



## **Annual Report to the Legislature**

# **Foster and Adoptive Home Placement**

RCW 74.13.031 (2)

December 1, 2011

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## Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
Foster Care Recruitment.....	4
Foster Home Turn-Over: Causes & Recommendations.....	7
Adoption Recruitment .....	10
Finalized Adoptions.....	14
Home Studies for Legally Free Children.....	16
Passport Program.....	17

## Executive Summary

This report is prepared in compliance with RCW 74.13.031 (2), which requires the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), Children's Administration (CA) to submit an annual report to the Governor and the Legislature on the agency success in:

- (a) Meeting the need for adoptive and foster home placements;*
- (b) Reducing the foster parent turnover rate;*
- (c) Completing home studies for legally free children; and*
- (d) Implementing and operating the passport program required by RCW 74.13.285.*

The report shall include a section entitled "Foster Home Turn-Over, Causes and Recommendations."

During Fiscal Year 2011, CA activities related to recruitment and retention resulted in the following:

**(a) Meeting the need for adoptive and foster home placements:**

- There were 5,570<sup>1</sup> licensed foster homes during FY 2011, of which 1,015 were newly licensed.
- There were 988<sup>2</sup> licensed families of color foster homes at the end of FY 2011.
- 1,659<sup>3</sup> adoptions were finalized.

**(b) Reducing the foster parent turnover rate:**

- Provided statewide support services through contracts with three private agencies: Olive Crest, Lutheran Community Services and the Foster Care Resource Network.

**(c) Completing home studies for legally free children:**

- Provided adoption home study services to 1,858<sup>4</sup> families during FY 2011, all of whom will have a home study completed prior to the adoption being finalized.

**(d) Implementing and operating the Passport Program<sup>5</sup>:**

- Implemented the Fostering Well-Being (FWB) program to improve healthcare services for children in out-of-home care.

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<sup>1</sup> Children's Administration Source FamLink Production Query Report (PQR) 427 - November 2011 Licensed Foster Homes

<sup>2</sup> Children's Administration Source FamLink PQR 427 - November 2011– Newly Licensed Foster Homes

<sup>3</sup> Children's Administration Source FamLink PQR 427 - November 2011 - Adoptions Finalized

<sup>4</sup> Children's Administration Source FamLink PQR 427 - November 2011 – Finalized Adoptions

<sup>5</sup> Passport is now called a Comprehensive Health Report

## **Foster Care Recruitment**

Children's Administration endeavors to continuously strengthen, improve and diversify recruitment efforts to seek potential foster and adoptive families. We seek a diverse pool of quality families who reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in care, as well as families who are interested in caring for children of varying age, gender, large sibling groups and children with special development, behavioral or medical needs.

We continue to recruit families that will help keep siblings together, parent adolescents and medically fragile children. Recruitment of adequate numbers of these resource families to meet the needs of children and youth in care is a complex process. Recruitment not only involves activities related to family finding; it must include the development of a positive public perception for the agency. Children's Administration's (CA) policies, practices and resources must also demonstrate our agency values and supports caregiver families to be successful in meeting the daily needs of children in care.

Children's Administration utilizes both community and CA staff in recruitment efforts across the three regions. Recruitment strategies are drawn from the Family to Family model and are designed to recruit resource families both across the state and in the local neighborhoods where data shows the greatest number of child removals. Each contract provides general consistency in recruitment issues and also allows for regionally tailored, specific recruitment needs. Contract staff providing recruitment and retention work must be either current or former foster parents. These "ground troops" are located in their own communities across each region.

CA bases much of its recruitment philosophy on the premise that satisfied; supported foster and adoptive parents make the best recruitments of other foster and adoptive parents.

CA strives to establish an effective, multi-dimensional recruitment strategy to encompass successful recruitment through general, targeted and child specific recruitment efforts. Recruitment must be ongoing, culturally competent and tailored to meet the changing background and needs of the children currently in need of placement, as well as those who may need placement in the future.

### **General Recruitment**

General recruitment broadcasts the need for foster and adoptive parents by building public interest and awareness of the need for foster families. It focuses on drawing in a wide variety of families while setting the stage for more targeted recruitment. General recruitment is most effective when used in combination with other recruitment strategies.

