



DSHS Children's Administration/TANF Concurrent Benefit Program: Costs and Reunifications for SFY 2009 Removals

Liz Kohlenberg, PhD • Kathryn Beall • Rebecca Yette MCS

In collaboration with Dori Shoji, Tom Berry, Babs Roberts, Carla Reyes, Can Du, and Judy Fitzgerald of the DSHS Economics Services Administration and Meri Waterhouse and Lee Doran of the DSHS Children's Administration.

The DSHS Children's Administration (CA) and Economic Services Administration (ESA) asked RDA to prepare a descriptive analysis of the use rates, costs and reunifications associated with the TANF concurrent benefits program. This program allows for the continuation of a TANF cash grant to a family from whom a child has been removed by CA (the "removal family") and placed with a licensed or unlicensed caregiver, either of whom could be a relative (the "receiving family"). CA must expect that absence to be temporary (180 days or less) and that the child will be reunified with the family of removal (per WAC 388-454-0015). Extensions beyond 180 days are possible if the CA social worker reports that the family is making progress, reunification is still the goal, and ESA's Community Services Division headquarters staff approves it.

Key Findings

We analyzed all 4,371 removal episodes that occurred in SFY 2009 that resulted in a placement of 90 days or more. We excluded the remaining 656 placements that lasted less than 90 days because most ended before concurrent benefits could be considered a viable option for the removal family: 319 (48 percent) of the removals ended within 7 days; 447 (68 percent) ended within 30 days. The vast majority of these short-term placements (605, 92 percent) ended with reunification.

The Children's Administration removal cases were matched with TANF caseloads from July 2008 to November 2011, to determine when concurrent benefit payments were made to the removal families, and what type of payments (TANF or Foster Care) were made to the receiving families. This analysis showed:

- In 35 percent (1,550 out of 4,371) of the removal episodes the removal families were receiving TANF grants when the children were removed from the home.
- Of those removal episodes, 80 percent (1,243 out of 1,550) involved removal families who received at least one month of continued TANF benefits while the child was in placement.
- The end result of these placements two years after removal was:
 - 38 percent (470 out of 1,243) of the removal episodes ended with reunification.
 - 44 percent (554 out of 1,243) ended without reunification. In these cases, the children "aged out" of the system, became legally free for adoption, or were permanently placed.
 - 18 percent (219) were coded as "open-unknown"—which means the placement was still open but the outcome of reunification was unknown as of November 2011.
- Average concurrent TANF benefit costs paid to the removal families during a single placement episode over two years was \$1,128. Note that all costs reported here for the concurrent benefits program are TANF costs – continuation of the entire TANF grant when no other children remain in the home or continuation of the removal child's portion of the grant when other children remain.

Q1. *How many cases received concurrent benefits? What were the costs?*

All of the children removed from their homes as a result of abuse or neglect investigations during SFY 2009, with removal episodes lasting 90+ days, were matched with TANF caseloads from July 2009 to November 2011, to describe participation in the concurrent benefit program. Table 1 on the next page shows removal episode counts and Table 2 shows ESA costs for the continuation of the TANF grant to the removal family.

4,371 removal episodes occurred during SFY 2009 and lasted more than 90+ days (some children were in more than one removal episode). Among those removal episodes:

- 65 percent (2,821) were from families not receiving TANF benefits when the children were removed. Concurrent benefits did not occur.
- 35 percent (1,550) were from families receiving TANF benefits when the children were removed. Of this group, 1,243 (80 percent) involved concurrent benefits.
- Payments to the receiving families were made in two ways, and these sometimes shifted over time, such as when a receiving family became licensed during a placement or when a child was moved from a licensed to an unlicensed caregiver or vice versa.
 - **TANF + Foster Care:** For 1,082 of these placements, all or part of the receiving family payments came through licensed foster care. The child’s removal family retained their full TANF benefit, including the removal child’s portion. The total TANF concurrent benefit cost for payments to removal families was \$1,231,683.
 - **TANF + TANF:** For 283 placements, all or part of the receiving family payments came through a TANF payment—either a child-only TANF payment or an adjustment to a receiving family’s already existing TANF grant. The child’s removal family retained their full TANF benefit, including the removal child’s portion. The total TANF concurrent benefit cost for payments to removal families was \$241,738.

COST: The total cost of the “concurrent” TANF payments made over the next two years to the original TANF families was \$1,473,421. The concurrent benefit payment months do not include the months of removal or reunification—only the months in between. The two-year average TANF cost per placement episode was \$1,128.

