



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)

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Executive Summary

The administration's top priority is to ensure that the children of Washington State are protected from abuse and neglect.

The Washington State Department of Social and Health Services Children's Administration (CA) works to provide quality services to vulnerable children and families and works to maintain accountability to those using CA services, those funding CA services, and to the community at large.

The administration's top priority is to ensure that the children of Washington State are protected from abuse and neglect. 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 the families of which they are a part.

This report, the ninth annual **Children's Services Annual Quality Assurance Report**, documents the administration's efforts to ensure child safety and permanency. This report provides performance outcome data in compliance with RCW 43.20A.870 and RCW 74.13.031(5).

As required by law, detailed outcome information is provided with reference to the administration's priorities of ensuring child safety and permanence, and 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 prevent children who have been abused or neglected from being re-abused 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 those children who have been removed from their families due to abuse or neglect so they are not re-abused 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 in 12 months and adoption in 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.

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

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

Data in this report reflects the period from July 1, 2004, through June 30, 2005, except where specifically noted.

In Fiscal Year 2005, the Children's Administration faced budget challenges and underwent a complete change in leadership for the second time in less than two years. Met with a budget shortfall and the Governor's requirement to trim excess management from state government, the administration's new leadership undertook the task of reducing the agency's non-case carrying workforce while maintaining a very clear focus on child safety and family stability.

During these leadership changes, Children's Administration personnel were already in the process of diligently working toward the implementation of a number of new initiatives related to several events that took place in Fiscal Year 2004. The Child and Family Services Review (CFSR), Braam v. DSHS lawsuit settlement and Rafael Gomez Child Fatality Review findings all resulted in a number of policy changes and practice reforms.

Those changes included among others, reducing the time in which social workers must make face-to-face contact with child victims in referrals of alleged abuse or neglect and increasing the frequency with which social workers must visit children served by the administration in their own homes.

- The administration implemented 24-hour and 72-hour response times for responding to allegations of abuse and neglect, and has improved steadily in meeting these timeframes.
- The administration continues exploring ways to decrease the incidences of children who experience additional founded allegations of abuse within six months of a previous finding. The recurrence rate did not meet the target in FY05.
- The percent of children in licensed care with founded allegations of abuse or neglect was better than the federal standard.
- The administration performed better than the federal standard in timely reunification of children, and improved in the timely adoption of children.
- While the number of children in out-of-home care has increased over the past several years, the amount of time children are spending in out-of-home care has decreased.
- The number of African American children in long-term care remained unchanged, while there has been a slight increase in the number of Native American children in long-term care.
- The percent of children for whom meaningful familial ties have been preserved through relative placements has also increased. This increase represents the fifth consecutive year in which the percent of children in out-of-home care who are placed with relatives has increased.
- The administration has required that social workers visit children in their out-of-home placements once every 90-days. The administration has done well with reference to 90-day visits.

The administration demonstrated progress overall with reference to child safety and permanency. In many cases, the administration was able to meet federal targets related to the Child and Family Services Review Program Improvement Plan within the plan timeframes, in some cases meeting the target ahead of time.

The administration continues to examine those areas in which performance measures fail to meet specified federal and internal targets, specifically in the areas of victim recurrence and re-entry into out-of-home placement.

Safety

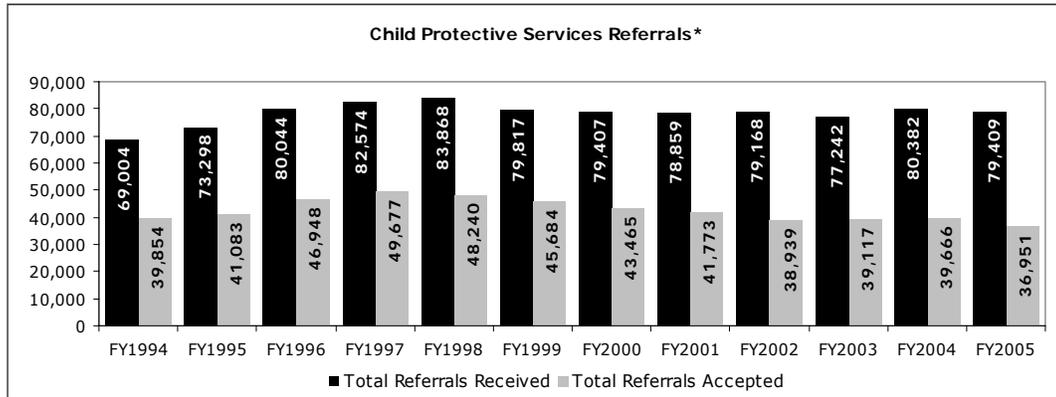
Goal: Children will be safe from abuse and neglect

