

# **Report to the Legislature**

Children's Administration  
Annual Quality Assurance Report, Fiscal Year 2013  
July 1, 2012 through June 30, 2013

Published under RCW 43.20A.870 and RCW 74.13.031(5)

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**Children’s Administration Overview**  
**Safe, healthy individuals, families and communities**

State law requires the Department of Social and Health Services Children’s Administration to produce this annual Quality Assurance Report on its efforts to enhance child safety and permanency and to support child and family well-being.

This is the 17<sup>th</sup> report detailing performance outcome data under RCW 43.20A.870 and RCW 74.13.031 (5) that shows performance in the following specific service areas.

**Child Protective Services (CPS) response time**

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

**Children’s health and safety in out-of-home care**

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

**Adherence to permanency planning guidelines**

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

**Children’s length of stay in out-of-home placement**

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

Children’s Administration provides or oversees provision of services and supports throughout the public child welfare continuum of care. Its roles include:

- Responding to and investigating reports of suspected child abuse and neglect.
- Providing or overseeing the provision of child and family services and supports to help parents safely care for their own children whenever possible.
- Securing safe and stable temporary placements for children until they may safely be returned home or placed into an alternative safe and stable permanent home.
- Overseeing the provision of medical, educational, and mental health services to children in out-of-home care.
- Licensing and monitoring foster family and relative homes for temporary placement of children, as well as congregate care or therapeutic facilities to care for children.
- Providing services and supports to youth transitioning from out-of-home care into responsible independent living.

The Administration tracks performance in many areas of service delivery and oversight in an effort to improve outcomes. This report addresses only the measures required by

state law. Additional performance information is available at <http://www.dshs.wa.gov/pdf/ppa/2013-15jan14/CA.pdf>

Children's Administration is accountable to the Legislature and to the public for continuing to improve the child welfare system. The Administration recognizes no government entity alone can ensure the safety of children. The Administration relies on mandated reporters such as community-based service providers, faith communities, schools and caring individuals to speak up on behalf of vulnerable children by reporting suspected child maltreatment.

The data in this report comes primarily from the federally mandated State Automated Child Welfare Information System, which in Washington is called **FamLink**.

Measures are reported by federal fiscal year, October 1, 2012 through September 30, 2013 as required by the federal Administration for Children and Families and by state fiscal year, July 1, 2012 through June 30, 2013 to meet state legislative requirements. The data source and reporting period are noted for each measure.

### **Performance measures in this report and summary of 2013 outcomes**

The following measures are included in this report:

- Timely response in emergent referrals  
*Performance = 97.8%/target=  $\geq$  97%\**
- Timely response in non-emergent referrals  
*Performance = 97.9%/target=  $\geq$  97%\**
- Children who did not experience recurrence of abuse  
*Performance = 92.1%/federal standard=  $\geq$  94.6%\*\**
- Children who are free from abuse or neglect while in out-of-home care  
*Performance = 99.68%/federal standard=  $\geq$  99.68%\*\**
- Foster homes receiving health and safety checks  
*Performance = 15.2%/RCW 74.13.260 target=  $\geq$  10%\**
- Children visited every month by the worker  
*Performance = 96.6%/target=  $\geq$  95%\**
- Children reunified within 12 months of placement  
*Performance = 64.4%/federal standard=  $\geq$  76.2%\*\**
- Children adopted within 24 months of placement  
*Performance = 30.7%/federal standard=  $\geq$  36.6%\*\**
- Children placed in permanent homes within two years  
*Percentage = 64.9%/previous year= 69.9%*
- Median number of days children are placed in care  
*Number of days = 444/previous year= 465*
- Percentage of children who remain safely with their family for 12 months following reunification  
*Performance = 88.9%/federal standard=  $\geq$  90.1%\*\**

\* Targets are established by the Children's Administration to set a standard for performance.

\*\* Federal Standards are established by Administration for Children and Families (ACF).

