

# **Report to the Legislature**

Children's Administration  
Annual Quality Assurance Report, Fiscal Year 2011  
July 1, 2010 through June 30, 2011

RCW 43.20A.870 and RCW 74.13.031(5)

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## **Children's Administration Overview** **Safe, healthy individuals, families and communities**

The Children's Administration Annual Quality Services Report is a legislatively required annual review of the Children's Administration's efforts to enhance child safety and permanency and support child and family well-being.

This report, the 15th **Children's Services Annual Quality Assurance Report**, details performance outcome data in compliance with RCW 43.20A.870 and RCW 74.13.031(5), in order to demonstrate progress in the following specific service areas:

### **Child Protective Services (CPS) response time**

*The Administration responds quickly to allegations of abuse or neglect and implements safeguards to protect children who have been abused or neglected from further abuse or neglect at the hands of their caregivers.*

### **Children's health and safety in out-of-home care**

*The Administration monitors children in out-of-home care, performs health and safety checks on licensed facilities, and works to provide safe placements to children who have been removed from their families due to abuse or neglect so they are not abused or neglected in licensed care.*

### **Adherence to permanency planning guidelines**

*The Administration works toward placing children in permanent homes as quickly as possible and tracks progress with reference to reunification within 12 months and adoption within 24 months.*

### **Children's length of stay in out-of-home placement**

*The Administration seeks to limit the amount of time children spend in out-of-home care prior to reunification or other permanency plan completion.*

The Department of Social and Health Services and all of its service administrations subscribe to one mission, one vision, and one core set of values. The department's vision is, "safe, healthy individuals, families and communities."

The Children's Administration, in alignment with that greater vision, is charged with providing or overseeing the provision of all aspects of services and supports within the public child welfare continuum. Overarching roles and responsibilities of the Children's Administration include:

- Responding to and investigating reports of suspected child abuse and neglect.
- Providing or overseeing the provision of child and family services and supports to help parents safely care for their own children whenever possible.
- Securing safe and stable temporary placements for children until children may safely be returned home or placed into an alternative safe and stable permanent home.
- Overseeing the provision of medical, educational, and mental health services to children in out-of-home care.
- Licensing and monitoring temporary foster family and relative homes for temporary placement of children, as well as congregate care or therapeutic facilities to care for children.

- Providing services and supports to older youth transitioning out of foster care into responsible independent living.

While the Administration continually tracks performance in all areas of service delivery and oversight in an effort to improve outcomes, this report addresses only a select number of measures as required by statute.

Children's Administration maintains accountability not only to the legislature but to the Washington public for efforts toward continuous quality improvement in the child welfare system while recognizing that no government entity alone can ensure the safety of children.

Children's Administration relies on mandated reporters such as community-based service providers, child serving agencies, faith communities, schools, as well as caring individuals to speak up on behalf of vulnerable children, by reporting suspected child maltreatment.

Children's Administration, like all other DSHS entities, has worked to improve methods for measuring and improving performance.

The data in this report comes from multiple sources including: the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services Executive Management Information System, the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, and the State Automated Child Welfare Information System called FamLink. Measures are reported by Federal Fiscal Year, October 1, 2010 until September 30, 2011 if required by the federal Administration for Children and Families and by state fiscal year, July 1, 2010 until June 30, 2011 for other legislatively required measures. The reporting period is noted for each measure.

### **Performance measures in this report**

In addition to monitoring performance in compliance with federal performance requirements, and responding to other legislative and judicial mandates for outcome measurement, Children's Administration continues to refine methods for assessing performance and improving outcomes for children and families.

The following measures are included in this report:

- Timely response in emergent referrals
- Timely response in non-emergent referrals
- Children who did not experience additional abuse
- Children who are free from abuse or neglect while in out-of-home care
- Foster homes receiving health and safety checks
- Children visited every month by their social worker
- Children in care for longer than two years
- Median number of days children are placed in care
- Children reunified within 12 months of placement
- Children adopted within 24 months of placement
- Percentage of children reentering care within 12 months of reunification

The validation of federal data usually occurs several months following the end of the federal fiscal year. In the interest of consistency and data integrity, beginning in 2013 for the FY2012 Quality Assurance Report, the report will be delivered to the Legislature at the end of April each year.

