

Building a Future for Washington's Children

Foster Care Improvement Plan



Department of Social and Health Services

Children's Administration

Casey Family Programs

May 2001

Foster Parents' Rights and Responsibilities

State of Washington

RIGHTS and responsibilities

- The RIGHT to be treated with consideration and respect by agency staff;
- The RIGHT to a supportive relationship from the agency;
- The RIGHT to receive reimbursement for the children in their care in a timely manner;
- The RIGHT to be trained in the role as members of a team;
- The RIGHT to give input into the decisions regarding the child in their care and to be treated as a member of the team in developing case plans for the child;
- The RIGHT to a clear explanation or description of their role as foster parents and the role of the child's family and the agency;
- The RIGHT to receive pertinent information about the children in their care;
- The RIGHT to be informed of any grievance procedures or access to any appeals process should they wish to appeal the agency's policy, regulation, or plan for a child in their care;
- The RIGHT to continue their own family patterns and traditions;
- The RIGHT to refuse to accept a child into their family if they feel they cannot meet the needs of the child or the placement will affect the well-being of the foster family;
- The RIGHT to be notified of any Court action, Administrative Review, or Foster Care Citizen Review Board Hearing concerning a child in their care. Per Washington statute; the Judge makes the decision regarding a foster parent attending a Court Hearing;
- The RIGHT to be included in the permanency consideration for the child who is in the foster family's care;
- The RIGHT & RESPONSIBILITY to advocate for children in their care;
- The RESPONSIBILITY for the day-to-day care and nurturance of the child;
- The RESPONSIBILITY for keeping the agency informed of any changes in the child's life and in the foster parent's household;
- The RESPONSIBILITY to respect a child's biological family, traditions, culture and values;
- The RESPONSIBILITY to gain further knowledge and expertise regarding the care of children by attending on-going foster parent training;
- The RESPONSIBILITY to work cooperatively with agency staff as members of the child's team; and
- The RESPONSIBILITY to ensure a child's health and safety needs are met.



May 5, 2001

Dear Interested Parties:

I am pleased to present the report *Building a Future for Washington's Children: Foster Care Improvement Plan*. This report is the result of the dedicated work of many organizations and individuals and is based on the recommendations of the Washington State Foster Care Task Force.

In Washington State, as in other states nationwide, the foster care system is faced with increasingly complex and difficult challenges. Foster care is one of the most important elements of the child welfare system in Washington State, as it provides foster children with the family connections essential to child and adolescent development. From 1985 to 1995, the number of children in foster care nearly doubled. In 1999, over 17,000 children were served in foster care.

Currently, there are more than 6,300 foster homes in Washington State. Some of these homes have been licensed for specific children, including families who are waiting to adopt a child. There is not an adequate supply of foster homes, particularly in some communities.

Foster parents and kinship families must be partners in and be supported by any successful effort in Washington State to care for and nurture children. One of the messages that clearly resonates in this report is that the Children's Administration (CA) must make improvements in how we partner with foster parents and support them. This change will require a reframing of our culture statewide. While we have been moving toward such a change, we must be more aggressive in improving our performance. Such an effort requires a comprehensive plan to guide the change.

The improvement plan outlined in this report is different from existing or previous foster care improvement efforts in several respects. First, this plan sets the stage for a public private commitment to create a system that will be responsive to foster parents and kinship caregivers. The plan recognizes that success will require the teamwork of those internal to the system—staff and foster parents, and those stakeholders external to the system including local communities, schools and community-based organizations. The plan also emphasizes using data to target retention and recruitment efforts, evaluate strategies for change, and guide continuous improvement to better meet the needs of the children it serves.

However, the true success of this plan will be the realization of the results we hope to achieve. These specific and measurable results are listed below:

- Foster parents will experience their relationship with the agency positively and will feel that they are true partners with the social worker in the child caring process.
- Foster parents will experience the relationship with CA differently through development of a support system that includes mentoring, training, crisis support services and communication.
- There will be a significant increase in the number of foster home placement resources.
- Children in foster care will have stable and developmentally appropriate experiences.
- Applicants to become foster and adoptive parents will feel welcomed.
- Child protective services investigations will be completed in a more timely way and in coordination with the social worker.

These results will not be easy to achieve. However, I believe that through increased collaboration with our child welfare partners and with communities, we can successfully meet these objectives.

I hope that you will join us in our efforts to improve the foster care system in Washington State.

Sincerely,



DENNIS BRADDOCK

Secretary



ROSALYN ORESKOVICH, MSW

Assistant Secretary

Children's Administration

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Sponsoring Agencies gratefully acknowledges the hard work of the Washington State Foster Care Task Force, which provided a strong foundation and direction for identifying needed improvements for the Washington State foster care system. The Task Force, which completed its work in November 1999, set the stage for developing this detailed improvement plan. A list of Task Force participants is included in Appendix A.

We also would like to acknowledge the contributions and continuing interest and support of the advocates for Washington's services to children, who shared their insights and support during the statewide Stakeholders' Meeting on July 31, 2000, as well as informally throughout the project. The stakeholder participant list is contained in Appendix B.