*“Foster Parenting – You Can Too”* generalized recruitment plan is widely recognized in communities and builds upon a consistent message around the state; and is utilized in brochures and pamphlets and other recruitment mediums. CA continues to use successful recruitment stories in the monthly recruitment Caregiver Connection newsletter.



All three regions celebrated National Foster Care Month (May) by hosting events to honor and support foster parents, including foster parent recognition and appreciation activities, and foster dinners.

The 4th Annual “We Are Family Day” was held at Safeco Field in May in partnership with the Seattle Mariners. Foster parents and others were able to purchase discounted tickets and were recognized at the game. Both CA and other private agencies set up recruitment booths at Safeco to hand out information about becoming foster parents.

Updated recruitment information is posted on the CA foster parent internet page. Calls are handled by the Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWA) which is able to provide a consistent message and assistance to inquiries statewide. Through a contract with CA, NWA also set up an electronic system where potential foster parents can fill out an online questionnaire of interest and send it. The questionnaire is automatically routed to the contractor in the appropriate part of the state, based on geographic information in the questionnaire. The contracted staff then contacts the potential foster parent and helps guide them through the recruitment process.

CA engaged in targeted recruitment to maintain children in their community or in the same school district. This is accomplished through use of the Family To Family “Neighborhood of Focus” approach, concentrating recruitment resources in those areas where the most children are removed from their homes and the fewest resources are available for placement.

The Braam requirement for placement stability on the average monthly ratio of licensed foster care beds to children in licensed foster care will be at least 2.0. CA met the benchmark requirement for FY 2009; and exceeded the FY 2010 benchmark. CA utilizes a variety of recruitment efforts to support children and families and improve outcomes to support Braam and GMAP goals.

Placement Stability as reported to the Braam Panel in March 2011 for Goal 1, Outcome 1 follows.

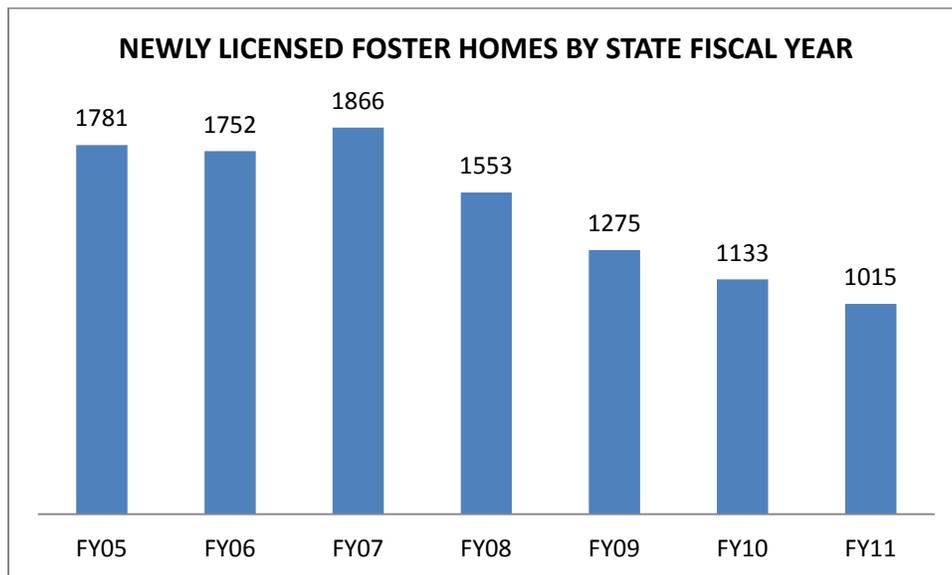
<p><b>Goal 1, Outcome 1</b>          The average monthly ratio of licensed foster care beds to children in licensed foster care will be at least 2.0.</p>
<p>Finding in Monitoring Report #8 Next Steps          (March 2011)</p>
<p><b>FY 10 Benchmark: 2.0</b>  <b>FY 10 Performance: 2.6</b>  <b>Reached FY 10 benchmark</b></p>

**Newly Licensed Homes**

Recruitment of new foster homes is a challenge in Washington state and nationally. Washington State has similar challenges to those experienced nationwide:

- Children in out-of-home care are presenting more difficult challenges for foster parents.
- Individuals or families may be reluctant to take on additional responsibilities of raising children if they are uncertain about their own job or economic status.
- An average of 70 percent of the children adopted are adopted by licensed foster parents (this includes relatives who were licensed). Adoption is a positive outcome for children, but also presents a challenge for placement resources, as a majority of Washington’s foster parents often leave the system when the adoption is complete.