## Safety

**Goal: Children will be safe from abuse and neglect**

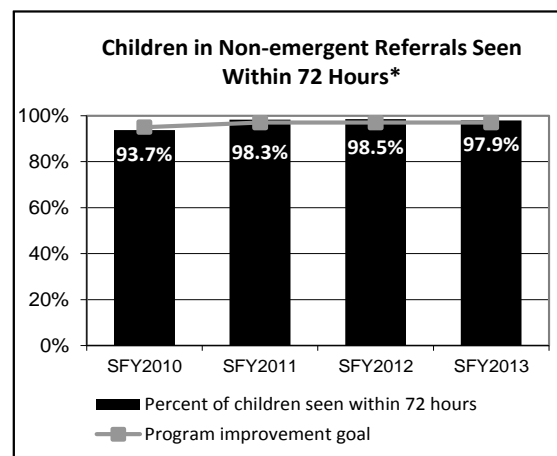
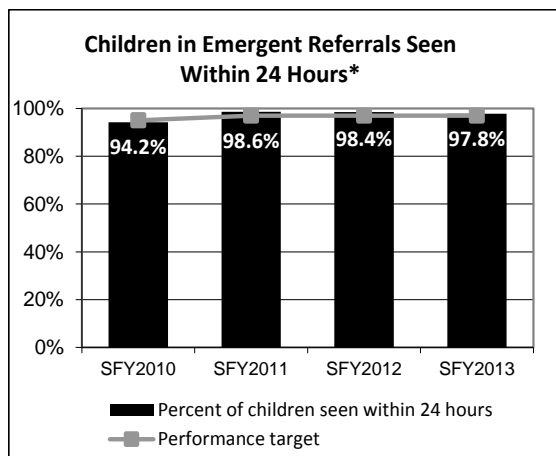
**Objective: Initiate timely investigations**

**Measured by: Children seen face-to-face by a worker following a referral accepted for investigation**

When an intake caseworker receives a report of suspected child abuse or neglect, the worker must determine, based on the information provided, whether the report meets the legal criteria to warrant an investigation. The caseworker must establish if the information indicates that some type of abuse or neglect may have occurred and if he or she has enough information to identify and locate the child or children involved.

Intakes meeting the sufficiency screen and criteria for either an emergent or a non-emergent response are screened in for investigation. When a child or group of children meets the legal criteria for an emergent response or is determined to be at “imminent risk” of harm, a caseworker must initiate the investigation and make face-to-face contact with the child within 24 hours of receipt of the referral. Intakes meeting the criteria for non-emergent response require caseworkers to make face-to-face contact with the child within 72 hours from receipt of referral.

During state fiscal year 2013, 97.8 percent of children in emergent referrals were seen within 24 hours. Of the children in non-emergent referrals, 97.9 percent were seen within 72 hours. Performance for both measures exceeded the target of 97 percent established for state fiscal years 2011-13. Children’s Administration continues to make efforts to improve child safety, evidenced by the Results Washington target established at the beginning of state fiscal year 2014 that 98.5 percent of children will be seen within 24 hours.



\*Average annual percentage of children in emergent referrals seen or attempted within 24 hours.

Excludes Division of Licensed Resources (DLR) CPS referrals. Source: FamLink

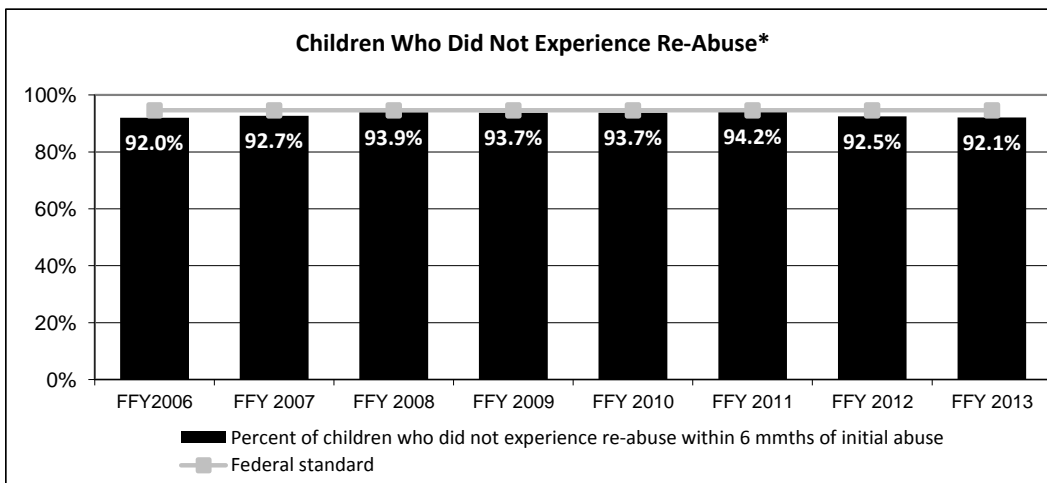
\*\*Average annual percentage of children in non emergent referrals seen or attempted within 72 hours.