## Safety

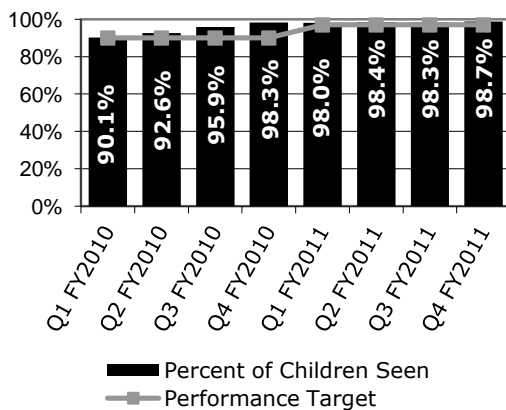
**Objective:** Initiate timely investigations  
**Measured by:** Children seen face-to-face by a social worker following a referral accepted for investigation

Any time a call is placed reporting the suspected abuse or neglect of a child, the intake social worker must determine whether the report meets the legal criteria to warrant an investigation based upon the information provided. Not only must there be indicators that some type of abuse or neglect has occurred, there must be adequate information to allow investigators to identify and locate the child or children concerned within prescribed timeframes.

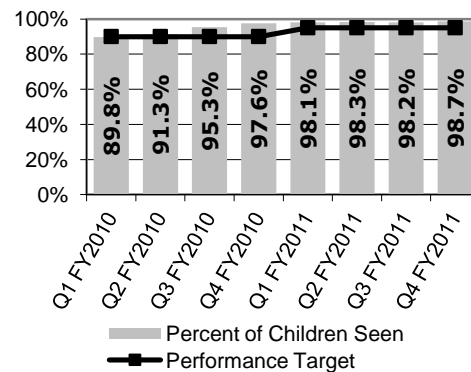
Intakes meeting the sufficiency screen and criteria for either an emergent or a non-emergent response are screened in for investigation. Whenever a child or group of children meets the legal criteria for an emergent response or are determined to be at "imminent risk" of harm, an investigating social worker must initiate the investigation and make face-to-face contact with the child within 24 hours of receipt of the referral. Intakes where the criteria for a non-emergent response are indicated, social workers must make face-to-face contact with the child within 72 hours.

As of the last quarter of State Fiscal Year 2011, 98.7 percent of children in emergent referrals were seen within 24 hours and the same proportion of children in non-emergent referrals, 98.7 percent, were seen within 72 hours.

**Percentage of Children in Emergent Referrals Seen Within 24 Hours\***



**Percentage of Children in Non-Emergent Referrals Seen Within 72 Hours\*\***



\* Average quarterly percentage of children in emergent referrals seen or attempted within 24 hours. Excludes Division of Licensed Resources (DLR) CPS referrals. Source: FamLink data for GMAP October 2011.

\*\* Average quarterly percentage of children in non-emergent referrals seen or attempted within 72 hours. Excludes Division of Licensed Resources (DLR) CPS referrals. FamLink data for GMAP October 2011.

**Objective: Reduce recurrence of abuse or neglect**  
**Measured by: Children who do not experience re-abuse**

A child is considered the victim of re-abuse when he or she has experienced a founded allegation of abuse or neglect within six months of a previous finding of abuse or neglect.

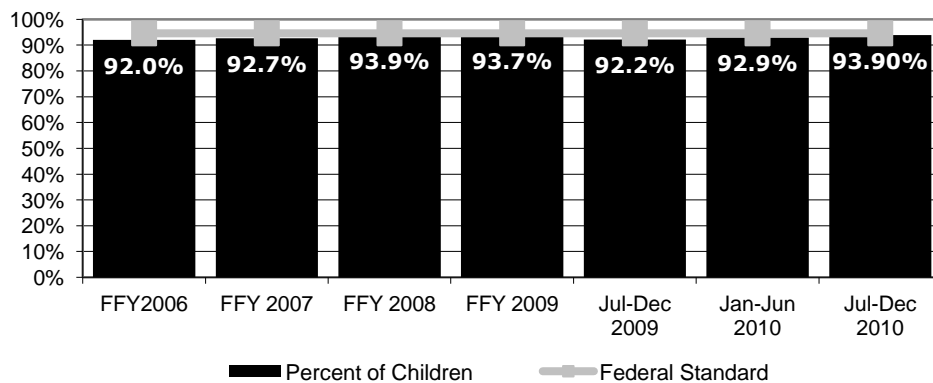
This measure is currently reported in six-month intervals for the first and second halves of a given calendar year. This allows Children’s Administration to more closely monitor recurrence rates. Because this measure requires a six-month look back on data, the most recent data reported will not be as current as is reported for other measures. The most current data for this measure is for July through December 2010.

