



Report to the Legislature

Foster and Adoptive Home Placement

RCW 74.13.031 (2)

December 1, 2005

Department of Social & Health Services
Children's Administration
Division of Program & Practice Improvement
PO Box 45710
Olympia, WA 98504-5710
360 902-7919
Fax: (360) 902-7903

Table of Contents

I.	Executive Summary	Page 3
II.	Highlights FY 2005	Page 5
III.	Foster Care Recruitment	Page 7
IV.	Foster Home Turn-Over, Causes & Recommendations	Page 9
V.	Adoption Recruitment	Page 12
VI.	Finalized Adoptions	Page 16
VII.	Passport	Page 17
VIII.	Plans for the Future	Page 19

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is prepared in compliance with RCW 74.13.031 (2), which requires the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), Children's Administration (CA) to submit an annual report to the Governor and the Legislature on the agency success to:

- (a) Meet the need for adoptive and foster home placements.*
- (b) Reduce foster parent turnover rate.*
- (c) Complete home studies for legally free children.*
- (d) Implement and operate the passport program required by RCW 74.13.285*

During fiscal year 2005 the Children's Administration (CA) has taken the following actions.

(a) To meet the need for adoptive and foster home placements, CA:

- Finalized 1,247 adoptions in fiscal year (FY) 2005. This is an increase of 141 more from FY 2004.
- Participated in the Washington State Heart Gallery, a portrait exhibit, to inspire Adoptive and Foster families to step forward on behalf of children. Twelve of the 21 children featured in 2004 and 2005 Heart Gallery exhibit have been adopted.
- There were 197 new children registered with the Washington Adoption Resource Exchange bringing the total to 397 children served and 174 of these children were placed with adoptive families.
- Provided adoption recruitment resources and options to staff, including recruitment contracts with community partners, purchase of service contracts for and utilization of local and national adoption exchanges.
- Increased the child specific adoption recruitment contract by adding 15 legally free children not in a permanent adoptive home.

(b) To reduce the foster parent turnover rate, CA:

- 5,920 foster homes were licensed in FY 2005. During this past fiscal year just over 70% of the adoptions finalized were children placed in licensed foster homes. A portion of these families may choose to close their foster care license after the adoption of their child has been completed.
- Licensed 1,461 minority foster homes in FY 2005.

- Implemented new foster and adoption home recruitment and retention contracts for FY 2005. The CA for the first time awarded two separate contracts for these services as a new method to increase recruitment and retention. These contracts are targeted to increase the pool of available, licensed and adoptive families, as well as developing resources to sustain and meet the needs of current foster families.

(c) To complete home studies for legally free children, CA:

- At any given time have 1,112 cases open for adoption services.

(d) To implement and operate the Passport Program, CA:

- Completed 3,601 passports in FY 2005 which is an increase from 3,542 completed passports in FY 2004.
- Developed and implemented system improvements to increase the efficiency in the program.

II. HIGHLIGHTS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2005 (July 1, 2004 – June 30, 2005)

The Children's Administration:

- Developed and provided training to staff on “Engaging Families for Change” in June 2005.
- Participated in the development of Fatherhood forums to be provided in each region to support and empower fathers to take a more active role in the care and planning of their children.
- Successfully completed the request for proposal for the statewide foster and adoptive parent recruitment and retention contracts. Contracts were implemented January 2005.
- Provided a support line for foster parents and caregivers to use during times of crisis, where foster parents can speak to a social worker Monday through Friday between the hours of 4:30 pm to 8:00 am and on weekends. The line was developed so that caregivers would have a person to call when the offices are not open so that they could be provided with support and guidance. The support line (1-800-301-1868) became operational on June 1, 2005.
- Implemented Family Team Decision Making (FTDM) in seven offices around the state. The offices are, Kent, Tacoma, Spokane, Richland, Yakima, Office of African American Children’s Services and Vancouver. At these sites, when a child is entering care or when placement changes are going to occur, a family meeting is set up to help make decisions around the placement of a child. Foster parents and caregivers are invited to these meetings and currently 50% of the meetings have included the current caregiver. During the FDTM the supports needed by the foster parent to successfully care for the child are identified. One of the goals of including foster parents in the decision making process is to plan for their needs, increase support and improve retention.
- Established a Youth Advisory Board to serve in an advisory function, providing CA with input and recommendations regarding policy and practices on a quarterly basis. The establishment of the board provides opportunities for adolescents to have their voices heard and provide input into CA policy and program decisions. The Youth Advisory Board is composed of youth and young adults (up to age 25) who have been recipients of services provided by CA. (February 2005)
- Implemented a new policy requiring all licensed caregivers, (including private agencies, Children's Administration and licensed relative homes),

to complete 36 hours of ongoing training during each three year licensing period. The mandatory training hours must be completed prior to the caregiver's license being renewed. (February 2005)

