



Washington State Department of Social and Health Services

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2002 CHILDREN’S ADMINISTRATION PROVIDER SURVEY

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Nearly 2,000 individuals and agencies who provide services to clients of DSHS Children’s Administration responded to a recent 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 staff attributes, processes, overall helpfulness and the need for resources.

COURTESY AND RESPECT

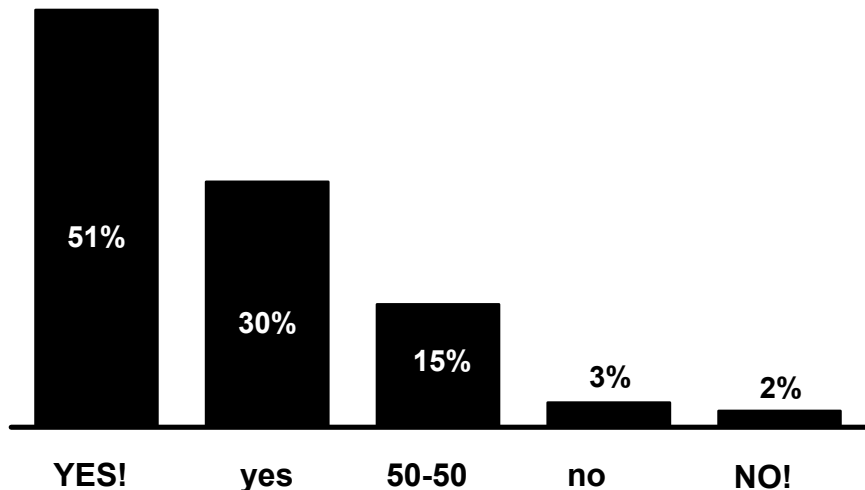
Most providers reported that they were treated with courtesy and respect by DSHS staff:

Question:

Do DSHS staff treat you with courtesy and respect?

Answer:

Eight out of ten Children’s providers said that they were treated with courtesy and respect. Five percent disagreed.



Differences by Type of Provider. In most Children’s Administration provider groups, about eight out of ten providers answered “YES!” or “yes,” indicating that they were treated with courtesy and respect. Those who receive adoption support payments and those who provided family preservation services, counseling or psychological evaluation tended to be most satisfied with DSHS staff courtesy and respect. Those who provide more than one type of service were least likely to say they were treated with courtesy and respect.

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*
Adoption Support	815 (41%)	87%
Foster Care or Relative Care	493 (25%)	75%
Childcare or Respite Care	299 (15%)	75%
Counseling or Psych Eval	74 (4%)	84%
Transportation	62 (3%)	77%
Family Preservation or Home-Based Services	23 (1%)	91%
Other	54 (3%)	83%
More than One Type of Service	112 (6%)	65%
Service Not Specified	34 (2%)	76%

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

PROVIDERS SPEAK OUT

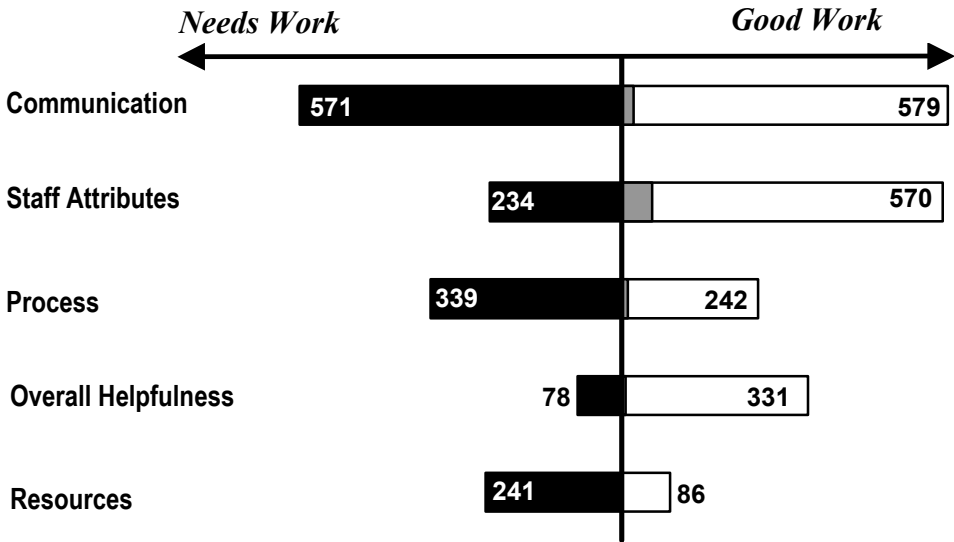
Providers were asked two questions

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).

