



WASHINGTON STATE  
Department of  
Children, Youth, and Families



Report to the Washington State Governor and Legislature

**ANNUAL FOSTER PARENT AND  
ADOPTIVE HOME RECRUITMENT REPORT**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is prepared in compliance with RCW 74.13.031(2), which requires the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF, or the Department), Division of Child Welfare Programs to submit an annual report to the Governor and the Legislature on the agency's 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 a program per RCW 74.13.285 that obtains all known and available information concerning the mental, physical, health, and educational status of the child for any child who has been in a foster home for 90 consecutive days or more.

The report provides a broad overview of foster and adoptive parent recruitment, the retention of foster and adoptive homes, the status of home studies in Washington, and the tracking of medical, mental, and educational status of children in foster care. The report must include a section entitled "Foster Home Turn-Over: Causes and Recommendations." Additionally, this report provides recruitment and retention data trends and summarizes the steps DCYF is taking to address areas of concern.

## MEETING THE NEED FOR ADOPTIVE & FOSTER HOME PLACEMENTS (RECRUITMENT)

DCYF works to continuously strengthen, improve, and diversify recruitment efforts for potential foster and adoptive families. This includes families who reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in care, with an interest in caring for children of varying age and gender, sibling groups, and children with special developmental, behavioral, or medical needs. To meet the need for adoptive and foster home placements, DCYF uses three recruitment strategies: general, targeted, and child-specific.

**General Recruitment** This strategy helps build public interest and awareness. Recruitment messages appeal to prospective families and their desire to make a difference for children. General recruitment strategies also encourage the development of communities that are responsive to the unique experiences of caregivers and children in care. Examples of general recruitment includes posters and flyers placed in locations that are frequented by a large cross-section of the public.

**Targeted Recruitment** This strategy uses data and demographics of the children and youth in care to recruit resources specific to need. Targeted recruitment is culturally-responsive and community-based. Regional Recruitment, Development, and Support (RDS) teams guide these efforts and develop regionally-based, targeted recruitment strategies with the recruitment contractors. These multi-disciplinary teams are coordinated by DCYF and engage the expertise of Olive Crest and Eastern Washington University (EWU), child placing agencies (CPAs), the Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence, tribes, foster parents, community partners, and stakeholders. Targeted recruitment may include posters and flyers tailored and placed in specific venues. It can also include outreach to organizations that serve particular groups. One example of targeted recruitment is partnering with Special Olympics to generate interest from families who understand and are interested in the serving the unique needs of special needs children and youth.

**Child-Specific Recruitment** This strategy focuses on recruitment of prospective families for specific children and youth in foster care. Child-specific recruitment may include the sharing of

biographical sketches of children with specific foster parent groups, brief video vignettes of individual children, or child and youth-developed profiles shared with recruitment partners.

## PARTNERING WITH RECRUITMENT CONTRACTORS

DCYF contracts with two entities for recruitment of foster parents: EWU in regions one and two in eastern Washington, and Olive Crest, a private CPA, in regions three, four, five, and six in western Washington. Funding is allocated across a two-year period, July 1, 2018 – June 30, 2020. EWU's maximum allocation for the two-year period is \$1,119,870, and Olive Crest's maximum allocation is \$2,242,920.

These agencies recruit prospective foster families, track their inquiries, support their completion of training, and assist with the submission of licensing applications either through DCYF Licensing Division or one of the CPAs.

Recruitment contract staff are essential to the support of prospective foster parents as they begin the process of required training and the licensure application. Guidance and direction from contractor liaisons and mentors helps ensure prospective foster parents continue the required process to obtain their license. Without this support, prospective foster parents can get lost in the process. The contract provides incentives for increases in the number of applications from prospective foster parents.

The contracts focus specifically on recruiting foster families for:

- Racially and ethnically diverse children
- Sibling groups
- Youth over the age of 13 and youth in Extended Foster Care
- Children with emotional and behavioral challenges
- Children birth to three
- Medically fragile children
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ+) children and youth

Recruitment messaging is shared across all regional areas and local communities, emphasizing that foster families are needed statewide for children of all ages and of diverse backgrounds.

Prospective foster parent inquiries are distributed to the two contractors by Northwest Resource Associates (NwRA) which manages the Statewide Recruitment Information Center (SRIC), serving as the point of entry for all initial inquiries from families who reach out to DCYF with an interest in foster parenting. A majority of these inquiries enter the SRIC response system through online form submissions such as the [Becoming a Foster Parent](#) form on the DCYF website, or are directly input by recruitment contractor staff. A small portion come from the 1-888-KIDS-414 statewide phone line listed on the DCYF website. Alternately, some prospective families inquire directly through a licenser in the Licensing Division. Based on the SRIC Monthly Reports,<sup>1</sup> the SRIC posted an average of 546 potential foster parent monthly inquiries during FY 2018. This was a small increase from FY 2017.

