

Report to the Legislature

Foster & Adoptive Home Placement

RCW 74.13.031(2)

December 1, 2013

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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 2013, CA activities related to recruitment and retention resulted in the following:

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

- There were 5,133¹ licensed foster homes during FY 2013, of which 1,035 were newly licensed.
- There were 1,179² licensed families of color foster homes at the end of FY 2013.
- 1,239³ adoptions were finalized.

(b) Reducing the foster parent turnover rate:

- Provided statewide support services through a performance-based contract with Olive Crest, a licensed private agency headquartered in Bellevue with regional recruitment/liaison staff stationed across the state.

(c) Completing home studies for legally free children:

- Provided adoption home study services to 2,218⁴ families during FY 2013, all of whom will have a home study completed prior to the adoption being finalized.

(d) Implementing and operating the Passport Program:⁵

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

¹ Children's Administration Source FamLink Production Query Report (PQR) 863 - July 2013 Licensed Foster Homes

² Children's Administration Source FamLink PQR 863 - July 2013– Newly Licensed Foster Homes

³ Children's Administration Source FamLink PQR 863- July 2013 - Adoptions Finalized

⁴ Children's Administration Source FamLink PQR 863- July 2013 – Finalized Adoptions

⁵ Passport is now called a Comprehensive Health Report

Foster Family Recruitment

Children's Administration (CA) endeavors to continuously strengthen, improve and diversify recruitment efforts to seek potential foster and adoptive families. We seek a diverse pool of safe, 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 developmental, behavioral or medical needs. The Children's leadership team emphasizes the message and belief that: "recruitment and support of foster families is everyone's business at Children's Administration."

Recruitment of prospective foster families is a complex, demanding and on-going process. Potential foster families, who make an initial inquiry in response to a recruitment message, typically respond after they have seen/heard the recruitment message approximately seven times. 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 (CA) policies and practices must also demonstrate our agency values to support caregiver families to be successful in meeting the daily needs of the children they care for. CA and many other states focus much of their recruitment philosophy on the premise that satisfied and supported foster and adoptive parents make the best recruiters of other foster and adoptive parents.

In October 2012, Children's Administration entered into a performance-based contract with Olive Crest, a licensed non-profit agency in Bellevue, Washington. The contract established one statewide contractor to partner with CA in the diligent recruitment of foster families to develop an adequate pool of foster families who can meet the diverse needs of children in out of home care. The new contract changed the recruitment of foster families from a regional to a statewide model. The Request for Proposals (RFP) and ensuing contract emphasized and incentivized recruitment of:

- Newly licensed foster families, and
- Foster families who would be licensed for:
 - Three or more siblings,
 - Youth ages 12 and older, and
- Foster families of Native American, African-American and Hispanic backgrounds.

The contract also specified a focus in recruiting families for:

- Children with challenging emotional and behavioral difficulties;
- Children birth to 3;
- Medically fragile children;
- Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual, Transgender and Questioning children and youth;
- Both urban and rural areas; and
- Local neighborhoods where historical data shows the greatest number of children are removed from their families and placed in foster care

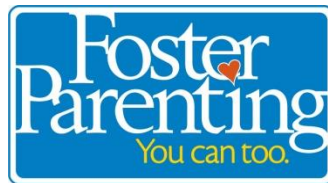
CA's foster care recruitment and retention contract with Olive Crest focuses on developing a consistent statewide message in recruitment utilizing a state Oversight Team that provides monthly consultation on recruitment needs, efforts and messaging. Regional representatives from Olive Crest and Children's implement the state recruitment messaging to meet specific recruitment needs both statewide and in their specific areas.

CA will maintain an adequate ratio of licensed foster care beds to children in licensed foster homes. The Braam settlement requires that at least two beds will be available to safely place every child who comes into care. CA exceeded the benchmark for FY 2013, as it has done every year since 2001.

CA strives to develop its diligent recruitment plan in concert with its contractor Olive Crest – Fostering Together, based on a 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 safely meet the needs of the children currently in need of placement, as well as those who may need placement in the future.