They identified FIVE major issues:

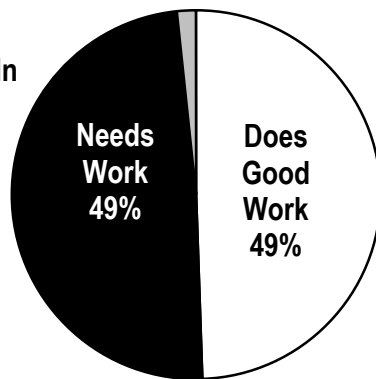


COMMUNICATION

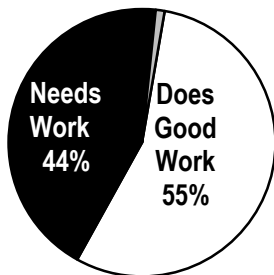
More than half (1,005) of the 1,966 respondents mentioned communication.¹ Comments were almost evenly divided between positive remarks and complaints or suggestions for improvement. The majority of the communication comments can be divided into two smaller categories:

- **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.

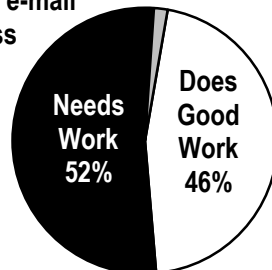
1005 Providers commented on communication. In this area, DSHS:



Of those, 577 commented on information



And 511 commented on phone / e-mail access



What DSHS does well: Provider comments clearly show that communication is a major issue. Many providers expressed appreciation for workers who return calls quickly, keep in contact and answer questions.

What DSHS could do better: Other providers expressed frustration with DSHS responsiveness. The phrase “Return calls” occurred repeatedly. Providers caring for children were also very concerned about receiving current, accurate information about those children – background, available resources, court case and parental status. Honesty was an issue; it was mentioned by 43 providers.

“They are much easier to get ahold of than in the past. They return calls. They listen to my needs for the child and respond appropriately.”

“Keep us informed! Foster parents are the last to know of changes.”

“Always answers my questions with courtesy and returns my calls quickly.”

“Get a better telephone system - don’t hang up on me because all lines are busy!”

“When I do reach someone, they are always courteous, but not always helpful.”

“They hide the facts about the child’s other placement and reasons for leaving home.”

“Gets me the info I need.”

“Answer the damn phone and return calls!”

“When on vacation they should have someone to cover their desk.”

“Informs me promptly and answers my questions. Lets me know my needs are important.”

“If they weren’t so busy, maybe they’d do a better job of returning calls.”

“Honesty would be nice.”

¹ 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.

STAFF ATTRIBUTES

“We feel respected and valued – you listen, thank you.”

“Staff are very competent, warm and professional - they do what they say they will and pay on time.”

“Put my child’s welfare first. Until that happens, chaos will continue and kids will suffer.”

“They have been as open and honest as they can be. They are empathetic to listening to my needs.”

“We are people too. Most caseworkers I have spoken to are RUDE!”

“Very helpful; will do anything to help family be successful.”

“In twenty years I only know of two or three deadbeat staff - the rest are top notch!”

“They make you feel comfortable and treat you in a dignified manner.”

“Some staff do excellent work and others just put in their time and draw their pay with little concern for kids’ best interests.”

“They are always there to help us.”

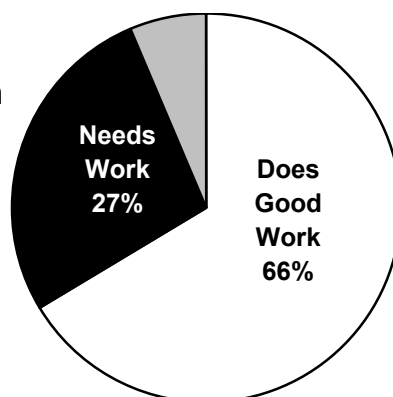
“Treat me as a person – not a house with a bed.”

“Good people. Good contact. Great for a government agency.”

About four out of ten providers (770) mentioned staff characteristics. Two-thirds of the comments were positive. 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.** 124 providers mentioned a specific staff member by name – all but twelve comments were complimentary.

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



What DSHS does well: The majority of respondents were satisfied with DSHS staff and praised their efforts to assist providers. DSHS staff were repeatedly described as helpful, committed, courteous, respectful, and caring. Providers praised DSHS staff who treat providers as a valued member of the team, listening to provider input and expressing appreciation. Many found DSHS staff an important source of support as they work with difficult children. They also commended staff who put children’s needs first. Many rhapsodized in describing their DSHS contacts, for example, “Shari Thaut is the most helpful, considerate, friendly and knowledgeable state employee I have ever encountered.”