- Requires, effective January 1, 2005, all social workers in Children's Administration to complete 20 hours of ongoing training on an annual basis. New social workers hired after January 1, 2005 are required to complete 24 days of mandatory training described in the post academy training requirements in the policy.

- Now enables social workers to link directly to information that the Regional Support Networks have about public mental health resources in every county around the state. This link allows workers to locate treatment and services that may be purchased using Medicaid. In addition, regional contract lists with contact information are posted to help social workers locate appropriate service providers that have contracts with the Children's Administration for services such as FPS/IFPS, FRS, BRS, and psych/psych. The link to the mental health resources is:
<http://ca.dshs.wa.gov/intranet/reference/reference.asp?id=940>

III. FOSTER CARE RECRUITMENT

The Children's Administration utilizes a variety of activities and community resources to recruit foster and adoptive parents across the state. Recruitment activities for foster and adoptive homes are related and yet significantly different. Foster home recruitment targets families interested in providing temporary foster care for children in out-of-home-care. Adoption recruitment focuses on searching for families that will permanently parent a child.

Statewide Foster Care Recruitment

During FY 2005 the Children's Administration completed the request for proposal from community providers to contract for statewide foster and adoptive home recruitment and retention. Effective January 2005 two new performance based recruitment contracts were implemented-one contract for Region 5 and one contract for the remainder of the state. Each of the 18 month performance based contracts has identified regional recruitment targets. The statewide recruitment target is to recruit 1,496 new foster families. The regional recruitment targets are:

Region	Recruitment Target
Region 1	207 foster homes
Region 2	145 foster homes
Region 3	236 foster homes
Region 4	281 foster homes
Region 5	273 foster homes
Region 6	354 foster homes

The identified targets are based upon the total number of foster homes newly licensed during FY 2004. The major recruitment strategy is continuing with the grassroots model using current foster parents as recruiters. This effort encourages currently licensed foster families to be there every step of the way for new families as they go through the licensing process. The new contractor utilizes a variety of recruitment techniques including:

- Establish a new statewide toll free line for recruitment (1-800-760-5340)
 - All calls are responded to within 24 hours
 - Support is provided from initial inquiry through licensing
- Advertising:
 - Television
 - Radio
 - Local Newspapers
 - Flyers
 - Brochures
- Strategies:
 - Using current foster parents as recruiters
 - Working with faith communities

- Working with schools
- Attending large community events

The new contractors have worked very hard to meet the challenges during the transition as the new statewide contractor for foster home recruitment. Their recruitment activities and numbers are starting to grow. Since implementation of the contract in January 2005 the recruitment program has responded to over 1,000 people inquiring about foster care. Twenty five percent of the people calling in have turned in an application to become licensed.

From inquiry to licensing there are a number of steps that prospective foster parents must complete. The foster parent licensing process is designed to educate families regarding the types and needs of children residing in out-of-home care; CA expectations and requirements, to enable the applicant to determine if foster parenting is right for their family and to enable the agency to assess the appropriateness of each family to meet the health and safety needs of children. As a result, not every family that inquires about foster parenting becomes a licensed foster parent.

The licensing process includes:

- Completion of 30 hours of pre-service training.
- Have a criminal history background and Child Protective Service checks.
- Have references checked.
- Have their home evaluated to meet minimum licensing requirements.
- Complete a home study that includes an evaluation of the family's ability to care for foster children.

The Division of Licensed Resources (DLR) strives to complete the entire foster home licensing process within 90 days of receiving the application to provide care.

IV. FOSTER HOME TURN-OVER, CAUSES & RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children's Administration continues working toward improving the retention of current foster home providers. In FY 2005 the retention rate was 79%, up slightly from 77% the last two years.

There are many reasons why foster parents stop fostering. Some of these reasons are positive. Some are negative and some are beyond agency control.