The Sponsoring Agencies appreciate the contributions and assistance of the Children's Administration and Casey Family Programs staff who have provided support and technical assistance for this project. In addition, a special thanks goes to Marie Jamieson Director, Families For Kids Partnership and Darlene Flowers, President, Foster Parents Association of Washington State, for their assistance in reviewing and providing input to this action plan.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Washington Foster Care Task Force first met in 1999 to develop recommendations for specific strategies to meet a vision for an improved foster care system. A public-private workgroup was subsequently created to guide the development of a foster care improvement plan in Washington State, based on the Task Force's recommendations. This work group, made up of staff from Washington State Children's Administration, Department of Social and Health Services, and Casey Family Programs was designed to build on the unique strengths of existing public and private organizations, while examining opportunities for further system-wide improvements.

The improvement plan outlined in this report is different from existing or previous foster care improvement efforts in several respects. First, the plan sets the stage for a public-private commitment to create a system that will be responsive to foster parents and kinship caregivers, and will focus on keeping children who cannot live with their birth parents connected to their families, neighborhoods and schools. Second, the plan recognizes that success will require the teamwork of those internal to the system – staff and foster parents, and those stakeholders external to the system including local communities, schools and community-based organizations. Through effective outreach and targeted communication strategies, local communities and individuals will be asked to help play a role in meeting the needs of the foster children and foster parents in their communities. Third, the plan is based on the importance of using data to target retention and recruitment efforts, evaluate strategies for change, and guide continuous improvement to better meet the needs of the children it serves.

This plan builds on the existing frameworks for continuous improvement in child welfare in Washington State. Specifically, it links directly to the overall Permanency Framework that originated with the Families for Kids Partnership. The plan is also a key component of the Kids Come First Action Agenda, which was established to guide a more comprehensive reform of the entire child welfare system in Washington State. Finally, the plan builds on the best practices in child

The recent foster care rate restructuring that was completed with resources from Casey Family Programs will greatly improve equity and predictability in reimbursement to foster parents.

welfare that are demonstrated daily throughout these two sponsoring organizations and by foster parents, statewide.

Significant reform will require new resources. Two of the major barriers in achieving an improved foster care system in Washington State have been the high caseloads of state social workers and the shortage of resources for foster parents. The recent foster care rate restructuring that was completed with resources from Casey Family Programs will greatly improve equity and predictability in reimbursement to foster parents. Additional resources to reduce caseloads and provide greater support to foster parents are included in the proposed 2001-2003 biennial budget.

IMPERATIVE FOR CHANGE

The foster care system is one of the most important elements of the child welfare system in Washington State. Foster care can provide foster children with the family connections essential to child and adolescent development. Foster parents and kinship families must be partners in and be supported by any successful effort in Washington State to care for and nurture children.

During the 10-year period from 1985 to 1995, more children entered the out-of-home placement system than left it, nearly doubling the number of children in state care. Since 1995, the number of children placed out of their homes has continued to climb with a total of 17,003 children receiving out-of-home care in the year ending June 2000. During that year, 11,049 children entered the care system. The number of children who have been adopted into permanent homes has also increased since 1995.

Children typically enter foster care as a result of child abuse and neglect. Family stress factors such as substance abuse, incarceration, and mental illness have forced the state to intervene in the lives of families to protect children from abusive and neglectful situations. Although an important objective is to work with families to return children home as quickly as possible, the safety of the child is the highest priority. Given the complex, multi-faceted problems some of these families face, returning children home is not always possible. Since 1996, family reunifications have dropped 30 percent.

Best practice suggests that the first choice for placement outside home is with relatives. In 1999, 34 percent of all children in out-of-home care in Washington State were in relative placements. When relative placement is not possible, children are placed with foster families. Currently, the Children's Administration directly licenses more than 4,300 foster homes and an additional 2,000 foster homes through private agencies. Foster family turnover continues to be an increasing concern. Nearly 1,200 foster families left the system last year; 70 percent because

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they lost interest, relocated, or adopted the child in their care. The number of foster families is clearly not enough to meet the placement demand.

Being a foster parent is not easy. Children entering care are likely to have come from substance abusing families in which they have been neglected over a long period of time. Nearly one-half of the children in foster care have special needs requiring special payments. Foster children often have developmental or mental health issues resulting from abuse or neglect. The majority of children in foster care are placed away from their home school district, as nearby homes are usually not available, making the transition to foster care especially difficult. These issues, as well as many others, place daily demands on foster parents.

While many foster parents gain tremendous satisfaction from helping meet the high needs of foster children, they are unable to be successful without a system that supports them. One of the main objectives of this plan is to create more effective strategies for retaining, recruiting, and supporting, foster parents and kinship placements so that children experience increased stability of placement, in their own communities, with continuity of educational and emotional connections. The Foster Care Task Force and the subsequent work group that developed this foster care improvement plan strongly agreed that improvement strategies must be strategically targeted to meet each community's needs.