General Recruitment

General recruitment shares information with individuals in local communities about the ongoing need for foster parents. This recruitment effort builds interest and awareness of the need for foster families – it is most effective when shared with the local community and focused on the number of children who currently need placement. General recruitment and awareness building draw in a wide variety of families while setting the stage for more targeted recruitment. General recruitment is most effective when used consistently in combination with other recruitment strategies. Children's continues to utilize its branding and messaging plan "Foster Parenting – You can too" developed in 2007 and 2008. It is utilized on the CA foster parent recruitment page and is utilized in brochures, pamphlets and other recruitment mediums. It is widely recognized in communities and continues to build upon a consistent message about foster parenting around the state.



Olive Crest, Children’s contractor uses: “Fostering Together – Our Community. . . Our Children” in conjunction with Children’s Administration logo in its recruitment work. Olive Crest also utilizes its Fostering Together website to enhance and support foster family recruitment and retention at: <http://fosteringtogether.org/>



National Foster Care Month and Recruitment Events

Governor Inslee recognized National Foster Care Month in Washington with a signed proclamation declaring May as Foster Care Month and recognized caregivers of children who live in out-of-home care. All three regions celebrated National Foster Care Month in May, hosting various events to honor and recognize foster parents with many foster parent appreciation events and dinners held across the state. Washington’s signature Foster Care Month event “*We Are Family*” day was held for the 6th year at Safeco Field in partnership with the Seattle Mariners. On May 19, 2013, nearly 700 foster families gathered at Safeco Field to watch the Mariners beat the Oakland As. Secretary Kevin Quigley greeted caregivers at the welcoming ceremony and offered his appreciation for their work and dedication in meeting the needs of the children in their care. Youth from the foster care system shared words of appreciation for their caregivers and one youth was selected to throw out the ceremonial first pitch.

Foster families received discounted tickets for the game and were treated to multiple give-aways donated for the event including Mariners tee-shirts for everyone, Mother’s Day bracelets and a drawing for a Mariners’ baseball signed by infielder Dustin Ackley. Foster parents were recognized by the Mariners during the game. Once again foster care agencies manned recruitment booths during the game to talk with families about Washington’s need for more foster parents.

Two recent statewide Spanish radio foster care recruitment broadcasts have been coordinated with the Commission on Hispanic Affairs through KDNA 91.9 FM to increase the numbers of Spanish speaking foster families; with three more planned for next year. CA is also now partnering with the Washington state Office for Deaf and Hard of Hearing to recruit deaf and American Sign Language (ASL) fluent individuals to meet the needs of deaf children in the foster care system. The first recruitment information night is planned for October 2013 in Tacoma.

Olive Crest – Fostering Together maintains an updated webpage and engages their recruiter/liaison staff within each region in recruitment of both general and targeted recruitment activities focused on the priority populations identified under the recruitment contract.

Recruitment efforts are also developed by regional collaboratives within each area based on local need utilizing placement and foster care data. Regional collaboratives feed information from their area up to the state Recruitment and Retention Oversight Team and also utilize state team information to plan and evaluate local and regional recruitment efforts.

Northwest Resource Associates (NWRA) manages all initial inquiries from families who express interest in foster parenting through the online website or through the 1-888-KIDS-414 statewide phone line. Approximately 300 electronic inquiries and 60 calls per month are routed through NWRA. This system routes each inquiry electronically to Olive Crest where the regional recruiter/liaisons make contact with each person within 24 business hours. Olive Crest's staff continues to provide twice a month contact with the prospective family through the recruitment, training and licensing process.

Targeted Recruitment

Targeted foster care recruitment identifies unique needs of children or youth in need of foster families and implements specialized recruitment messages and strategies to identify prospective families. Effective targeted recruitment utilizes data to inform recruitment planning; looking at characteristics of current foster parents, their locations and children who are entering placement. Children's current contract with Olive Crest also adds a focus on communities or neighborhoods where the largest numbers of children have been removed from their homes. Targeted recruitment helps CA maintain children in their community or in the same school district when it is safe to do so for each child.

Child Specific Recruitment

Child-specific recruitment strategies are employed to help recruit foster, relative and adoptive families for specific children in foster care. These efforts require strong partnership between the child's worker and the recruiter to coordinate information that can be shared about the child or youth without violating confidentiality. Child specific recruitment is most frequently used for older youth who have experienced multiple placement disruptions or for adoption recruitment planning.