Excludes Division of Licensed Resources (DLR) CPS referrals. Source: FamLink

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

A child is considered the victim of re-abuse or recurrence when he or she has experienced a founded allegation of abuse or neglect within six months of a previous finding of abuse or neglect. This measure requires us to look at performance in six-month and annual intervals.

Under the federal standard for recurrence of abuse and neglect set by the Administration for Children and Families, 94.6 percent of children who have experienced a founded allegation of abuse or neglect will be safe from an additional founded allegation within six months. Data for 2013 shows Washington state's performance to be 92.1 percent.



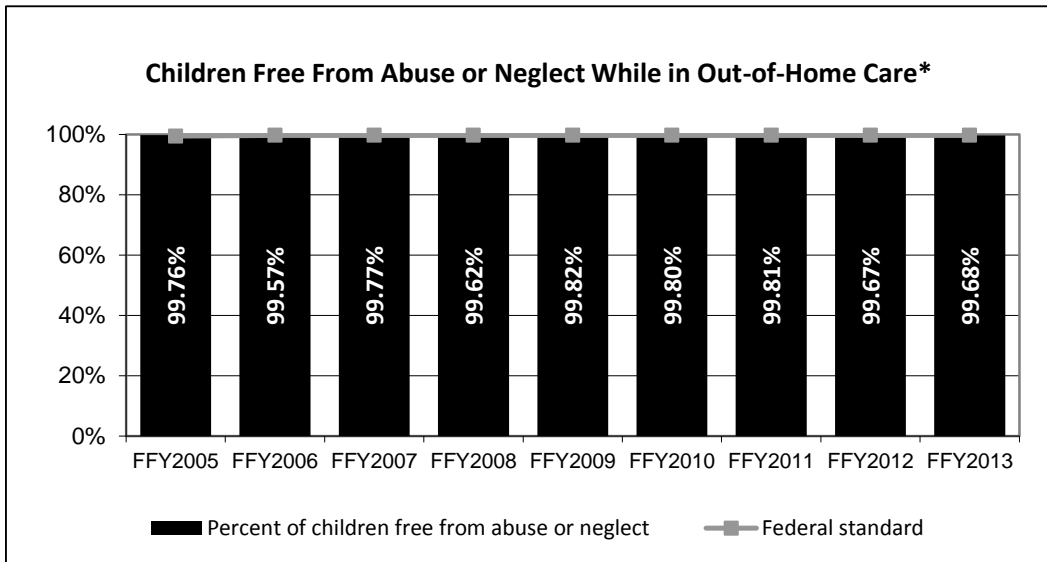
\*Percentage of children with a founded referral of abuse or neglect who did not have an additional founded referral of abuse or neglect within six months of the initial referral. "Founded" means that an investigation concluded that the maltreatment was more likely than not to have occurred. For referrals with multiple allegations, the referral is considered founded if any of the allegations are founded. The federal standard for this measure is 94.6 percent or more children will be free from additional founded allegations. Source: FamLink data submitted to NCANDS<sup>1</sup> for Washington State Child and Family Services Review Data Profile.

<sup>1</sup> The National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) is the federal data collection system that gathers information from all states about reports of child abuse and neglect. The data are used to examine trends in child abuse and neglect across the country.

**Objective:** Improve safety for children placed in out-of-home care  
**Measured by:** Children who are free from abuse or neglect in out-of-home care

Children’s Administration works diligently to ensure that caregivers licensed to provide care for children and the homes in which they live are safe and stable. Those responsible for caring for children must undergo background checks, participate in education and training and demonstrate competency in a variety of skills associated with caring for and nurturing vulnerable children.

The federal standard for this measure is set very high at 99.68 percent. Washington met that standard for federal fiscal year 2013 but continually strives to improve.



\*Percent of children in out-of-home care without a founded referral of abuse or neglect annualized data; not unduplicated. The federal standard is 99.68 percent or more. Source: FamLink data submitted to AFCARS<sup>2</sup> and NCANDS for Washington State Child and Family Services Review Data Profile.