Key strategies identified for action include:

- Increase data capacity to guide improvement strategies and monitor improvements.
- Create a responsive foster care system that increases satisfaction of existing foster parents and attracts new foster families
- Target school districts that have had the highest placement rates to increase caregiver recruitment and support.
- Focus recruitment efforts in communities of color from which a disproportionate number of children have entered the foster care system.
- Build foster parent and staff team efforts around children with histories of frequent moves and attachment disorders.
- Increase early involvement of extended family in planning and placement decisions.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

A work group was established in January 2000 of representatives from the Washington Department of Social and Health Services Children's Administration (DSHS CA) and from Casey Family Programs (Casey), a private operating foundation. The work group was asked to oversee the development of a foster care retention, recruitment and support improvement plan, starting with the recommendations generated by the 1999 Foster Care Task Force.

In addition, the work group solicited broad-based statewide input from the foster care community and used available data from the Children's Administration (CA). A series of seven focus groups were held in five communities around the state. Two of the seven groups addressed childcare issues. Four of the groups discussed foster care in general and the last group focused on specific concerns that were identified by foster care providers. The work group also researched the foster care systems in other states and strategies they had implemented to make improvements.

Foster Parent Retention, Recruitment and Support Forum

In July 2000, the work group convened a stakeholders' meeting attended by over 80 representatives of public and private child welfare agencies, foster care providers, and representatives of communities of color. The purpose of the meeting was to launch a major statewide initiative to retain, recruit and support foster parents. The meeting was intended to develop a list of major priorities for the workgroup (CA and Casey) to use in developing specific action plans and success measures to develop the foster care improvement plan.

Participants worked in five major areas of system reform addressing retention, recruitment and support:

1. Supports for foster parents;
2. Respite care;
3. Change in agency culture;
4. Statewide public, private and tribal recruitment;
5. Diversity

The work group was asked to oversee the development of a foster care retention, recruitment and support improvement plan.

Forum participants identified several priority areas for system reform to ensure an adequate number of foster parents in the communities from which children originate and stability of placement in the same community. These priorities are listed in the following chart:

**Summary of Foster Parent Retention Recruitment and Support Meeting
July 2000**

- Foster parents will feel fairly treated and informed throughout licensing and abuse investigations.
 - Foster parents will have access to information and be actively involved in the development of the case plan for children in their homes
 - Policy and practice information will be readily accessible to foster parents and staff.
 - Respite care providers will be paid directly.
 - A consistent, statewide policy will be implemented for respite care.
 - The partnership between the foster parent and the agency will be a priority for staff.
 - Foster parents will be able to have greater influence on agency practice and policy.
 - Achieving reductions in child welfare caseloads will be an agency priority.
 - Increased placement resources will be aggressively sought through enhanced recruitment activities, including increased diversity in foster homes and improved response to potential foster parents.
 - Coordination and accountability among all agencies that have a role in recruitment and training of foster parents will be improved.
-

The work group took the information from the community Retention, Recruitment and Support Meeting and developed a more detailed plan for achieving foster care system reform:

- Provide Foster Care Improvement Plan leadership and coordination
- Change agency culture
- Increase foster home retention and target recruitment efforts to keep children in their own communities and achieve timely permanency
- Enhance community partnerships and increase public awareness and support
- Ensure continuous improvement and increase supports for foster families

FOSTER CARE SYSTEM OVERVIEW

The foster care system in Washington State is essentially a volunteer system, whereby a foster family does not receive financial supports commensurate with the actual costs of raising a child. For the majority of children, foster care is intended to be a temporary placement, although there are some foster care placements that are intended to be long-term, such as those provided by Casey Family Programs.

To become a foster parent requires completing a licensing application, background check and demonstrating that a prospective family and home meet state licensing standards. Many foster parents are reimbursed at a rate that only partially covers the costs of providing foster care services. Some foster parents receive additional funds to provide intensive parenting, including enhancement supervision and/or for child-specific services to the foster children in their homes. Until recently, foster care reimbursement practices varied considerably by region or office, and sometimes varied by individual social workers. The CA recently initiated a comprehensive statewide foster care rate restructuring initiative to provide greater consistency and equity in foster parent rate reimbursement.

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FOSTER CARE TRENDS

One of the most important jobs of the public and private child welfare system in Washington State is to protect and care for its most vulnerable citizens, the abused, neglected and abandoned children. Every day, children in Washington State are the victims of family violence. In the year ending September 2000, the Washington Children's Administration received over 76,000 referrals for investigation of child abuse and neglect.¹ About 11,000 children entered new out-of-home placements during the year and 17,000 children were cared for in out-of-home placements overall.² In 1999, 6,107 children were reunified with their parents, 1,005 adoptions were finalized, and 587 guardianships completed.³

While the growth of adoptions has increased since the mid-1990's, there are serious concerns with the children who remain in foster care which support the need for foster care improvements.

