

# **Report to the Legislature**

## **Foster & Adoptive Home Placement**

RCW 74.13.031(2)

December 1, 2014

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## 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 in:

- (a) Meeting the need for adoptive and foster home placements;*
- (b) Reducing the foster parent turnover rate;*
- (c) Completing home studies for legally free children; and*
- (d) Implementing and operating the passport program required by RCW 74.13.285.*

The report shall include a section entitled "Foster Home Turn-Over, Causes and Recommendations."

During Fiscal Year 2014, CA activities related to recruitment and retention resulted in the following:

***(a) Meeting the need for adoptive and foster home placements:***

- There were 5,125<sup>1</sup> licensed foster homes during FY 2014, of which 1,076 were newly licensed.
- There were 1,156<sup>2</sup> licensed families of color foster homes at the end of FY 2014.
- 1,390<sup>3</sup> adoptions were finalized.

***(b) Reducing the foster parent turnover rate:***

- Continued statewide support services for foster parents through the recruitment and retention contract with Olive Crest, a licensed private agency headquartered in Bellevue with regional recruitment/liaison staff stationed across the state.

***(c) Completing home studies for legally free children:***

- Provided adoption home study services to 2,220<sup>4</sup> families during FY 2014, all of whom will have a home study completed prior to the adoption being finalized.

***(d) Implementing and operating the Passport Program:<sup>5</sup>***

- Implemented the Fostering Well-Being (FWB) program to improve healthcare services for children in out-of-home care.

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<sup>1</sup> Children's Administration Source FamLink Production Query Report (PQR) 863 - August 2014 Licensed Foster Homes

<sup>2</sup> Children's Administration Source FamLink PQR 863 - August 2014- Newly Licensed Foster Homes

<sup>3</sup> Children's Administration Source FamLink PQR 863- August 2014 - Adoptions Finalized

<sup>4</sup> Children's Administration Source FamLink PQR 863- August 2014 - Finalized Adoptions

<sup>5</sup> Passport is now called a Comprehensive Health Report

## Foster Family Recruitment

Children's Administration (CA) endeavors to continuously strengthen, improve and diversify recruitment efforts to seek potential foster and adoptive families. We continuously seek a diverse pool of safe, quality prospective families who reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in care, as well as families who are interested in caring for children of varying age, gender, large sibling groups and children with special developmental, behavioral or medical needs. The Children's leadership team emphasizes the message and belief that: "recruitment and support of foster families is everyone's business at Children's Administration."

Recruitment of prospective foster families is a complex, demanding and ongoing process. Recruitment opportunities and messages must be delivered frequently within the local community to maintain the message of the ongoing need for foster families. Potential foster families, who make an initial inquiry in response to a recruitment message, typically respond after they have seen/heard the recruitment message approximately seven times. Recruitment not only involves activities related to family finding; it must include the development of a positive public perception for the agency. Children's Administration policies and practices must also demonstrate our agency values to support caregivers' families to be successful in meeting the daily needs of the children they care for. CA and many other states focus much of their recruitment philosophy on the premise knowledge that satisfied and supported foster and adoptive parents make the best recruiters of other foster and adoptive parents.

Since October 2012, Children's Administration has maintained a statewide foster parent recruitment contract with Olive Crest, a licensed non-profit agency in Bellevue, Washington. The contract focuses on diligent recruitment of foster families across the state and developing an ample supply of foster families to meet the placement needs of children entering out-of-home care. The recruitment contract continues an emphasis with incentivized recruitment of:

- Newly licensed foster families, and
- Foster families who become licensed for:
  - Three or more siblings,
  - Youth ages 12 and older, and
- Foster families of Native American, African-American and Hispanic backgrounds.

Other areas of recruitment focus also include:

- Children with challenging emotional and behavioral difficulties;
- Children birth to 3;
- Medically fragile children;
- Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual, Transgender and Questioning children and youth;
- Both urban and rural areas; and

- Local neighborhoods where data shows the greatest number of children are removed from their families and placed in foster care.

CA's foster care recruitment and retention contract with Olive Crest brings a consistent statewide message delivered in each region of the state and utilizes local consultation to address recruitment needs within specific areas.

CA must maintain an adequate ratio of licensed foster care beds to children in licensed foster homes. The Braam settlement agreement requires that at least two beds will be available to safely place every child who comes into care. CA exceeded the benchmark for FY 2013, as it has done every year since 2001.

CA develops diligent recruitment planning together with Olive Crest "Fostering Together," based on a multi-dimensional recruitment strategy to encompass successful recruitment through ongoing general, targeted and child specific recruitment efforts. Recruitment efforts and messages are ongoing, culturally competent and tailored to meet the needs of children who cannot be placed with relatives and are being placed in out-of-home care.

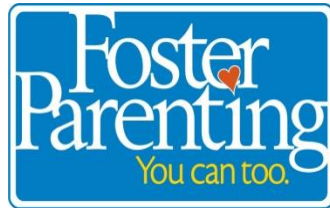
CA also has re-launched utilization of Recruitment, Development and Support (RDS) teams in each region. RDS teams built from the Annie E. Casey model of Family to Family, are multi-disciplinary in nature and engage the expertise of CA, Olive Crest Fostering Together, child placing agencies, the Alliance for Child Welfare, foster parents, community partners and stakeholders. RDS teams provide focus and direction to local teams in identifying recruitment needs based on the demographics of children entering care. Recruitment, development (training) and support services for foster families are closely linked; one supports and stimulates the other to encourage both recruitment of new families and retention of veteran foster families.