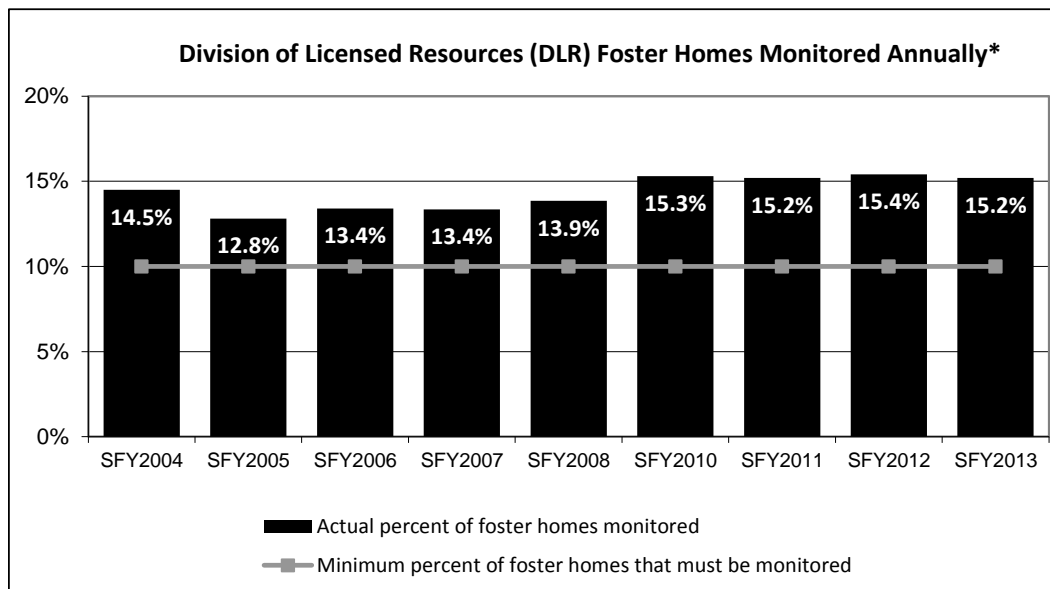
<sup>2</sup> The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) is the federal data collection system that collects case-level information from state and tribal Title IV-E agencies on all children in foster care and those who have been adopted with Title IV-E agency involvement.

**Objective:** Improve safety for children placed in out-of-home care  
**Measured by:** Foster homes receiving health and safety checks

Washington state law requires the department to monitor a random sample of no less than 10 percent of the total number of family foster homes licensed by Children’s Administration by July 1 of each year and to report monitoring results annually (RCW 74.13.260; RCW 74.13.031 (5)).

In state fiscal year 2013, 15.2 percent of licensed homes received a health and safety check. Those caring for children must meet minimum licensing standards as must the homes in which children live. Homes must be free of known safety hazards. For example, fireplaces or wood stoves must be surrounded by safety fences. Medications kept in the home must be secured and foster parents must be trained in First Aid and CPR.

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



\*Percentage of Division of Licensed Resources (DLR) foster homes with a health and safety check completed by the Division of Licensed Resources, annually. Source: FamLink



**Objective: Increase worker visits with children**

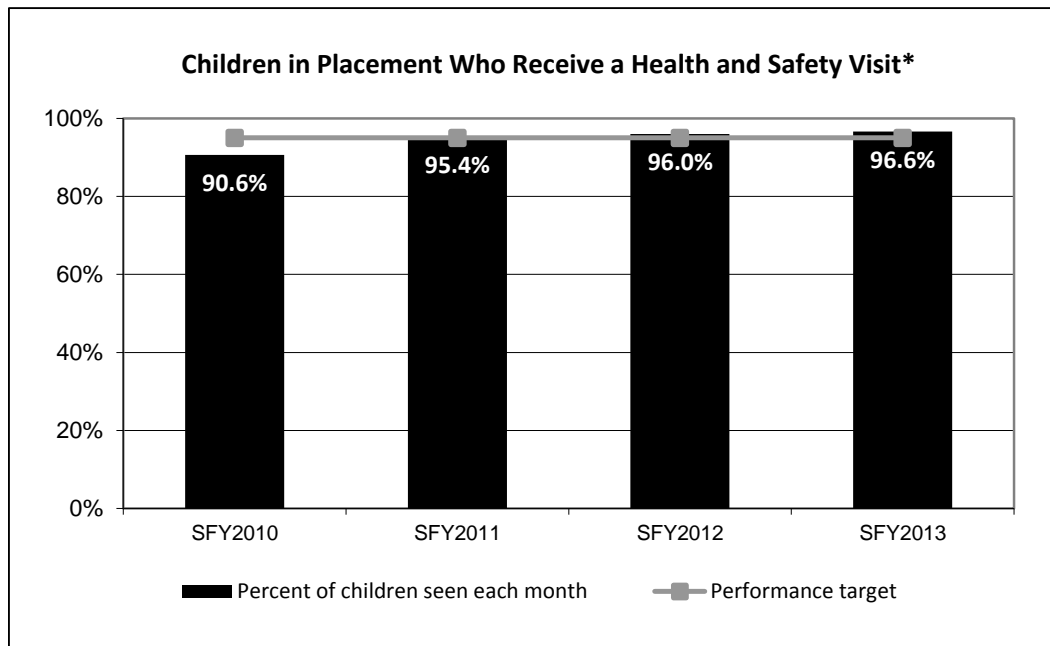
**Measured by: Children visited every month by their worker**

