

Report to the Legislature

Children's Administration
Annual Quality Assurance Report, Fiscal Year 2012
July 1, 2011 through June 30, 2012

RCW 43.20A.870 and RCW 74.13.031(5)

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Children's Administration Overview
Safe, healthy individuals, families and communities

The Children's Administration Quality Services Report is an annual, legislatively required review of the Administration's efforts to enhance child safety and permanency and to support child and family well-being.

This report, the 16th **Children's Services Annual Quality Assurance Report**, details performance outcome data in compliance with RCW 43.20A.870 and RCW 74.13.031 (5), in order to demonstrate progress in the following specific service areas.

Child Protective Services (CPS) response time

The Administration responds quickly to allegations of abuse or neglect and implements safeguards to 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 is charged with providing or overseeing the provision of services and supports throughout the public child welfare continuum of care. The roles of the Children's Administration include the following:

- 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 older youth transitioning out of foster care into responsible independent living.

The Administration continually tracks performance in all areas of service delivery and oversight in an effort to improve outcomes. This report addresses only a select set of measures as required by state law. Additional performance outcome information is available at www.dshs.wa.gov/ca/pubs/reports.asp.

Children’s Administration is accountable to the state legislature and to the public for continuing to improve the child welfare system. The Administration recognizes that no government entity alone can ensure the safety of children. Children’s Administration relies on mandated reporters such as community-based service providers, child serving agencies, 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 state’s federally mandated State Automated Child Welfare Information System, which in Washington is called **FamLink**.

Measures are reported by federal fiscal year, October 1, 2011 until September 30, 2012 as required by the federal Administration for Children and Families and by state fiscal year, July 1, 2011 until June 30, 2012 to meet state legislative requirements. The data source and reporting period are noted for each measure.

Performance measures in this report and summary of 2012 outcomes

The following measures are included in this report:

- Timely response in emergent referrals
Performance = 98.4%/GMAP¹ target= ≥ 97%
- Timely response in non-emergent referrals
Performance = 98.5%/GMAP target= ≥ 97%
- Children who did not experience recurrence of abuse
Performance = 94.2%/federal standard= ≥ 94.6%
- Children who are free from abuse or neglect while in out-of-home care
Performance = 99.87%/federal standard= ≥ 99.68%
- Foster homes receiving health and safety checks
Performance = 15.2%/RCW 74.13.260 target= ≥ 10%
- Children visited every month by the social worker
Performance = 97.2%/GMAP target= ≥ 95%
- Children reunified within 12 months of placement
Performance = 70.4%/federal standard= ≥ 76.2%
- Children adopted within 24 months of placement
Performance = 38.2%/federal standard= ≥ 32%
- Children in care for longer than two years
Percentage = 30.1%/previous year= 35.1%

¹ GMAP is the Government Measurement Accountability and Performance reporting system. The Washington state GMAP website is <http://www.accountability.wa.gov>

- Median number of days children are placed in care
Number of days = 465/previous year= 450
- Percentage of children re-entering care within 12 months of reunification
Performance = 13.8%/federal standard= \leq 8.6%