### **General Recruitment**

General recruitment shares information, builds interest and develops awareness of the need for foster families. It is most effective when shared with the local community with data on the number of children who currently need placement. General recruitment and awareness building draw in a wide variety of families while setting the stage for more targeted recruitment. General recruitment is most effective when used consistently in combination with other recruitment strategies.

During 2014, Children's Administration has increased recruitment messaging with the "Foster Parenting – You can too" slogan developed initially in 2007. It is utilized on the CA foster parent recruitment page and Facebook pages. It appears in agency brochures, pamphlets and other recruitment mediums. It is widely recognized in communities and continues to build upon a consistent and positive message about foster parenting around the state. A significant partnership was developed with Wagner's European Café and Bakery, of Olympia through the design and sales of a foster care recruitment cookie bearing the "Foster Parenting – You can too" message. Cookies were sold daily at the

bakery and at several locations. Recruitment material was made available and recruiters were on hand to answer questions. Twenty percent of the sales from this campaign went to support Camp To Belong. The success and replicability of this general recruitment effort is being shared across the state.



Olive Crest, Children’s contractor uses “Fostering Together – Our Community. . . Our Children” in conjunction with Children’s Administration logo in its recruitment work. Olive Crest also utilizes its Fostering Together website and 36 Facebook pages to enhance and support foster family recruitment and retention at <http://fosteringtogether.org>



### **National Foster Care Month and Recruitment Events**

Governor Jay Inslee recognized National Foster Care Month in Washington with a signed proclamation declaring May as Foster Care Month and recognized caregivers of children who live in out-of-home care. All three regions celebrated National Foster Care Month in May, hosting various events to honor and recognize foster parents with many foster parent appreciation events and dinners held across the state.

Washington’s signature Foster Care Month event “We Are Family” day was held for the 7th year at Safeco Field in partnership with the Seattle Mariners. On April 27, 2014, nearly 1,400 foster families gathered at Safeco Field to watch the Mariners beat the Texas Rangers. Assistant Secretary Jennifer Strus welcomed caregivers at the morning recognition ceremony and offered appreciation for their work and dedication in meeting the needs of the children in their care. Foster care alumni youth shared words of appreciation for their caregivers and one youth was selected to throw out the ceremonial first pitch. Foster families received discounted tickets for the game and were treated to a special visit by the Mariner Moose. Multiple giveaways were donated for the event including Mariners tee shirts and picture frames for everyone. Foster parents and relative caregivers were recognized by the Mariners during the game. Each year foster care agencies man recruitment booths during the game to bring awareness to the need for foster parents in each community of the state.

Statewide Spanish radio foster care recruitment broadcasts have continued in 2014 in partnership with the Commission on Hispanic Affairs through KDNA 91.9 FM. These efforts have been successful in sharing information in the Hispanic community of the need for more Hispanic and Spanish speaking foster parents. This successful effort will be continued in 2015.

A recruitment partnership was operationalized this year with the Washington State Office for Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH). Recruitment presentations occurred in four areas seeking prospective foster parents who are deaf and American Sign Language (ASL) proficient. Several families have become licensed and are in the pre-service training/licensing process. This effort will continue with additional recruitment presentations in the coming year.

Olive Crest Fostering Together continues as CA's statewide foster care recruitment and retention contractor. Twenty-eight recruiter/liaison staff are engaged across the state delivering recruitment activities through:

- General awareness building activities in communities
- Targeted activities focused on specific priority populations identified under the recruitment contract and,
- Child specific outreach for individually identified children.

### **General Recruitment**

General recruitment builds interest and awareness of the need for foster families across the state in regional areas and in local communities. This recruiting effort shares the message that foster families are needed in all areas for children of all ages and of diverse backgrounds. Examples include: media broadcasts, recruitment information at Seattle's Safeco Field, Olive Crest's coffee sleeves, library book markers and CA's newest recruitment flyer "Are You Ready to Make a Difference For Children in Your Community?" General recruitment sets the stage for more targeted recruitment efforts.

### **Targeted Recruitment**

Targeted foster care recruitment identifies unique needs of children or youth in need of foster families and implements specialized recruitment messages and strategies to identify prospective families. Effective targeted recruitment utilizes data to inform recruitment planning; looking at characteristics of current foster parents, their locations and children who are entering placement. Children's current contract with Olive Crest also adds a focus on communities or neighborhoods where the largest numbers of children have been removed from their homes. Targeted recruitment helps CA maintain children in their community or in the same school district when it is safe to do so for each child.

### **Child Specific Recruitment**

Child specific recruitment strategies are employed to help recruit foster, relative and adoptive families for specific children in foster care. These efforts require strong

partnership between the child's worker and the recruiter to coordinate information that can be shared about the child or youth without violating confidentiality. Child specific recruitment is most frequently used for older youth who have experienced multiple placement disruptions or for adoption recruitment planning.