Positive reasons include:

- The foster parent adopts the child they are caring for (over 70% of the adoptions that finalized were families with a foster care license).¹
- The foster parent was a relative, kin, or family friend and wanted to foster a specific child and that child has returned home

Negative reasons include:

- Lack of support
- Negative foster care experience (e.g. child behavior, placement breakdown, involvement with the child's parents)

Situations beyond agency control include:

- Changes in the family or extended family (e.g. health concerns, pregnancy, accidents)
- Family leaves the state for personal or employment reasons

In FY 2005 the Division of Licensed Resources (DLR) maintained 5,920 foster homes.² This number represents a total of 1,183 new foster homes getting licensed in FY 2005.³

¹ Data pulled September 9, 2005 based upon placement type

² CAMIS Performance Measures – Well Being September 2005 download

³ CAMIS Performance Measures – Well Being September 2005 download

Chart 1

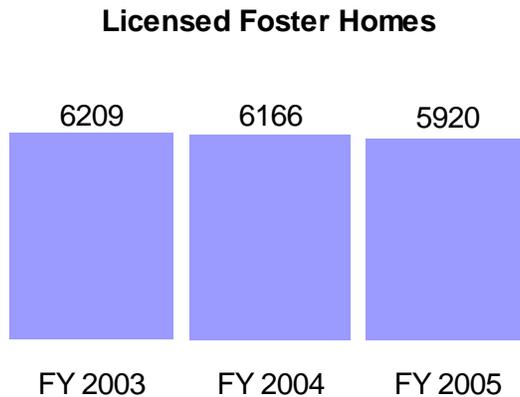


Chart one exhibits a decline in the total number of licensed foster homes for the past three fiscal years. CA does not have currently have system in place to determine just why foster families are closing their license. A new exit survey instrument is under development.

To improve retention CA implemented new performance based retention/support contracts. Effective January 2005 two new performance based contracts were implemented-one contract for Region 5 and one contract for the remainder of the state. Each of the 18 month performance based contracts has identified regional retention/support targets. The goal is to develop an array of specific regional support services for foster parents. Work on developing the regional support system is well underway. It is expected that the support system will have substantial long-term benefits for foster parent retention. The support system includes the following components:

- **Hub:** A family who serves as a coordinating center with other foster parents informally tied together (by locale for example) to help support each other.
- **Buddy System:** The pairing of a veteran (two or more years) foster family with a new foster family.
- **Support Groups:** Groups of foster parents that meet regularly to discuss issues of mutual concern.
- **Mentoring:** A “mentor” is defined as a veteran foster parent that has demonstrated knowledge in the area in which the foster parent is mentoring.
- **Liaisons:** Those persons recruited by the Contractor to serve as trouble-shooters, developers and coordinators of retention, to provide support and volunteer activities and to serve as advocates for foster parents.

In addition to these regional support programs CA has implemented a 24-hour statewide foster parent support phone line, which became operational in June, 2005. This phone line is intended to be a life-line for foster parents and caregivers to get help and support with situations that arise after regular business hours. Foster parents can speak to a social worker, Monday through Friday, between the hours of 4:30 pm to 8:00 am and on weekends.

Foster Parent Training

Foster parent training is an essential part of retention and support as it provides caregivers opportunities to gain additional skills and knowledge to enable them to care for children in out-of-home care.

The Resource Family Training Institute (RFTI) provides a wide variety of training opportunities to licensed and unlicensed caregivers. Training is provided throughout the state. On-line training is also provided. During FY 2005 training was provided to over 9,000 people. This number represents total participants who may have attended one or more trainings. Training provided included:

- Pre-Service training – this is 30 hours of mandatory training for licensed foster parents and anyone applying to be an adoptive family
 - First Aid training – usually 8 hours (includes CPR, First Aid and Blood Borne Pathogens)
 - Training in caring for children with a history of sexually aggressive behavior
 - Training in caring for children with a history of physically aggressive behavior
 - Special workshops included:
 - Tax Tips for Foster Parents
 - De-escalation training
 - An annual foster parent conference
 - Web based training which had about 800 foster parents utilizing the website for training about 1% of these are foster parents from other states.
- Training topics include:
- Behavioral Challenges in Foster Care
 - Relative Issues for Caregivers
 - Trauma and Children Stress Reduction Relief
 - Dependency Court Process

V. ADOPTION RECRUITMENT

Adoption Recruitment Activities

Choosing an adoptive family is an important task for social workers seeking to achieve permanency for children. There are many factors to consider when choosing a family that can “best meet the needs of a child” on a lifetime basis. A shared decision making approach is used to match adoptive parents with children legally free for adoption.