In order to monitor the health and safety of children in out-of-home care, workers are required to visit children in person in their out-of-home placements at least once a month.

Face-to-face contact with children permits workers to assess a child's health and well-being, evaluate the home, including the child's personal space, and determine how well a child is adjusting to his or her placement. While monthly in-person visits are the minimum requirement, Children's Administration workers often make additional contact with children through telephone calls, case staffings, court hearings and other personal visits.

Children's Administration strives to see 95 percent of children in out-of-home care at least once during the calendar month with a private and individual face-to-face health and safety visit. Children's Administration continues to strive to improve performance in this area as evidenced by its strategic plan target that 98 percent of children in out-of-home care will be seen monthly. This target was established at the beginning of state fiscal year 2014.

Workers completed monthly visits with more than 96 percent of children in out-of-home placements during fiscal year 2013.



\*Source: FamLink

## Permanency

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

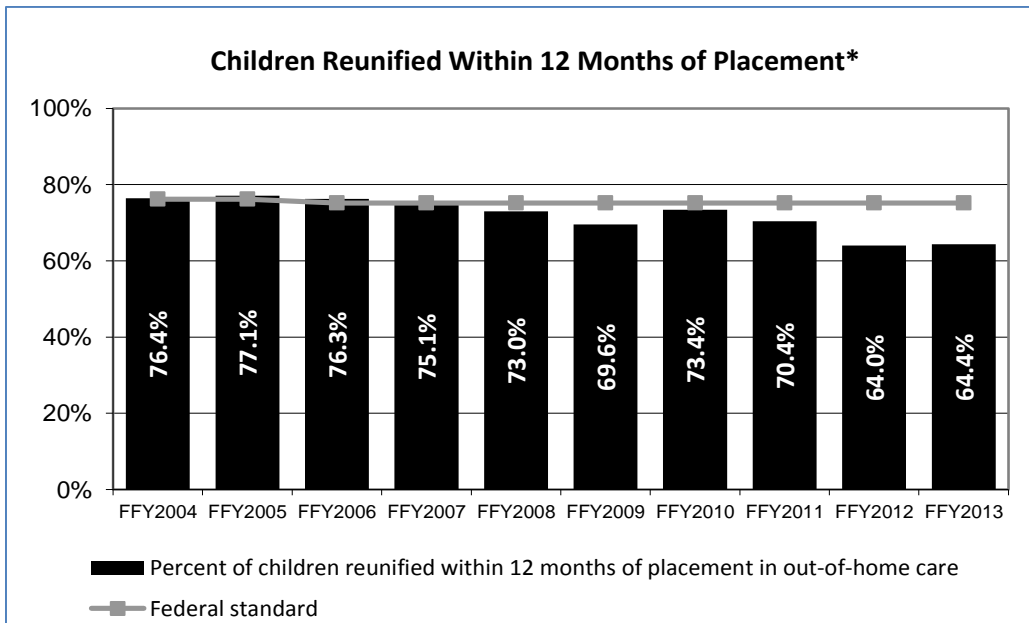
**Objective: Increase permanency for children in out-of-home care**

**Measured by: Children reunified within 12 months of placement**

Children’s Administration works to reunify children with their families of origin when safety assessments show and parents demonstrate that they are able to safely care for their children and when reunification is in a child’s best interest.