Northwest Resource Associates (NWRA) manages all initial inquiries from families who express interest in foster parenting through the online website or through the 1-888-KIDS-414 statewide phone line. Approximately 300 electronic inquiries and 60 calls per month are routed through NWRA. This system routes each inquiry electronically to Olive Crest where the regional recruiter/liaisons make contact with each person within 24 business hours. Olive Crest's staff continues to provide twice a month contact with the prospective family through the recruitment, training and licensing process.

### **Communication with Caregivers**

Foster parents, relative caregivers, social work staff and community partners continue to be served by the Caregiver Connection. This newsletter is produced by CA. The Caregiver Connection, first issued in March 2005, is currently delivered electronically each month to over 7,000 subscribers and reaches about seventy-six percent of foster parents. It contains feature stories, information about policies, resources and help available to caregivers.

Olive Crest also utilizes online communication to share information with foster parents through their website, the Northwest Resource Associates data tracker system and their 36 established Facebook pages.

### **Support Groups**

Support groups remain the backbone of the caregiver support system. Most groups are facilitated by the foster parent recruiter liaisons with Olive Crest, and some operate independently. The groups provide time for networking, training, sharing of resources and advice and are community based. Veteran foster parents mentor newer foster parents, sharing information and their experiences with caregivers new to the group. They help inform and support new caregivers on behavioral/emotional issues presented by children.

Olive Crest utilizes closed Facebook support groups that are secure for the groups participating. They are monitored by Olive Crest staff and offer a significant opportunity for foster families to gain information and support for the children placed with them. Veteran foster parents also share their knowledge, supports and skills in these discussions. Resources, information, social connections and respite care are shared among the participants. Olive Crest currently operates 107 in-person or online support groups under the contract with Children's Administration.

### **Foster Home Recruitment Challenges**

Washington, as most states, continues to be challenged in recruiting an adequate supply of quality, safe and nurturing foster families who can meet the diverse needs of children



and youth who must enter out-of-home care. Factors that impact foster care recruitment in Washington state and other states nationwide are:

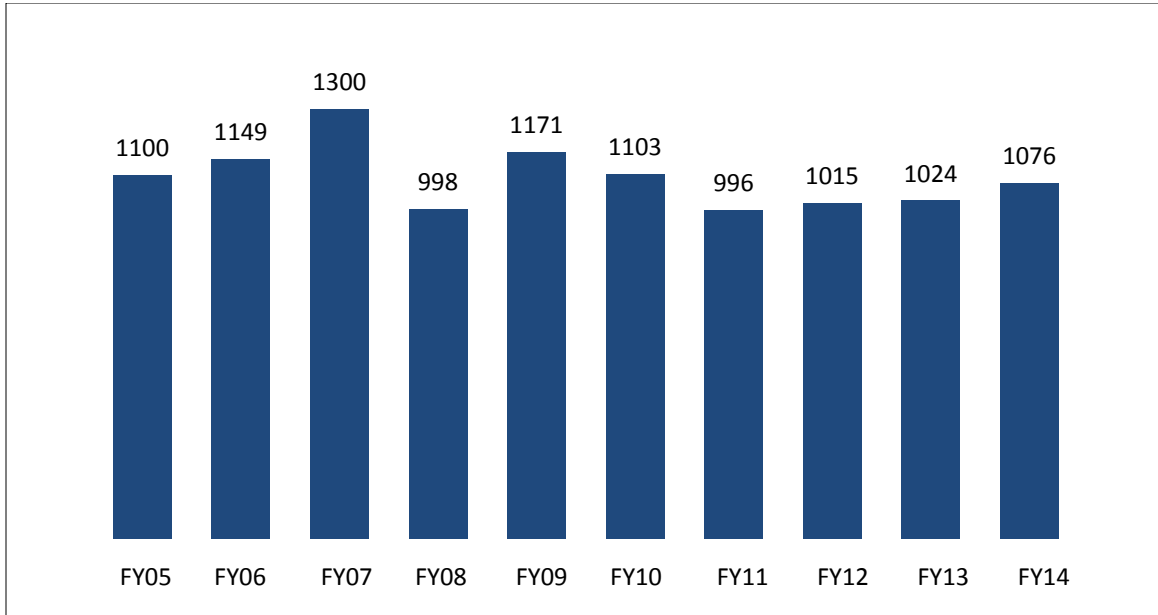
- Children in out-of-home care now present with more difficult and challenging behaviors and issues.
- Foster parents today are asked to take on more responsibilities than in previous years. Foster parents in the past were recruited as substitute care providers. Today, foster parents are considered important members of the child's professional team, their information about the child is valued and they are often asked or encouraged to:
  - Meet with the social service specialist and other professionals working with the child,
  - Provide transportation for the child,
  - Help with regular visitation for siblings and/or parent(s),
  - Attend multiple staffings and give input,
  - Attend the child's court hearings and provide a written report.
- Individuals or families may be reluctant to take on additional responsibilities of raising children if they are uncertain about their own job or economic status.
- In the past, many foster families became licensed and served as foster parents for extensive periods of time; many foster families today become licensed for a "reason" or a "season." Some may not serve as long because they become licensed:
  - As a "foster/adoptive" family;
  - For a specific child or sibling group; or for a relative child;
  - Only to provide respite care for other foster parents.

Once the permanent plan for the child is completed, these foster parents typically close their license.