Communication

Foster parents, relative caregivers, social work staff and community partners within the child welfare community are served by the monthly Caregiver Connection newsletter produced by CA. The Caregiver Connection was first issued in March 2004, is currently delivered electronically each month to over 7,000 subscribers and reaches about 76% of foster parents. It contains feature stories, information about policies, resources and help available to caregivers.

Olive Crest also utilizes online communication to share information with foster parents both through their website and also through the Northwest Resource Associates data tracker system. Olive Crest operates numerous online Facebook groups to help facilitate communication with foster parents.

Support Groups

Support groups remain the backbone of the support system and will continue to serve that role in the new contract. The groups are built and often maintained by the foster parent recruiter liaisons working under contract with CA. The groups provide time for networking, training, sharing of resources and advice and are community based. Small issues receive information and support in the groups, often by veteran foster parents mentoring newer foster parents on process of behavioral/emotional issues they have experienced with children.

Olive Crest utilizes Facebook support groups that are secure for the groups participating. They are monitored by Olive Crest staff and offer a significant opportunity for foster families to gain information and support for the children they are caring for. Resources, information and respite care are shared among the participants. Olive Crest currently operates 51 in-person or online support groups under the contract with Children's Administration.

Foster Home Recruitment Challenges

Washington, like most states, faces the challenge of recruiting an adequate supply of quality, safe and nurturing foster families who can meet the diverse needs of children and youth who must enter out-of-home care. Factors that impact foster care recruitment in Washington State and other states nationwide are:

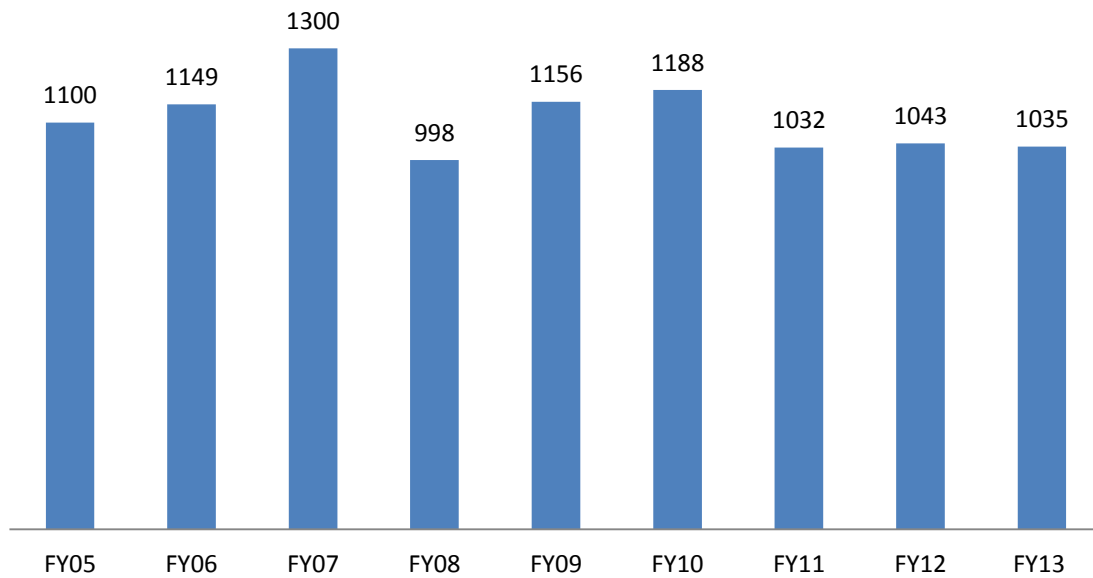
- Children in out-of-home care now present with more difficult and challenging behaviors and issues.
- Foster parents today are asked to take on more responsibilities than in previous years. Foster parents in the past were recruited as substitute care providers. Today, foster parents are considered important members of the child's professional team, their information about the child is valued and they are often asked or encouraged to:
 - Meet with the social worker and other professionals working with the child,
 - Provide transportation for the child,
 - Help with regular visitation for siblings and/or parent(s),
 - Attend multiple staffings and give input,
 - Attend the child's court hearings and provide a written report.
- 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.
- In the past, many foster families became licensed and served as foster parents for extensive periods of time; many foster families today become licensed for a "reason" or a "season." Some may not serve as long because they become licensed:
 - As a "foster-adoptive" family;
 - For a specific child or sibling group; or
 - Only for a relative child.