- Only 6 percent of State's children are African American or Native American, yet these children account for 23 percent of the children in care.
- Children of color are in the system longer before achieving their permanent plan.
- Only 34 percent of children in out-of-home care are placed with relatives and there continue to be disincentives for relatives who receive temporary assistance for needy families (TANF or welfare) to take in these children.
- In 1999, 366 youth aged out of the system and many of them became homeless.⁴
- Fifty to 75 percent of school-aged children who enter foster care must leave their school districts because foster homes are not available near their homes.⁵

Consistent with national child welfare trends, Washington State's foster children and their caregivers face a changing mix of conditions.

- Since 1994, the state's daily foster care and relative placement census of children in care more than 60 days has grown from 8000 to nearly 9000 children.⁶
- Since 1996, family reunifications from foster care have dropped 30 percent

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due, in part, to ongoing substance abuse by birth parents who do not respond to conventional, short-term family-based treatment.⁷

- Almost one-half of Washington's foster children receive special payments because of the difficult developmental, behavioral and physical challenges they present.⁸
- Many foster parents are employed. The state pays for childcare for more than 1,800 foster children.⁹

FOSTER HOME RESOURCES

The state and its private agency partners have worked diligently to identify families and individuals who are interested in caring for abused and neglected children. The state licenses about 4300 state-served foster homes and another 2000 private agency supported homes.¹⁰ Some of these homes are licensed to care for particular children; others care for up to six children. Private agency homes tend to have a lower child to caregiver ratio suggesting that they may take fewer children.

One of the challenges in having sufficient foster homes available to match children with an optimal placement relates to difficulties in foster home retention. For example, in 1999 nearly 1,200 foster families left the system. Historically, reliable data has not been available to adequately understand which homes left for what reason. The CA has made efforts to improve the data integrity for foster parent attrition and will continue to increase its ability to guide improvements with accurate and timely data. There are several reasons why a foster parent might not renew a foster home license. These reasons include:

- The licensee was no longer interested in being a foster parent,
- The foster parent relocated
- The foster parent adopted the foster child or children in their home
- The foster parent was only licensed for a specific child (such as a friend or relative)
- The foster parent no longer met licensing requirements
- The foster parent left following an allegation of abuse or neglect toward a foster child
- Dissatisfaction with the support the system provided given the difficulty caring for special needs children.

In 2000, additional data was collected which identified that more than three out of four foster parents did not leave because of dissatisfaction. The primary reasons given by these foster parents were relocation, loss of interest, or adoption.¹¹

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NEW APPROACHES NEEDED

The work group identified several child welfare trends that needed to be addressed in a plan for foster care reform. Any actions to reform the system must be undertaken in a context that provides flexibility for a changing environment, to meet new federal and state requirements, as well as the changing needs of the children and families who are served. In particular there must be a commitment to keep children and youth connected to their own families, communities and schools.

It is no longer feasible to pretend that the foster care system is basically a temporary system, a one-time, short-term safety net for the majority of children. One-third or more of the children placed in foster care are actually returning to the system. There needs to be capacity to plan placements so that children who return to the foster system can be placed in a home and a community that they are familiar with and that they are not bounced from stranger to stranger. It is clear that children often lose ground when they change schools. It is imperative to develop more foster homes in those neighborhoods where children originate to provide these children with greater stability, educational continuity and improve their chance of success.

It is also known that an increasing number of children are placed who have been victims of chronic neglect. There must be an effort to develop foster homes that are prepared to meet the developmental and emotional challenges that are associated with chronic neglect.

With a shortage of resources, it is important to try new strategies for retaining foster homes, including becoming more responsive to foster parent needs. There also must be a concerted effort to change the perception of foster care. Ongoing negative media attention that is infused with sensationalism harms existing foster families and drives potential foster families away. Foster parents must be supported in this climate.

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PLAN STRATEGIES AND ACTION ITEMS

The foster care improvement action plan is a multi-year plan that has identified five priority areas. The plan will be modified and updated annually to incorporate legislative and funding changes, as well as new information for improved practice based on better data or child welfare practice improvements.

Foster Care Improvement Plan Strategies:

- Establish state leadership for the plan implementation
 - Create an agency culture that promotes collaboration between foster families and case-workers
 - Enhance data systems to inform policy, outcomes and continuous improvement
 - Increase foster parent retention by enriching supports for families and improving customer service
 - Initiate a statewide public, private and Tribal recruitment strategy and increase the recruitment of families in neighborhoods where children originate
 - Increase the diversity of foster homes.
 - Engage the community in improving foster care and improve the public's perception of foster care
-

Structure for Plan Implementation

Improving the foster care system in Washington State is not a new concept. In fact, many successful improvements have been made over the years to the foster care system. The external challenges continue to increase, however, which suggest that a different approach is needed. System-wide changes are difficult for any organization. Such changes are even more challenging when the “system” is actually several systems representing multiple organizations. Much of the initial effort for foster care reform has been to identify what changes can be made to the child welfare system, both public and private in the State of Washington, with participation of multiple stakeholders.

Undeniably, the primary responsibility rests upon the Children's Administration, the state entity charged with serving and overseeing the services to children in

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out-of-home care. However, for any effort to be truly successful in addressing the problems of foster care retention, recruitment, and support, other systems and entities must be involved. The following plan identifies those actions that the Children's Administration plans to take, with the support of Casey Family Programs and other stakeholders. These actions will require participation by others – such as the Superintendent of Public Instruction and local public school systems, the community mental health system, and local community organizations.