Children’s Administration uses a Child Safety Framework, which focuses on increasing child safety throughout the life of a case. This framework includes all decisions made from intake through permanency, including the plan to return a child to his or her home.

When reunification is the best permanent outcome for children, it is important that they be reunified as soon as it is safe for them to return to their parents. In federal fiscal year 2013, 64.4 percent of children who had been removed from their parents due to abuse or neglect were able to safely return home within 12 months of placement.



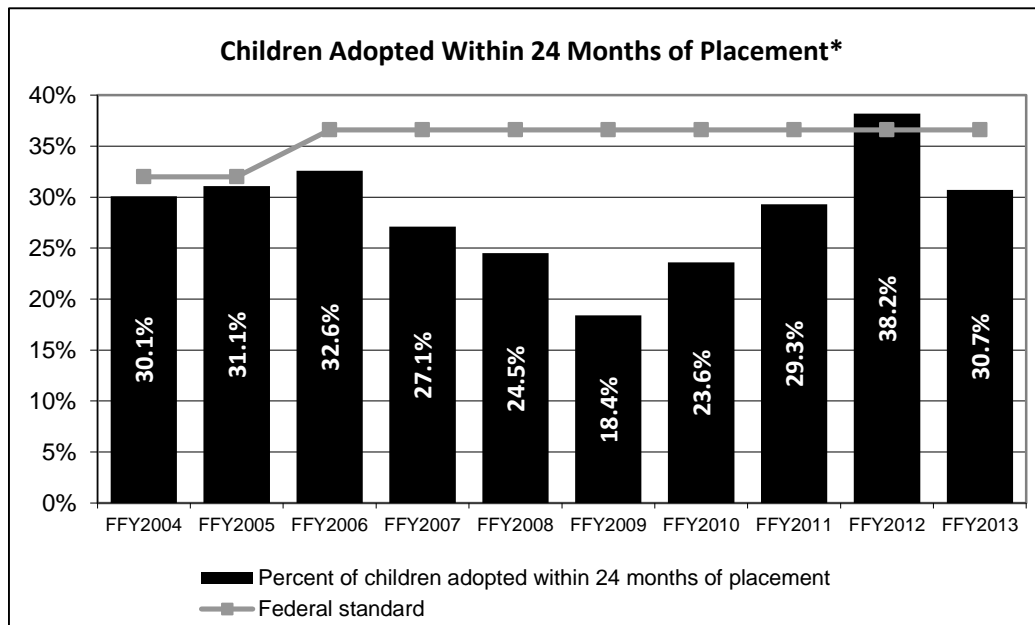
\*Percent of children reunified with their parents within 12 months of placement into out-of-home care. The federal standard is 75.2 percent, based on the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of all states reporting to AFCARS. Source: FamLink data submitted to AFCARS for Washington Child and Family Services Review Data Profile.

**Objective:** Increase permanency for children in out-of-home care  
**Measured by:** Children adopted within 24 months of placement

Whenever it is safe and in the best interest of the children involved, Children’s Administration strives to maintain children in their homes or to return them home as quickly as can be safely accomplished. However, in alignment with federal requirements, the Administration engages in concurrent planning to find an alternative permanent home should reunification efforts prove to be unsuccessful. Concurrent planning is designed to prevent children from extended out-of-home care stays and to ensure that children have safe and stable permanent homes regardless of whether reunification is possible.

Additional efforts often are needed for some children when it is challenging to find an adoptive home. Children who enter state care after the age of five, children of color, sibling groups and children with special physical, mental or behavioral needs tend to stay in out-of-home care longer than very young, healthy children.

The federal standard is 32 percent of children in care will be adopted within 24 months of placement. In federal fiscal year 2013, 30.7 percent of children in Washington state were adopted within 24 months of placement.