Safety

Goal: Children will be safe from abuse and neglect

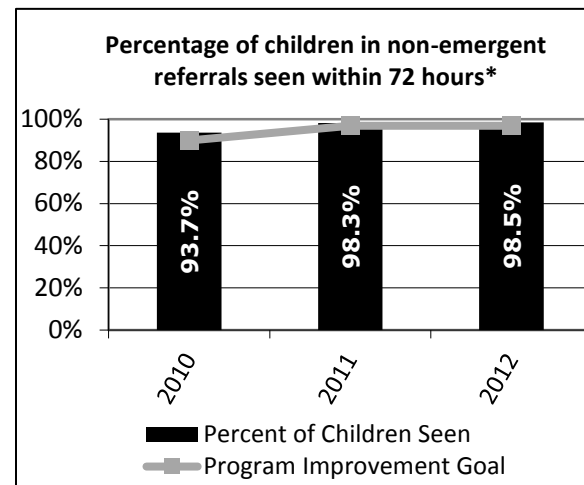
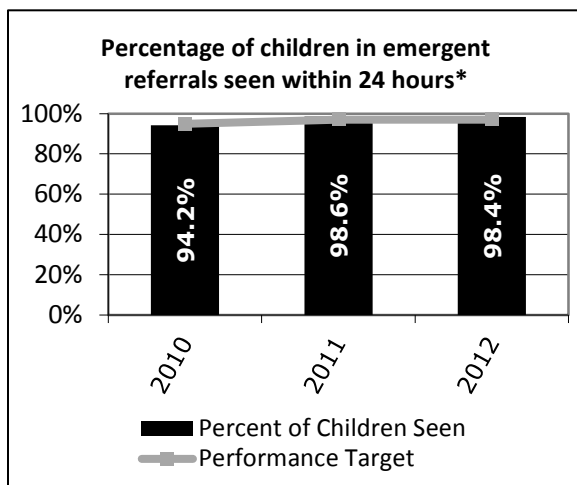
Objective: Initiate timely investigations

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

Any time 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 has occurred and if there is 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. Whenever a child or group of children meets the legal criteria for an emergent response or are 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.

During state fiscal year 2012, 98.4 percent of children in emergent referrals were seen within 24 hours. Of the children in non-emergent referrals, 98.5 percent were seen within 72 hours. Performance for both measures exceeded the Government Management Performance and Accountability (GMAP) target of 97 percent for the fiscal year.



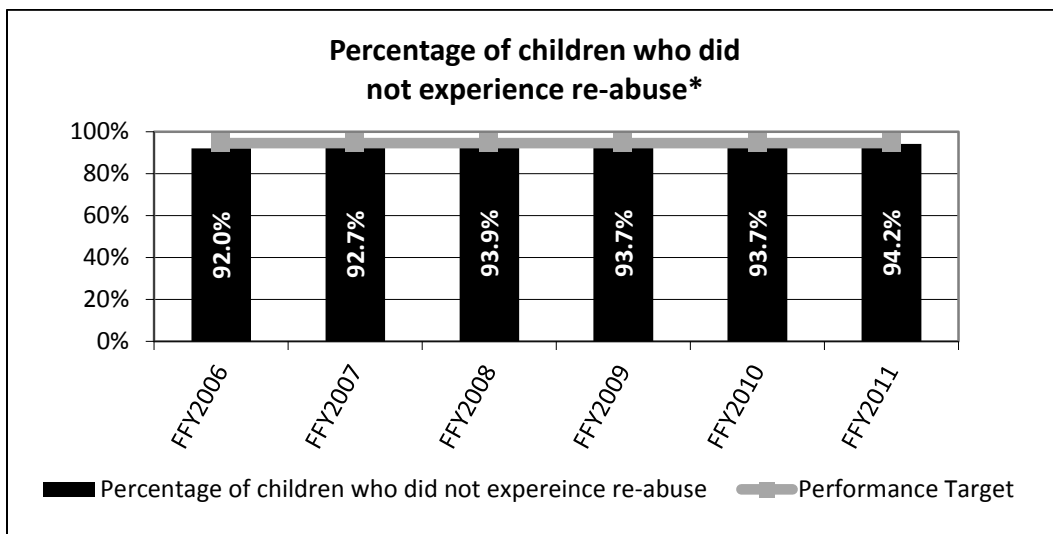
*Average annual percentage of children in emergent referrals seen or attempted within 24 hours. Excludes Division of Licensed Resources (DLR) CPS referrals. Source FamLink data for GMAP.

**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 for GMAP

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 a look back at performance in six-month and annual intervals. Because of the retrospective nature of this measure, the most current data available is for federal fiscal year 2011.

Under the federal standard, 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. Washington state has historically fallen short of the federal standard; however, performance in the most recent reporting period represents marked improvement and the highest percentage since tracking of this measure began.