Oversight of change requires both leadership attention at varying levels in the organization and coordination and feedback on the progress of implementation. Rosalyn Oreskovich, CA Assistant Secretary, has recognized the critical importance of foster care reform to improve the retention, recruitment, and support for foster parents. She has charged her executive management team including each regional administrator with the task of taking personal responsibility to make sure that reform efforts are successful. In addition, Ms. Oreskovich will hire a project manager to oversee the coordination, data collection and communication of the effort's progress in each region to assure accountability in this change effort. The project manager will also staff a steering committee representing the public and private partnership to help guide the reform effort.

Casey Family Programs supports improvements in foster care systems nationwide. In Washington State, Casey Family Programs will participate with other key partners to assist the Children's Administration in this foster care reform effort. Given the urgency in which this reform effort must occur, Casey Family Programs has made tangible commitments to support its success. These commitments include establishing a Casey project management position to work in collaboration with the Children's Administration project manager to advance the reform's implementation, securing expertise to increase data capacity to guide and monitor improvement strategies, providing technical expertise on successful innovations in foster care, and supporting the Children's Administration's efforts to increase its collaboration in the community.

The Children's Administration will include other key players in advancing this reform, including the Families for Kids Partnership, Foster Parents Association of Washington State, and representatives of child placing agencies. These additional participants will greatly facilitate the success of this reform.

Oversight of change requires both leadership attention at varying levels in the organization and coordination and feedback on the progress of implementation.

DETAILED FOSTER CARE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Strategy 1: Provide Plan Oversight and Coordination

Develop and implement an infrastructure for implementing, monitoring and communicating the effectiveness of strategies

Action #1

Provide consistent project leadership, oversight and coordination to ensure continued progress toward the goals identified in the plan.

<p>Objective</p> <p>Create a mechanism for project leadership at the statewide and regional levels.</p>	<p>Indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing regional reports on activity implemented • Regular communication on project progress is made • Information available at Foster Parent Web Site • Project manager hired 	<p>Status</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional administrators have been asked to identify regional coordinator to provide local coordination for the reform • Project manager candidates have been interviewed. • DLR will designate a lead person responsible for recruitment and coordination in each region and for statewide plan implementation.
<p>Next Steps</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish oversight committee that at a minimum includes CA, Casey Family Programs, the Foster Parents Association of Washington and representatives of child placing agencies and of Families for Kids Partnership (5/01) 2. Define oversight committee's role, including clarifying partnership roles and commitments (5/01) 3. Develop memorandum of understanding between partnership members (5/01) 4. Approve recommendations of statewide implementation team regarding priorities for action in fiscal year 2002 (July 2001 through June 2002) (9/01) 		

Action #2

Develop ongoing relationships, partnerships and collaborations with stakeholder groups necessary to continue the developmental processes of this plan.

<p>Objective</p> <p>Develop mechanisms for ongoing broad-based participation of key stakeholders.</p>	<p>Indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse cultural/ethnic participation involved in reform process 	<p>Status</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial participant list available based on 2000 Stakeholders Meeting and the 2001 Families for Kids Partnership Permanency Summit • Work group has identified other potential participants
<p>Next Steps</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish mechanisms for implementation team and oversight committee to gain broad-based participation and by interested parties (9/01) 2. Periodically evaluate whether sufficient outreach is occurring 		

Action #3

Establish regional and statewide teams to implement plan and coordinate information.

<p>Objective Regional and statewide reform efforts will be coordinated and each CA region will have an implementation team.</p>	<p>Indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse participation is involved in the reform process in each region • Staff actively involved in effort 	<p>Status</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional administrators and DLR managers will identify coordinators by 5/15/01
<p>Next Steps</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish statewide implementation team by 6/01. Develop statewide tools for use by regional teams <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Establish guidelines for distribution of new recruitment and retention resources, including process for accepting innovation proposals by regional teams to support reform objectives b. Identify and recommend first year priorities to oversight committee c. Establish statewide communication protocols for each region 2. Establish regional implementation teams by 6/01 <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Establish priorities and action steps for each region by 8/01 		

Action #4

Data systems and reporting mechanism identified to support reform.

<p>Objective Locally relevant information informs and improves local strategies for resource development Data will inform policy, continuous improvement efforts and targeted strategies for retention and recruitment.</p>	<p>Indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular reporting completed on time at regional and statewide levels 	<p>Status</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify specific data needs to support reform efforts • Review current data systems and evaluate their abilities to meet identified need • Make needed changes
<p>Next Steps</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify specific data needs to support reform efforts 2. Consultation with external research team 3. Review current data systems and their capacity to evaluate identified need 4. Establish statewide reporting formats for use by each region 5. Develop a mechanism to evaluate strategies and make necessary changes based on new information 6. Convene a continuous quality improvement team to address placing home studies on CAMIS so that social workers can improve placement matches 		

DETAILED FOSTER CARE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Strategy 2: Change Agency Culture

Create an agency culture that promotes collaboration between foster families and case-workers

Action #5

Reduce social work staff caseloads.