## FOSTER HOME RECRUITMENT CHALLENGES

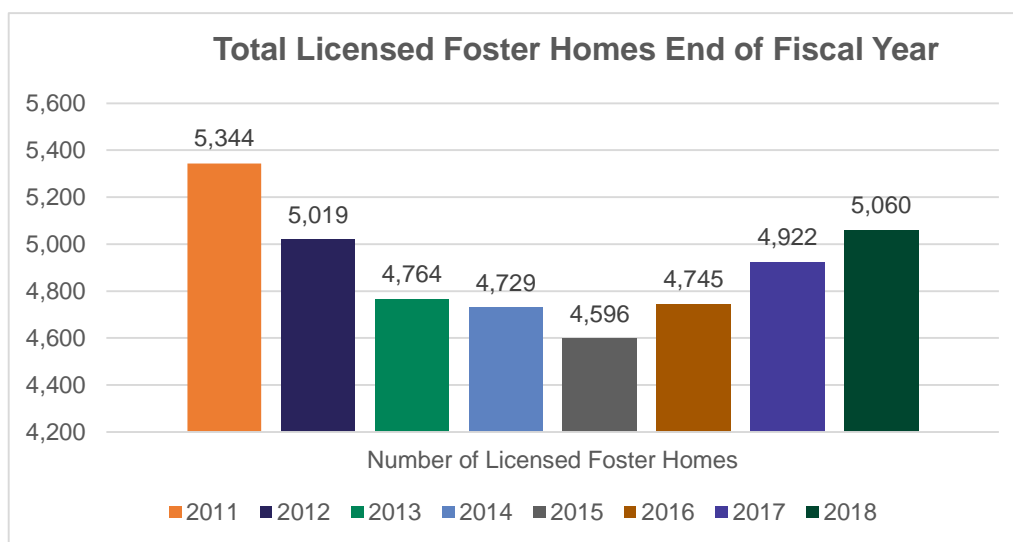
Washington continues to be challenged in recruiting an adequate supply of diverse, quality, safe, and nurturing foster families. Factors that have been identified which may impact foster care recruitment in Washington and other states include:

<sup>1</sup> Statewide Recruitment Information Center Monthly Reports, July 2017 – June 2018

- Children and youth enter care due to child abuse and neglect, which may result in challenging behaviors, mental health issues, and other unique needs.
- Today’s foster parents assume more responsibilities than foster parents in the past. Previously, foster parents were recruited as substitute care providers; now they are considered important members of the child’s case planning team. Their information and knowledge about the child is highly valued and they are often asked or encouraged to:
  - Meet with the caseworker and other professionals working with the child
  - Provide periodic or ongoing transportation for the child
  - Help with regular visitation for siblings and/or parent(s)
  - Attend family team meetings
  - Provide a written report for the court and attend hearings
- “The pool of potential foster parents is affected by cost of living, maternal employment, child care, and [monthly foster care reimbursement rates].”<sup>2</sup>
- Negative press about foster children and problems in the child welfare system discourages individuals from learning more about becoming foster parents, supporting foster caregivers, and other ways to support positive outcomes for children in care.
- Families who provide foster care experience changes in life circumstances including adopting children placed in their home and decide they can no longer be a resource for foster children.

## REDUCING FOSTER HOME TURNOVER: RETENTION

There was a small overall upward trend in the total number of licensed foster homes in Washington over the last fiscal year. Permanency efforts to decrease length-of-stay have resulted in some foster home closures as families finalize permanent plans such as adoption or guardianship for children in their care.



The table<sup>3</sup> below shows the number of foster homes licensed each year since 2010. The licensed foster homes retained from one year to the next has been improving slightly. The

<sup>2</sup> Marcenko, M. O., Brennan, K. D., & Lyons, S. J. (2009). *Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention: Developing Resource Families for Washington State’s Children in Care*. Seattle: Partners for Our Children

<sup>3</sup> All data updated 9/5/18. DCYF Source PQR 863 – Data on Licensed Foster Family Homes  
Data include DLR licensed, adoptive home, and other provider types. Counts identify first foster home license date.

licensing period for foster homes is three years and to remain licensed must be renewed. There is a tendency for foster families to allow their license to expire at the three-year mark.

