



Washington State Department of Social and Health Services

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# 2002 ECONOMIC SERVICES ADMINISTRATION PROVIDER SURVEY

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More than 1,840 individuals and agencies who provide services to clients of the DSHS Economic Services Administration<sup>1</sup> (ESA) responded to a recent DSHS survey. They reported that most DSHS staff are courteous and respectful, and cited a number of areas of satisfaction and dissatisfaction – as well as numerous suggestions for improvement. The greatest number of both positive and negative comments concerned communication. Providers also frequently mentioned processes, staff attributes, overall helpfulness and resources.

## COURTESY AND RESPECT

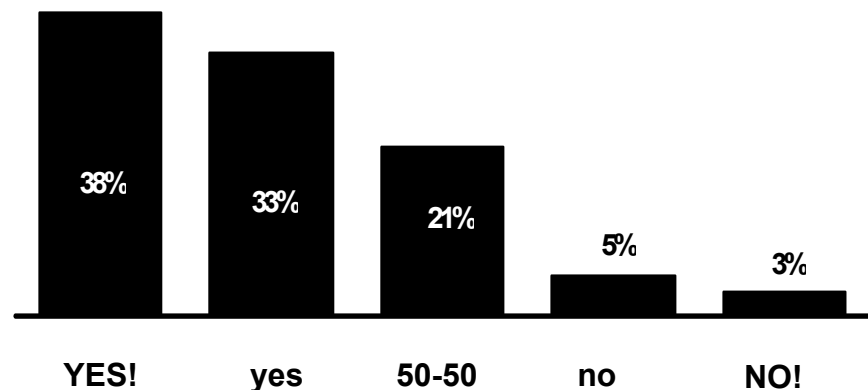
Most providers reported that they were treated with courtesy and respect by DSHS staff:

### Question:

Do DSHS staff treat you with courtesy and respect?

### Answer:

Seven out of ten ESA providers said that they were treated with courtesy and respect. Less than nine percent disagreed.



**Differences by Type of Provider.** In most ESA provider groups about two out of three providers answered “YES!” or “yes,” indicating that they were treated with courtesy and respect. The small group of providers who perform psychological evaluations were the most satisfied; more than nine out of ten of these forty-one providers felt they are treated with courtesy and respect. Eighty-seven providers did not answer this question because they don’t deal with DSHS staff.

<sup>1</sup> This study surveyed Economic Services Administration providers paid through the SSPS payment system. It includes the majority of ESA providers. The study did not include providers paid through the standard state voucher system. A similar study of ESA providers paid through the state voucher system will be released in 2003.

The table below shows the percentage of respondents in each provider group reporting they were treated with courtesy and respect.

Service Provided by Respondent	# Responding	% Yes*
Childcare - Licensed	1135 (62%)	71%
Childcare – in child’s home or by relative	492 (27%)	67%
Medical evaluation (includes disability/incapacity)	72 (4%)	71%
Psychological evaluation	41 (2%)	93%
Other	29 (2%)	82%
More than One Type of Service	27 (1%)	74%
Service not specified	47 (3%)	64%

\*Answer to “Do DSHS staff treat you with courtesy and respect?”  
87 respondents did not answer this question.

### PROVIDERS SPEAK OUT

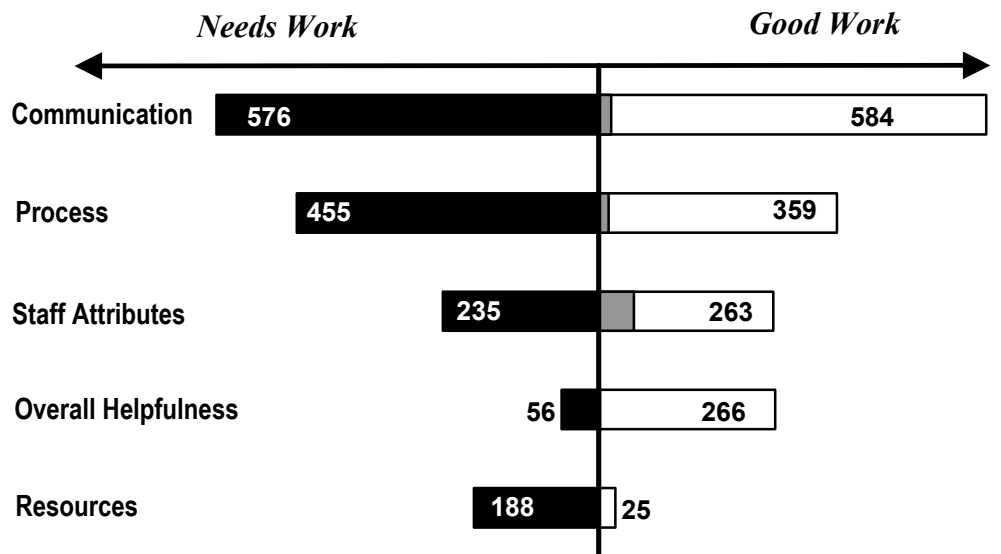
The survey asked two open-ended questions:

- *What does DSHS do well?*
- *What could DSHS do better?*

Providers’ answers gave valuable insight into areas of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The table below shows the five major issues identified and the number of providers who made positive comments (Good Work), and critical comments or suggestions for improvement (Needs Work). A small number gave neutral or mixed responses (in gray).

**Providers were asked two questions**

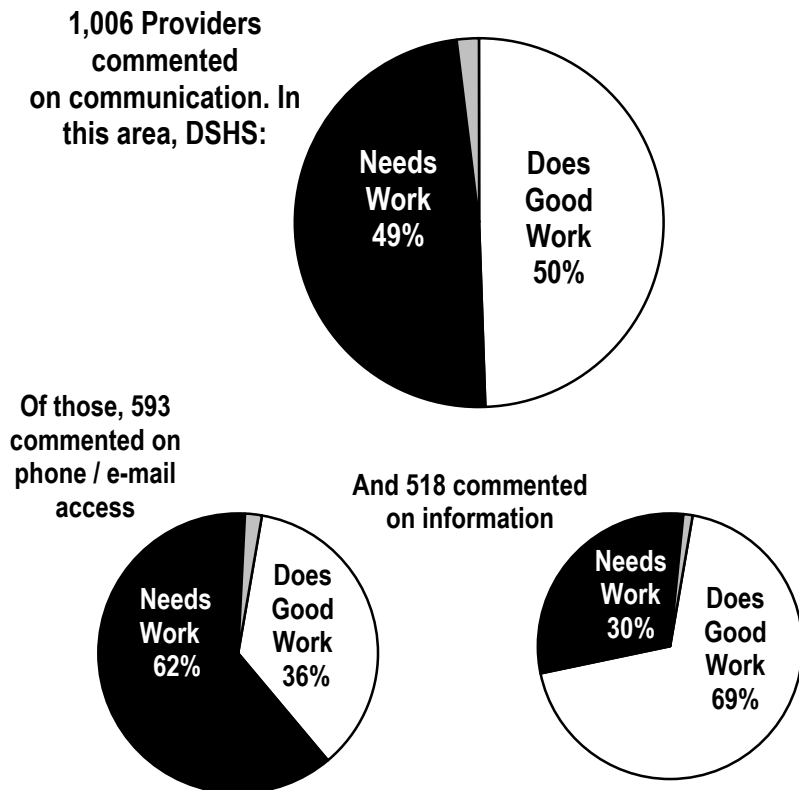
**They identified FIVE major issues:**



## COMMUNICATION

Over half (1,006) of the 1,843 respondents mentioned communication.<sup>2</sup> About one-half of these comments were complaints or suggestions for improvement; one-half were positive comments about communicating with DSHS. Communication comments have two main sub-categories:

- **Information.** How well DSHS staff provided accurate and timely information and answered questions.
- **Phone or e-mail access.** How easy it is to contact DSHS staff via phone and e-mail.



**What DSHS does well:** Most providers were happy with answers to questions. Some praised call centers and staff who answer the phone, return calls, and give helpful information.

**What DSHS could do better:** The biggest source of discontent was DSHS responsiveness; respondents asked for more returned calls, direct line to staff, and shorter hold times. Many would like better information about how the system works and about client status (approval, termination, approved days). Some were unhappy with employees who do not listen, though most were clear that only some DSHS staff are poor listeners.