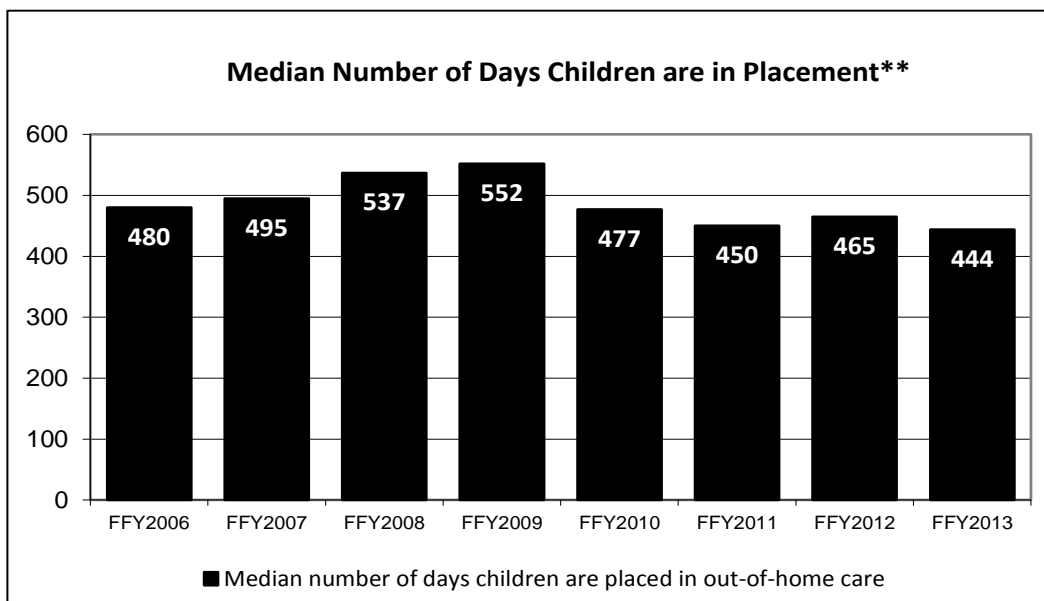
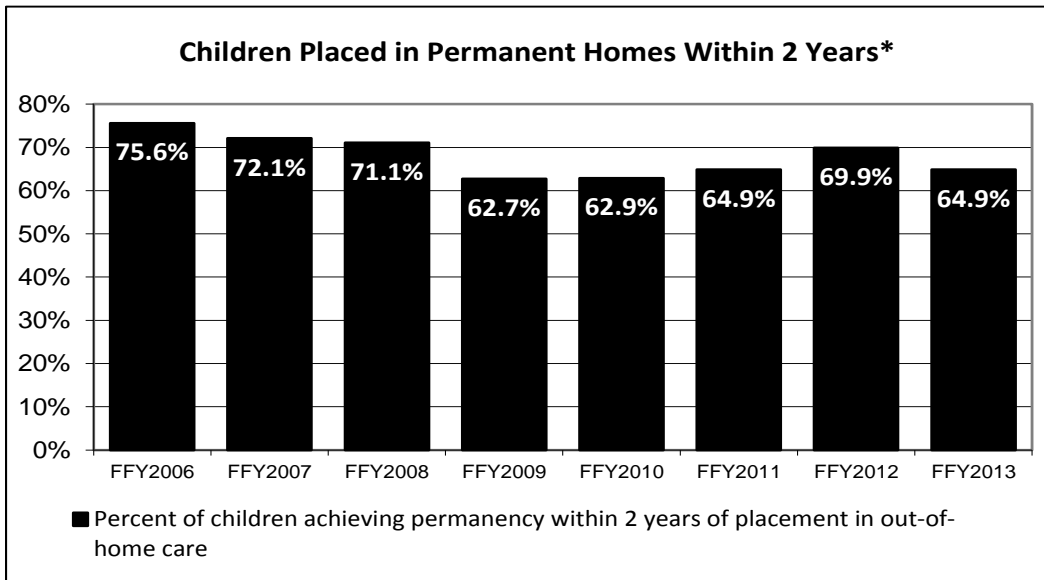


\*Percent of children adopted within 24 months of placement into out-of-home care. The federal standard is 36.6 percent, based on the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of all states reporting to AFCARS. Source: FamLink data submitted to AFCARS for Washington Child and Family Services Review Data Profile.

**Objective:** Decrease length of stay without increasing re-entry  
**Measured by:** Length of stay less than two years and median length of stay

When children must be placed into out-of-home care to keep them safe and stable, Children’s Administration strives to move them into permanent homes as quickly as is safely possible.

The length of stay less than two years indicates the percent of children who achieve permanency through reunification, guardianship, or adoption within two years of placement in out-of-home care. The median length of stay measure indicates the median number of days children spend in out-of-home care.