Once the permanent plan for the child is completed, they are more likely to close their license.

- An average of 70 percent of adopted children 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 2013, 1,035 new foster homes were licensed.

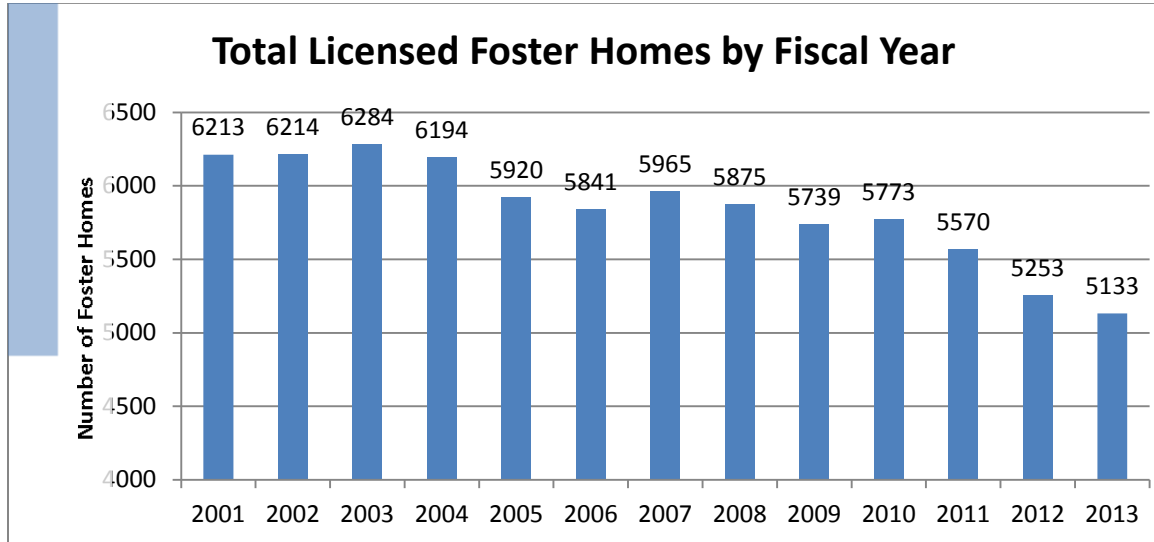
NEWLY LICENSED FOSTER HOMES BY STATE FISCAL YEAR⁶



⁶ All counts updated 7/31/13. Source: FamLink Production Data Warehouse. Data include DLR licensed, adoptive home and other provider types. Counts identify first foster home license date where application was not incomplete or withdrawn.

Foster Home Turn-Over: Causes & Recommendations

There continues to be an overall downward trend in the total number of licensed foster homes in Washington over the last decade. This trend is likely associated with a push toward permanency for children in care, changes in the economy and increases in relative placements. The table below represents the total number of foster homes licensed at the end of the state fiscal year.



Retention

The chart on the next page shows the retention of homes remaining licensed since 2005. Licensed foster home attrition has shown a consistent pattern over many years. The number of homes continuing licensure from year to year remains very high until Year Three, when there is a significant decline between Year Three and Year Four. This is tied to the fact that the licensing period is three years. Many families close at renewal if the children in their home achieve permanency, or no longer require out-of-home care. We do know that the two greatest reasons for families closing their license is due to adoption, or the family moves.