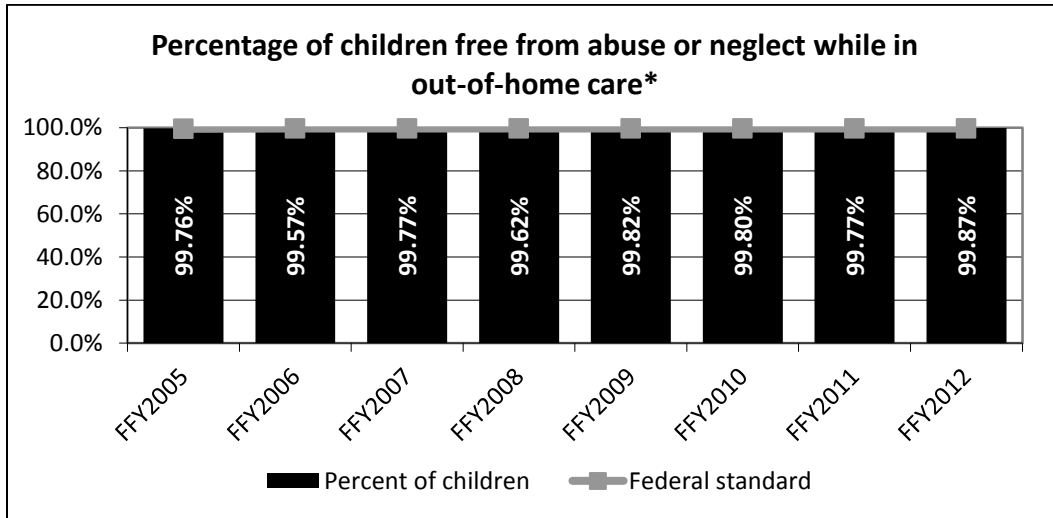


*Percentage of children with a founded referral of abuse or neglect who were free from an additional founded referral of abuse or neglect within six months of the initial referral. "Founded" means that an investigation concluded that the maltreatment was more likely than not to have occurred. For referrals 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.

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

The Children’s Administration works diligently to ensure that caregivers licensed to provide care for foster 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 state has always performed well on this outcome measure and continually strives to promote safety and stability for every child in licensed care.



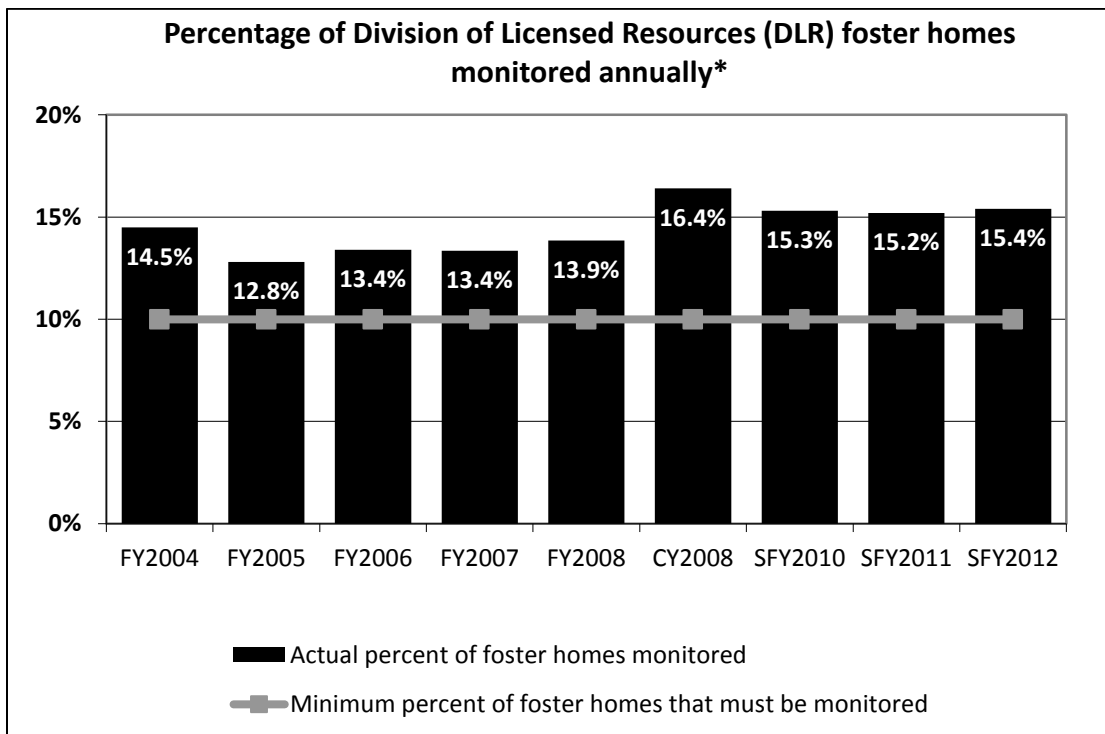
*Percent of children in out-of-home care without a founded referral of abuse or neglect annualized data; not unduplicated. The federal standard is 99.68% or more. Source: FamLink data.