CA undertakes a variety of activities to recruit adoptive families for waiting children. These activities include attending consortiums, specific recruitment contracts with community partners and the use of local and national adoption exchanges.

Adoption Consortiums

Adoption consortiums are often the first step in recruitment for a child in need of a permanent adoptive family when the birth family and the current caregiver are not a permanent resource. An adoption consortium is a staffing that brings together both state and private agency staff to provide information about a child or children, learn about waiting adoptive families and learn about additional recruitment options. These consortiums occur in all six regions and build relationships with community partners and inter-regional linkages on behalf of children. For some children this is the only level of recruitment needed, for others a referral is made to the Washington Adoption Resource Exchange and other national recruitment venues.

Local and National Adoption Exchanges

The Children's Administration contracts with the Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE), a private agency with recruitment experience and expertise, to place children on the Washington Adoption Resource Exchange (WARE) and the NWAE. The Washington Adoption Resource Exchange provides a photolisting that is distributed to all Washington State private agencies and DCFS social work staff who provide adoption services for children and families. The book provides a picture and a brief description of each child and is only accessed by social workers or families that have an approved adoptive home study. The children listed in the WARE book or on the WAREkids website include both children that are legally free and children that are not legally free but have a court approved plan of adoption. CA staff are required to register all children that are not in an identified adoptive home and have a permanent plan of adoption.

During FY 2005 there were 197 new children registered with WARE for a total of 397 children served. During this past year 174 children were placed which is an increase from 155 in FY 2004.

WARE created a webpage for CA and private agency staff to use for recruitment and matching during FY 2005. The site was officially released in March 2005. Children can be added to the site immediately versus waiting for the next printing of the WARE photolisting book which occurs bi-monthly. The website for waiting children and families is password protected. There is a section that does allow the general public to view children and read a write up about the child that includes non-identifying information. Social workers are using the website extensively with over 500 CA or private agency staff using the site and over 47,000 visitors to the site since March 2005. The use of the website can mean earlier matches for waiting children.

Children who are registered with WARE for more than 90 days and are legally free have recruitment expanded to a national level that includes registration on the Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE) website www.nwae.org. The NWAE served 243 children in FY 2005, 109 of these children were placed, 20 have pending placements, 21 children were withdrawn and 93 children are still in need of active recruitment. The average wait time for a child who is registered to be placed on the Exchange is 8.8 months. In FY 2005 there were 91 children over the age of 12 registered with WARE and 34% of these teens were placed.

The NWAE website continues to generate a great deal of interest in families wishing to adopt. In the last quarter of the fiscal year, the website had over nine million hits. During this fiscal year NWAE received 9,305 home studies from families inquiring about individual children on the site. Each one of those inquiries receives a personal response from NWAE staff. NWAE refers every appropriate family on to the child's social worker. Appropriate families must first have an approved adoptive home study and appear to be a good match for the child. Families that do not have an approved adoptive home study are referred to agencies that can provide assistance.

In addition to the website, photolisting books and recruitment activities the NWAE sponsor's a matching party called Kid's Fest which is solely funded through private donations. This event is sponsored by NWAE and private partners and provides an opportunity for approved waiting families to meet children who need a permanent family. In FY 2005 NWAE held two separate events, one in Tacoma and one in Seattle. These events had a total of 87 families and 50 children participate.

Child Specific Recruitment

The Child Specific Recruitment contract completed its fourth year with continued success. In the four years since its inception, the program has been a tremendous success with 70% of the children enrolled placed with adoptive families.

This contract is a partnership with several private agencies that provides comprehensive recruitment activities each year for 40 children that need an adoptive family. The Northwest Adoption Exchange is the primary contractor which then subcontracts with six to seven private child placing agencies.

The recruitment process begins with gaining a better understanding of the child and assures that the most appropriate profile for recruitment is developed. This preparation includes discussion with the current caretaker to determine if they might be a resource for the child. An additional relative search, which can include contacting relatives who have been previously considered, is conducted to ensure that all possible resources are explored.

In FY 2005, a total of 56 children were enrolled in the project. This number includes adding 15 additional children under the age of 6. The children identified were under the age of 6 and did not have a permanent family identified. Out of the 56 children, 37 children were placed with adoptive families and 3 children had placements pending.

