



Washington State Department  
of Social and Health Services

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## 2003 ECONOMIC SERVICES ADMINISTRATION PROVIDER SURVEY

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Nearly 400 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 overall number of comments, as well as the greatest number of negative comments, concerned communication. The greatest number of positive comments concerned staff. Providers also frequently mentioned staff attributes and processes.

### COURTESY AND RESPECT

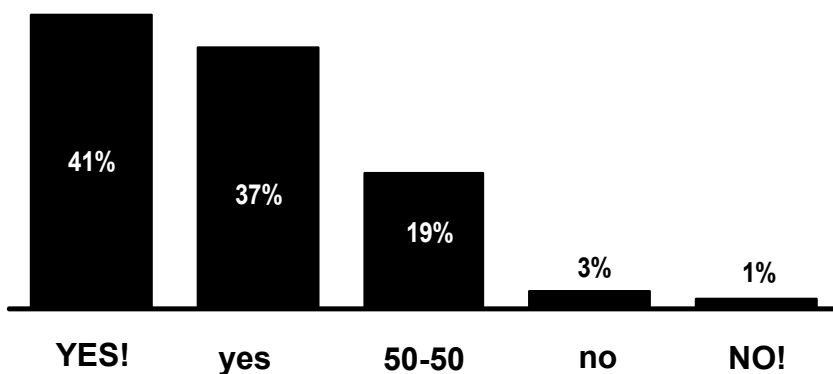
Most providers reported that they were treated with courtesy and respect by DSHS staff:

#### Question:

Do DSHS staff treat you with courtesy and respect?

#### Answer:

More than three out of four ESA providers said that they were treated with courtesy and respect. Only four percent disagreed.



**Differences by Type of Provider.** In most ESA provider groups more than three out of four providers answered “YES!” or “yes,” indicating that they were treated with courtesy and respect. Providers of legal and Guardian ad Litem services were the most satisfied; all agreed that they were treated with courtesy and respect. Providers of refugee services and multiple types of services were least satisfied. Satisfaction rates also differed according to whether the respondent was an individual provider or part of an agency; 86% of individual providers said they were treated with courtesy and respect – a much higher proportion than agency providers (71%).

<sup>1</sup> This study surveyed Economic Services Administration providers who have active contracts in the DSHS Agency Contracts Database. These are providers who are paid through A-19 invoices. A larger number of ESA providers are paid through the Social Service Payment System (SSPS). A survey of those providers was released in February, 2003 (Fact Sheet 11.108b).

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	96 (25%)	77%
Guardian ad Litem	32 (8%)	100%
Protective Payee	32 (8%)	81%
Work First	31 (8%)	77%
Refugee Services	15 (4%)	60%
Legal Services	12 (3%)	100%
More than one type of service provided	102 (27%)	69%
Other services	57 (15%)	77%
Service not specified	3 (1%)	N/A**

\*Answer to “Do DSHS staff treat you with courtesy and respect?”

\*\*6 respondents did not answer the question.