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 ten 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 2012, 15.4 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 entirely surrounded by safety fences. Any 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. Data Source: FamLink

Objective: Increase worker visits with children

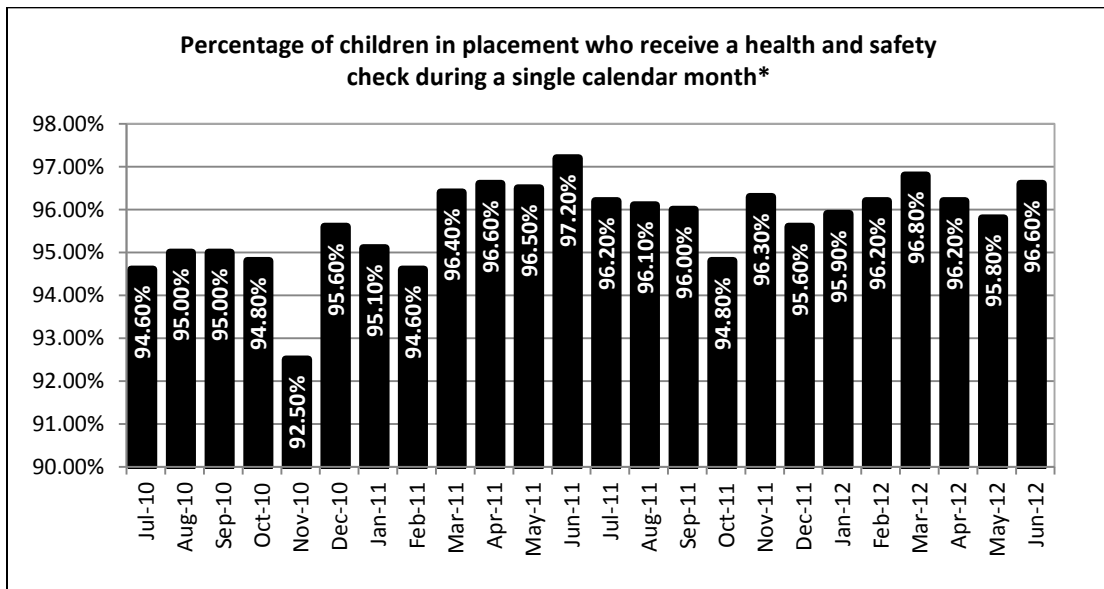
Measured by: Children visited every month by the social worker

In order to monitor the health and safety of children in out-of-home care, social workers must have contact with children on their caseloads in each calendar month.

Social 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 social 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 social workers often make additional contact with children through telephone calls, case staffings, court hearings and other personal visits.

This Government Management Accountability and Performance reporting (GMAP) measure requires that 95 percent of children in out-of-home care will receive a private and individual face-to-face health and safety visit at least once during the calendar month.