LICENSED FOSTER HOME RETENTION BY YEAR FIRST LICENSED⁷

FY05	FY06	FY07	FY08	FY09	FY10	FY11	FY12	FY13
1100	1039	887	721	472	388	330	214	168
100.0%	94.5%	80.6%	65.5%	42.9%	35.3%	30.0%	19.5%	15.3%
	1149	1098	946	798	462	367	297	194
	100.0%	95.6%	82.3%	69.5%	40.2%	31.9%	25.8%	16.9%
		1300	1227	1062	879	482	385	325
		100.0%	94.4%	81.7%	67.6%	37.1%	29.6%	25.0%
			998	961	830	684	380	316
			100.0%	96.3%	83.2%	68.5%	38.1%	31.7%
				1156	1124	978	806	439
				100.0%	97.2%	84.6%	69.7%	38.0%
					1188	1153	1000	843
					100.0%	97.1%	84.2%	71.0%
						1032	996	872
						100.0%	96.5%	84.5%
							1043	1010
								1035
								100.0%

Legend
1st yr
2nd yr
3rd yr
4th yr
5th yr
6th yr
7th yr
8th yr
9th yr

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 his/her 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.

⁷ All counts updated 7/31/13. Source: FamLink Production Data Warehouse. Data include DLR licensed, adoptive home and other provider types. Counts identify first foster home license date where application was not incomplete or withdrawn.

Children's Administration uses two key strategies to address these issues:

- 1) Increased and Enhanced Foster Training through Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence, partnership with the University of Washington and Eastern Washington University. Currently there is a partnership between the Alliance and Children's Administration to develop and enhance current foster parent training. Core competencies have been established, and a new curriculum is being developed for both pre-service and in-service foster parent training. New training is anticipated to be developed in the spring of 2014.
- 2) Support, through recruitment and retention contract providers, quarterly statewide 1624 meetings, annual foster parent survey results.

1624 Quarterly Consultation Meetings

Children's Administration (CA) has continued the quarterly foster parent consultation meetings through the Children's Administration Foster Parent Consultation Team (CAFPT). The team is composed of CA staff appointed by the Children's Assistant Secretary and regionally elected foster parents and representatives from the Foster Parents' Association of Washington State (FPAWS). In October 2013, the team completed six years of consultation. The "1624 Consultation Team" was established in response to ESHB 1624 enacted in 2007. Foster parents and regional leadership from Children's Administration continues to meet quarterly in two locations within each region (mirroring the old six regions); to ensure the foster parent voice is heard in all areas throughout the state related to foster parent recruitment, retention and services to foster children. At the regional meetings, identified topics with statewide impact are moved forward for discussion and appropriate action at the quarterly state CAFPT meeting. Due to continuing budget constraints, the quarterly statewide CAFPT meetings are convened through video/teleconference.

Two monthly conference calls debrief and clarify issues from the last meeting and to build the agenda for the upcoming meeting.

CAFPT 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 and to identify and resolve issues of concern. Highlights of the 2013 CAFPT team include:

- Rewriting the 2001 "Foster Parents Right and Responsibilities" which will be shared with all CA staff and caregivers;
- On-line accessibility to all Children's social workers and supervisors' telephone and email contact information, updated every other month;
- Efforts to improve the lack of respite care services for foster parents;
- Identifying a variety of options to complete foster parent in-service training: in-person, online, videos, books and periodicals that allow foster parents to complete training as their schedules permit;
- Informing Children's Administration of the significant need of funding for child care to assist foster parents when they must attend mandatory trainings;

- Timely permanence for children in out-of-home care;
- Clarification of the foster parent's role in Family Team Decision Meetings (FTDMs), court hearings and timely notification to caregivers; and
- Updated information on issues related to medical and health related care for children in out-of-home care.

The Caregiver Connection, the monthly foster parent newsletter, and the Foster Parent Listserv continue to be essential and active resources in sharing information from the CAFPT and other important information quickly with caregivers.

Including the regional and statewide meetings and conference calls, 36 meetings are planned for State Fiscal Year 2014.