## PROVIDERS SPEAK OUT

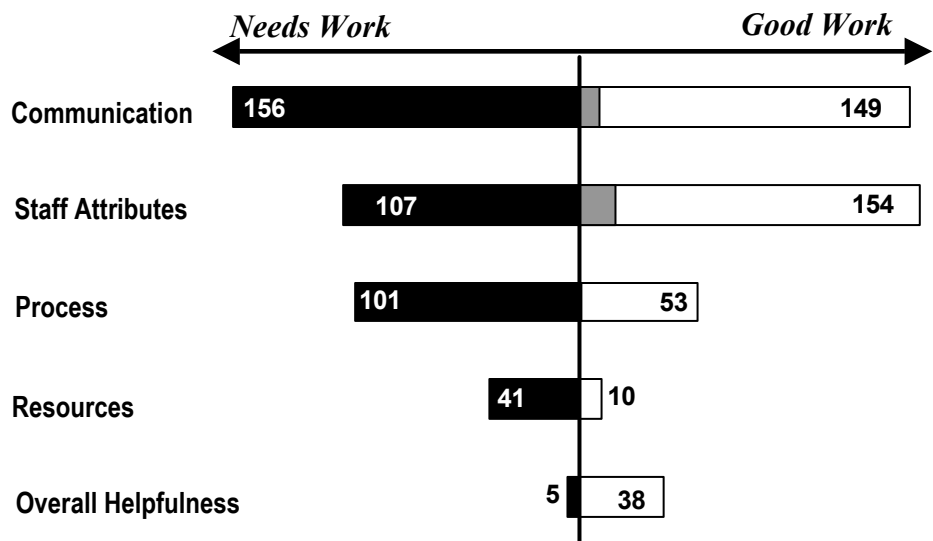
**Providers were asked two questions**

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).

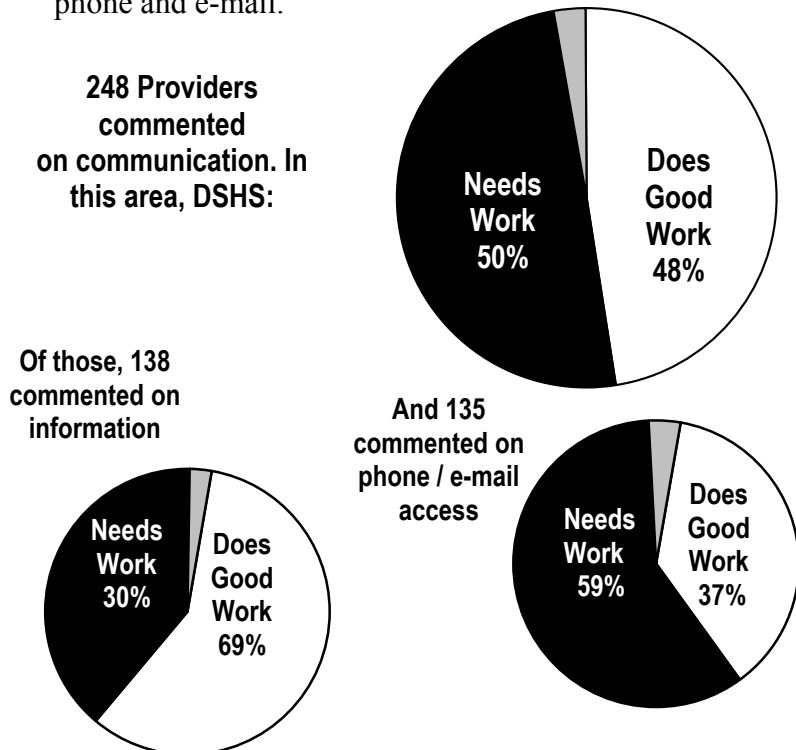
**They identified FIVE major issues:**



## COMMUNICATION

Two out of three (249) of the 380 respondents mentioned communication.<sup>2</sup> About one-half of these comments were complaints or suggestions for improvement; slightly less than 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:** Many providers were happy with information and answers to questions provided by DSHS staff. Some were pleased with timely responses to questions and phone calls. Comments about communication through eJas and the Call Centers were mixed.

**What DSHS could do better:** The biggest source of discontent was DSHS responsiveness; respondents asked for more returned calls and email, improved methods of communication with staff, and knowledgeable staff to answer calls. Many would like better information about changes in case managers, rules and client status (approval, termination, approved days).

*“Provides necessary information, training and support for us to do our jobs.”*

*“The caseworker doesn’t return my calls.”*

*“EJas is a great tool for communications.”*

*“It is difficult to get information from DSHS employees. I felt like an afterthought and they did not really want my input.”*

*“They TAKE my calls, figure out what I need to know and answer my questions.”*

*“I would like the call center to answer more than 3 questions.”*

*“Some caseworkers return calls within 15 minutes or answer the phone and talk to me.”*

*“We love the new provider lines, fax and e-mail!”*

*“Respond in a timely manner (within a week) or according to DSHS policy!!!! We need to hear or receive the answers to our questions and client needs.”*

*“The call center is a great help. The immediate attention and action is a great help to me in my work.”*

*“I don’t like the call center way of handling business. I want to talk to the same person, not have to re-explain.”*

<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.