Fiscal Year	Newly Licensed Homes
FY10	1,203
FY11	1,049
FY12	1,056
FY13	1,036
FY14	1,096
FY15	1,031
FY16	1,180
FY17	1,195
FY18	1,155

## HOME STUDIES FOR LEGALLY-FREE CHILDREN

To promote the health, safety, and permanency of children in out-of-home care, DCYF Licensing Division completes home studies for all caregivers caring for children in the custody of DCYF. The vast majority of home studies completed by DCYF are unified, meaning that the caregiver is assessed for placement as well as permanency (adoption or guardianship). Home studies can be divided into two general categories: licensed and unlicensed. Kinship caregivers are not required to get a foster care license; however, there are benefits (discussed later in this report) to licensing kinship caregivers when possible. In order to increase resources, establish permanency for children sooner, and better support kinship caregivers, DCYF Licensing Division would like to:

- License more homes for general foster care
- Increase the number of home studies completed each month
- Improve the timeliness of home studies
- License more kinship caregivers

The two primary barriers to achieving the goals listed above are:

- Insufficient capacity to manage the applications, approve home studies, license homes, and maintain the foster homes once they are licensed
- The home study process is inefficient with large amounts of paperwork that must be completed by applicants and managed by DCYF Licensing Division staff<sup>4</sup>

DCYF Licensing Division is currently undergoing structural changes as well as considering significant changes to the home study process to increase efficiency and timeliness. The current home study process and its tools were designed more than a decade ago and need to be updated with the goal of establishing a research-based and data-guided methodology which will help with consistency, objectivity, and reliability. In addition to the changes in the home study process, many other factors are being considered, including repurposing current resources, developing an IT system with an online portal for providers and caregivers, and adding new resources. Short-term, mid-range, and long-term tasks are identified:

### Short-Term

- Lean process to streamline the home study methodology

<sup>4</sup> The Department is requesting funding for an online portal allowing individual foster parents to set up an online account and monitor the progress of a licensing application, including changes or submitting follow-up information through the portal.

## ANNUAL UPDATE ON FOSTER PARENT AND ADOPTIVE HOME RECRUITMENT

- Six-person unit working solely on backlogged kinship home studies that have been identified as priority (two-year project using reallocated FTEs)
- Improve the home study referral process. A report was recently developed that identifies all caregivers in need of a home study, resulting in earlier home study referrals. When home studies are referred sooner caregivers are more likely to engage in the process
- Effort to license more relatives by improving caregiver engagement

### Mid-Range

- Streamline home study process, based on recommendations from the lean process and the Licensing Division study of the research-based methodology
- Workload study to identify resource needs/allocation and performance measures
- Negotiation with the union regarding performance measures. Once there are improvements to the home study process and referrals are made sooner, it is anticipated that the rate of production will increase
- Work with IT to automate the home study referral process

### Long-Term

- Online portal (dependent on funding)
- Additional capacity (dependent on funding)

## BENEFITS OF LICENSING RELATIVES

At the end of FY 2018 there were 9,278 children in out-of-home care and approximately 46 percent of those are placed with kinship caregivers. Of the kinship caregivers, approximately 7.5 percent are licensed. Kinship caregivers who are not licensed can apply for a Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) grant, which provides some financial support; however, foster care reimbursement rates are significantly higher, especially for sibling groups (see table below for comparisons).

### BASIC FOSTER CARE AND TANF RATES (AS OF JANUARY 2019)

Number of Children Placed	Basic Foster Care Rate (Ages Birth-5)	Basic Foster Care Rate (Ages 6-11)	Basic Foster Care Rate (Ages 12+)	TANF Rates With Shelter Costs (Includes Utilities Assistance)	TANF Rates Without Shelter Costs
1	\$562	\$683	\$703	\$363	\$221
2	\$1,124	\$1,366	\$1,406	\$459	\$280
3	\$1,686	\$2,049	\$2,109	\$569	\$345
4	\$2,248	\$2,732	\$2,812	\$670	\$408
5	\$2,810	\$3,415	\$3,515	\$772	\$469
6	\$3,372	\$4,098	\$4,218	\$877	\$532

In addition to financial support, licensing kinship caregivers would provide the following benefits:

- Increased support (they would have a licenser assigned to them)
- More prepared and better trained kinship caregivers
  - Trauma informed training would be provided. Currently, training is available but not required for unlicensed kinship caregivers
- Increased consistency in care between kinship caregivers and licensed foster homes
  - First Aid/CPR/BBP training
  - TB testing
  - Influenza vaccinations for caregivers if caring for children under the age of two
  - Required safety equipment
  - Vaccinations required for all child household members

## WORKLOAD AND RATE OF PRODUCTION

Licensing kinship caregivers will significantly increase workload for DCYF Licensing Division staff, where there is already a substantial backlog. There are currently 1,473 kinship caregivers who are in need of non-licensed home studies (see *Current Pending Home Studies* table below). Additionally, there are 607 pending applications for new state licensed foster homes.