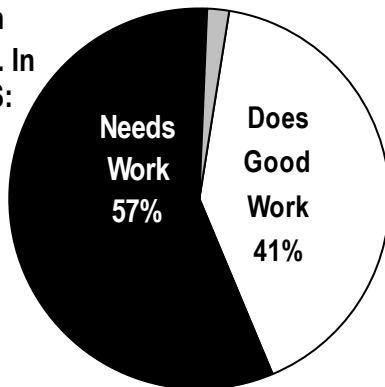
What DSHS could do better: Some respondents described DSHS staff as rude, patronizing or unresponsive. They want to feel valued and to be treated as professionals, not “glorified babysitters.” A number of providers explained that some DSHS employees are better than others: “Social workers vary, either very good, or hostile, insulting and unfriendly.”

PROCESS

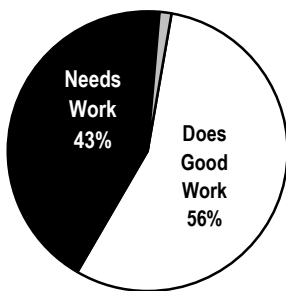
About one quarter of the Children’s providers (547) addressed the ease or difficulty of working with DSHS business processes and procedures. Negative process comments outnumbered positive. Because more than half of the process comments concerned pay, this issue is divided into two categories:

- **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, withholding taxes, and the automated Invoice Express payment system.

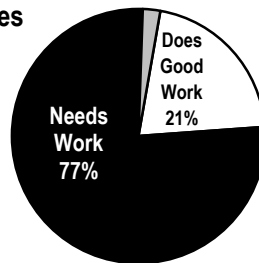
547 providers commented on DSHS processes. In this area, DSHS:



Of those, 320 commented on pay processes



And 264 commented on general processes



What DSHS does well: Respondents were appreciative of workers who assisted with billing problems and processed paperwork promptly, resulting in timely pay. Many commented favorably on Invoice Express payment system.

What DSHS could do better: A number of providers expressed frustration with slow pay and payment errors. Some gave examples, such as, “I billed DSHS February 9th, 2002 and received payment June 24, 2002.” The annual payment delay in the June/July time frame was also an issue.

“Often it is nearly impossible to navigate internally in DSHS to find things. One hand is not familiar with the other.”

“The payment system is quick and excellent.”

“Too many forms for everything, time spent poorly. Everything is a tug-of-war.”

“Process my invoices without losing them first.”

“They are timely and efficient.”

“We deserve to get paid ON TIME just like everybody else.”

“Payment faster with Invoice Express – I love it.”

“I wish there was a billing contact who could straighten things out rather than waiting for my worker to call.”

“Make paperwork less or make it easier to understand.”

“Paperwork is processed exceptionally fast.”

“Free children for adoption faster so they’re not as damaged as our son is.”

“I tried to get on direct deposit five times and they kept sending back my application.”

“The foster care division! It took them a year to license me. I’m willing to adopt and I’ve had no calls regarding adopting a child.”

“We feel DSHS has improved over the years we have been foster parents.”

“I don’t think they do anything extremely well. . . I feel like I’ve had to fight for everything that our son was entitled to.”

“Our experience has been great.”

“We live in Virginia now so all dealings are long distance. What could be a hassle is very pleasant. Keep up the good work!”

“Foster care system is a disaster. Keeps moving kids and damaging them further.”

“They’ve been doing a great job. I’m sure their job is stressful...they do their best to keep up.”

“They screw families over. They say they will help, but they don’t.”

“I feel DSHS is trying to help us be successful.”

“DSHS helped us with the support we need to adopt two boys.”

“When you decide to help a client, you’re great. I wish you had time and resources to help more.”

“Don’t change workers so often. Before my kids were adopted, they had six different workers on our case.”

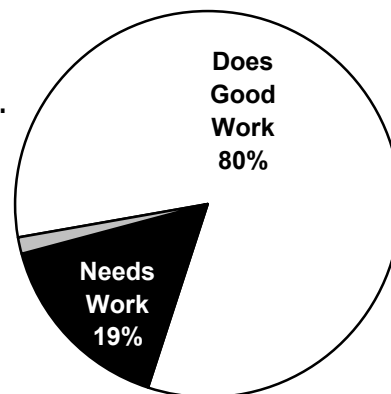
Providers had many suggestions for process improvements: Decrease and clarify paperwork, eliminate redundancy, process payment paperwork promptly, inform providers of status changes that affect payment, streamline the licensing process, and simplify rules. Providers also would welcome more stable children’s placements – less movement between foster homes and earlier eligibility for adoption.

OVERALL HELPFULNESS

About one in five respondents (410) made more general comments about how they liked or disliked DSHS, or about how DSHS did or did not help them. Eight out of ten of these comments were positive.

143 providers commented on specific programs; 80% of these comments were positive.