*“Call center staff is good, but staff never seem all to be on the same sheet of music.”*

*“Many questions and changes can be resolved with just a phone call.”*

*“When I call with only one question they are most helpful. More than one question and they become frustrated.”*

*“Local CSO is very willing to give us information by telephone...they seem to understand the challenges providers face when accepting DSHS funding.”*

*“Most of the time they kind of help, but we are always the last to know anything.”*

*“When new staff do not know the answers they ask knowledgeable staff and call back.”*

*“Could have more employees for phone calls...maybe a separate phone number for providers.”*

*“Every time I call I get a different answer to my questions and the last time it caused me to be overpaid. Now I am treated like a criminal!”*

*“When I finally get through the automated stuff, I have to sit on hold for over 10 minutes! When I have children here that’s way too long.”*

<sup>2</sup> Some providers made both positive and negative comments on the same issue. Often they also commented on more than one subcategory of a major issue. Thus, one cannot total the subcategories to calculate the total number of providers commenting on a particular issue.

*“Through the years I’ve lost thousands of dollars by parents or caseworkers not doing their paperwork.”*

*“Payments are timely, paperwork is easy.”*

*“Sends notices in January that November and December of the previous year will not be covered after all.”*

*“I appreciate how much faster we get our checks now and Invoice Express is great!”*

*“I think DSHS is a pain to bill - too many nit-picky things have to be done to get claims paid.”*

*“Call centers are working great—fast and effective.”*

*“They have underpaid me for hours worked.”*

*“It seems the staff has gotten much better at just getting things right and done the first time.”*

*“I care for my sister’s little boy. The check is mailed to her address in her name. I feel this is crazy! She often keeps the money.”*

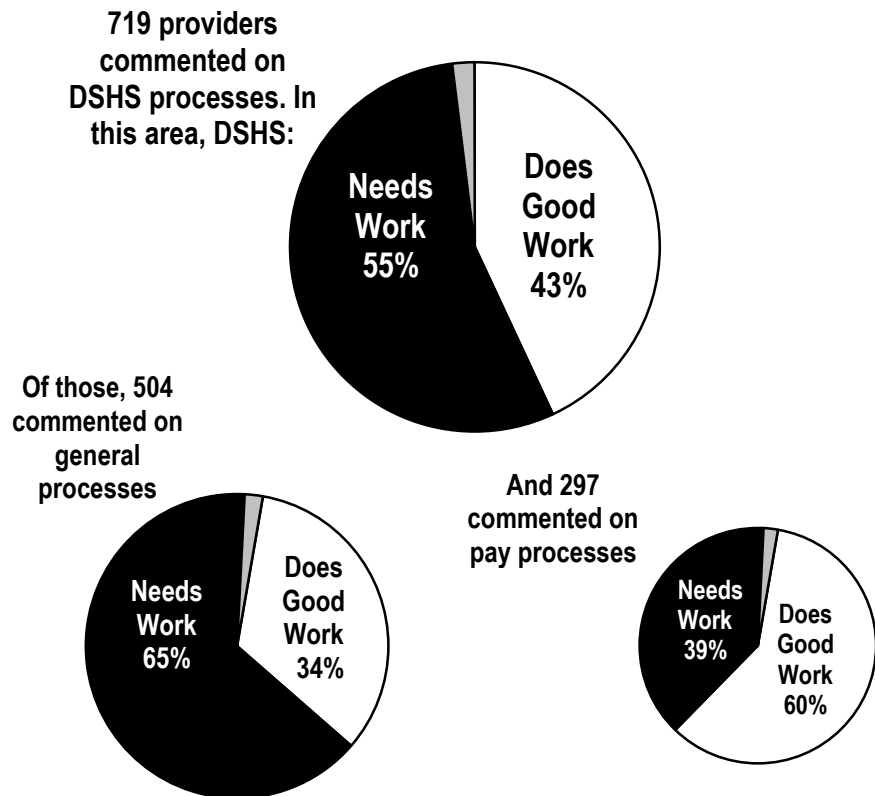
*“I like the notices to let me know a child’s eligibility is almost up. It lets me spur parents into getting paperwork done.”*

*“Let us know immediately when someone’s benefits are terminated.”*

## PROCESS

About four out of ten ESA providers (719) addressed the ease or difficulty of working with DSHS business processes and procedures. Because almost half of the process comments concerned pay, this issue is divided into two categories:

- **General Process.** Issues with the process of working with DSHS, including paperwork, bureaucracy, and efficiency.
- **Pay.** Comments related to the process of being paid, such as accurate and timely payment, paying providers directly, payment rules, and the automated Invoice Express payment system.