Camp to Belong

Children's Administration continues to work with its contractor, Foster Family Connections to offer Camp to Belong (CTB) each year in August at Miracle Ranch in Port Orchard. 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 operated through the United States and Australia. 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 reconnect the siblings at the camp. Foster Family Connections provides camp administration, logistical support and raises private money to help fund camp activities. In 2013, Washington sent 100 kids to camp, the largest number of campers at any of the Camp to Belong camps for the fourth year in a row. For three days during the 2013 camp, Camp to Belong founder, Lynn Price participated with the youth speaking on the theme: "Victors in Life – Not Victims." The Camp to Belong website can be found at: <http://camptobelong.org/camp-locations/camp-to-belong-washington/>

Summary of Recruitment and Retention Activities

Recruiting and retaining a pool of diverse, safe, caring, quality licensed foster families is challenged by a number of factors: fewer stay-at-home parents coupled with families who lead complex and busy lives, continued lack of knowledge about the need for foster parents in each local community, assumptions about lack of qualifications and apprehension about the emotional and financial costs of investing in children as a volunteer. For many prospective families, there simply is a lack of awareness about the need for more foster families. The approach by Children's Administration together with Olive Crest's Fostering Together program utilizes generalized, targeted and child specific recruitment. This effort delivered across the state and to each community, together with strong support of current foster parents, creates a multi-pronged strategy for successful foster care recruitment and retention.

Adoption Recruitment

On average, seventy percent of children in foster care in Washington who are adopted are adopted by their foster parents. Adoption is a social and legally permanent measure for children that provides 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 very thorough 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; and
- 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 as an adoptive family. Department staff use 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 June 30, 2013, there were 1,517⁸ 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.

⁸ Children’s Administration Source: FamLink PQR 863 July 2013 Legally Free Children

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 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 for 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 2013 there were 155⁹ new children registered with WARE for a total of 293¹⁰ children served during the year. During this past year, 92¹¹ 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 which provides recruitment on a national level. NWAE served 256¹² children throughout the fiscal year; this number fluctuates as new children are registered. At the end of the fourth quarter, 64¹³ children were placed with permanent families, 33¹⁴ are on hold with potential pending placements, and 141¹⁵ children are still in need of matching with a family.

⁹ Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2013

¹⁰ Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2013

¹¹ Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2013

¹² Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2013

¹³ Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2013

¹⁴ Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2013

¹⁵ Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2013

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 2013, 20¹⁶ children were enrolled in the program, 9¹⁷ children were placed with adoptive families, 4¹⁸ children are still waiting to be matched with a family, and 6¹⁹ 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.

¹⁶ Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2013

¹⁷ Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2013

¹⁸ Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2013

¹⁹ Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2013

A breakdown by age for the children served is:

Children in Child Specific Recruitment FY 2013²⁰	
Age in Years	Number of Children/Youth Enrolled
0-7	0
8-12	9
13-18	11
Total	20

Children in Child Specific Recruitment in FY 2012	
Age in Years	Number of Children/Youth Enrolled
0-7	8
8-12	14
13-18	25
Total	47

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.

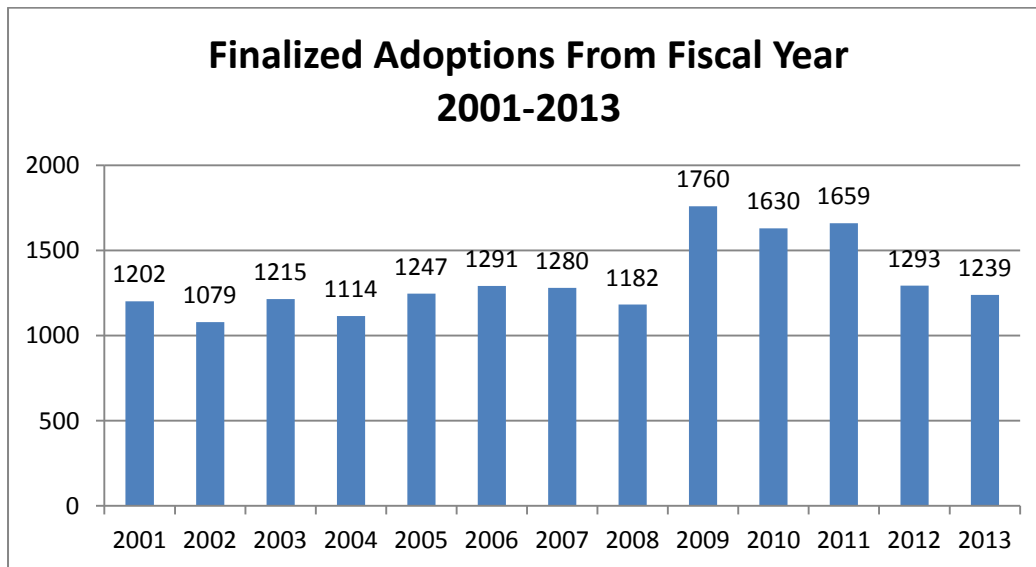
CA develops individual contracts for each eligible child. Contracts are outcome-based and allow for two payments, one for the adoptive placement and one for the finalization of the adoption. If a child disrupts from the placement, the second payment is not paid.