The Children's Administration has as its main priority ensuring that children are safe from harm. The administration depends upon the caring, conscientiousness, and right action of relatives, neighbors, schoolteachers, doctors, and concerned community members to know when a child is at risk of harm.

A concerned citizen may act on behalf of a vulnerable child simply by placing a call to Child Protective Services (CPS). When a call comes into CPS, the social worker receiving the report must make screening decisions based upon the information provided.

More than 79,000 referrals of suspected abuse or neglect were reported in Fiscal Year 2005. Of those, more than 36,000 met the legal definition of abuse or neglect and were investigated by the administration.

More than 4,700 families with children deemed at low risk of harm were directed to community-based contracted agencies that make up the Alternative Response System (ARS).



If a referral meets legal criteria to be "accepted" for investigation, the level of severity is evaluated and an investigating social worker responding to the allegation must assess the child's safety within prescribed response times.

* Number of referrals received based upon fiscal year. Includes Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and Division of Licensed Resources (DLR) Child Protective Services referrals.

Objective Measured by

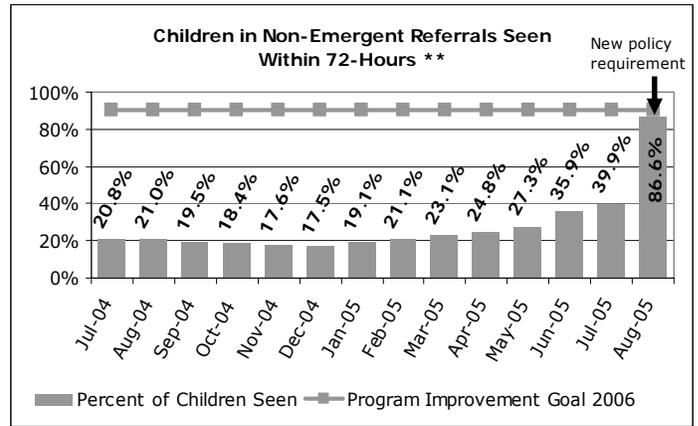
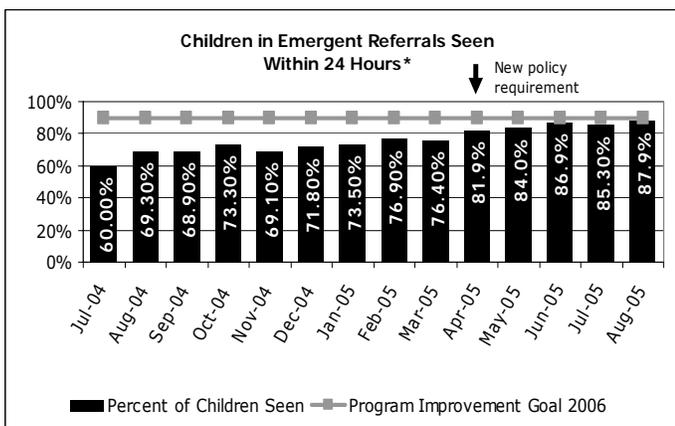
**Initiate timely investigations
Children seen face-to-face by a social worker following an accepted referral**

An intake social worker must make a determination about the best course of action in responding to any allegation of abuse or neglect based upon the information provided. Social workers rely upon community members to relay information about the nature of suspected abuse or neglect, in addition to adequate information that will aid investigators in identifying and locating the child or children.