- An average of seventy percent of children adopted from foster care are adopted by licensed foster parents (this includes relatives who were licensed). Adoption is a positive outcome for children, but also presents a challenge for placement resources as a majority of Washington's foster parents often leave the system when the adoption is complete.

In FY 2014, 1,076 new foster homes were licensed by the Division of Licensed Resources and by private child placing agencies in Washington.

**NEWLY LICENSED FOSTER HOMES BY STATE FISCAL YEAR<sup>6</sup>**

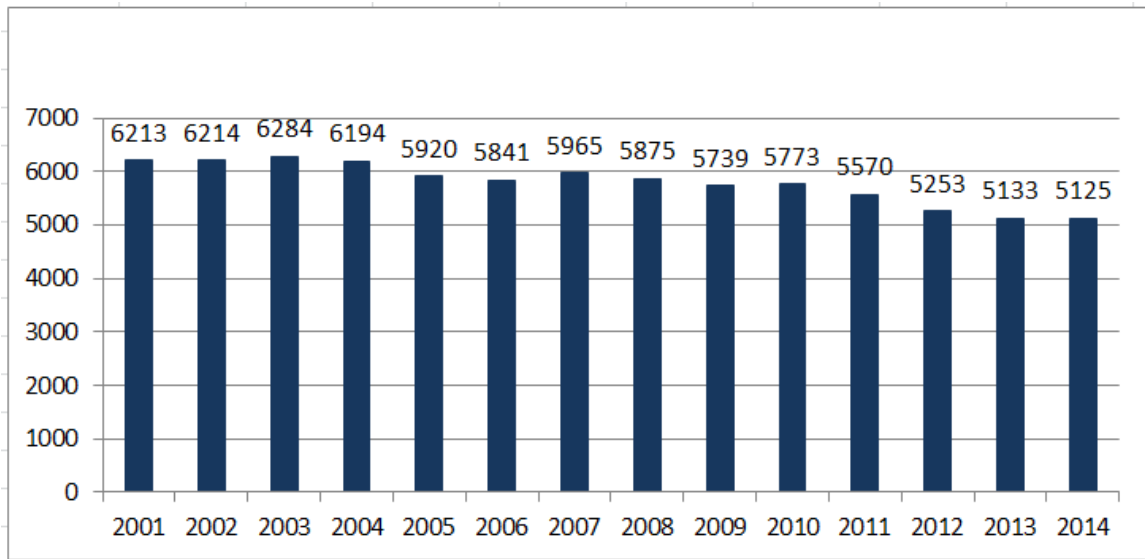


<sup>6</sup> Data after SFY09 updated 8/4/14. Source: FamLink Production Data Warehouse. Data includes DLR licensed, adoptive home and other provider types. Counts identify first foster home license date where application was not incomplete or withdrawn.

## Foster Home Turn-Over: Causes & Recommendations DLR

There continues to be an overall downward trend in the total number of licensed foster homes in Washington over the last decade. This trend is likely associated with a push toward permanency for children in care, changes in the economy and increases in relative placements. The table below represents the total number of foster homes licensed at the end of the state fiscal year.

**TOTAL LICENSED FOSTER HOMES BY FISCAL YEAR<sup>7</sup>**



### Retention

The chart on the next page shows the retention of homes remaining licensed since 2005. Licensed foster home attrition has shown a consistent pattern over many years. The number of homes continuing licensure from year to year remains very high until Year Three, when there is a significant decline between Year Three and Year Four. This is tied to the fact that the licensing period is three years. Many families close at renewal if the children in their home achieve permanency or no longer require out-of-home care. We do know that the top precursors to families closing their license is due to adoption, family moves or a specific child for whom the family was licensed is no longer in care.

<sup>7</sup> Children's Administration Source FamLink PQR 863- August 2014 – Total Licensed Foster Homes

## LICENSED FOSTER HOME RETENTION BY YEAR FIRST LICENSED<sup>8</sup>

FY05	FY06	FY07	FY08	FY09	FY10	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14
<b>1100</b>	1039	887	721	472	388	330	214	168	146
<b>100.0%</b>	94.5%	80.6%	65.5%	42.9%	35.3%	30.0%	19.5%	15.3%	13.3%
	<b>1149</b>	1098	946	798	462	367	297	194	167
	<b>100.0%</b>	95.6%	82.3%	69.5%	40.2%	31.9%	25.8%	16.9%	14.5%
		<b>1300</b>	1227	1062	879	482	385	325	217
<b>Legend</b>		<b>100.0%</b>	94.4%	81.7%	67.6%	37.1%	29.6%	25.0%	16.7%
1st yr			<b>998</b>	961	830	684	380	316	268
2nd yr			<b>100.0%</b>	96.3%	83.2%	68.5%	38.1%	31.7%	26.9%
3rd yr				<b>1171</b>	972	854	705	389	325
4th yr				<b>100.0%</b>	83.0%	72.9%	60.2%	33.2%	27.8%
5th yr					<b>1103</b>	1071	930	787	413
6th yr					<b>100.0%</b>	97.1%	84.3%	71.4%	37.4%
7th yr						<b>996</b>	962	839	678
8th yr						<b>100.0%</b>	96.6%	84.2%	68.1%
9th yr							<b>1015</b>	<b>983</b>	<b>864</b>
10th yr							<b>100.0%</b>	96.8%	85.1%
								<b>1024</b>	995
								<b>100.0%</b>	97.2%
									<b>1076</b>
									<b>100.0%</b>

There are expected reasons for license closure and they are important in understanding retention challenges. These reasons include:

- The foster parent completes the adoption or guardianship of a child in his/her home.
- The specific child the foster parent became licensed to care for has returned home.
- The foster parent's personal goals change (e.g. illness, job change, death in the family, family commitments, etc.).
- The foster parent did not respond to renewal notices and the foster home license is subsequently closed.
- A move or change in employment.