**What DSHS does well:** Many respondents were thankful for prompt pay, help with pay problems, and notification of changes. The automated telephone Invoice Express system was almost universally appreciated.

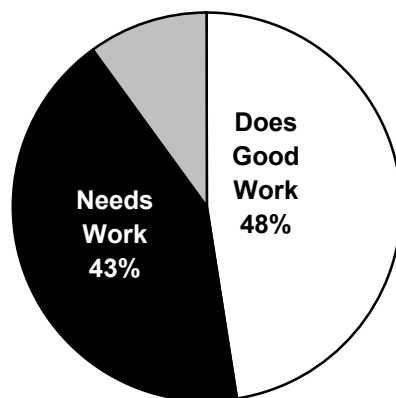
**What DSHS could do better:** There were many complaints about errors and lost or late paperwork. Suggestions for change included paying providers directly (rather than parents), eliminating redundant paperwork, and simplifying processes. Childcare providers say that DSHS rules make them lose money. They are not paid if child is sick or absent, only paid for 22 days in months with 23, only paid for half-day if less than 10 hours, and not paid when child is ruled ineligible – even when they are not informed. They also cannot always collect co-payments from parents.

## STAFF ATTRIBUTES

About one in four providers (503) mentioned staff characteristics. Half of the comments were positive. Approximately 10% of these comments were neutral. Staff attributes include:

- **Courtesy and respect.** Whether staff treat providers with courtesy and respect.
- **Follow through and support.** How well staff follow through with requests, provide guidance and support, and, resolve problems.
- **Knowledge of rules and help.** Level of knowledge about various DSHS or community programs and resources to help providers and clients, and, staff willingness to assist.
- **Specific staff.** Sixty providers mentioned a specific staff member by name – all but two comments were complimentary.

503 Providers commented on staff attributes. In this area, DSHS:



**What DSHS does well:** Respondents did not tend to be either totally positive or negative about DSHS staff; they realize that individual staff members differ. A typical comment was, “Some are very nice; others are mean and rude.” Providers appreciated workers who treat them like fellow professionals, who listen, and are efficient, friendly and helpful. Most of the 81 providers who singled out specific DSHS staff members were positive. For example, one enthused, “I absolutely adore working with Ken Fung in Oak Harbor.”

**What DSHS could do better:** Respect was a major issue. A number of providers felt that some DSHS workers are condescending and treat them like “scum.” Others felt they were not treated respectfully if they did not speak the same language (Spanish or English) as the worker. Lack of knowledge was sometimes an issue. One of the providers complained, “It would be nice if someone knew what they were doing – it seems I end up telling them how things work!”

*“I have been in the child care field for over twenty years and have been treated wonderfully on most occasions.”*

*“They are not interested in helping us! I call as little as possible, I am tired of talking to workers who hate their job.”*

*“They listen when it gets tough...they give me faith.”*

*“Most of the workers are great, but there are a few who could stand to find a new job. I don’t like to be treated like we’re taking dollars from them personally.”*

*“Certain staff go above and beyond to help resolve issues. Others can’t be bothered.”*

*“They put in the extra effort to make things happen.”*

*“They won’t listen to us. They won’t call back and when we tell them they are wrong they get mad.”*

*“Get people in there who care about children and providers.”*

*“My last caseworker treated me with respect, not like I was a lazy bum. I really appreciated that.”*

*“Sometimes they give me the runaround and sometimes they help me.”*

*“Stop acting like I’m robbing society for \$1.70 an hour.”*

*“I’ve been out of the business, just returned after three years. I see very positive changes.”*