Purchase of Service

The Purchase of Service (POS) program continues to be a successful approach for the recruitment of adoptive families for hard to place children. The program which was designed in the late 1980's, provides funding to private agencies, in the state of Washington and other states, to offset the cost of recruitment, training, transitioning and supervision of adoptive placements for eligible children.

Eligibility is based upon the child being registered with WARE and on the length of time they are registered prior to identification and placement with an adoptive family. CA headquarters manages the program and develops individual contracts for each eligible child placed. The contracts, which are performance based, make two placements. One is for the placement and the other is when the adoption has been finalized. If a child disrupts from placement, the second half of the fee is not paid. The POS program is an avenue to achieve adoptive placements for children when an appropriate family has been located via a private agency.

The program is statewide and has provided regions with a way to pay for placement fees charged by private agencies in Washington State and other states. Sometimes when a family in another state has been found for a child, the private agencies have higher placement fees than most agencies in Washington. In FY 2005, 56 children were referred to the program which resulted in 34 child specific contracts, 13 adoptions have been finalized, one placement disrupted and the other children are still pending adoption finalization.

Heart Gallery

The Children's Administration continues to participate in the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) Washington Heart Gallery exhibit which includes a collection of 59 portraits of children, teens, adults, families and seniors supported by DSHS programs. The [Washington State Heart Gallery](#) is a unique portrait exhibit of compelling photographs of DSHS clients who need help and encouragement. Nine of the Northwest's top photographers volunteered their expertise to create the stunning visual images.

The goal of The Heart Gallery is to inspire the public to step forward as:

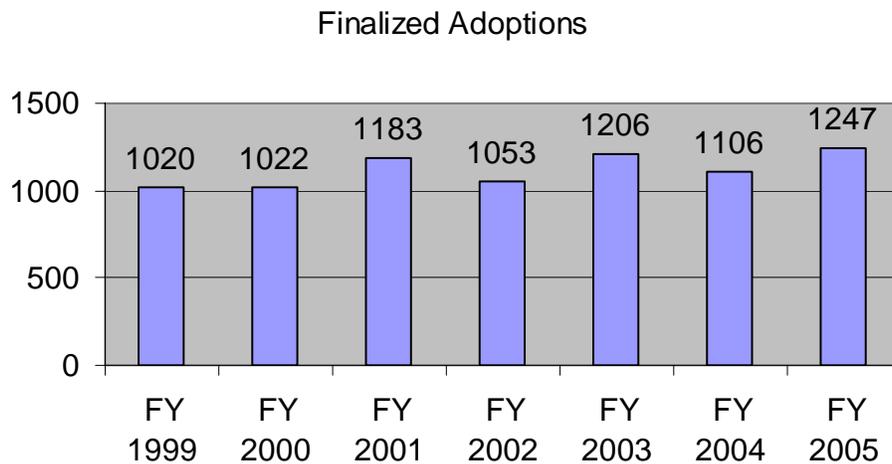
- Adoptive and foster families
- Mentors for at-risk teens
- Caregivers and companions to elderly people and people with disabilities
- Supporters for the Governor's Scholarship Fund for youth in foster care
- Potential employers of people with developmental disabilities, or respite care providers for families of people with developmental disabilities

The Heart Gallery has been well received around the state. However, the overall effectiveness of the program for children in need of adoptive families has not yet been determined. Although 12 of the 21 featured children have been adopted, there is not information to link the placement of these children directly to the Heart Gallery.

VI. FINALIZED ADOPTIONS

The Children's Administration (CA) continues to make every effort to establish permanency for children unable to return to the care and custody of their birth parents through adoption, guardianship, long term foster care, and/or relative placements. Permanency through adoption was established for 1,247 children in the care and custody of the CA during fiscal year (FY) 2005.⁴ Since 1999 the CA has continued to increase the number of adoptions completed each year with some fluctuations from year to year.

Chart 1



Adoptive Home Studies

The Children's Administration provides adoption services to many families throughout the year. Families that are interested in adoption through CA attend 30 hours of pre-service training, have criminal background checks completed, must have a completed and approved adoptive home study which includes checking personal references and gaining an understanding of families in order to make a determination about their ability to parent a child in out-of-home care. In September of 2005 there were 1,112 open cases to families receiving adoption services; which are down from FY 2004 which had 1,373 open cases in July 2004.