Social workers completed monthly visits with more than 95 percent of children in out-of-home placements in nearly every month of fiscal year 2012.



*Source: FamLink data for GMAP

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

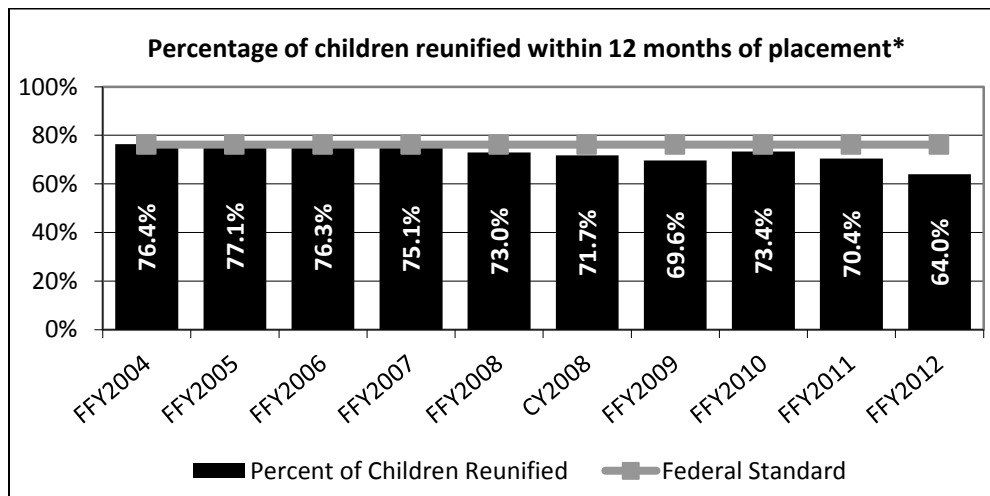
Measured by: Children reunified within 12 months of placement

The 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 has implemented the Child Safety Framework, which focuses on increasing child safety throughout the life of the case. This increased emphasis on child safety includes all decisions made from intake through permanency decisions, including the plan to return a child to his or her home. Implementation of new practices associated with the Child Safety Framework combined with reduced resources due to the economic recession have impacted timely reunification.

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

In federal fiscal year 2012, 64.0 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, representing a decline from the previous year.



*Percent of children reunified with their parents within 12 months of placement into out-of-home care. The federal standard is 76.2 percent or higher. Source Washington Child and Family Services Review Data Profile, Jan., 2013

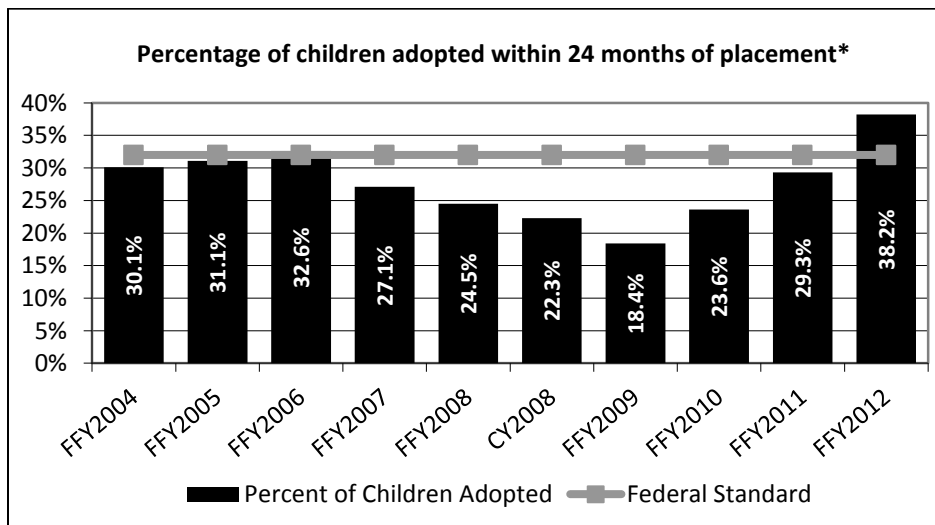
Objective: Increase permanency for children in out-of-home care
Measured by: Children adopted within 24 months of placement

Whenever it is safe and in the best interest of the children involved, the Children’s Administration strives to maintain children in their homes or 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 fail. Concurrent planning is designed to prevent children from extended foster care stays and to ensure that children have safe and stable permanent homes regardless of whether or not reunification is possible.