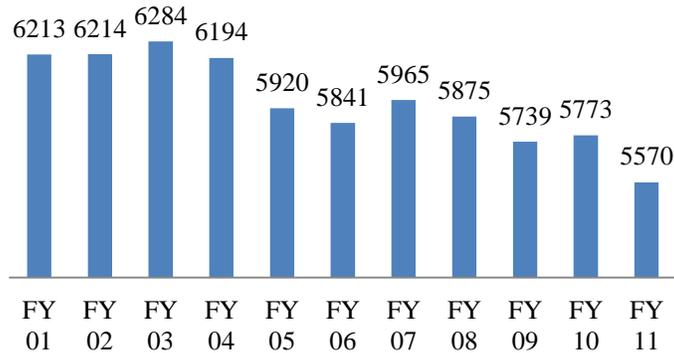
In FY 2011, 1,015 new foster homes were licensed. There has also been a equal decline the number of youth utilizing licensed foster care.



## Foster Home Turn-Over: Causes & Recommendations

There continues to be fluctuation in the total number of licensed foster homes in Washington during the fiscal year. It is believed that some of the reasons for the fluctuation are due to the changes in the economy, environment and increases in relative placements, which are not required to be licensed. The table below represents the total number of foster homes licensed at the end of the state fiscal year.

**Total Licensed Foster Homes FY 2011**



### Retention

The licensed foster home retention rate has been stable over the last several years. Foster homes initially licensed in 2005 that remained licensed in 2008 (three years later) were at 45.2 percent. In 2011, 20.4 percent continued to be licensed six years later. The following chart shows the retention of homes remaining licensed after three years has had a gradual increase during the past years.

LICENSED FOSTER HOME RETENTION BY YEAR FIRST LICENSED						
FY05	FY06	FY07	FY08	FY09	FY10	FY11
1781 100%	1337 75.10%	975 54.70%	805 45.20%	548 30.80%	430 24.10%	364 20.40%
	1752 100%	1367 78.00%	1014 57.90%	855 48.80%	511 29.20%	406 23.20%
		1866 100%	1434 76.80%	1061 56.90%	872 46.70%	504 27.00%
<b>LEGEND</b>			1553 100%	1161 74.80%	849 54.70%	715 46.00%
YEAR 1				1275 100%	1057 82.90%	932 73.10%
YEAR 2					1133 100%	1102 97.30%
YEAR 3						1015
YEAR 4						100%
YEAR 5						
YEAR 6						

There are expected reasons for license closure and they are important in understanding retention challenges. These reasons include:

- The foster parent completes the adoption or guardianship of a child in their home.
- The specific child the foster parent became licensed to care for has returned home.
- The foster parent's personal goals change (e.g. illness, job change, family commitments).
- The foster parent did not respond to renewal notices and the foster home license is subsequently closed.

Reasons for license closure that CA seeks to address include:

- Frustration with the child welfare system; and
- Challenges in coping with child behavior.

Children's Administration uses two key strategies to address these issues, 1) training and 2) support.

### **1624 Quarterly Consultation Meetings**

ESHB 1624 was passed in 2007 and directs Children's Administration (CA) to consult on a quarterly basis with foster parents and members of the Foster Parents Association of Washington (FPAWS). The first quarterly meetings began in October 2007 and have met consistently in the local regions, as well as in the statewide forum since that time. Due to budget constraints, the quarterly statewide meetings are convened through video/teleconference.