Current Pending Home Studies		
<i>Licensed Home Studies</i>	<i>Unlicensed Home Studies</i>	<i>Total Home Studies Pending</i>
607	1,473	2,080

Currently home study workers and licensors are averaging 2.3 home studies per worker per month (see *FTE, Workload and Rate of Production* table below). If the number of licensed relatives significantly increases, as is hoped, it will impact workloads for DCYF Licensing Division, as there will be additional licensed foster homes to monitor.

FTEs, Workload, and Rate of Production					
<i>Current Licensor / Home Study FTEs</i>	<i>Home Studies Pending</i>	<i>Pending Home Studies Per FTE</i>	<i>Average # of Home Studies Completed Per Month Per FTE</i>	<i># of Months Needed to Complete Pending Home Studies</i>	<i>Average # of Applications Received Per Month</i>
97	2,080	21.4	2.3	9.3	313

DCYF plans to implement an online portal to allow foster parent applicants and kinship caregivers the ability to complete the home study application and paperwork online.<sup>5</sup> It is currently done in paper form, and a single application packet consists of 30 to 50 pages of paperwork. Licensors and home study writers spend a large part of their time reviewing the paperwork to determine what is complete and what is still needed. They must individually review each form; incomplete forms often cause the paperwork to go back and forth between DCYF and the applicant multiple times.

## WITHDRAWN APPLICATIONS

Due to the “back and forth,” paperwork is sometimes lost. The withdrawal rate for licensed applications is around 50 per month (see *Application Withdrawals* table below), and on average the withdrawal rate for unlicensed withdrawals is 60 per month, which totals an average of 110 withdrawals per month.

Application Withdrawals January – November 2018		
<i>Type of Application</i>	<i>Applications Received</i>	<i>Applications Withdrawn</i>
Unlicensed	1,957	655 (33 percent)
Licensed	1,464	537 (37 percent)

DCYF believes that many applicants withdraw because of how frustrating and cumbersome it is to deal with the amount of paperwork. It is anticipated that the online portal will result in the following:

- Improve convenience for applicants to apply for a home study or foster care license
- Manage large amounts of information that is currently kept in paper form
- Paperwork will not be lost
- The application submission time will be shortened
- Reduce application withdrawals
- Increase the number of relatives getting licensed
- Increase accountability for staff

<sup>5</sup> The Governor's 19-21 biennial budget proposal sets aside \$1.4 million to accomplish this critical project.



- Staff will spend less time on paperwork and will have more time to work on the home study portion of the process, decreasing the amount of time it takes to complete a home study/license
- Improve permanency numbers if home studies are completed more quickly
- Decrease the current backlog of pending applications
- Will be less overwhelming for applicants if they can enter information into a portal where it is managed and progress is tracked by the applicant and staff

Given this workload and the existing capacity, if DCYF Licensing Division continues at the current rate of production, it would take about nine months to complete all of the current pending home studies. This does not take into account the home study applications received every day in the DCYF Licensing Division. With the short-term, mid-range, and long-term tasks discussed on page six, it is anticipated that DCYF Licensing Division will be able to reduce the average time it takes to complete home studies and increase the number of home studies completed each month, which will lead to better outcomes for children.

## ADOPTION HOME RECRUITMENT

Adoption home recruitment is different than foster home recruitment because adoption is a social, legal, and lifelong permanent commitment for children and youth while foster care is temporary care. Not all families are able to be an adoptive resource for DCYF's children and youth. Prospective adoptive families must have an approved pre-placement home study report prior to being considered as an adoptive family. Using shared planning meetings, DCYF makes critical assessments regarding the best interest of the children/youth and prospective families.