\*Children in care for less than two years at the time of exit using exit cohort data. Source: AFCARS data submission calculation through Casey Family Programs data share agreement.

\*\*Median length of stay on last day of the federal fiscal year. Source: FamLink data submitted to AFCARS for Washington Child and Family Services Review Data Profile.

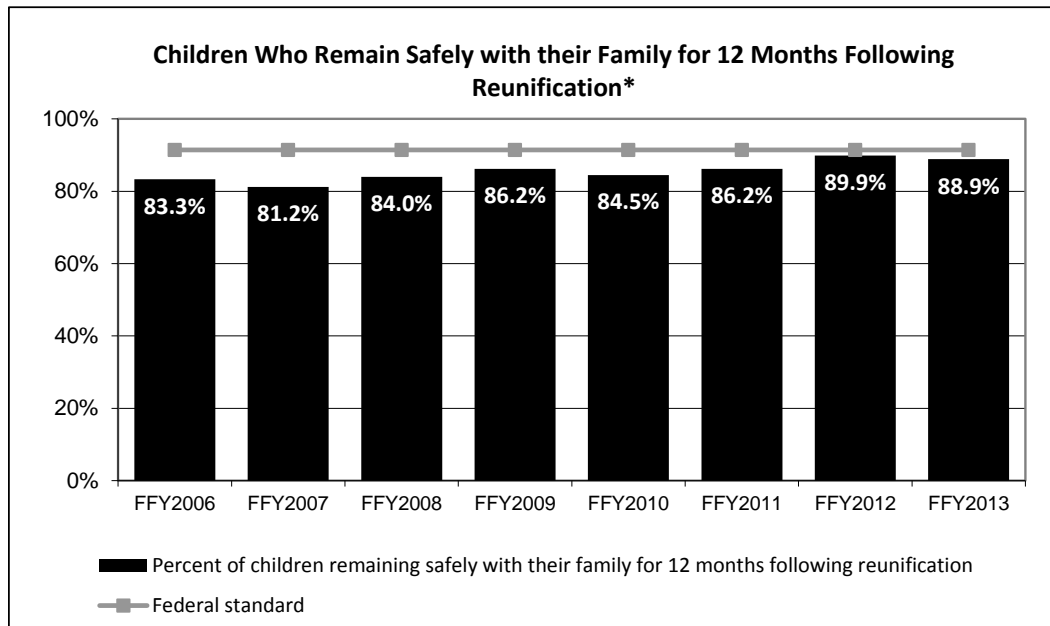
**Objective:** Decrease length-of-stay without increasing re-entry  
**Measured by:** Children remaining safely at home following reunification

Children’s Administration strives to safely maintain children in their own homes whenever possible through community-based resources and natural supports. However, children cannot always be safely cared for by their own families.

Children’s Administration does not act alone in making the decision to remove a child from his or her parents’ care. Child Protective Services (CPS) makes recommendations to a court that a child needs to be placed in the home of a substitute caregiver due to safety threats. The courts, not CPS, make the decision on whether to remove children from their parents. Likewise, the decision to return children to the homes from which they have been removed is a serious legal decision. Child welfare professionals must assess whether or not a family has succeeded in eliminating safety threats so a child may return home.

Children’s Administration puts in place safety plans designed to control and manage safety threats when children are returned to parental care and to prevent children from returning to out-of-home care.

In federal fiscal year 2013, 11.1 percent of children who had previously returned home came back into out-of-home care and 88.9 percent were able to remain safely at home for 12 months following reunification.



\*Of all children discharged from out-of-home care to reunification in the 12 month period prior to the year shown, the percent that did not re-enter out-of-home care within 12 months from the date of discharge. The federal standard is 90.1 percent, based on the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of all states reporting to AFCARS. Source: FamLink data submitted to AFCARS for Washington Child and Family Services Review Data Profile.

**Conclusion**

Children's Administration is the public child welfare system for Washington state and as such is held to very high standards for improving child safety, placement stability, and child and family well-being.

In addition to continuous quality improvement efforts designed to meet the requirements of federal, state, and judicial oversight entities, the Administration engages in ongoing self appraisal. Children's Administration workers are dedicated to doing the best possible work for vulnerable children not because of mandates but because it is the work to which we are committed.

Children's Administration will continue to engage in continuous quality improvement efforts and to increase research-based efforts to protect children and preserve families.