In FY 2013, 66 children were referred to the program which resulted in 64 child specific contracts for adoptive placements. Twenty-four children have had their adoption finalized during the fiscal year and three children were moved to new homes. The remaining 37 children are pending adoption finalization.

²⁰ Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2013

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. That permanency is achieved through adoption, third party custody and guardianships with foster parents or relatives. Permanency through adoption was established for 1,239 children in the care and custody of CA during Fiscal Year 2013. The decrease in finalized adoptions that began in 2012 and continued in 2013 is likely due to a number of reasons. Between 2009 and 2011 Children's Administration focused on establishing permanency for children, which resulted in a high number of adoptions as this goal was accomplished. The number of finalized adoptions for 2012 and 2013 is consistent with the numbers from 2001-2008, prior to that permanency push.



There continues to be a high number of legally free children (1,517) 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 or updated.
- Child and family may need services to stabilize a placement prior to finalizing an adoption.
- Prospective adoptive family is not willing and/or able to meet the specific needs of a child and a new placement needs to be identified.
- The Child's Family Medical and Social Background disclosure and entire legally free case disclosure with the adoptive family is time intensive and difficult to complete more quickly with current staffing.
- 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; and
 - ICPC regulations and contracting issues.
- Children are not ready for adoption due to mental health and/or behavioral issues.
- It is more difficult to find a permanent family and requires more intense recruitment work to find an adoptive family for children with higher needs and issues (emotional or behavioral).
- Some youth and adoptive families are more frequently inquiring about the pros and cons of delaying adoption finalization in order to 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.
- There is a continual fluctuation in numbers as children achieve permanency through adoption and new children are becoming legally free.

Summary

CA continues to focus on achieving permanency for children in foster care. There continued to be focus on permanency through adoption in FY 2013 that resulted in 1,239 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. Some children are adopted by families for whom services were provided by a private agency. Some children are placed with adoptive families for whom services were provided 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 of the family including:
 - 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; and
 - 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 submitted application. The actual amount of time it takes to complete an adoptive home study involves a variety of factors and is dependent upon timely submission of documentation and completion of requirements by the family themselves.

Children's Administration has taken a unified approach to completion of home studies in order to maximize efficiency in the process and enhance customer service. Instead of the possibility of a relative home study, then subsequently a licensing home study for families choosing to be licensed, and then even further, an adoption home study if the family seeks to be a permanent resource, the Division of Licensed Resources completes a single home study exploring the potential for permanency for each applicant. This has enabled the department to examine the potential for permanency early on in a child's placement rather than finding that a home that may meet licensing standards may not be as suitable for permanency for a particular child or children. The department implemented this approach statewide in the fall of 2012 and continues to make improvements in the process.

The home study utilizes many tools to make a 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; and
- References returned to the agency

Fostering Well-Being Program

Overview & History

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 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.
- Washington State Immunization Information System reports are 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 and uploaded into FamLink.
- Fostering Well-Being program managers and clinical nurse advisors are available for care coordination as well as 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 of children under age 13 within three (3) working days of initial placement notification. Early and Periodic Screening Diagnosis & Treatment (EPSDT) or Well-Child Exam reminder alerts are sent to social workers via FamLink.
- Health education materials mailed to caregivers for children with certain health conditions. A single nurse is assigned to oversee and coordinate healthcare of medically fragile children in foster care.
- Complete case reviews of medically fragile children to ensure they are connected to on-going and appropriate health care services that address their medically fragile conditions.
- In CY 2012, the Fostering Well-Being Care Coordination Unit provided services to 955 children.