Q2. *How many concurrent benefit cases were reunified?*

Children’s Administration Reunifications and Time Frames. Among the 1,243 placements where concurrent TANF benefits were paid, we know:

- 38 percent (470 placements) ended with reunification. Concurrent TANF benefit costs for this group during the two years following removal were \$1,020 per placement episode over two years. On average, the clients in this group were on concurrent benefits for 130 days.
 - 10 percent (119 placements) of all concurrent benefit placements were reunified between three and six months after removal (91-180 days). Two-year TANF costs were \$488 per placement episode.
 - 28 percent (351 placements) of all concurrent benefit placements were reunified in more than six months after removal. Two-year TANF costs were \$1,200 per placement episode.
- 44 percent (554 placements) ended without reunification. In some of these cases, the children “aged out” of the system. In other cases, they were legally free for adoption or were permanently placed. Concurrent benefit costs for this group during the two years following placement were \$1,071. On average, the clients in this group were on concurrent benefits for 132 days.
- 18 percent (219 placements) were still coded as “open-unknown” at the end of this analysis period. Concurrent benefit costs for this group during the two years following placement were \$1,500. On average, clients in this group were on concurrent benefits for 234 days.

TABLE 1¹

Counts refer to child removal episodes starting in SFY 2009 which resulted in a placement of 90 or more days.

	Total Placement Episodes	On TANF when Removed		Concurrent Benefit Received?			
			% of Total Removed	No	Yes		
					Both Payment Groups ²	Foster Care + TANF	TANF + TANF
SUBGROUPS							
Total Removed	4,371	1,550	35%	307	1,243	1,082	283
Total Reunified	1,540	580		110	470	405	115
<i>Percent Reunified</i>	35%	37%		36%	38%		
Length of Placement = 90-180 days	426	147		28	119	95	30
Length of Placement = 181+ days	1,114	433		82	351	310	85

¹ Child placements are counted, not unduplicated children (a child can be in more than one placement episode in a year and if they are, they are counted in each placement). Placements are defined by the combination of FAMLINK ID, removal date, and ACES client ID. TANF + TANF means a child was a recipient in removal Assistance Unit and another Assistance Unit. Foster Care + TANF means that while the child was in licensed foster care, they were also a recipient in the removal Assistance Unit.

² Within a single placement episode, a child can be in more than one type of benefit household. Thus, the sum of the TANF + TANF and Foster Care + TANF placement episodes will exceed the count in this column, where the placement episode is counted only once.

TABLE 2¹

Counts refer to child removal episodes starting in SFY 2009 which resulted in a placement of 90 or more days.

	Both Concurrent Payment Groups			Foster Care + TANF		TANF + TANF	
	n ²	Total TANF Cost	Avg Cost/Client 2yr period	n	TANF \$	n	TANF \$
Total Removed	1,243	\$1,473,421	\$1,128	1,082	\$1,231,683	283	\$241,738
Total Reunified	470	\$481,506	\$1,020	405	\$393,158	115	\$88,348
Length of Placement = 90-180 days	119	\$58,098	\$488	95	\$39,983	30	\$18,115
Length of Placement = 181+ days	351	\$423,408	\$1,200	310	\$353,175	85	\$70,233
Mean Days on Concurrent Benefits³		130			122		102
Median Days on Concurrent Benefits³		92			91		92
Not Reunified	554	\$604,826	\$1,071	473	\$500,241	120	\$104,585
Length of Placement = 90-180 days	27	\$15,040	\$557	19	\$11,763	8	\$3,277
Length of Placement = 181+ days	527	\$589,786	\$1,098	454	\$488,478	112	\$101,308
Mean Days on Concurrent Benefits³		132			129		102
Median Days on Concurrent Benefits³		62			61		92
Open Placement, Unknown Outcome	219	\$387,089	\$1,500	204	\$338,284	48	\$48,805
Length of Placement = 181+ days	219	\$387,089	\$1,500	204	\$338,284	48	\$48,805
Mean Days on Concurrent Benefits³		234			221		128
Median Days on Concurrent Benefits³		153			151		92

¹ Child placements are counted, not unduplicated children (a child can be in more than one placement episode in a year and if they are, they are counted in each placement). Placements are defined by the combination of FAMLINK ID, removal date, and ACES client ID. TANF costs are only the dollars paid to the Assistance Unit of removal. All TANF monies, including Additional Requirements for Emergent Needs (AREN) payments, are included. Months of removal and reunification are not counted. TANF + TANF means a child was a recipient in removal Assistance Unit and another Assistance Unit. Foster Care + TANF means that while the child was in licensed foster care, they were also a recipient in the removal Assistance Unit.