*“DSHS has never helped any of us. They treat us like the enemy. They don’t like us, we don’t like them!”*

*“They’re doing very good services, but it’s difficult to satisfy the public.”*

*“It’s not nice to point out one’s faults, let’s just say much improvement is needed.”*

*“I want to say thank you for all your help and all the programs you provide.”*

*“They meet minimum requirement but it seems to take maximum effort.”*

*“Washington may be a leader in the nation for quality care, however, it will be the leader in losing good quality and loving homes due to pettiness and overzealous rules. WAKE UP!”*

*“I think you do a super job. You have a HUGE workload, yet I feel like I’m an important client when I call.”*

*They’re doing the best they can, considering their heavy, demanding workload.”*

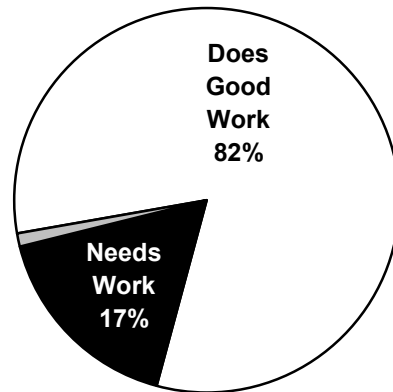
*“My only concern is that budget cuts could dramatically increase workloads and diminish the quality of services.”*

## OVERALL HELPFULNESS

About one in five respondents (320) made more general comments about how they liked or disliked DSHS, or about how DSHS did or did not help them. More than eight out of ten of these comments were positive. 23 providers commented on specific programs; most of these specific comments were positive.

A few comments appeared to come from clients rather than providers. Parents receiving childcare assistance were instructed to give the survey to their childcare provider, but some obviously missed these instructions. Consequently, some comments addressed DSHS help to clients. One said, “DSHS helped me find a job and got me on my feet.”

**320 providers commented on DSHS helpfulness. In this area, DSHS:**



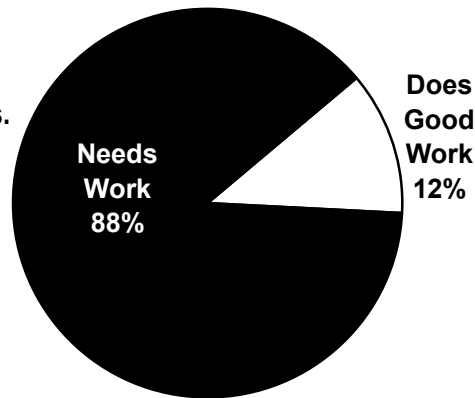
**What DSHS does well:** The ESA providers who made general comments overwhelmingly felt that DSHS is a helpful agency. Most praised the agency's efforts and staff. Words such as “great” and “good work” occurred frequently.

**What DSHS could do better:** A small minority related that they did not like DSHS or only dealt with them because they had to. One simply said, “You suck!” Generally these comments included little or no additional information about what DSHS could improve to make the provider’s experience better.

## RESOURCES

Approximately one in ten providers (208) commented on the need for more resources from DSHS. Most comments in this area were suggestions for improvement. Ninety-seven providers said that DSHS should pay providers better. Many childcare providers complained that DSHS pays a much lower rate than their private clients. Seventy-two providers mentioned that DSHS needs more staff or that DSHS staff has too great a workload. Other comments concerned needs for more resources for clients and more training.

208 providers commented on needed resources. In this area, DSHS:



*“The staff gives 110% but they have more clients than they can handle. Consequently, numerous mistakes are made.”*

*“Make it possible to get paid at least minimum wage.”*

*“\$2.00 an hour is not enough. Who can survive on that?”*

*“We won’t be able to care for DSHS families any longer because you don’t honor our contract and we can’t make it financially on your terms.”*

*“We are withdrawing from accepting DSHS because the rates are WAY too low and we don’t like being stiffed when a child is sick or on vacation.”*

*“I’m always the loser on the money end.”*

**What DSHS does well:** The few positive comments about resources expressed gratitude for client benefits or provider training.