Reasons for license closure that CA seeks to address include:

- Frustration with the child welfare system; and
- Challenges in coping with child behavior.

<sup>8</sup> Counts after SFY08 updated 8/04/14. Source: FamLink Production Data Warehouse. Data include DLR licensed, adoptive home and other provider types. Counts identify first foster home license date where application was not incomplete or withdrawn.

Children's Administration uses two key strategies to address these issues:

- 1) Increased and Enhanced Foster Training through Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence, partnership with the University of Washington and Eastern Washington University. Currently there is a partnership between the Alliance and Children's Administration. A new caregiver curriculum has been developed to respond to the training needs of caregivers and this curriculum was implemented in April 2014. Core competencies were established and a new training policy was developed in response to caregiver's needs for both pre-service and in-service training. The curriculum also strongly encourages an experiential component prior to licensure. Workgroup members included key stakeholders, including Alliance staff, the Division of Licensed Resources, foster parent caregivers, a representative of the Foster Parent Association of Washington State and private agency staff. Initial feedback has been enthusiastic from trainees which include licensed providers as well as unlicensed caregivers.
- 2) Support, through recruitment and retention contract providers, quarterly statewide 1624 meetings and annual foster parent survey results.

New administrative rules were also written and are currently in the rules process, concerning licensing requirements for foster families. The intent of the new proposed rules was to simplify the requirements for licensed foster families while maintaining health and safety standards for children and youth in out-of-home care. Foster parents will be more able to find necessary information and will be more easily able to understand and interpret them. DLR completed usability tests of the new rules with a group of foster parents (as well as public and private agency staff) and determined that foster parents were able to find information in half the time it took them to locate information in the old rules and were more accurate in their understanding. The focus groups were very positive about this version of the rules; they felt they were far more approachable and practical for the foster families in Washington state.

#### **Children's Administration Foster Parent Consultation Team**

The Children's Administration Foster Parent Consultation Team (CAFPT) also known as the 1624 Team continues meetings on a quarterly basis. The team is composed of CA staff appointed by the Children's Administration Assistant Secretary and regionally elected foster parents and representatives from the Foster Parents' Association of Washington State (FPAWS). In October 2014, the team completed seven years of consultation work. The CAFPT was established in response to ESHB 1624 enacted in 2007. Foster parents and regional leadership from Children's Administration continue to meet quarterly in two locations within each region (mirroring the old six regions) to ensure the foster parent voice is heard in all areas throughout the state related to foster parent recruitment, retention and services to foster children. At the regional meetings, identified topics with statewide impact are moved forward for discussion and appropriate action at the quarterly statewide CAFPT meeting. The quarterly statewide CAFPT meetings are convened through video/teleconference.

Two monthly conference calls debrief and clarify issues from the last meeting and build the agenda for the upcoming meeting.

CAFPT meetings focus on identified issues to improve recruitment and retention of foster homes, effective foster parent training, enhancing children's lives in care and the commitment to strengthen communications between foster parents and CA and to identify and resolve issues of concern. Highlights of the 2014 CAFPT team include:

- Children's continued maintenance and regular updates of the online listing of all social service specialists and supervisors' telephone and email contact information.
- Development of informational articles to instruct foster parents when challenges occur if the foster child's ProviderOne card wasn't available; children were refused in medical specialty offices or medical providers insisted foster parents sign payment obligation forms.
- Distribution of cutout wallet cards through the Caregiver Connection to help foster parents if pharmacists have questions or are unwilling to fill prescriptions for foster children.
- Foster parents received information and support when caring for a developmentally disabled child and the coordination of services between Children's Administration and the Developmental Disabilities Administration.
- Visitation provider's contracts were modified to provide clearer information on what information can be reported to foster parents after a child's visit.
- Sharing updates on the Prudent Parent Legislation and the development of Caregiver Guidelines.
- Reminders for social service staff about responding timely to caregivers were made at the Children's State Supervisor Conference in July 2014.
- Recommendations for greater utilization of the Caregiver Connection, the Foster Parent Listserv and the Fostering Together Facebook pages to update and inform caregivers on important issues or changes.

Information and materials from the CAFPT meetings are disbursed to foster parents across the state through the regional representatives, the Caregiver Connection, Foster Parent Listserv, Olive Crest liaisons, foster parent support groups and the Olive Crest Facebook pages.

Including the regional and statewide meetings and conference calls, 36 meetings are planned for CA consultation with foster parents during State Fiscal Year 2015.