Whenever an intake social worker determines a referred child to be at moderate or high risk of harm, the referral is accepted for investigation by Child Protective Services (CPS) staff. A determination is made about the urgency of the situation and the referral is determined to require an emergent or non-emergent response. In Fiscal Year 2005, the Governor required the administration to expedite the timeliness in which social workers must make face-to-face contact with children in both emergent and non-emergent referrals.

Effective April 29, 2005, when a child meets the legal criteria for being at "imminent risk" of harm, the referral requires an emergent response and an investigating social worker must see the child face-to-face within 24 hours of receipt of the referral. Social workers historically were required to initiate the investigation within 24 hours and make face to face contact with the child within ten working days.

Social workers must now make face-to-face contact with children in non-emergent referrals within 72 hours of receipt of the referral, where previously they were required to make face to face contact with the child within ten working days. This new policy became effective August 8, 2005, so limited data was available at the time this document went to press.



* Percent of children seen or attempted within one calendar day as a proxy for 24-hours. The 24-hour calculation will be available for referrals received in September 2005 and forward. Excludes DLR-CPS. Source: CAMIS SER. The federal Program Improvement Plan goal is 90 percent.

** Percent of children seen or attempted within three calendar days as a proxy for 72-hours. The 72-hour calculation will be available for referrals received in September 2005 and forward. Excludes DLR-CPS. Source: CAMIS SER. The federal Program Improvement Plan goal is 90 percent.

Note: Some data from Fiscal Year 2006 has been included to better reflect the status of recent policy changes.

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

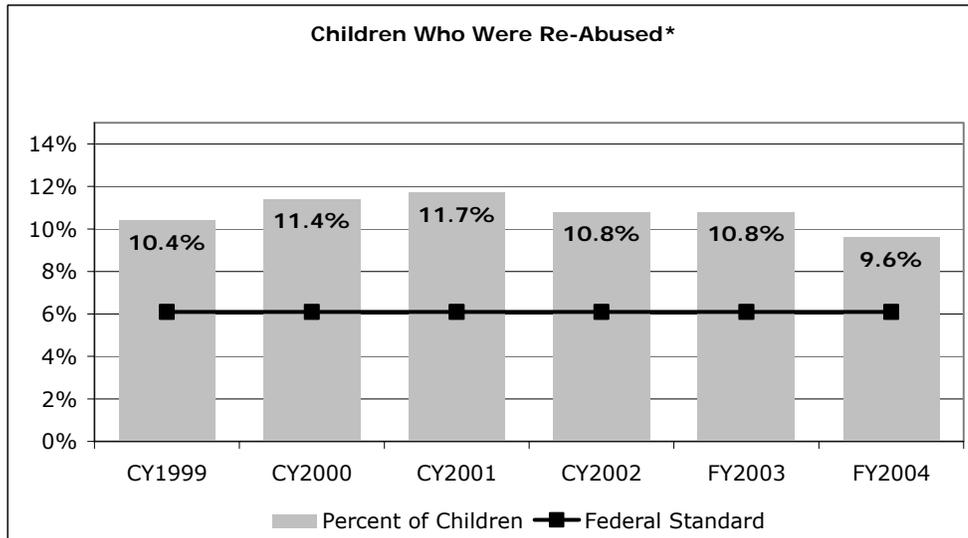
Any child who experiences a founded allegation of abuse or neglect within six months of a previous founded incident of abuse or neglect is considered to be a victim of re-abuse.

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 child or 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 six-year tracking period. Statewide, the rate at which children have been re-abused has varied between 9.6 percent and 11.7 percent.

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.



* 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 event was more likely than not to have occurred. For referrals with multiple allegations, the referral is considered founded if any of the allegations is founded. Data included in this chart is based upon data submitted to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS). The federal standard is 6.1 percent or less. In 2002, the federal government changed the required reporting period from calendar year to a fiscal year.