The federal standard states that 94.6 percent of children who have experienced a founded allegation of abuse or neglect will be safe from an additional founded allegation within six months.

This standard is necessarily stringent and like the federal entities who have established this performance target, the Administration believes that no child should experience re-abuse at the hands of a caregiver. Toward that goal, the Administration has worked to implement interventions designed to further reduce incidents of re-abuse including safety plans and implementing a variety of family supports. Children’s Administration has demonstrated outcome performance of between 92.0 percent and 93.9 percent since 2006 with the last half of Calendar Year 2010 showing the highest performance.

Safety is at the forefront of every aspect of our work; we anticipate continued improvement regarding this measure as Children’s Administration implements an enhanced child safety framework designed to maintain child safety at every point in a child’s involvement with the public child welfare system.

**Percentage of Children Who Did Not Experience Re-Abuse\***



\* Percent of children with a founded referral of abuse or neglect who were free from an additional founded referral of abuse or neglect within six months of the initial referral. "Founded" means that an investigation concluded that the maltreatment was more likely than not to have occurred. For referrals with multiple allegations, the referral is considered founded if any of the allegations are founded. The federal standard is 94.6 percent or more children will be free from additional founded allegations of abuse. In 2002, the federal government changed the required reporting period from calendar year to federal fiscal year. Source: FamLink data for GMAP October, 2011.

**Objective:** Improve safety for children placed in out-of-home care

**Measured by:** Children who are free from abuse or neglect in out-of-home care

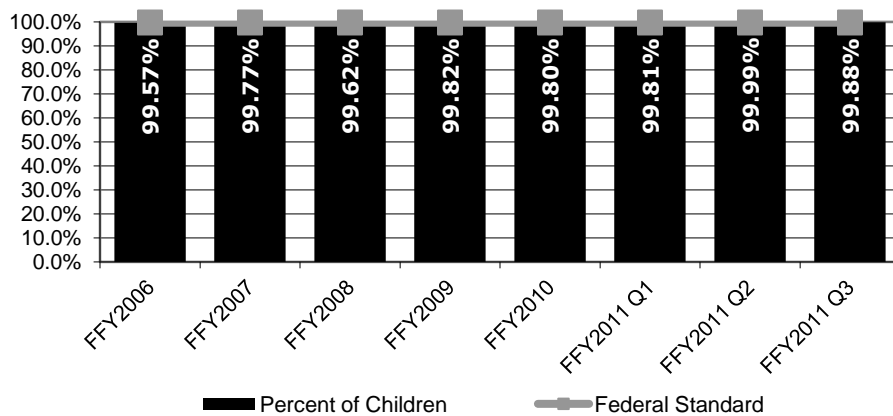
The Children’s Administration works diligently to ensure that homes licensed to provide care for foster children are safe and stable. Those homes or facilities must meet strict licensing standards to ensure that the family homes and surrounding grounds are safe for children.

In addition, those responsible for caring for children must undergo background checks, participate in education and training, and demonstrate competency in a variety of skills associated with providing care for and nurturing vulnerable children. Children’s Administration takes great care to ensure that children who have already experienced caregiver abuse or neglect are safe in licensed care.

This measure is currently reported on a fiscal quarterly basis, allowing the Administration to more closely monitor the percentage of children in out-of-home care who are safe from abuse or neglect. More than 99 percent of children were safe from abuse or neglect in their out-of-home care settings for every quarter of State Fiscal Year 2011.

While Children’s Administration exceeds federal expectations for this measure, ongoing efforts are underway to ensure that no child experiences harm in state licensed family foster homes or facilities.

**Percentage of Children Free From Abuse or Neglect While in Out-of-Home Care\***



\* Percent of children in out-of-home care without a founded referral of abuse or neglect. The federal standard is 99.68 percent or more. Source: FamLink Data: October 2011.