Additional efforts are often needed for some children for whom adoptive homes may be more challenging to identify. 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 foster 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 2012, 38.2 percent of children in Washington state were adopted within 24 months of placement. This is an increase of 8.9 percent from federal fiscal year 2011 and the highest timely adoption rate in the past seven years. This increase is attributed to a statewide targeted focus on permanency beginning in July 2011.

The Administration identified offices needing support to finalize adoptions and redistributed some staff resources to help with adoptions. The result of this targeted effort is an increase in adoption finalizations within 24 months of placement for federal fiscal year 2012.



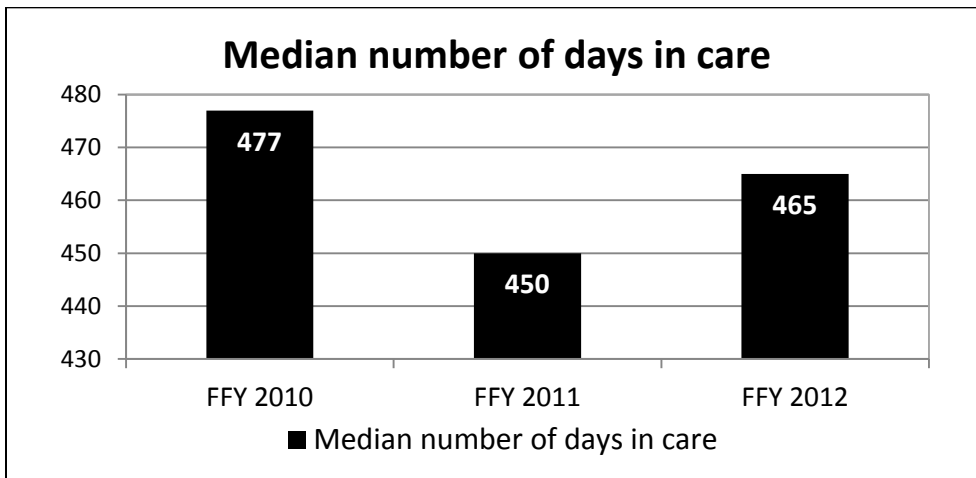
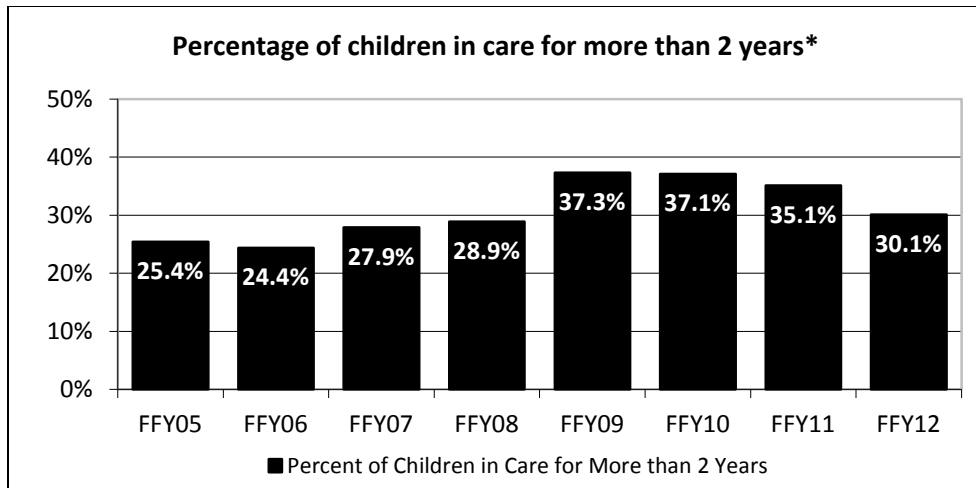
*Percent of children adopted within 24 months of placement into out-of-home care. The federal standard is 32% or higher. Source: Washington Child and Family Services Review Data Profile, Jan., 2013

Objective: Decrease length of stay without increasing reentry
Measured by: Length of stay greater 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.