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

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

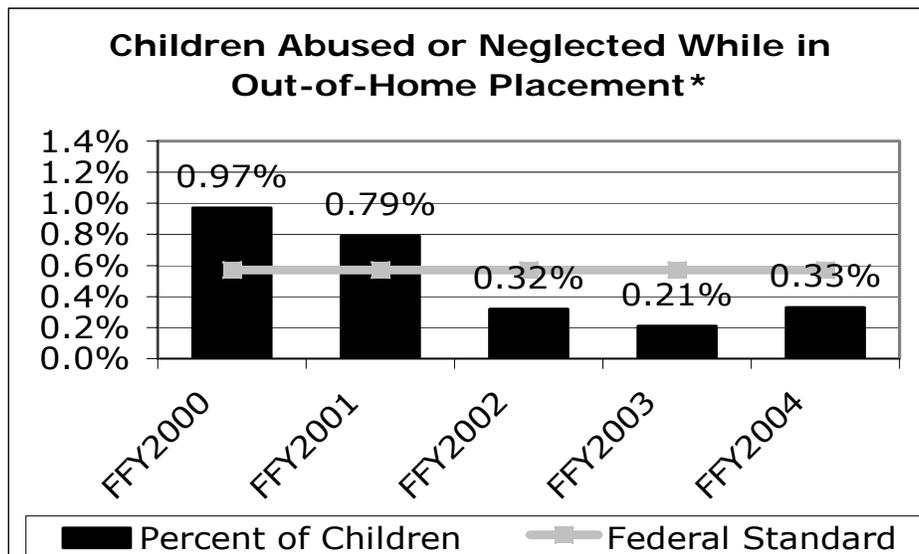
Foster parenting can be incredibly rewarding. As one foster parent stated at the 2004 Foster Care Month Celebration, "The secret is that we get to live with these children. We get to see them change and heal and grow." It is also a challenging role; families wishing to foster children must undergo detailed 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 will experience abuse or neglect while in out-of-home placement. Washington State has shown performance that is better than the standard for the past three years.

The administration has placed greater emphasis upon risk assessment and has made increased efforts to improve training regarding what constitutes a finding of abuse or neglect. A founded allegation means that abuse or neglect more likely than not occurred in the licensed home or facility. This increased emphasis on child safety may explain, in part, the reason for the slight increase in Federal Fiscal Year 2004.

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.



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

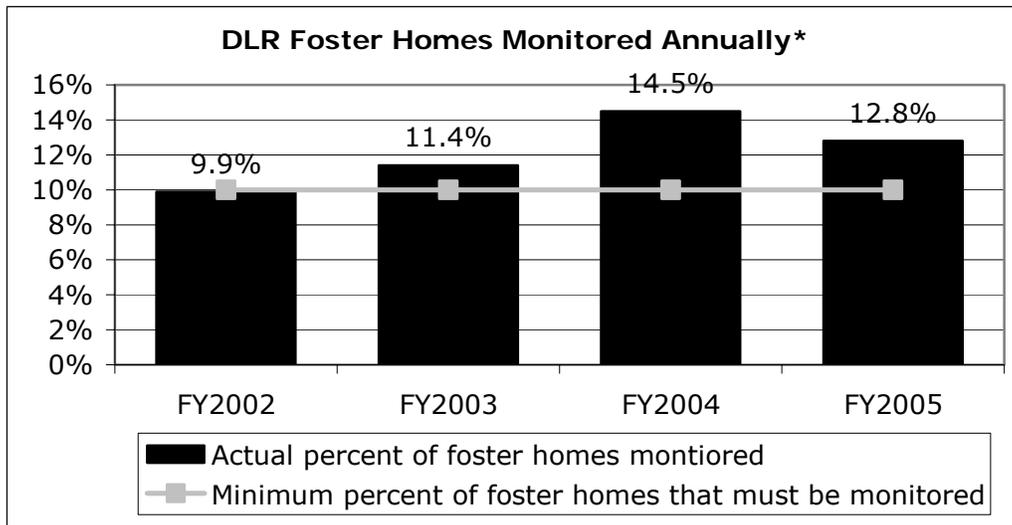
Objective Improve safety for children placed in out-of-home care

Measured by Foster homes receiving health and safety checks

Washington State requires ongoing monitoring of licensed foster homes. Monitoring is to be done by CA 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 the homes or facilities to make sure that no hazards have arisen since a license was issued and to ensure all licensing standards continue to be met.