### **Camp To Belong**

Children's Administration continues to work with its contractor, Foster Family Connections to offer Camp To Belong (CTB) each year in August at Miracle Ranch in Port Orchard. Camp To Belong is a nonprofit camp that provides a five-day summer camp experience for siblings separated from each other due to foster care or other out-of-home care arrangements. The Washington camp is part of a national Camp To Belong

network operated throughout the United States and Australia. The events at camp are designed to increase bonding between siblings to keep them connected in what will likely be their longest life relationship. Children's Administration provides key financial and administrative support to help reconnect the siblings at the camp. Foster Family Connections provides camp administration, logistical support and raises private money to help fund camp activities. In 2014, Washington had 100 slots for campers, with 88 children attending camp. National Camp To Belong founder Lynn Price attended Washington's camp this year participating with the youth and sharing her story of separation from her sibling as a youth. The Camp To Belong website can be found at: <http://camptobelong.org/camp-locations/camp-to-belong-washington/>

### **Summary of Recruitment and Retention Activities**

Recruiting and retaining a pool of diverse, safe, caring, quality licensed foster families is a daily and ongoing commitment of Children's Administration and our contractor, Olive Crest Fostering Together. Various recruitment efforts occur on a regular basis across the state in collaboration with local staff, Olive Crest, child placing agencies and community partners in child welfare. Recruitment efforts are developed to be responsive to the local community. Recruitment of foster parents is challenged by a number of factors: fewer stay-at-home parents coupled with families who lead complex and busy lives, continued lack of knowledge about the need for foster parents in each local community, assumptions about lack of qualifications and apprehension about the emotional and financial costs of investing in children as a volunteer. For many prospective families, there simply is a lack of awareness about the need for more foster families. Foster parent recruitment efforts are delivered across the state and to each community. Together with strong support from current foster parents, these efforts create a multi-pronged strategy for successful foster care recruitment and retention.

## **Adoption Recruitment**

On average, seventy percent of children in foster care in Washington who are adopted are adopted by their foster parents. Adoption is a social and legally permanent measure for children that provides a lifetime commitment; it is not a temporary arrangement between individuals. Adoption for many is not an easy journey; it comes with many unanswered questions, good intentions and is not for everyone. CA staff must have the skills to delicately handle difficult issues and in some cases assist families to understand that love is not enough and that perhaps adoption is not the best plan for them. Adoptive parents must go through an assessment that is very thorough and requires dealing with difficult issues in order for the adoption home evaluator to determine the fitness of the applicant (RCW 26.33.190).

There are many factors to consider when choosing a family that can “best meet the needs of a child” on a lifetime basis. It requires:

- Keeping the best interests of the child as the focal point;
- Making placement decisions with known and available information;
- Critically assessing a family’s willingness and ability to meet the child’s needs, not their own needs; and
- Making placement decisions that are in the best interests of the child both now and in the future.

Not all families are able to be an adoptive resource for children. Prospective adoptive families must have an approved pre-placement (adoptive home study) report prior to being considered as an adoptive family. Department staff use many tools and critical thinking to make a recommendation of approved or denied. Using shared planning, the department makes critical assessments regarding the best interest of the child and prospective families.

### **Adoption Recruitment Activities**

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

As of July 31, 2014, there were 1,417<sup>9</sup> legally free children with a permanent plan of adoption. Over half of these children are in placement with a permanent adoptive family and are awaiting finalization of their adoption.

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<sup>9</sup> Children’s Administration Source: FamLink PQR 863 August 2014 Legally Free Children



## **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 three 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 those for whom an adoption consortium does not result in a match, adoption exchanges are used.

## **Local and National Adoption Exchanges**

The Children's Administration contracts with the Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE) to provide adoption recruitment through the use of local and national adoption exchanges. The Washington Adoption Resource Exchange (WARE) is a Washington state only recruitment resource. WARE provides a secure website that is password protected for CA staff and private adoption agency staff to recruit and match children with approved adoptive families. This website provides current information on children in need of an adoptive family and on approved adoptive families. In 2013, WARE launched an online registration form to streamline the WARE child registration process.

The children listed on the WAREKids website include children where concurrent planning is occurring and those who may not yet be legally available for adoption. CA staff are required to register all children who have a permanent plan of adoption and are not in an identified adoptive home.

During FY 2014 there were 144<sup>10</sup> new children registered with WARE. During this past year, 72<sup>11</sup> children registered with WARE were placed with permanent families.

Children who are registered with WARE for approximately 90 days and are legally free are registered with the Northwest Adoption Exchange website [www.nwae.org](http://www.nwae.org) which provides recruitment on a national level. NWAE served 212<sup>12</sup> children throughout the fiscal year; this number fluctuates as new children are registered. At the end of the fourth quarter, 49<sup>13</sup> children were placed with permanent families, 54<sup>14</sup> are on hold with potential pending placements and 125<sup>15</sup> children are still in need of matching with a family. The majority of the children registered on the exchange are older with only 40 of the 125 active children under the age of 11 and 85 children ages 12 years and older.

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<sup>10</sup> Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2014

<sup>11</sup> Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2014

<sup>12</sup> Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2014

<sup>13</sup> Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2014

<sup>14</sup> Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2014

<sup>15</sup> Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2014

### **Child Specific Recruitment**

Children's Administration contracts with NWAE to provide comprehensive recruitment activities for children who need an adoptive family and for whom other recruitment activities have not been successful. NWAE subcontracts with six to seven private child placing agencies forming a partnership to provide this child specific recruitment program known as Specialized Adoption Recruitment Program (SARP).