**Objective: Improve safety for children placed in out-of-home care**

**Measured by: Foster homes receiving health and safety checks**

Washington state statute requires that "Monitoring shall be done by the department on a random sample basis of no less than ten percent of the total licensed family foster homes licensed by the Administration on July 1 of each year," and reported annually. (RCW 74.13.260; RCW 74.13.031(5))

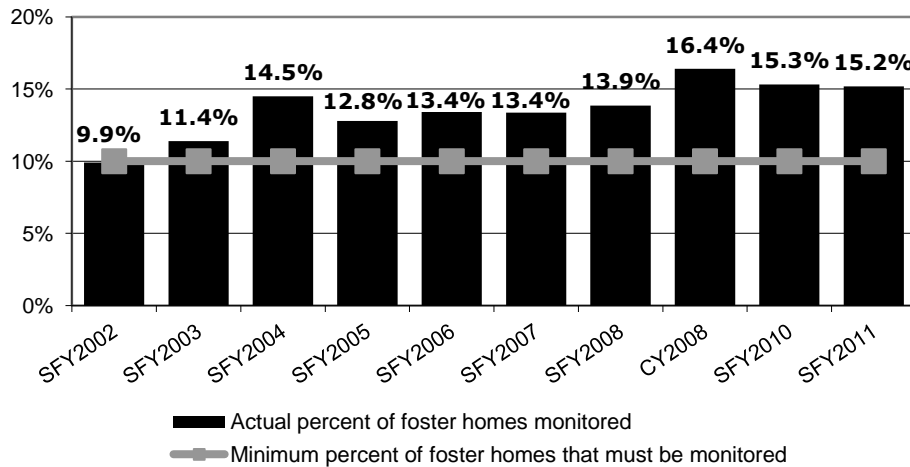
In State Fiscal Year 2011, 15.3 percent of licensed homes received a health and safety check, exceeding the 10 percent performance standard.

Foster parents must meet licensing standards and so must the physical structures in which children are placed.

Fireplaces or wood stoves must be entirely surrounded by safety fences. Two-story houses are required to demonstrate safe methods of exit in case of fire. Medications are locked, first aid kits are well-stocked, and foster parents must be trained in First Aid, CPR and safe response to Blood-borne Pathogens.

Licensors thoroughly inspect and evaluate the condition of homes and facilities to make sure that no health or safety hazards have arisen since a license was issued or since a previous health and safety check.

**Percentage of Division of Licensed Resources (DLR) Foster Homes Monitored Annually\***



\* Percentage of Division of Licensed Resources (DLR) foster homes with a health and safety check completed by the Division of Licensed Resources annually. Data Sourced: FamLink data, State Fiscal Year 2011 for total number of licensed foster homes (excludes private agency homes). Division of Licensed Resources hand counts for total number of homes receiving health and safety checks during the fiscal year.



**Objective: Increase worker visits with children**  
**Measured by: Children visited every month by their social worker**

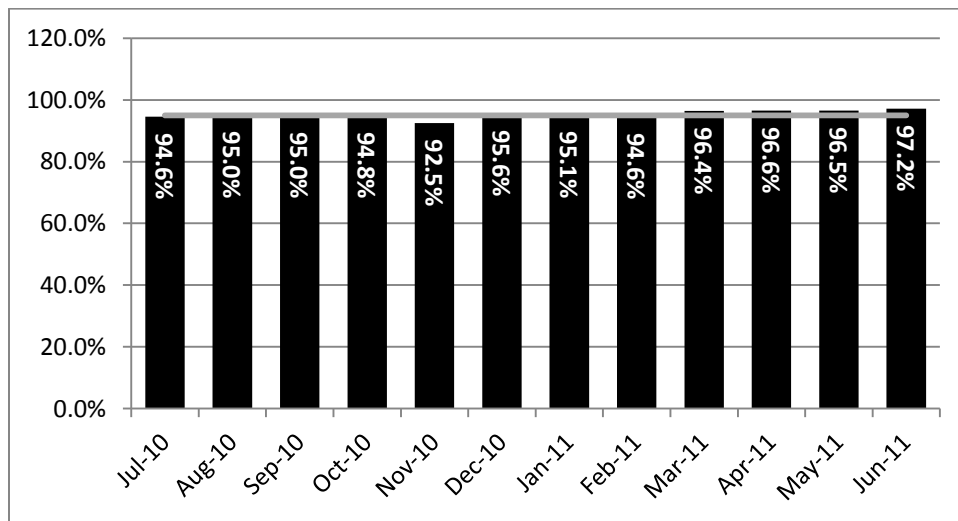
In order to monitor the health and safety of children in out-of-home care, social workers must make contact with children on a monthly basis.