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



* Percentage of DLR foster homes with a health and safety check completed by the Division of Licensed Resources. As of Fiscal Year 2005, this measure is tracked via CAMIS SER.

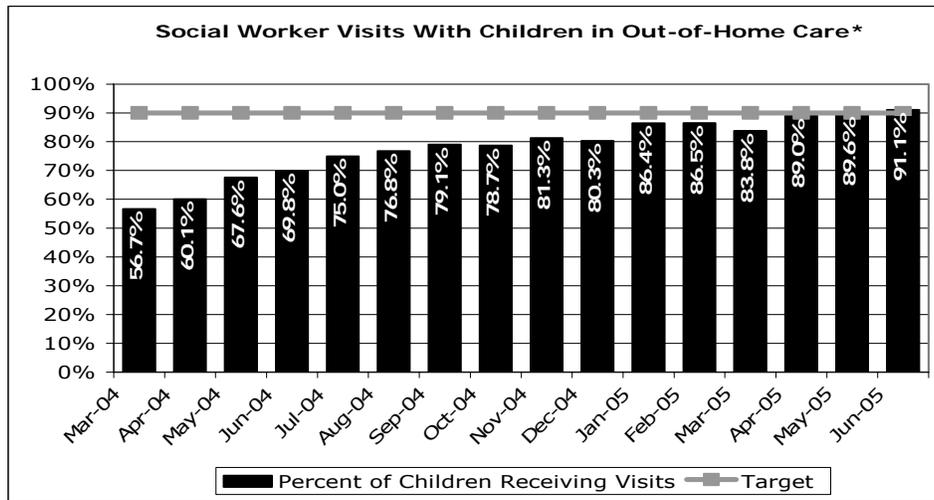
**Objective
Measured by**

**Increase worker visits with children
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 and attendance at meetings and appointments related to a child's case. In addition, social workers are required to visit children in person, in their out-of-home placements at least 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.

The target for this measure requires that 90 percent of children in care will be visited in their placement every 90 days. The administration has demonstrated significant progress with reference to this measure, improving from a baseline of 56.7 percent in March 2004 to the most recent performance of 91.1 percent in June 2005.



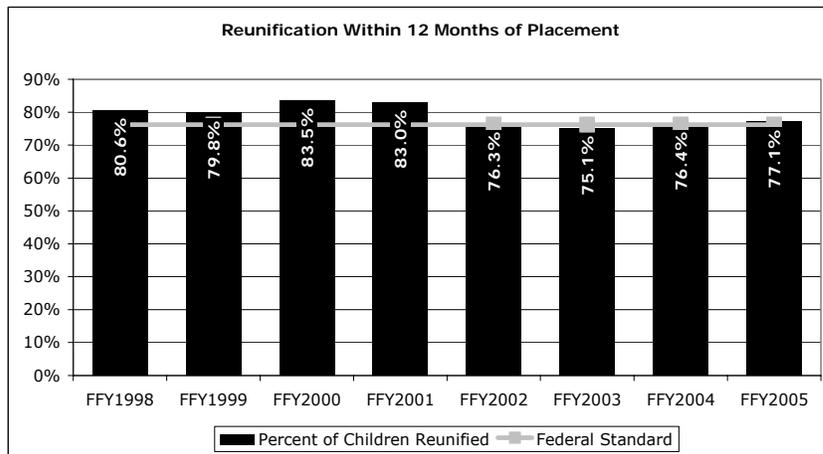
* Percent of children in out-of-home placement who are seen face-to-face by their social worker in the caregiver's home at least once within the last 90 days.

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 administration works to reunify children with their families of origin, following safety assessment and planning and thorough reunification planning.

The federal standard requires that at least 76.2 percent of children for whom reunification is the best permanent outcome, will be reunified within 12 months of out-of-home placement.

Washington State has historically done well with reference to this measure having met the standard for every year of the eight year period documented.