## STAFF ATTRIBUTES

*“I am very pleased with the services we receive. The staff is courteous and helpful.”*

*“Employees need to be friendly and helpful. Many times they have almost made our families cry. They feel scared to call the call center.”*

*“They are excellent partners!”*

*“We are in a rural community – our CSO has made themselves very accessible, and we have been able to maintain a good working relationship with workers to the benefit of those we serve.”*

*“I wish all workers went by the same rules. It’s so frustrating getting so many different answers.”*

*“They are expeditious in solving a problem.”*

*“Most DSHS staff want to connect their clients up to helpful community resources.”*

*“Some workers are very caring and help us figure out how to remove barriers for client service, others seem to feel it’s ‘not my job.’”*

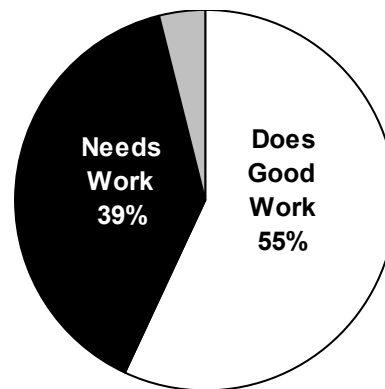
*“Understand that we are trying to help the same population, not make more work for them.”*

*“With many staff there is a sense of partnership and support. Many are good at communicating effectively.”*

More than half of the providers (216) mentioned staff characteristics. Positive comments outnumbered negative and neutral comments. Only 6% of the 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.** Twenty-four providers mentioned a specific staff member by name – two thirds of these specific comments were complimentary.

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



**What DSHS does well:** Respondents felt positive about DSHS staff members’ cooperation, problem-solving abilities and responsiveness. A typical response was, “DSHS is a fine agency. We enjoy working with everyone.” Employees were often described as friendly, courteous and professional. Providers appreciated workers’ teamwork and collaboration. They praised workers who treat them like fellow professionals. As one provider stated, “They value the services we provide to their clients . . . “

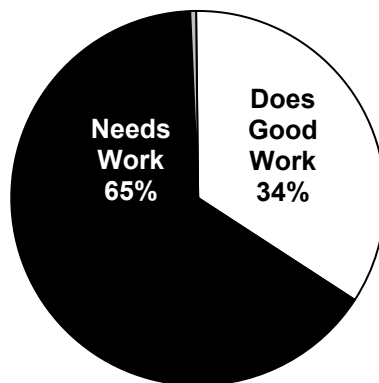
**What DSHS could do better:** Respondents requested improvements in the areas of responsiveness, knowledge of resources, consistent rule interpretation, flexibility and open-mindedness, and teamwork and collaboration. A number of providers indicated they were not treated as partners in serving clients. Some providers also described DSHS staff as rude or unresponsive. A particular area of concern was treatment of clients. In some comments, DSHS employees were described as condescending and punitive. One provider suggested, “Hire people that actually like their jobs, instead of cranky people.”

## PROCESS

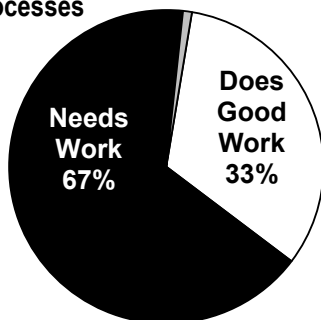
About four out of ten ESA providers (135) addressed the ease or difficulty of working with DSHS business processes and procedures. Because one third of the providers who commented on process mentioned pay, this issue is divided into two categories:

- **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, payment rules, and other payment systems.