Social workers are required to visit children in person, in their out-of-home placements at least once a month not to exceed 40 days between visits. These visits allow the social worker to visually assess a child's health and well-being, evaluate the child's physical surroundings and examine the child's adjustment to his or her placement to determine whether or not the placement is meeting the child's needs. In addition, social workers interact with children on their caseloads through telephone contact and attendance at meetings and appointments related to a child's case.

The target for this measure requires that 95 percent of children in out-of-home care will receive a private and individual face-to-face health and safety visit at least once during the calendar month.

Social workers completed monthly visits with more than 95 percent of children in their out-of-home placements throughout FY2011.

**Percentage of children in placement who receive a health and safety check during a single calendar month.**



\* Source: FamLink run October, 2011. Not all children requiring a monthly visit during June 2011 are reflected due to a data discrepancy in the FamLink information system. The known issue has now been corrected and implemented.

**Permanency**

**Goal: Provide safe, permanent placements as quickly as possible for children who are placed into out-of-home care**

**Objective: Increase permanency for children in out-of-home care**

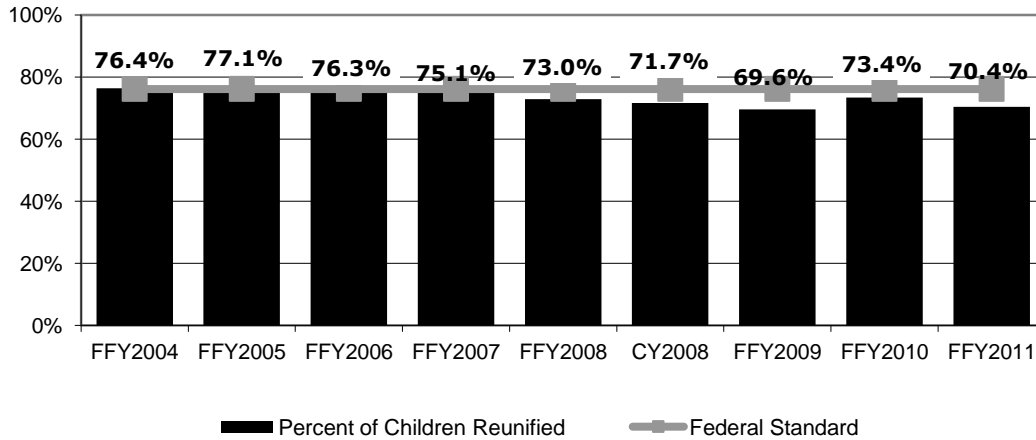
**Measured by: Children reunified within 12 months of placement**

The Children’s Administration works to reunify children with their families of origin when parental actions, safety assessment, and adequate safety planning indicate that reunification is in the child’s best interest.

The federal standard requires that at least 76.2 percent of children for whom reunification is the best permanent outcome will be reunified within 12 months of out-of-home placement.

In Federal Fiscal Year 2011, 70.4 percent of children who had been removed from their parents due to abuse or neglect were able to safely return home, representing a decline from the previous year.

**Percentage of Children Reunified Within 12 Months of Placement\***



\* Percent of children reunified with their parents within 12 months of placement into out-of-home care. The federal standard is 76.2 percent or higher. Source: Washington Child and Family Services Review Data Profile, February 1, 2011.

**Objective: Increase permanency for children in out-of-home care**

**Measured by: Children adopted within 24 months of placement**

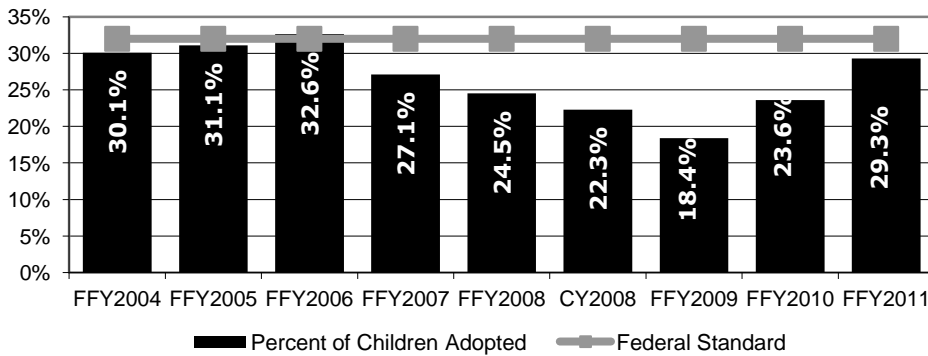
Whenever it is safe and in the best interest of the children involved, the Children’s Administration strives to maintain those children in their home or return them home as quickly as can be safely accomplished. However, in alignment with federal requirements, the Administration simultaneously engages in a process of concurrent planning to find an alternative permanent home should reunification efforts fail.