Two video/teleconference sites are located in each region for the state meeting. Audio conference calling is also available for foster parents who are unable to travel to the video/teleconference sites. The statewide meetings will continue with the use of video teleconferencing through the current biennium. Between statewide meetings two conference calls are held: one to debrief and clarify issues from the last meeting and one to build the agenda for the upcoming meeting.

All consultation meetings focus on identified issues to improve recruitment and retention of foster homes, effective foster parent training, enhancing children's lives in care and the commitment to strengthen communications between foster parents and CA. During the past year a new charter was drafted to improve the function and facilitation between the regional and state meetings and to build a solid process for nomination and election of foster parent representatives. With the restructuring of DSHS regions (from six to three), it was essential the number of foster parents seated on the state consultation team remain unchanged (12 from the regions and 2 from FPAWS) and were able to represent the voices of foster parents from all areas of the state. Currently the CA Assistant Secretary, the Director of Field Operations, the Director of the Division of Licensed Resources (DLR), the three Regional Administrators and any

others as directed by the CA Assistant Secretary, represent CA at the quarterly statewide meeting. State meetings are co-facilitated by a foster parent and a representative of CA.

Including the regional and statewide meetings and conference calls, 36 meetings are planned for 2012.

### **Camp To Belong**

Camp To Belong is a non-profit camp that provides a five-day summer camp experience for siblings separated from each other due to foster care or other out-of-home care arrangements. The Washington camp is part of a national Camp To Belong network. The events at camp are designed to increase bonding between siblings to keep them connected in what will likely be their longest life relationship. Children's Administration provides key financial and administrative support to help re-connect the siblings at the camp. CA works with its private partner, Foster Family Connections, which provides considerable logistical support, raises private money and directs the camp in August. In 2011, Washington sent 101 kids to camp at Miracle Ranch in Port Orchard, the largest number of campers at any of the Camp To Belong camps for the second year in a row.

### **Summary**

Increasing and maintaining a pool of quality licensed foster homes is challenged by the emotional and financial costs of caring for children as a volunteer. In a world with fewer stay-at-home parents and where most families have complex, busy lives, fostering is often seen as out of reach.

CA is working to increase supports of all kinds for licensed foster parents and relative caregivers, hoping to build on the foundation created the past several years through contracts, state law and other initiatives.

# Adoption Recruitment

Seventy-five percent of children in foster care in Washington who are adopted are adopted by their foster parents. Adoption is a social and legal protective measure for children that provide a lifetime commitment; it is not a temporary arrangement between individuals. Adoption for many is not an easy journey; it comes with many unanswered questions, good intentions and is not for everyone. CA staff must have the skills to delicately handle difficult issues and in some cases assist families to understand that love is not enough and that perhaps adoption is not the best plan for them. Adoptive parents must go through an assessment that is often intrusive and requires dealing with difficult issues in order for the adoption home evaluator to determine the fitness of the applicant (RCW 26.33.190).

There are many factors to consider when choosing a family that can “best meet the needs of a child” on a lifetime basis. It requires:

- Keeping the best interests of the child as the focal point
- Making placement decisions with known and available information
- Critically assessing a family’s willingness and ability to meet the child’s needs not their own needs
- Making placement decisions that are in the best interests of the child both now and in the future.

Not all families are able to be an adoptive resource for children. Prospective adoptive families must have an approved pre-placement (adoptive home study) report prior to being considered an adoptive family. Department staff uses many tools and critical thinking to make a recommendation of approved or denied. Using shared planning, the department makes critical assessments regarding the best interest of the child and prospective families.

## Adoption Recruitment Activities

CA undertakes a variety of activities to recruit adoptive families for waiting children. These activities include hosting consortiums, specific recruitment contracts with community partners, and the use of local and national adoption exchanges.

As of July 9, 2011, there were 1,379<sup>6</sup> legally free children with a permanent plan of adoption. Over half of the children are in placement with a permanent adoptive family and are awaiting finalization of their adoption.