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

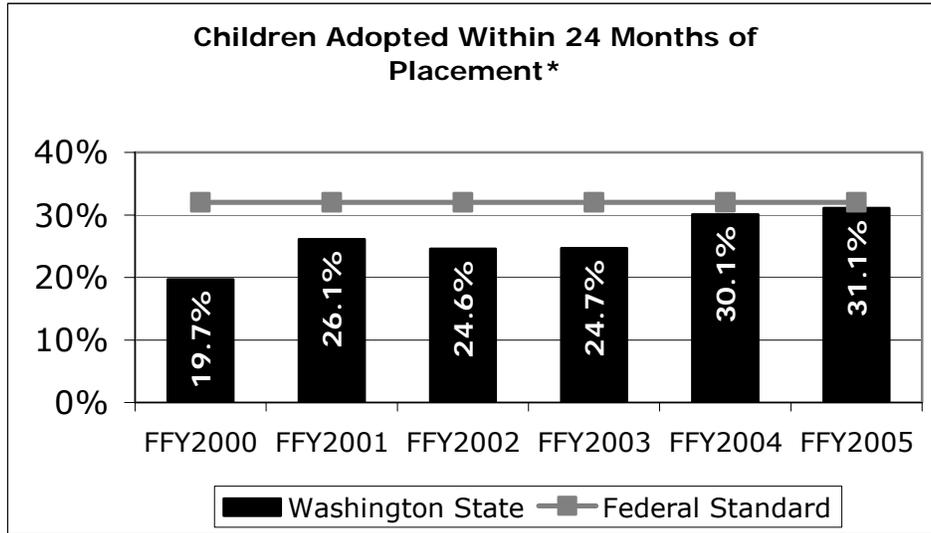
Objective Increase permanency for children in out-of-home care

Measured by Children adopted within 24 months of placement

The longer a child remains in out-of-home placement, the less likely it is that the administration will be able to secure a permanent home for that child.

It is important that children for whom reunification is not possible and parental rights have been terminated are placed in adoptive homes as quickly as possible. This permanency is necessary to allow for appropriate attachment between parents and child and to restore a sense of normalcy to the child's life.

The federal practice standard for timely adoptions is that at least 32 percent of children for whom adoption is the identified outcome will be adopted within 24 months of placement into out-of-home care. Washington State has made progress toward this target and in the most recent fiscal year nearly met the federal standard.



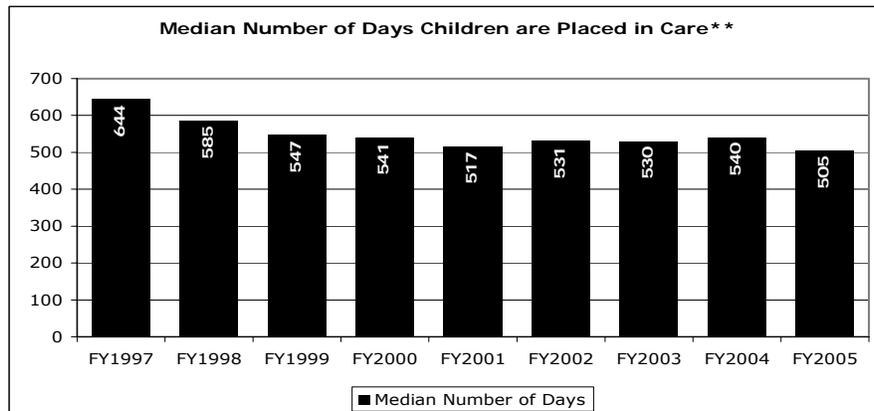
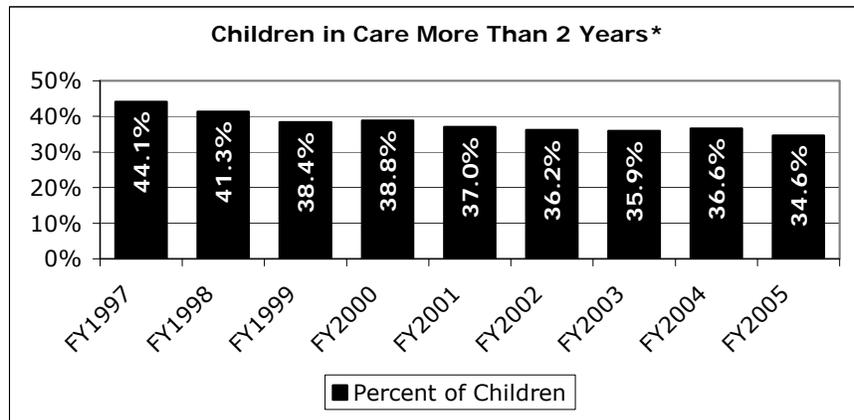
* Percent of all children adopted within 24 months of placement into out-of-home care. Based upon federal fiscal year data submitted to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). The federal standard is 32 percent or higher.