Objective	Indicators	Status
Align caseload ratios more closely to the National Child Welfare League of America's recommended standard of 1:15.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Caseloads reduced Staff spend more time with foster parents and foster children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Caseload reduction requested by agency and included in Governor Locke's proposed 2001-2003 budget Joint labor-management update of workload prioritization is planned
Next Steps <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Hire additional staff as authorized in final budget Expand use of child placing agencies as authorized in final budget Confirm that there is face to face contact between the foster parent and the social worker within the first week of placement 		

Action #6

Involve foster parents in practice and policy development processes.

Objective	Indicators	Status
Foster parents will be given increased opportunity to provide input on policy development and practice changes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased foster parent feedback on proposed policy and practice changes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information from foster parent surveys has been used to influence policy development
Next Steps <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Establish ongoing mechanisms to capture foster parent input on policies and practices at both the regional and statewide levels Provide link to foster parents on foster parent web site to inform them of pending policy changes and opportunities for input Implement regional mechanisms to identify levels of foster parent participation in staffings Expand customer service feedback cards for all CA programs 		

Action #7

Change the organizational culture within DSHS/CA to welcome the participation and partnership of foster families in the process of caring for children under the agency's responsibility.

<p>Objective</p> <p>The DSHS/CA culture will change to embrace the partnership between foster parents and the agency.</p>	<p>Indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster parents report that visits to homes occur at least once within the first 7 days of the child's placement • Foster parents participate in child staffings • Foster parents report prior notification of court dates as per CA policy • A child's information binder has been created for each child in foster care • Foster parents will be provided and have access to timely, comprehensive and accurate information for children placed in their homes 	<p>Status</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While many efforts have been undertaken to change the agency culture regarding foster parents, these strategies have not resulted in systematic change • The Passport Program has been implemented within available resources. Additional resources are included in Governor Locke's 2001-2003 budget proposal to expand the Passport Program • A statement of Foster Parents' Rights and Responsibilities has been developed
<p>Next Steps</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conduct statewide forums with social workers to identify barriers to increased foster parent involvement 2. Identify successful examples of staff/foster parent partnerships 3. Clarify expectations of staff for foster parent interaction 4. Create a binder for each child with relevant information to be given to the foster parent 5. Support cultural change through accountability and incentive system approaches 6. Conduct ongoing focus groups with foster parents in each region 7. Implement statewide guidelines to normalize foster care 8. Finalize foster adopt guidelines 		

Action #8

Establish consistent sharing of policy and practice information.

<p>Objective</p> <p>Social workers understand what information is always to be shared with foster parents and provide it on a timely basis.</p> <p>Social workers will consistently provide foster parents with information critical to supporting and caring for children in their homes.</p>	<p>Indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster parents confirm that the child's ISSP was given to them • Foster parents report that they have input into the development of the ISSP • Complaints by foster parents regarding not being told about child behaviors is reduced 	<p>Status</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy regarding ISSP has been shared with social workers statewide
<p>Next Steps</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Clarify policies and procedures related to foster parent information sharing 2. Implement improved accountability for information sharing in each region and monitor sharing of ISSP 3. Improve capacity of on-line manuals for searching 		

DETAILED FOSTER CARE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Strategy 3: Increase Foster Home Retention, Recruitment and Diversity

Initiate a statewide public, private and Tribal recruitment strategy and increase diversity in foster family recruitment.

Action #9

Establish common definitions for retention and recruitment.

<p>Objective Retention and recruitment are clearly defined and consistently measured statewide.</p>	<p>Indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruitment partners use a common definition and standard to report progress 	<p>Status</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The lack of clarity in working definitions for recruitment and retention activities have made it difficult to improve contract accountability
<p>Next Steps</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and implement working definitions of foster parent retention and foster parent recruitment Develop standard reporting for recruitment and retention indicators and provide statewide feedback on progress Monitor satisfaction of individuals interested in participating in the foster care system Revise and implement contracts with CA recruitment providers to ensure achievement of statewide recruitment strategy Improve consistency between information provided by recruitment providers and foster parent trainers Implement PRIDE foster parent training curriculum 		

Action #10

Expand recruitment of foster and adoptive families and increase the number of culturally relevant homes.

<p>Objective The available foster and adoptive family resource pool in each region is able to address the specific needs of the children placed in their care.</p>	<p>Indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased number of applicants Increased number of families completing required training Increased number of families who get licensed or certified 	<p>Status</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Efforts are underway in each region to expand foster care resources and increase the diversity of foster homes
<p>Next Steps</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Identify specific foster home needs by geographical areas (e.g. school district, community-based organization, etc.) Set regional targets for foster care recruitment Actively seek funding and partnerships for community outreach activities for foster parents Revise and implement contracts with CA recruitment providers to ensure achievement of statewide recruitment strategy Establish culturally diverse recruitment and retention regional advisory committee to focus on strategies to increase the number of culturally relevant homes Implement common home study 		

DETAILED FOSTER CARE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Strategy 4: Enhance Community Partnerships and Outreach

Engage the community in improving foster care and improve the public's perception of foster care.