## Adoption Consortiums

Adoption consortiums are often the first step in recruitment for a child in need of a permanent adoptive family when the birth family and the current caregiver are not a

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<sup>6</sup> Children’s Administration; Source FamLink PQR 427 - November 2011 Legally Free Children

permanent resource. An adoption consortium is a staffing that brings together both state and private agency staff to provide information about a child or children, learn about waiting adoptive families and learn about additional recruitment options. These consortiums occur in all three regions and build relationships with community partners and inter-regional linkages on behalf of children. For some children this is the only level of recruitment needed; for those whom an adoption consortium does not result in a match, adoption exchanges are used.

### **Local and National Adoption Exchanges**

The Children's Administration contracts with the Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE) to provide adoption recruitment through the use of local and national adoption exchanges. The Washington Adoption Resource Exchange (WARE) is a Washington state only recruitment resource. WARE provides a secure website that is password protected for CA staff and private adoption agency staff to recruit and match children with approved adoptive families. This website provides current information on children in need of an adoptive family and on approved adoptive families.

The children listed on the WAREKids website include children where concurrent planning is occurring and those who may not yet be legally available for adoption. CA staff is required to register all children who have a permanent plan of adoption and are not in an identified adoptive home.

During FY 2011 there were 198 new children registered with WARE for a total of 461 children served during the year. During this past year, 210 children registered with WARE were placed with permanent families.

Children who are registered with WARE for more than 90 days and are legally free are registered with the Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE) website [www.nwae.org](http://www.nwae.org) which provides recruitment on a national level. NWAE served 342 children throughout the fiscal year; this number fluctuates as new children are registered. At the end of the fourth quarter, 134 children were placed with permanent families, 45 are on hold with potential pending placements, and 136 children are still in need of matching with a family.

### **Child Specific Recruitment**

Children's Administration contracts with NWAE to provide comprehensive recruitment activities for children who need an adoptive family and for whom other recruitment activities have not been successful. NWAE subcontracts with six to seven private child placing agencies, forming a partnership to provide this child specific recruitment program, known as Specialized Adoption Recruitment Program (SARP).

Child-specific recruitment includes gaining a full understanding of the child's needs through discussion with the current and past caregivers including relatives, to determine

if they might be a resource for the child. Focused, individualized and persistent recruitment can and does work for children who are considered the hardest to place.

In FY 2011, 57 children were enrolled in the program, a slight drop from the previous year as one region did not enroll children. Thirty-seven (37) children were placed with adoptive families, 17 children are still waiting to be matched with a family, and 3 children were withdrawn at the request and/or in consultation with social workers.

Child-specific recruitment continues to increase the probability of finding a permanent adoptive family for children where regular recruitment methods have failed.

A breakdown by age for the 56 children served is:

<b>Children in Child Specific Recruitment FY 2011</b>	
<b>Age in Years</b>	<b>Number of Children/youth Enrolled</b>
0-7	6
8-12	20
13-18	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>

<b>Children in Child Specific Recruitment in FY 2010</b>	
<b>Age in Years</b>	<b>Number of Children/youth Enrolled</b>
0-7	8
8-12	24
13-18	28
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>

### **Purchase of Service**

The Purchase of Service (POS) program is a successful means to pay for post-placement supervision for hard to place children placed with adoptive families until the adoption is finalized. The POS program was designed in the late 1980s and provides funding to private agencies in and out of Washington state to offset the cost of recruitment, training, transitioning and supervision of adoptive placements for eligible children. This program is considered adoption recruitment and is IV-E reimbursable. Child eligibility is based upon WARE registration, and the length of time they are registered prior to identification and placement with an adoptive family.