Child-specific recruitment includes gaining a full understanding of the child's needs through discussion with the current and past caregivers including relatives to determine if they might be a resource for the child. Focused, individualized and persistent recruitment can and does work for children who are considered the hardest to place.

In FY 2014, 23<sup>16</sup> children were enrolled in the program, 5<sup>17</sup> children were placed with adoptive families, 10<sup>18</sup> children are still waiting to be matched with a family and 7<sup>19</sup> children were withdrawn at the request and/or in consultation with social service specialists.

Child-specific recruitment continues to increase the probability of finding a permanent adoptive family for children where regular recruitment methods have failed.

### **Purchase of Service**

The Purchase of Service (POS) program is a successful means to pay for post-placement supervision for hard to place children placed with adoptive families until the adoption is finalized. The POS program was designed in the late 1980s and provides funding to private agencies in and out of Washington state to offset the cost of recruitment, training, transitioning and supervision of adoptive placements for eligible children. This program is considered adoption recruitment and is IV-E reimbursable. Child eligibility is in part based upon WARE registration and the length of time the child is registered prior to identification and placement with an adoptive family.

CA develops individual contracts for each eligible child. Contracts are outcome-based and allow for two payments, one for the adoptive placement and one for the finalization of the adoption. If a child disrupts from the placement, the second payment is not paid.

In FY 2014, 51 children were referred to the program which resulted in 39 child specific contracts for adoptive placements. Twenty-nine children have had their adoption finalized during the fiscal year and four children were moved to new homes. There are currently 20 children with pending adoption finalization.

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<sup>16</sup> Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2014

<sup>17</sup> Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2014

<sup>18</sup> Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2014

<sup>19</sup> Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2014

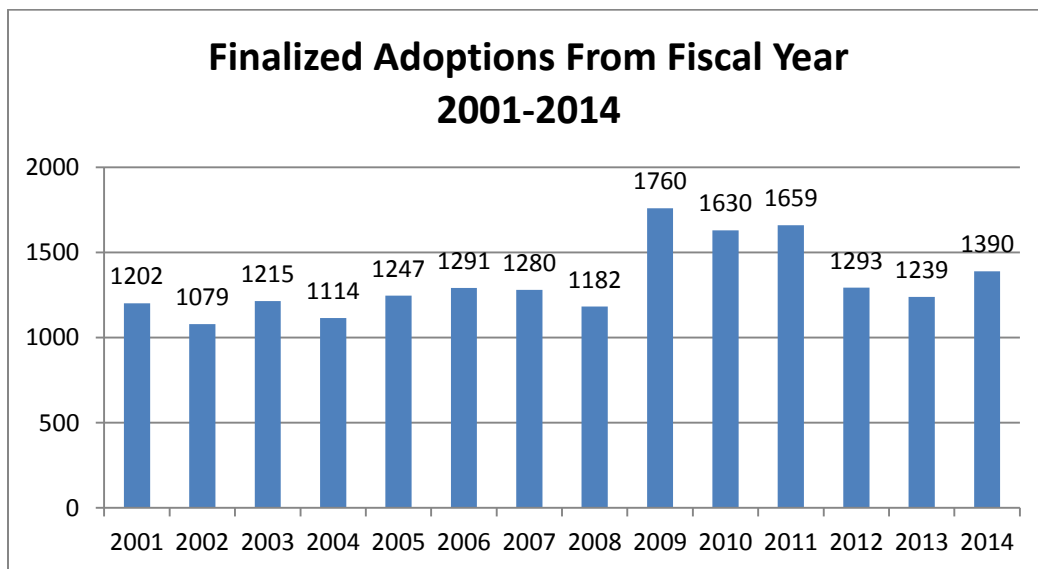
In 2014, the Purchase of Service program was expanded to pay for the completion of adoption home studies and adoption home study updates by private agencies based upon specific program criteria. The eligibility requirements include:

- The family was licensed prior to September 2012;
- The family has been identified as the adoptive family by the DCFS worker;
- The child has been in the adoptive home for at least three months; and
- The Division of Licensing Resources is unable to complete the home study or adoption update.

The expansion of the POS program has assisted in facilitating adoption for families where the cost of a new home study was prohibiting finalization. Three families have had adoptive home studies completed or updated since this program was initiated.

## Finalized Adoptions

The Children's Administration continues to make every effort to establish permanency for children unable to return to the care and custody of their birth parents. That permanency is achieved through adoption, third party custody and guardianships with foster parents or relatives. Permanency through adoption was established for 1,390 children in the care and custody of CA during Fiscal Year 2014. Between 2009 and 2011, Children's Administration focused on establishing permanency for children, which resulted in a high number of adoptions as this goal was accomplished. The number of finalized adoptions for 2012 and 2013 is consistent with the numbers from 2001-2008, prior to that permanency push. In 2014, Children's Administration focused a three month period on finalizing permanency options for children. This included contracting with private agencies for backlogged home study completion and a temporary increase in field staff to assist in addressing high case numbers. The result is reflected in the increase in adoptions for 2014.