**What DSHS could do better:** Most suggestions for resources addressed one of two issues: First, DSHS needs to pay better for childcare. Childcare providers would like to be paid as much for DSHS children as for private pay children. Clients said DSHS pays only one-half to two-thirds of the cost of childcare. This limits the number of DSHS clients a provider will accept. Second, DSHS should have more staff. A number of respondents mentioned that excessive caseloads and frequent staff turnover have a deleterious effect on DSHS’s work.

**RESPONSE RATE**

This ESA provider survey was sent to all ESA providers who received payments via the Social Services Payment System (SSPS) in July, 2002. During that month, SSPS sent 22,800 payments to individuals and for services to ESA clients. The short postcard-style provider survey was enclosed with each payment. Over 1,840 ESA providers responded.

The response rate is greater than 8 percent. The exact response rate cannot be calculated because we do not know the exact number of providers who received surveys. The SSPS payment system could not specify the number of July provider payments made to the same provider. Certainly, there were a number of cases in which a provider received more than one SSPS payment during July, and thus received more than one copy of the survey.

The response rate was lower than those found with similar provider surveys done for other DSHS programs. This lower response rate is probably due to the fact that childcare payments are sent to the child’s parent or guardian, who in turn pays the provider. Parents were requested to give the survey to the child’s provider, but a number may not have complied.

22,800	1,843
Surveys sent out	Respondents
Greater than 8% Response Rate	

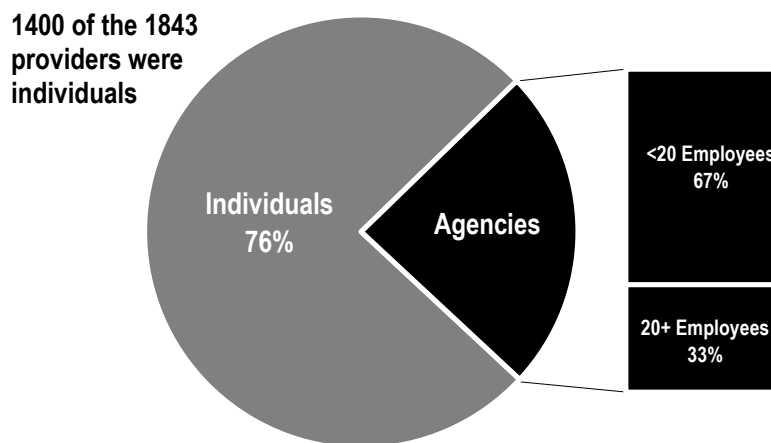
## RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

### The typical respondent:

- Provides childcare
- An individual (not part of an agency)
- Located in Western Washington

**Provider Type.** Almost 90% of the ESA providers were paid for childcare; 62% provided licensed childcare, while 27% provided childcare, but were not required to be licensed because they either cared for relatives or provided care in the child’s home. The table at the top of page 2 provides a complete list of provider services.

The majority of respondents were individual providers (76%). Agencies comprised 24% of the returned surveys. Of those agencies, 67% were small organizations with less than 20 employees and 33% were agencies with twenty or more employees:



King	18%
Pierce	11%
Spokane	9%
Snohomish	8%
Other	54%

**Location.** Nearly half of completed surveys were returned by providers who delivered services in just four Washington counties: King (329 respondents), Pierce (203), Spokane (165), and Snohomish (144). The remainder, 1,008 respondents, served Economic Services Administration clients in smaller counties, more than one county, or out of state.

The majority of the responding providers (69%) reported that they work in Western Washington. Most of the remainder (30% of the total) work in Eastern Washington. Eighteen providers work out of state, and two agencies work in both Eastern and Western Washington.

For questions or comments on this report contact: Nancy Raiha, PhD, DSHS Research and Data Analysis at (360)902-7667 or [raihank@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:raihank@dshs.wa.gov)

This fact sheet, future provider survey reports, and complete lists of provider comments are available from the **RDA website:** [www-app2.wa.gov/dshs/rda](http://www-app2.wa.gov/dshs/rda)

Additional copies of this fact sheet and future reports may be obtained from Department of Social and Health Services, Research and Data Analysis Division, P.O. Box 45204, Olympia, WA 98504-5204, or request by telephone: (360)902-0701, please refer to Fact Sheet Number 11.108b.