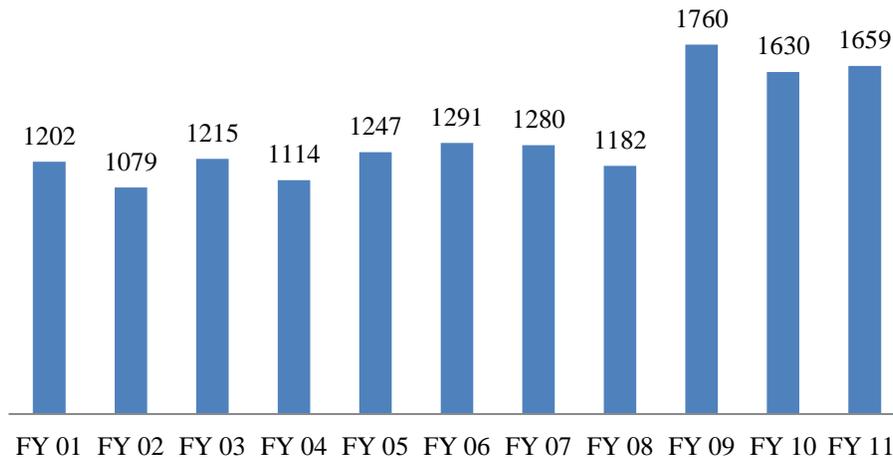
CA develops individual contracts for each eligible child. Contracts are outcome based and allow for two payments, one for the adoptive placement and one for the finalization of the adoption. If a child disrupts from the placement, the second payment is not paid.

In FY 2011, 57 children were referred to the program which resulted in 54 child specific contracts for adoptive placements. Fourteen children have had their adoption finalized during the fiscal year and the remaining children are pending adoption finalization.

## Finalized Adoptions

The Children's Administration (CA) continues to make every effort to establish permanency for children unable to return to the care and custody of their birth parents through adoption, third party custody, dependency guardianship and long-term-care agreements with foster parents or relatives. Permanency through adoption was established for 1,659 children in the care and custody of CA during Fiscal Year 2011.

### Finalized Adoptions FY 2011



There continues to be a high number of legally free children, 1,379 in need of permanency, even though CA continues to complete over 1,000 adoptions annually. Reasons for legally free children remaining in out-of-home care are:

- Current caregiver has been identified as a potential permanent family but an adoptive home study has not been completed.
- Child and family may need services to stabilize a placement prior to finalizing an adoption.
- Prospective adoptive family is not willing and able to meet the specific needs of a child and a new placement needs to be identified.
- Completing the Child's Family Medical and Social Background disclosure with the adoptive family is time intensive.
- Though recruitment efforts are underway, a permanent family has not yet been identified for a child, youth or sibling group.
- Preparing and transitioning children into permanent adoptive families involves several factors. Including:
  - Age of the child or youth
  - Needs of the child (educational, medical, emotional)
  - Proximity of adoptive family to child's current placement
  - ICPC regulations and contracting issues

- Children are not ready for adoption due to mental health and/or behavioral issues.
- Children with a higher level of needs and issues (emotional or behavioral) are harder to find a permanent family and require more intense recruitment work to find an adoptive family.
- Some youth and adoptive families are more frequently inquiring about the pros and cons of delaying adoption finalization in order take advantage of newly publicized college assistance programs. The eligibility requirements for some programs are determined by the youth's age at time of adoption.

### **Summary**

CA continues to focus on achieving permanency for children in foster care. There continued to be focus on permanency through adoption in FY 2011 that resulted in 1,659 children achieving permanency. The goal of the agency continues to be developing permanency plans that are in the best interests of a child. There have been several children in the past couple of years that have been waiting for adoption for several years and were able to finally have a family to call their own. Each child remains the central element in adoption decision making.

## Home Studies for Legally Free Children

The Children's Administration provides adoption services to many families throughout the year; the number of families receiving adoption services is determined by looking at a point in time. There were 1,858 families that had an adoptive home study completed through Children's Administration in FY 2011. Some children are adopted by families that have services provided by a private agency. Some children are placed with adoptive families that receive services through a private child placing agency either in Washington or in another state.

Adoption services provided by CA to adoptive families include:

- Completion of adoptive home studies, which requires making a critical assessment regarding an applicant's:
  - Willingness and capacity to meet a child's needs
  - Belief that a child will do well in life
  - Understanding of the impact of positive day-to-day experiences can have on a child
  - Character, suitability and fitness to parent a special needs child
  - Recognition of their own limitations and challenges in parenting a special needs child
  - Openness to be flexible and seek out resources to meet needs of child and family
- Child identification
- Transition support for successful placement
- Post-placement services to the child and family
- Assistance with adoption finalization and application for Adoption Support