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

Whenever children must be placed into out-of-home care to provide for their safety, every effort is made to make sure 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 44.1 percent in Fiscal Year 1997 to 34.6 percent in Fiscal Year 2005.

The median number of days children spend in out-of-home care has ranged from a high of 644 days in Fiscal Year 1997 to a low of 505 in the most recent reporting period, Fiscal Year 2005.



* Percent of children in CA custody in care for more than 60 days, who have a cumulative time in care during their current placement episode of more than two years.

** Median cumulative time in care for all children in care for more than 60 days.

Note: 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 who are placed for very short periods were included in this measure of children in care more than two years, it would inaccurately skew the understanding of the percent of children who are placed for much longer periods of time.

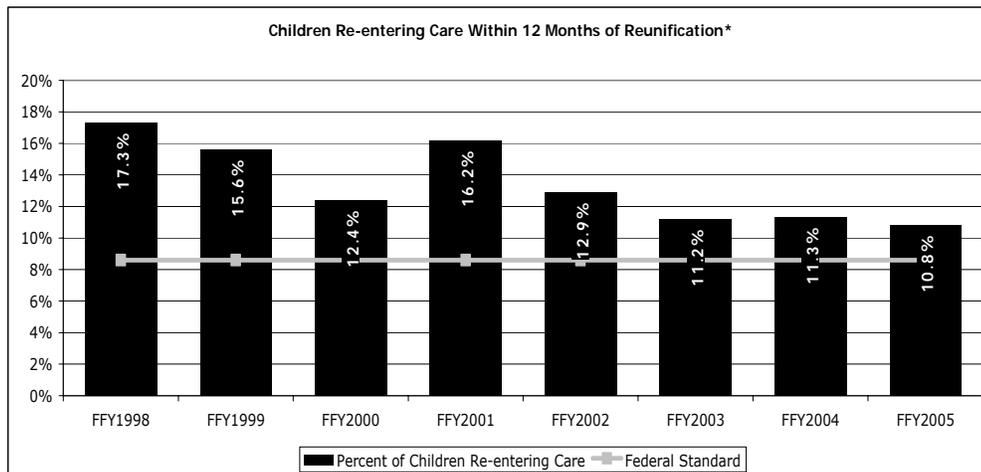
Objective Decrease length of stay without increasing re-entry
Measured by Children re-entering care

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

Efforts are made to support families so that transition and safety plans are followed and parents are adhering to conditions required to regain custody of their children. Even when great care is taken, there are those children who will again be placed into out-of-home care following reunification with their families due to new allegations of abuse or neglect.

The federal standard states that no more than 8.6 percent of children should re-enter 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 eight years that this measure has been tracked. Since 2001, progress has been made but the state performance rate still exceeds the federal standard by a considerable margin. The most recent performance showed a decrease from the previous fiscal year.



* Percent of children who re-enter out-of-home care within 12 months of reunification with their parents, regardless of length of stay. Data included in this chart is based on federal fiscal year data submitted to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). The federal standard is 8.6 percent or less.