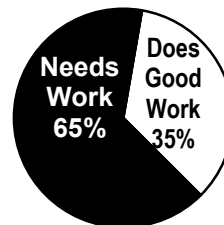
135 providers commented on DSHS processes. In this area, DSHS:



Of those, 106 commented on general processes



And 47 commented on pay processes



*“Accessing eJAS to respond to client calls is too slow and impossible to do... eJAS – redundant and doubles my workload.”*

*“DSHS sees us a real service for client families. We keep getting plentiful referrals year after year.”*

*“Less paperwork!”*

*“Referrals are coming better with more needed information.”*

*“Have more clients on eJAS.”*

*“Love the call in line for vouchers – gets checks out ASAP.”*

*“Pay me on time. This job is my livelihood.”*

*“Too rigid in referrals, too few, and too inflexible and uncompromising lip services (little follow through), not true partners!”*

*“They solve problems and handle the necessary paperwork”*

*“Currently, we have a case of nonpayment... We have complained but ALMOST three months have gone by.”*

*“Authorizations are going MUCH more smoothly with the phone center system.”*

*“Security of eJAS is overkill.”*

*“When they make financial/co-pay errors I don’t ever see the money.”*

**What DSHS does well:** Many respondents were thankful for the management of paperwork, help with pay problems, and notification of changes. Receiving referrals was almost universally appreciated. A typical comment was, “They generally respond quickly to requests for information regarding contracting matters, and provide A-19 forms promptly upon request.”

**What DSHS could do better:** There were many complaints about the eJAS system, including that it was not universally used or understood. Suggestions for change included improving the eJAS system, reducing paperwork, simplifying processes and speeding up the payments. A number of the providers expressed frustration about payment delays.

## RESOURCES

*“Raise the rate of pay.”*

*“Pay better reimbursement rates and don’t punish the child care centers when the parents don’t bring their child.”*

*“Could increase contract rate which has not changed in 15 years.”*

*“Regional meetings/training are a big plus.”*

*“Line staff turn over frequently and don’t understand duties and responsibility of different contracts.”*

*“Problems could be resolved with proper staff levels.”*

*“CSO staff could have fewer clients on their caseloads to improve time on Medicaid awards, and to reduce the likelihood of lost or misplaced paperwork.”*

*“Line staff frequently turn over and don’t understand duties and responsibilities of different contracts.”*

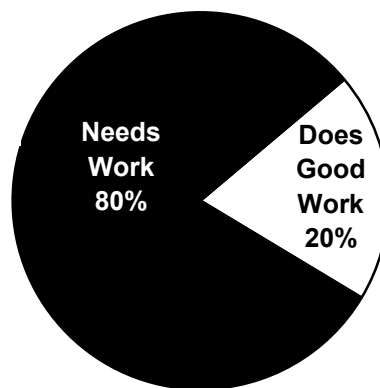
*“Take advantage of the resources we have to provide more cross training.”*

*“It would be great to figure out more possible ways to team together and provide more services.”*

*“I am very pleased with the services we receive.”*

More than one in ten providers (49) commented on the need for more resources from DSHS. Most comments in this area were suggestions for improvement.

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



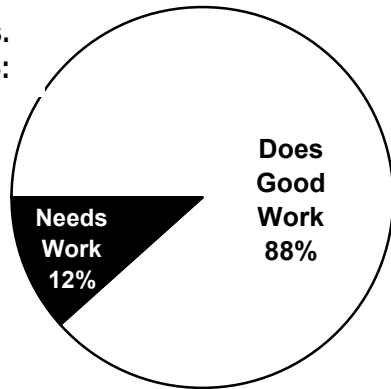
**What DSHS does well:** The few positive comments about resources expressed gratitude for client benefits and trainings. The respondents acknowledged that understaffing negatively affects services. A typical expression of empathy was: “We understand the severe cut, besides that not much can be done without more staff.”

**What DSHS could do better:** Most suggestions for resources addressed one of two issues: First, DSHS needs to pay better. Second, DSHS should have more staff. Many providers complained that contract rates needed to be increased, and a few child care providers questioned the countable hours per day paid for children. Twenty providers said that DSHS did not have enough staff to handle the workload, which negatively affected their ability to do business with DSHS and clients’ ability to obtain needed services. Other comments concerned the need for more resources for clients and more training for the providers and DSHS staff. Respondents thought that both providers and DSHS staff would benefit from training in the utilization of eJas.