There continues to be a high number of legally free children (1,417) in need of permanency even though CA continues to complete over 1,000 adoptions annually. Reasons for legally free children remaining in out-of-home care are:

- Current caregiver has been identified as a potential permanent family but an adoptive home study has not been completed or updated.
- Child and family may need services to stabilize a placement prior to finalizing an adoption.
- Prospective adoptive family is not willing and/or able to meet the specific needs of a child and a new placement needs to be identified.

- The Child's Family Medical and Social Background disclosure with the adoptive family is time intensive and difficult to complete more quickly with current staffing.
- The change in legislation mandating that every child who has been legally free six months or longer will be appointed legal counsel has increased adoption workloads considerably. Overall, newly appointed attorneys are requesting discovery information even on cases with pending adoption finalization. Workers must complete the discovery request, which includes redacting the entire legally free case file, before the adoption can proceed.
- Though recruitment efforts are underway, a permanent family has not yet been identified for a child, youth or sibling group.
- Preparing and transitioning children into permanent adoptive families involves several factors, including:
  - Age of the child or youth;
  - Needs of the child (educational, medical, emotional);
  - Proximity of adoptive family to child's current placement; and
  - ICPC regulations and contracting issues.
- Children are not ready for adoption due to mental health and/or behavioral issues.
- It is more difficult to find a permanent family and requires more intense recruitment work to find an adoptive family for children with higher needs and issues (emotional or behavioral).
- Some youth and adoptive families are more frequently inquiring about the pros and cons of delaying adoption finalization in order to take advantage of newly publicized college assistance programs. The eligibility requirements for some programs are determined by the youth's age at time of adoption.
- There is a continual fluctuation in numbers as children achieve permanency through adoption and new children are becoming legally free.

### **Summary**

CA continues to focus on achieving permanency for children in foster care. There continued to be focus on permanency through adoption in FY 2014 that resulted in 1,390 children achieving permanency. The goal of the agency continues to be developing permanency plans that are in the best interests of a child. There have been several children in the past couple of years that have been waiting for adoption for several years and were able to finally have a family to call their own. Each child remains the central element in adoption decision making.

## Home Studies for Legally Free Children

The Children's Administration provides adoption services to many families throughout the year; the number of families receiving adoption services is determined by looking at a point in time in CA's electronic case management system. Some children are placed with adoptive families for whom services were provided through a private child placing agency either in Washington or in another state.

Adoption services provided by CA to adoptive families include:

- Completion of adoptive home studies, which requires a critical assessment of the family including:
  - Willingness and capacity to meet a child's needs;
  - Belief that a child will do well in life;
  - Understanding of the impact of positive day-to-day experiences can have on a child;
  - Character, suitability and fitness to parent a special needs child;
  - Recognition of their own limitations and challenges in parenting a special needs child; and
  - Openness to be flexible and seek out resources to meet needs of child and family.
- Child identification;
- Transition support for successful placement;
- Post-placement services to the child and family;
- Assistance with adoption finalization and application for adoption support.

Children's Administration has taken a unified approach to completion of home studies in order to maximize efficiency in the process and enhance customer service. Instead of the possibility of a relative home study, then subsequently a licensing home study for families choosing to be licensed, and then even further, an adoption home study if the family seeks to be a permanent resource, the Division of Licensed Resources completes a single home study exploring the potential for permanency for each applicant. This has enabled the department to examine the potential for permanency early on in a child's placement rather than finding that a home that may meet licensing standards may not be as suitable for permanency for a particular child or children. The department implemented this approach statewide in the fall of 2012 and continues to make improvements in the process.

The home study utilizes many tools to make a critical assessment and requires:

- Completion of pre-service training;
- Completion of criminal history background check including fingerprint check;
- Completion of child abuse and neglect check in and out of state when required;
- Completion of adoption paperwork; and
- References returned to the agency

# Fostering Well-Being Program

## Overview & History

The Fostering Well-Being (FWB) program is a collaborative effort between the Health Care Authority, the Aging and Disability Services Administration and Children's Administration. Fostering Well-Being uses a person-centered health model to address the comprehensive healthcare needs of children in out-of-home placement and better aligns the department's resources to improve health outcomes for these children.

## The Major Components to the Program

- Medical ID cards issued to all children in out-of-home placement within three working days of placement notification.
- Washington State Immunization Information System reports are mailed to caregivers within three working days of placement notification.
- Medical records requested for the last two years for all children in out-of-home placement for more than 30 days and uploaded into FamLink.
- Fostering Well-Being program managers and clinical nurse advisors are available for care coordination as well as consultation with social service specialists and caregivers regarding individual health questions and concerns.
- Six Regional Medical Consultants continue to be a vital link for social service specialists, caregivers and local medical communities.
- Healthcare reports mailed to caregivers of children under age 13 within three working days of initial placement notification. Early and Periodic Screening Diagnosis & Treatment (EPSDT) or Well-Child Exam reminder alerts are sent to social service specialists via FamLink.
- Health education materials mailed to caregivers for children with certain health conditions. A single nurse is assigned to oversee and coordinate healthcare of medically fragile children in foster care.
- Complete case reviews of medically fragile children to ensure they are connected to on-going and appropriate health care services that address their medically fragile conditions.
- In CY 2013, the Fostering Well-Being Care Coordination Unit provided services to 2,042 children.