The goal of the Children's Administration is to complete an adoption home study within 90 days of a completed application. The actual amount of time it takes to complete an adoptive home study involves a variety of factors. The home study process consists of several phases, including:

- Information gathering
- Assessing the information you learn
- Review what makes you curious
- Address concerns
- What were the circumstances of the situation,
- What did they learn, what changed
- When did they learn it
- Responsibility (owning up to their role in the issue)
- What would they do if the same situation occurred again
- Assessment of what you learned

- Evaluating what you learn that leads to a critical assessment and recommendation

The home study utilizes many tools to make the critical assessment, including:

- Completion of pre-service training
- Completion of criminal history background check including fingerprint check
- Completion of child abuse and neglect check in and out of state when required
- Completion of adoption paperwork
- References returned to the agency

## Passport Program

### Overview & History

The Department of Social and Health Services is committed to improving healthcare services for children in out-of-home placement. The Fostering Well-Being (FWB) program is a collaborative effort between the Health Care Authority, the Aging and Disability Services Administration and Children’s Administration. Fostering Well-Being uses a person-centered health model to address the comprehensive healthcare needs of children in out-of-home placement and better aligns the department’s resources to improve health outcomes for these children. The Passport program has been melded into the overall agency Fostering Well-Being.

The information below has been reported to the Braam panel report #10 the Appendix (September 2011).

<b>Goal 1, Outcome 2</b> Children in out-of-home care 30 days or longer will have completed and documented Child Health and Education Track (CHET) screens within 30 days of entering care.	
Most Recent Annual Performance Data	Next Steps in Monitoring Compliance
<b>FY11 Performance: 91%</b>  <b>FY10 Performance: 78.0%</b> <b>FY09 Performance: 64%</b>  <b>Benchmark: 90%</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue Quality Assurance Review to Identify and Address Reasons CHETs are not completed within 30 days</li> <li>• Continue to facilitate early periodic screening diagnosis and treatment (EPSDT) exams for children and youth within 30 days of entry into care</li> </ul>

<b>Goal 1, Outcome 3</b> A shared planning meeting (SPM) focusing on the CHET screening results will be held within 60 days of each child’s entry into care.	
Most Recent Annual Performance Data	Next Steps in Monitoring Compliance
<b>FY11 Performance: 90%</b>  <b>FY10 Performance: 90%</b> <b>FY09 Performance: 51.9%</b>  <b>Benchmark: 90%</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to use monthly CHET share planning meeting in FamLink management report</li> <li>• Develop and implement online shared planning meeting FamLink management report</li> <li>• Continue to communicate policy and practice expectations</li> </ul>

<b>Goal 1, Outcome 4</b> Children age 3 and under in out-of-home care will be referred to the Early Support for Infant and Toddlers Program (Early Intervention) 6 within 2 workdays of identification of concerns about developmental delays from their CHET screens.	
Most Recent Annual Performance Data	Next Steps in Monitoring Compliance
<b>FY11 Performance: 97%</b>  <b>FY10 Performance: 86%</b> <b>FY09 Performance: 72%</b>  <b>Benchmark: 90%</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue Quality Assurance Review to Identify and Address Reasons ESIT referral are not completed within required timeframe.</li> </ul>

### The Major Components to the Program

- Medical ID cards issued to all children in out-of-home placement within three (3) working days of placement notification.
- CHLD Profile Immunization information reports mailed to caregivers within three (3) working days of placement notification.
- Medical records requested for the last two (2) years for all children in out-of-home placement for more than 30 days.
- Care coordination of health concerns provided for children in out-of-home placement.
- Fostering Well-Being program managers and clinical nurse advisors are available for consultation with social workers and caregivers regarding individual health questions and concerns.
- Six (6) Regional Medical Consultants continue to be a vital link for social workers, caregivers, and local medical communities.
- Healthcare reports mailed to caregivers within three (3) working days of initial placement notification. (Fall 2011)
- Early and Periodic Screening Diagnosis & Treatment (EPSDT) or Well-Child Exam reminders sent to caregivers. (Fall 2011)
- Health education materials mailed to caregivers for children with certain health conditions. (Fall 2011)