Washington state showed a marked decrease in the percentage of children remaining in care for more than two years to 30.1 percent in the most recent reporting period.

The median length of stay measure indicates how many days a child spends in foster care. The median number of days children spent in out-of-home care showed an increase in the most recent reporting period of 465 days up from 450 days in federal fiscal year 2011.



*Children in care for longer 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 Washington Child and Family Services Review Data Profile, January, 2013.

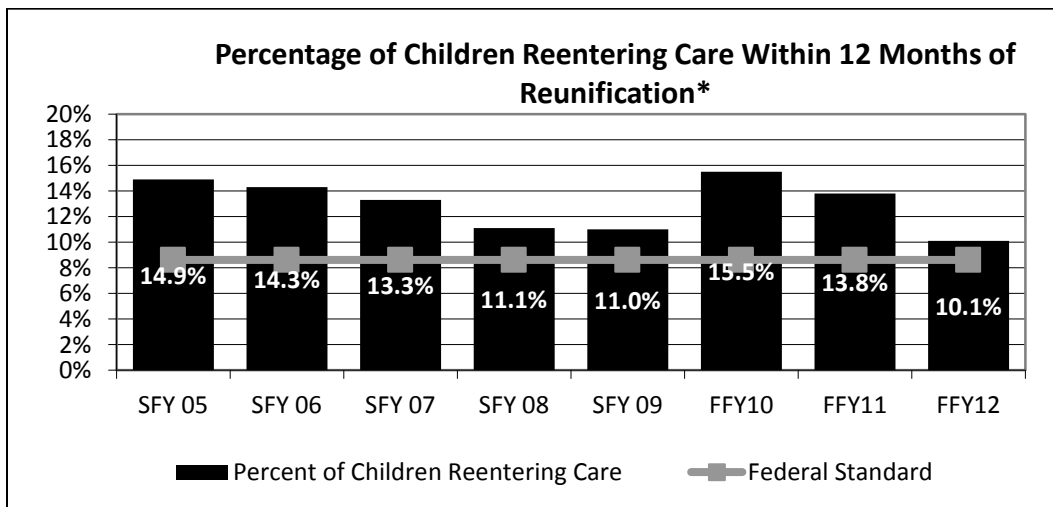
Objective: Decrease length-of-stay without increasing re-entry
Measured by: Children re-entering care

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 implements safety plans designed to control and manage safety threats when children are returned to parental care and prevent children from returning to foster care. Data reporting for this measure changed in 2010 for consistency with other permanency measures through the use of federally validated Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System data used in the Children’s Administration Child and Family Services Review data profile.

The federal standard requires that no more than 8.6 percent of children who have been returned home will come back into care for reasons of abuse or neglect. In federal fiscal year 2012, 10.1 percent of children who had previously returned home came back into foster care, a significant reduction compared to the previous year.



*Of all children discharged from foster care to reunification in the 12 month period prior to the year shown, the % that re-entered foster care in less than 12 months from the date of discharge. Source: Washington Child and Family Services Review Data Profile, Jan. 2013.

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 various federal, state, and judicial oversight entities, the Administration engages in ongoing self appraisal. Children's Administration and those who work for the agency are committed to doing the best possible work for vulnerable children not because of mandates but because it is the work we are committed to.

This legislative report tells a small piece of the Children's Administration story. It demonstrates that amid economic hardship and fewer resources, social workers exceeded performance standards on six of the nine measures that have performance standards and made progress on a number of remaining measures.

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