The goal of concurrent planning is to prevent children from spending a long time in temporary foster care by making diligent efforts to secure safety and permanency regardless of whether a child returns home.

Children who enter state care after the age of five, children of color, sibling groups, and children with special physical, mental, or behavioral needs tend to stay in foster care longer than very young, healthy children.

The federal standard is that 32 percent of children in care will be adopted within 24 months of placement. In Federal Fiscal Year 2011, 29.3 percent of children in Washington state care were adopted within 24 months of placement. That figure represents the highest timely adoption rate in the past six years.

**Percentage of Children Adopted Within 24 Months of Placement\***



\* Percent of children adopted within 24 months of placement into out-of-home care. The federal standard is 32 percent or higher. Source: Washington Child and Family Services Review Data Profile, February 1, 2012.

**Objective:** Decrease length of stay without increasing reentry

**Measured by:** Length of stay greater than two years and median length of stay

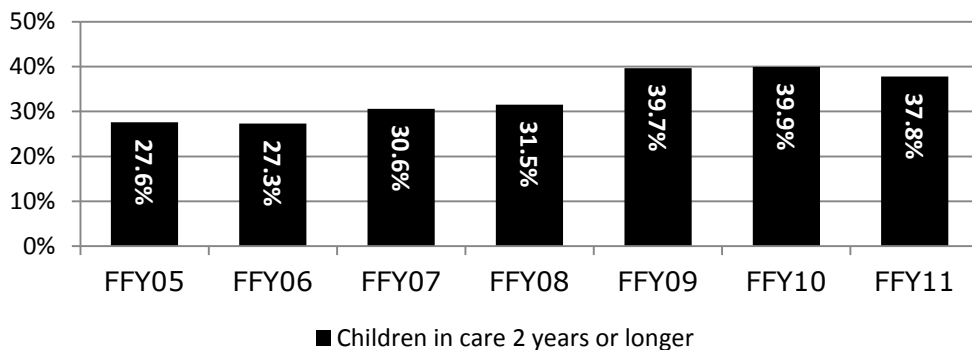
When children must be placed into out-of-home care to keep them safe and stable, the goal is always to move those children into stable, permanent homes as quickly as possible while maintaining safety.

The length of stay greater than two years measure is now based upon the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System data. It showed a decrease in the most recent reporting period to 37.8 percent.

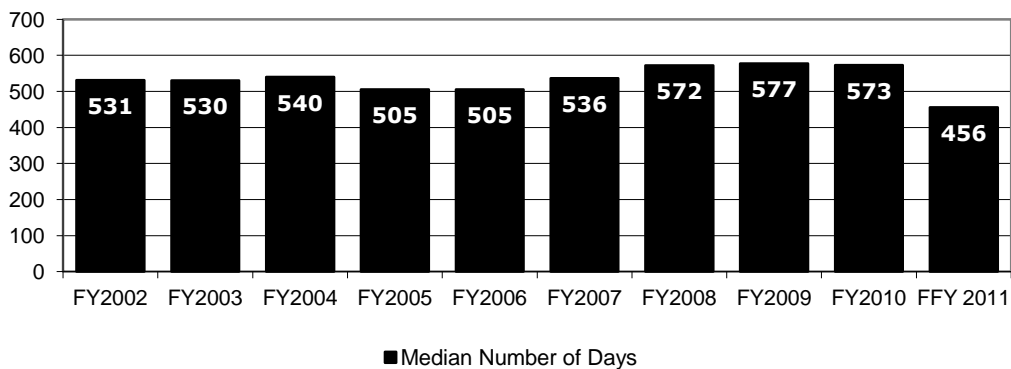
The median length of stay measure indicates how many days a child spends in foster care. The median number of days children spent in out-of-home care shows a marked decrease in the most recent reporting period to 456 days, diminishing to the lowest number in the ten year period shown.