⁴ CAMIS Performance Measures – Permanency September 2005 download

VII. PASSPORT PROGRAM

The Foster Care Passport Program (FCPP) that was developed in 1998 as a result of a legislative mandate provides a centralized repository to maintain known and available mental and physical health, familial and educational information for children placed in out-of-home care in Washington State.

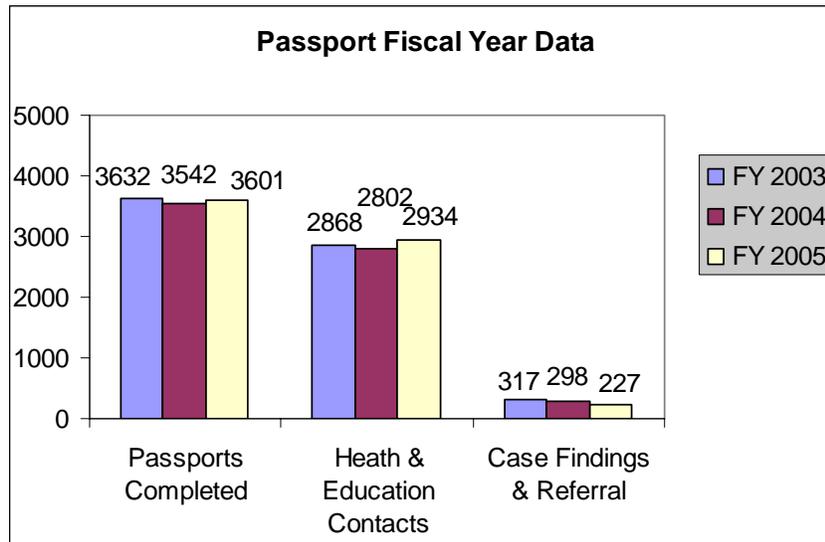
The FCPP is a contracted service provided by the Public Health Nurses (PHNs) that also provide consultation to social workers and caregivers as needed. Due to funding limitations of the program, each region has determined the prioritization of children that receive a Passport. The Public Health Nurses receive a referral directly from the Children's Administration, Case and Management Information System (CAMIS) when a child is placed in out-of-home care. This electronic communication allows the service provider to begin work immediately on developing a Passport on a child that meets the regional criteria.

It takes the Public Health Nurse approximately 11-14 hours to complete a Passport and health recommendation. At any given time there are 600 to 800 Passports in progress. Since the inception of the FCPP approximately 115,000 individual child records have been identified and the information incorporated into the Passport database and recommendations.

In addition to producing the Passports, providing consultation and making recommendations and referrals for health care needs, the PHNs also provide education on health related issues. In FY 2005 information was provided on 75 different health related topics ranging from Asthma, Immunizations, and Skin Disorders to the West Nile Virus.

During FY 2005 there were 3,601 passports completed, 2,934 health and education contacts and 227 findings and referrals were made. Chart three on the following page shows the last three fiscal years of the Foster Care Passport Program.

Chart 3



Over the past three years the number of Passports completed has remained relatively constant. There has been a small increase related to providing education, information and consultation (Health and Education Contacts) to social workers and/or foster parents regarding general health topics. There has been a decline in the number Case Findings and Referrals provided to caregivers about other people that did not receive FCPP services in a home of someone. In the past years the PHNs have provided additional consultation to social workers and caregivers on a variety of issues ranging from immunizations to hepatitis to chicken pox. This has been provided in addition to providing information that is specific to a particular child that has had a passport completed.

In an effort to increase efficiency FCPP has increased workloads and expanded the hours of the trained PHNs to cover multiple counties or sites from a central site. The collaboration between the regions, local health jurisdictions and the statewide program coordinator has enabled the FCPP to provide services for multiple offices and create a more flexible pool of PHN expertise.

VIII. PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

- Support caregiver training by having a Caregiver's Conference for foster parents, kinship providers and adoptive parents in September 2005.
- Provide joint training for caregivers and staff on "Improving Teaming between Foster Parents and Social Workers." Joint training will provide caregivers and staff an opportunity to learn from each other and open lines of communication.
- Develop a plan to implement 30 day health and safety visits for children placed in out of home care.
- Revise the brochures on adoption services.
- Participate in National Adoption Day celebrations around the state as part of National Adoption Month (November).
- Provide monthly newsletters to foster parents to keep them abreast of issues that are occurring within CA.