² Within a single placement episode, a child can be in more than one type of benefit household. Thus, the sum of the TANF + TANF and Foster Care + TANF placement episodes will exceed the count in this column, where the placement episode is counted only once.

³ Under the "Both Concurrent" column, the mean and median days on concurrent benefits may exceed the maximum in either Foster Care + TANF or TANF + TANF placement because some children are in more than one type of concurrent benefit household during a single placement episode.

Q3. Is age related to the likelihood of receipt of concurrent benefits, or reunification for those who receive benefits?

The concurrent benefit table below was created for four age groups—birth through 4 years, 5 through 12 years, 13 through 15 years, and 16 and over. Abuse and neglect removals generally diminished by age of the child. Almost 40 percent of the children under 13 were on TANF when they were removed; in the oldest group, only 15 percent were on TANF when they were removed.

Among the children younger than 16, there did not seem to be strong differences by age in the reunifications among the children receiving concurrent benefits—it was between 32 and 43 percent for the three younger groups. Reunification of the oldest group of children (16 and up) was much lower (15 percent)—but that is primarily because almost 75 percent of those children transitioned to adulthood rather than reunify with their families (30 out of 41 youth).

TABLE 3¹

Counts refer to child removal episodes starting in SFY 2009 which resulted in a placement of 90 or more days.

	Total Placement Episodes	On TANF when Removed		Concurrent Benefit Received		
		n	% of Total Removed	Both Payment Groups ²	Foster Care + TANF	TANF + TANF
ALL AGES						
Total Removed	4,371	1,550	35%	1,243	1,082	283
Reunified	1,540	580		470	405	115
Percent Reunified		37%		38%		
Birth through Age 4						
Total Removed	2,201	843	38%	694	609	148
Reunified	794	308		258	231	55
Percent Reunified		37%		37%		
5 through Age 12						
Total Removed	1,343	528	39%	414	346	124
Reunified	531	224		176	139	58
Percent Reunified		42%		43%		
13 through Age 15						
Total Removed	459	124	27%	94	90	7
Reunified	141	37		30	30	1
Percent Reunified		30%		32%		
16 plus						
Total Removed	368	55	15%	41	37	4
Reunified	74	11		6	5	1
Percent Reunified		20%		15%		

¹ Child placements are counted, not unduplicated children (a child can be in more than one placement episode in a year and if they are, they are counted in each placement). Placements are defined by the combination of FAMILINK ID, removal date, and ACES client ID. TANF + TANF means a child was a recipient in removal Assistance Unit and another Assistance Unit. Foster Care + TANF means that while the child was in licensed foster care, they were also a recipient in the removal Assistance Unit.

² Within a single placement episode, a child can be in more than one type of benefit household. Thus, the sum of the TANF + TANF and Foster Care + TANF placement episodes will exceed the count in this column, where the placement episode is counted only once.

Q4. *How does the concurrent benefit program impact reunification rates?*

This question cannot be answered at this time because there is no clear comparison group. To provide a valid comparison of reunification rates, the two groups (those who received concurrent benefits and those who did not) must have the same general characteristics. A valid comparison group would be families with similar risk profiles, situations and stresses who were not receiving concurrent benefits during a similar time period. The risks, family situations and stresses that impact reunification are complex, and receiving concurrent benefits is likely only one part of the family reunification picture.

Referring back to Table 1, this is what we do know about those families who were on TANF when a child was removed during SFY 2009 and in placement at least 90 days:

- 36 percent (110 out of 307) of the families who did not receive concurrent benefits reunified.
- 38 percent (470 out of 1,243) of the families who received concurrent benefits reunified.

A team of staff from the Economic Services Administration and Children’s Administration within DSHS and the Washington State Health Care Authority have recently developed a new streamlined process to ensure that concurrent benefits are allocated consistently and appropriately—with the goal of ensuring that the families most in need of the benefits receive them. This effort will result in a new online training module for ESA and Children’s Administration staff which is expected to be available by November 2012. This training is expected to boost the already high percentage (80%) of TANF children in out-of-home placement who receive concurrent benefits.