## OVERALL HELPFULNESS

About one in ten respondents (42) made more general comments about how they liked or disliked DSHS, or about how DSHS did or did not help them. Almost nine out of ten of these comments were positive. Eight providers commented on specific programs; most of these specific comments were positive.

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



*“We always get quick responses. Thank you!”*

*“DSHS is a fine agency. We enjoy working with everyone.”*

*“They do great. No changes needed. They treat us wonderful!!!”*

*“We work with CSO’s. Financial workers are very responsive in resolving problem client issues. Region 4 Call Center is an improvement.”*

*“CSO in Vancouver is great!!”*

*“No complaints whatsoever.”*

**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 “wonderful” occurred frequently.

**What DSHS could do better:** Only five of the respondents gave general negative comments. The most common negative comment was “nothing” in response to the question, “What does DSHS do well?”

## RESPONSE RATE

This ESA provider survey was sent to all ESA providers who have active contracts in the DSHS Agency Contracts Database<sup>3</sup>. These providers are paid through the Washington State’s standard invoicing system, utilizing A-19 invoices. The short postcard-style provider survey was mailed directly to the contract point of contact.

Because the population survey was fairly small, a number of measures were employed to increase the response rate. All the providers were sent a reminder postcard one week after the initial survey and were asked to indicate that they had returned the anonymous survey or did not want further reminders. Two weeks later all who did not return the postcard were sent a second copy of the survey.

The measures to increase the response rate were highly successful. Of the 529 surveys sent to valid addresses, 380 ESA providers responded. The response rate was 72 percent.

529	380
Surveys sent out	Respondents
72%	
Response Rate	

<sup>3</sup> A larger number of ESA providers paid through SSPS payment system was released in February 2003 (Fact Sheet 11.108b).

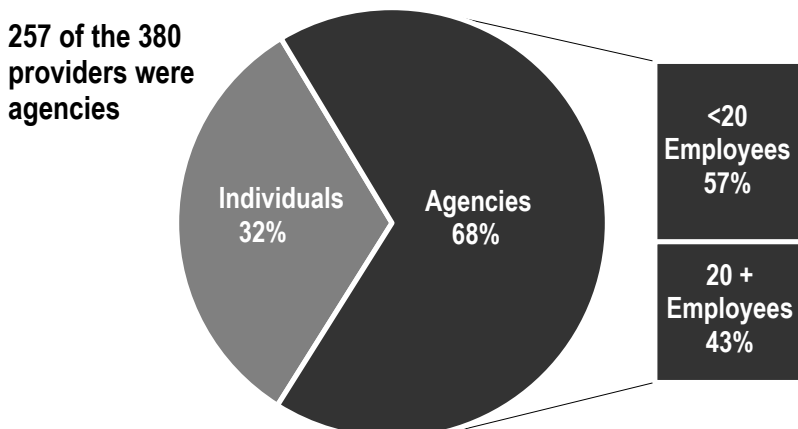
## RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

### The typical respondent:

- Provides more than one type of service
- Part of an agency
- Located in Western Washington

**Provider Type.** Almost 30% of the ESA providers were paid for more than one service and 25% provided only licensed childcare. The table at the top of page 2 provides a complete list of provider services.

The majority of respondents were agency providers (68%). Individual providers comprised 32% of the returned surveys. Of the agencies, 57% were small organizations with less than 20 employees and 43% were agencies with twenty or more employees:



King	17%
Spokane	10%
Snohomish	6%
Pierce	8%
Clark	5%
Other	54%

**Location.** Nearly half of completed surveys were returned by providers who delivered services in just five Washington counties: King (64 respondents), Spokane (37), Pierce (29), Snohomish (23), and Clark (20). The remainder, 202 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 (29% of the total) work in Eastern Washington. A few provider agencies work in both Eastern and Western Washington or out of state.

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

This fact sheet, other 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 11.108g.