410 providers commented on DSHS helpfulness. In this area, DSHS:



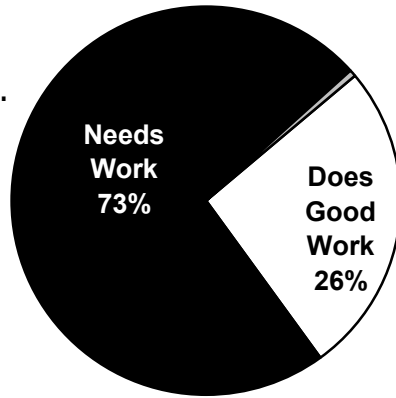
What DSHS does well: The Children’s providers who made general comments were almost all appreciative of the agency’s efforts. The adoption support program was repeatedly singled out for praise.

What DSHS could do better: A small group expressed negative comments about DSHS helpfulness. Some providers were concerned about children’s welfare or about the overall helpfulness of staff.

RESOURCES

Less than one in six providers (305) commented on needs for more resources from DSHS. Most comments in this area were suggestions for improvement. More than one hundred providers mentioned client needs for more resources. Seventy-six providers mentioned that DSHS needs more staff or that DSHS staff have too great a workload. Other comments concerned needs for respite care and training, better provider pay, a larger DSHS budget, and health care insurance for providers.

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



“Every time we get to know a social worker and he/she knows our case, we get a new one and have to start all over again.”

“Offer more classes on difficult teens and raise the cost of providing care for them.”

“Most of the staff is caring and responsive but they are overworked and carry too many cases. Kids in care nowadays have SO many problems.”

“Not enough respite providers.”

“We love these kids and want to help them, but we need RESOURCES and FUNDING.”

“The seminars available on the foster parent web site are fantastic!”

“Raise the pay scale.”

What DSHS does well: Relatively few comments expressed satisfaction with resources. Some providers were grateful to DSHS for meeting children’s needs, making adoption possible, or for providing high quality training.

What DSHS could do better: Providers noted that more resources are needed for DSHS staff, clients, and the providers themselves. They said that DSHS staff need smaller caseloads and less turnover. Clients need more services—especially better availability of dentists and orthodontists. Providers need better pay, benefits and help in arranging respite care. A number pointed out that the rates DSHS pays for childcare are lower than the childcare center’s standard rates. Several expressed worries about the effect of budget cuts.

RESPONSE RATE

The Children’s Administration provider survey was sent with all adoption support payments made in July 2002 and with all payments to other Children’s Administration providers in June 2002. During those periods, the Social Services Payment System (SSPS) sent payments to 12,723 individuals and agencies who provided services to Children’s Administration clients. The short postcard-style provider survey was enclosed with each payment. Nearly 2,000 Children’s Administration providers responded to the survey.

The response rate is greater than 15 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 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 the survey time frame, and thus received more than one copy of the survey.

12,723	1,966
Surveys sent out	Respondents
Greater than 15% Response Rate	

RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

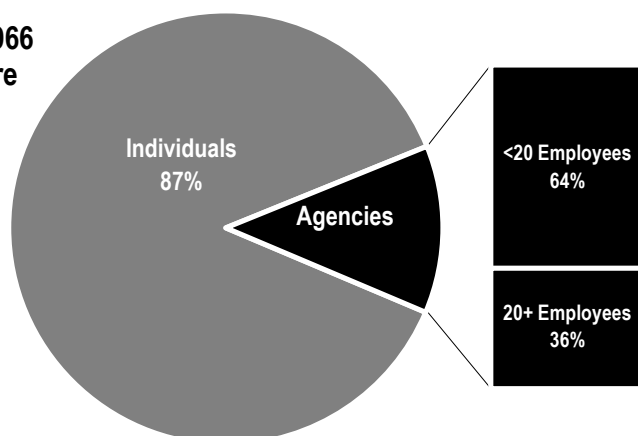
The typical respondent:

- Receives payments for adoption support or foster care
- An individual (not part of an agency)
- Located in Western Washington

Provider Type. The largest group of providers (41%) received payments for adoption support. One quarter of the providers provided foster care, and fifteen percent provided childcare or respite care. The table at the top of page 2 provides a complete list of provider services.

The majority of respondents were individual providers (87%). Agencies comprised 13% of the returned surveys (247); of those, 64% were small organizations with less than 20 employees and 36% were agencies with twenty or more employees:

1719 of the 1966 providers were individuals



King	17%
Pierce	11%
Spokane	10%
Snohomish	9%
Other	53%

Location. Nearly half of completed surveys were returned by providers who delivered services in just four Washington counties: King (342 respondents), Pierce (211), Spokane (198), and Snohomish (173). The remainder, 1,042 respondents, served Children’s Administration clients in smaller counties, more than one county, or out of state.

The majority of the responding providers (78%) reported that they work in Western Washington. Most of the remainder (14% of the total) work in Eastern Washington. Eight percent of the providers work out of state, and four 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

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

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 11.108c.