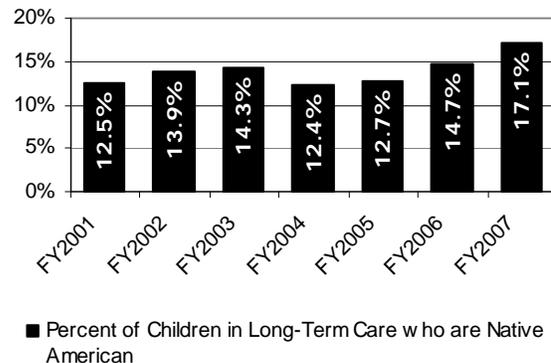
In Washington state, efforts are under way to address over-representation of minority children in care through diversity training for new foster parents, training to social workers and investigators, and hiring personnel reflective of the child demographics of children and families in our the state.

In Fiscal Year 2007, the percent of African American children in long term care decreased to the lowest rate in the seven years of reporting shown. However, the percent of Native American children in long term care increased markedly in the most recent reporting period. In partnership with Tribes, the Children's Administration developed an Indian Child Welfare (ICW) Case Review model and performed case reviews throughout Fiscal Year 2007 in order to gain a better understanding of the unmet needs of Native American children in out-of-home care and to develop strategies for better serving these children.

African American Children in Care for More Than 2 Years*



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



*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 2007 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 2007 CAMIS download.

¹ African American Children in Foster Care. Additional HHS Assistance Needed to Help States Reduce the Proportion in Care. United States Government Accountability Office Report to the Chairman, Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives. GAO-07-816 July 2007.

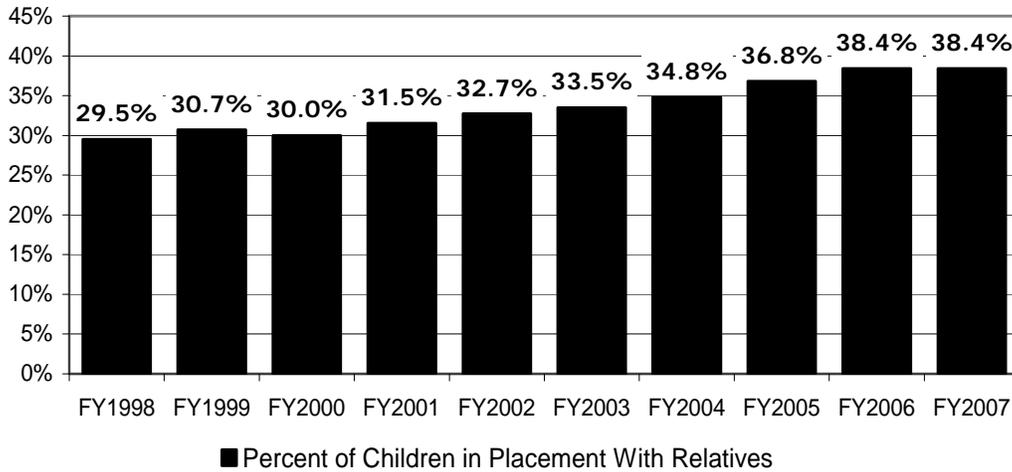
Objective: Increase relative placements
Measured by: Children placed with relatives

Whenever children must be removed from their own homes due to parental abuse or neglect, every effort is made to place them with family members if it is safe and in the best interest of the child to do so.

Preserving family connections, maintaining language and cultural customs, and securing a sense of familiarity can contribute greatly to a child's sense of belonging and stability.

Over the ten year period shown, the Children's Administration has demonstrated a 30 percent increase in the percent of children in out-of-home care who are placed with relatives.

Children in Placement With Relatives*



*The percent of children in placement with a relative on the last day of the fiscal year. Source: July 2007 CAMIS download.