Data reporting for these measures changed in 2011 for consistency with other permanency measures through the use of federally validated Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System data used in the Children’s Administration Child and Family Services Review data profile.

**Percentage of Children in Care for More Than 2 Years\***



**Median Number of Days Children are Placed in Care\*\***



\* Children in care for longer than two years at time of exit using exit cohort data. Source: AFCARS data submission calculation through Casey Family Program data share agreement.

\*\*Median length of stay in foster care on the last day of the federal fiscal year. Source: Washington Child and Family Services Review Data Profile, February 1, 2012.

**Objective: Decrease length-of-stay without increasing reentry**

**Measured by: Children reentering care**

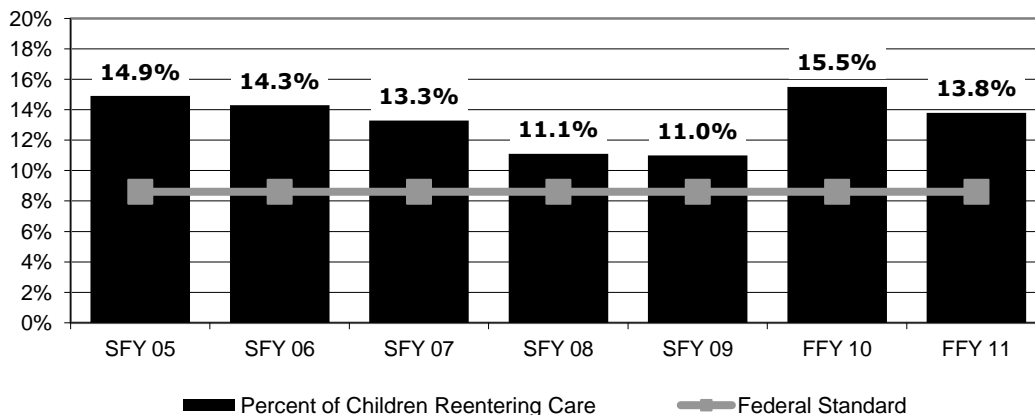
Children’s Administration strives to safely maintain children in their own homes whenever possible through community-based resources and supports. However, children cannot always be safely cared for by their own families.

The decision to remove a child from their home and family is not taken lightly and Children’s Administration cannot make such decisions unilaterally. Child Protective Services (CPS) makes recommendations to the court that a child needs to be placed in the home of a substitute caregiver, as there is no other way to control or manage threats to the child’s safety. Courts, not CPS, have the ultimate authority to remove children from their parents.

Likewise, the decision to return children to the homes from which they have been removed is serious and a great deal of effort on the part of the families to improve safety and stability and on the part of child welfare professionals must go into assessing a family’s readiness for a child to return home. Children’s Administration implements safety plans designed to control and manage safety threats when returned to their parents’ care and prevent a return to foster care. Data reporting for this measure changed in 2010 for consistency with other permanency measures through the use of federally validated Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System data used in the Children’s Administration Child and Family Services Review data profile.

The federal standard requires that no more than 8.6 percent of children who have been returned home will come back into care for reasons of abuse or neglect. In Federal Fiscal Year 2011, 13.8 percent of children who had previously returned home came back into foster care.

**Percentage of Children Reentering Care within 12 Months of Reunification\***



\* Of all children discharged from foster care to reunification in the 12-months period prior to the year shown, the percent that re-entered foster care in less than 12 months from the date of discharge. Source: Washington Child and Family Services Review Data Profile, February 1, 2012.

## ***Conclusion***

As the public child welfare agency for the state of Washington, the Children's Administration is held to necessarily high standards in its administration of strategies to improve the safety, stability, and well-being of children and families.

The Children's Administration and its partners must meet various stringent federal, legislative, and judicial requirements. Even with these requirements, the Children's Administration engages in continual self appraisal. Where our efforts have succeeded, we work to replicate them; where we have been challenged, we strive to improve.

This report tells part of the Children's Administration story. It shows that social workers are visiting more vulnerable children more quickly than ever before and that children are safer in their own homes and in foster homes because Children's Administration became involved in their lives. It also demonstrates that children are spending less time in temporary foster care placements and are being adopted more quickly through the efforts of Children's Administration staff.

Children's Administration will continue to practice self evaluation and engage in quality improvement efforts in an effort to keep more children safe in their own homes and in out-of-home care and to help preserve families, communities, and cultures through the vital work that we do.