Objective Decrease over-representation of minority children in care

Measured by Minority children in care more than two years

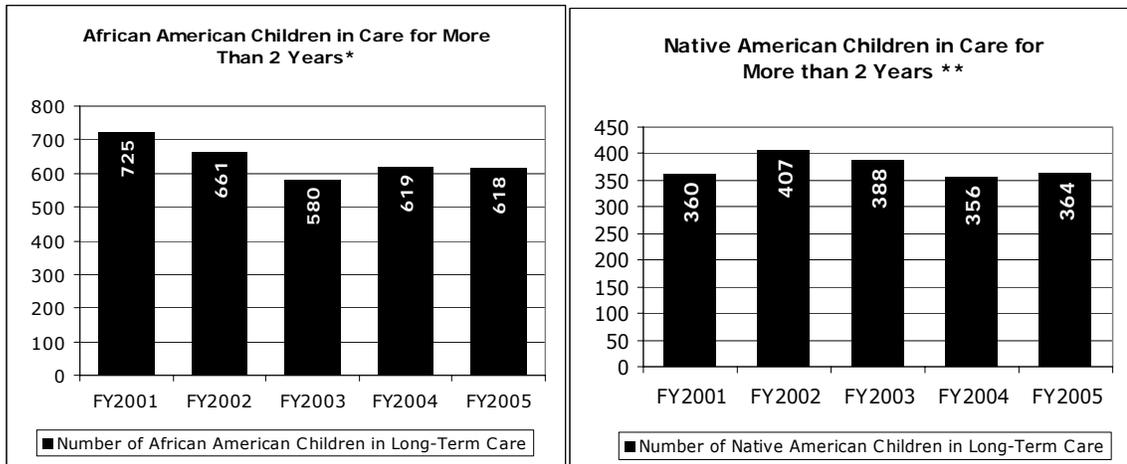
Throughout Washington State and across the nation, there are disproportionate numbers of African American and Native American children in out-of-home care and they tend to stay in care for longer periods of time than other racial and ethnic groups.

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 adopted¹."

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 increased consultation and collaboration with tribes statewide, both towards the goal of improving compliance with Indian Child Welfare Act mandates and improving outcomes for Native American children.

In Fiscal Year 2005, the number of African American children in care for longer than two years remained virtually unchanged, while the number of Native American children in long-term care increased.



1. Child Welfare League of America, [Disproportionality, Facts about Children in Foster Care](http://www.cwla.org/programs/culture/dsisproportionate.htm)

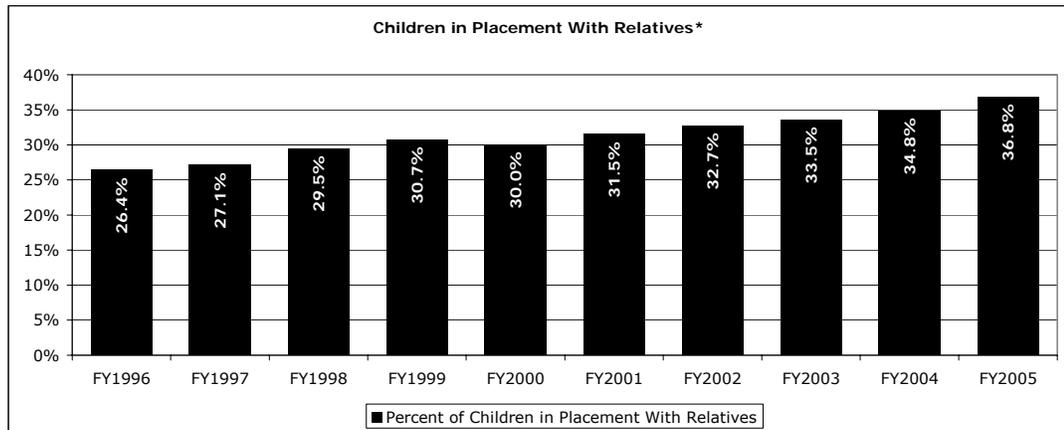
* Number of African American children who have been placed in out-of-home care for two years or longer who are not in their permanent home.

** Number of Native American children whom have been placed in out-of-home care for two years or longer who are not in their permanent home.

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. Whenever 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 Children's Administration has continually increased the percent of children placed with extended family members from 26.4 percent in June 1996 to 36.8 percent in June 2005.



* The percent of children in placement with a relative on the last day of the fiscal year.