Action #11

Promote community awareness of positive foster care experiences and implement high-profile foster home recruitment campaign.

Objective	Indicators	Status
Improved image of foster care and increased support of foster care in each community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communities actively support foster children and foster parents • New foster parents are found through communication efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dissemination of positive foster care stories is currently underway at DSHS
<p>Next Steps</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop community information campaign 2. Solicit community and statewide leaders to increase foster care awareness 3. Evaluate current capacity to respond to increased interest in foster care 4. Develop and implement regional plans for community outreach by CA and private agencies in schools, churches and community based organizations 		

DETAILED FOSTER CARE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Strategy 5: Increase Supports for Foster Care

Provide foster parents with support to improve the outcomes for children in foster care.

Action #12

Increase supports for foster parents under investigation for abuse, neglect or licensing violations.

Objective	Indicators	Status
Increase the number of foster parents who feel they were fairly treated and informed during a licensing and abuse investigation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The number of foster parents who turn in their licenses after being investigated is reduced Foster parents report they were satisfied with the way in which they were treated during an investigation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CA has a program designed to provide support for foster families under investigation. By policy, staff members are expected to refer foster families to that program. Training is provided for staff and families
<p>Next Steps</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Collect data on number of foster parents who close their license after an investigation Conduct satisfaction surveys with foster parents who were investigated. Support the efforts of FIRST to increase volunteer staffing for supporting foster parents during investigations Make policy and practice changes that result from new data and survey information 		

Action #13

Clarify respite care policy.

Objective	Indicators	Status
Implement a statewide respite care policy and establish a mechanism for respite providers to receive timely payments. Increase the number of individuals who are qualified to provide respite foster care.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foster parents have consistent access to respite services statewide Foster care respite providers receive timely payment for services Number of respite foster parents increased in each region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CA has proposed a consistent statewide foster care respite policy that is included in Governor Locke's 2001-2003 budget proposal. Lack of funding has been the primary barrier to implementing a statewide policy in the past
<p>Next Steps</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Implement statewide policy if approved in the final budget Explore options for making payments directly to respite providers Identify potential respite foster parents Establish mechanisms to review and approve respite foster parents in a timely, user-friendly manner 		

Action #14

Increase supports to foster parents to stabilize placements for difficult children and youth.

<p>Objective</p> <p>Reduce the number of placements for children in out-of-home care through improved support to foster parents.</p>	<p>Indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster families providing for difficult youths report feeling supported • Children and youths experience fewer total placements 	<p>Status</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussions have been underway with the Mental Health Division to improve mental health services of children in out-of-home care • Assessments of children in out-of-home care will help identify their needs for services which will support successful placements
<p>Next Steps</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop resources to strengthen foster placements involving special needs children and youth 2. Set up mechanisms that assure that foster parent phone calls are followed up in a timely way, including back-up for social workers in court. Collect data on number of foster parents who close their license after an investigation 3. Use a case management team to meet the treatment and learning needs of children identified as likely to disrupt from placement 4. Establish criteria and recruit specialized foster homes for more difficult children 5. Implement foster care enhancements if adopted in the final budget 6. Monitor that foster children get required EPSDT exams and services as needed 		

CONCLUSION

The sponsoring agencies are confident that the strategy outlined in this report will cause significant and lasting reform of the Washington State foster care system. However, as has been stated repeatedly throughout this document, most of these changes cannot be achieved without additional resources and the involvement and active participation of the tribes and Indian organizations, local communities throughout the state, advocates, private agencies, foster families, community based organizations, the media and the business sector.

REFERENCES AND APPENDICES

- ¹ DSHS Executive Management Information System (EMIS) Report, November 2000.
- ² Department of Social and Health Services, Children's Administration (DSHS, CA) Data Integration and Support Unit fact sheet "Out of Home Placement Statistics, July 1999-June 2000." (There is approximately seven percent duplication included in the total children placed because a child can be placed in more than one type of placement during a month.)
- ³ Washington Permanency Report, September 2000, p. 13.
- ⁴ DSHS, CA Data Integration and Support Unit Outcomes Report, September 2000, p. 9.
- ⁵ DSHS, Children's Administration Data Integration and Support Unit ad hoc Report, November 2000.
- ⁶ DSHS, CA Data Integration and Support Unit Outcomes Report, September 2000, p, s 7,
- ⁷ DSHS, CA Data Integration and Support Unit Outcomes Report, September 2000, p. 17.
- ⁸ Report on the Characteristics of Exceptional Cost Plans, DSHS Children's Administration, Office of Quality Assurance and Training, February 2000
- ⁹ DSHS Executive Management Information System (EMIS) Report, November 2000.
- ¹⁰ DSHS Executive Management Information System (EMIS) Report, November 2000.
- ¹¹ DSHS Division of Licensed Resources (DLR) Study "Attrition in Licensed Foster Homes," 1999 and 2000.

APPENDIX A

Foster Care Task Force Members

Jonell Anderson	Senator Jim Hargrove	Glen Paddock
Colleen Archilla	Steve Hassett	Marsha Riggers
Dan Austin	Ginny Heim	Jacob Romo
Janis Avery	John Henderson	Bernie Ryan
Barbara Baker	Fran Hume	Julie Salvi
Kathy Barbell	Dennis Ichikawa	Risa Sandler
Phil Bayne	Marie Jamieson	Mary Sarno
Lucy Berliner	Robert Jones	John Schlatter
Stephen Bogan	Rep. Ruth Kagi	Ann Schley
Rep. Marc Bolt	Berigth Kayyali	Deborah Smith
Jim Brewster	Andi Kawamura	Pam Smith
Peggy Brown	Ted Keyes	Rep. Duane Sommers
Jackie Buchanan	Kelly Warner-King	Bernadine Spalla
Stephanie Burbach	Dave Knutson	Jan Spears
Virge Burke	Phyllis Lowe	Luanne Spott
Rep. Tom Campbell	Linda Lillevik	Barbara Stone
Celeste Carey	Laurie Lippold	Jennifer Strus
Sue Castonguay	Senator Jeanine Long	Nancy Sutton
Kathy Costanich	Susan Moore	Ruth Teichroeb
Marcia Craddock	Ron Murphy	Rep. Kip Tokuda
Kate Cruse	Joan Mell	Gwendolyn Townsend
Mary Ann Curran	Sean Maloney	John Vail
Lee Doran	Mavis McHenry	Dwight Waiters
James Edmondson	Barbara McPherson	Vickie Wallen
Diana English	Trish O'Conner	Wendy Warman
Families for Kids	John O'Leary	Gia Wesley
Judy Fitzgerald	Patty Maddox	Cathy Wiggins
Darlene Flowers	Paola Maranan	Rick Williams
Betty Floyd	Edith Nelson	Ray Winterowd
J.D. Fripp	Rosalyn Oreskovich	Sylvia Young
Linda Gil	Annette Olson	
Lisa Giard	Carol Overbeck	

APPENDIX B

Stakeholder Meeting Attendees

Stephanie Aird	Cherrie Druffel	Bergith Kayyali
Bobbi Alexander	Melinda Dryer	Donna Kellam
Ruthann Alleman	James Edmondson	Bill Kettenring
Talia Baker	Suzanne Engelberg	Linda Koshel
Fran Barnett	Barb Fenster	Marion LeCours
Colleen Barrett	Marjorie Fitzgerald-	Ruth Anne LeFevre-
Tawnia Baze	Rinehart	Alleman
Joe Bell	Darlene Flowers	Margie Leon-Gaiten
Paul Berry	Betty Floyd	Sue Lewis
Dennis Braddock	Gary Fontaine	Nalani Linder
Jim Brewster	Lydia Frias	Laurie Lippold
Trina Bridges	J. D. Fripp	Senator Jeanine Long
Gayle Brown	Alfonso Garcia	Sean Maloley
Jackie Buchanan	Samantha Garcia	Paola Maranan
Pam Caird	Kay Gedrose	Valerie Marshal
Celeste Carey	Terry Gibson	Ester Massey
Brian Carroll	Linda Gil	Ruth Massinga
Judy Carter	Enedilia Gomez	Betsy Miller
Ernie Cathcart	Jane Gooding	Don Milligan
Christine Cavanagh	Ilana Guttmann	Susan Moore
Shan-Shan Chien	Cecil Hanson	Ruthie Morris
Scott Collier	Art Harper	Leona Morse
Susan Corwin	John Henderson	Ron Murphy
Kathie Costanich	Kent Henderson	Sharon Newcomer
Diana Cote-Smith	Jodi Honeysett	John O'Leary
Karen Crown	Richland Hoppe	Ray Olney
Kate Cruse	Martin Howell	Annette Olson
Omi Cummings	Marie Jamieson	Rosalyn Oreskovich
Mary Ann Curran	Kelly Jensen	Norma Owens
Mike Curtis	Tewannah Johnson	Andrea Owner
Kikora Dorsey	Linda Jones	Glen Paddock
Joyce Drake	Rep. Ruth Kagi	Evelyn Perez

Rachel Peters
Pat Pincham
Lisa Powers
Linda Redman
Shawn Regan
Ann Reichler
Randy Roberts
Chris Robinson
Jacob Romo
Tom Saunders
Nancie Scott
Kathy Sculley
Kathy Sealy
Grace Sheehy
Marlene Siemila
Pam Smith
Luanne Spott
Barbara Stone
Jennifer Strus
Bob Stutz
Mark Sullivan
Nancy Sutton
Rep. Kip Tokuda
Gwendolyn Townsend
Sara VanMeter
Arleen Ventura
Ralph Vreugdenhil
Ron Walker
Dwight C. Waiters
Lois Ward
Wendy Warman
Marlene Weigand