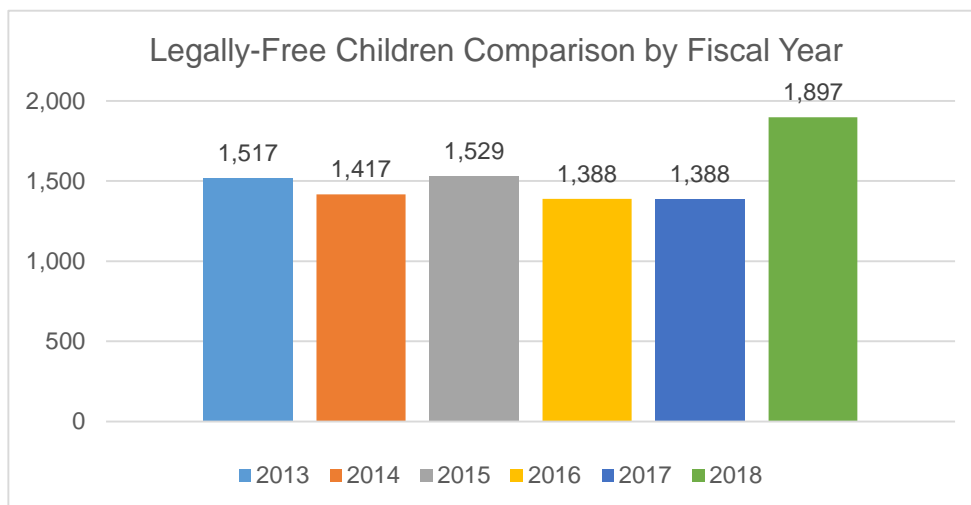
As of July 1, 2018, there are 1,897<sup>6</sup> legally-free children with a permanent plan of adoption. More than half of these children are in placement with a permanent adoptive family and are awaiting finalization of their adoption. There are also 64 youth age 18 or older who were legally-free and are now in the extended foster care program. The length of time to finalize an adoption depends on several factors:<sup>7</sup>

- The Child/youth is in a permanent placement.
- There is not an appeal of the termination of parental rights order.
- The case transferred from Child and Family Welfare Services to adoptions within five days as per policy.
- There is an approved home study completed for the prospective adoptive parent.
- The relative search and Indian Identity form been completed for the child/youth.

Adoptions for children and youth can be completed within three months if the answers to the factors listed above are affirmative.

<sup>6</sup> DCYF Source: FamLink PQR 863 August 2018 Legally-free Children

<sup>7</sup> Also see page 13 of this report which discusses the barriers to adoption finalization and the steps being taken to improve timeliness.



FamLink<sup>8</sup> does not provide current information on whether the placement for a legally-free child is permanent. FamLink does not allow a case worker to accurately identify if a child or youth is in a permanent placement. Requests have been made to change this function in FamLink, and it is in the Department's technology services queue to be processed. At this time, hand counts within regions as well as feedback from adoption staff are used to assess placement needs and the success of recruitment techniques.

DCYF uses a variety of methods and activities to recruit adoptive families for waiting children and youth. These activities include using local and national adoption exchanges, Kids Fests, hosting consortiums, and contracting with community partners for child-specific recruitment.

## LOCAL AND NATIONAL ADOPTION EXCHANGES

DCYF currently has a contract with NWRA to provide two exchanges and specialized recruitment for Washington youth at a cost of \$366,445 per year. This contract also includes training for case workers and coordination of other state recruitment efforts.

Registration on the state exchange site is the first step in recruitment for a child/youth in need of a permanent adoptive family. Prospective adoptive families can read child and youth profiles on the exchange site and request additional information if they are interested in possible adoption. NWRA provides a secure website Washington Adoption Resource Exchange (WARE) for DCYF staff and private adoption agency staff to recruit and match children/youth with approved adoptive families as well as the Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE) which is open to the general public.<sup>9</sup> Only approved Washington families have access to WARE. The goal is to place children and youth in a permanent home in their community; if that is not possible, then within Washington.

In FY 2018, NWRA provided a specialized recruitment program (SRP) for 21 children and youth. Eleven of the 21 children were matched (52.4 percent), none were withdrawn from SRP, and 13 children/youth are still waiting for an adoptive placement. This is an increase from 2017 when four of 20 children were matched (20 percent).

<sup>8</sup> DCYF's child welfare information system

<sup>9</sup> [www.nwae.org](http://www.nwae.org)

NWAE features children in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Alaska. According to the NWAE Annual Report for FY 2018, there were 548 children served on the NWAE. The majority of the children and youth registered on the exchange are older than 12 years of age.

In 2017, NWAE hired a Youth Engagement Specialist to expand the youth-driven content with teenagers featured on NWAE. The Youth Engagement Specialist works 1:1 with youth who desire to have a leading voice in their own adoption recruitment. Through these 1:1 visits, youth have collaborated to create videos and podcasts, share their writing and artwork, expand on their interests and passions, and take ownership over their own profile content.

NWAE has seen a sharp increase in referrals to this service as more youth participate and workers recognize the value of this youth engagement work. This service promotes youth-directed recruitment. The goal is to serve at least 40 youth through In-Depth Profile services in FY 2019. The number of youth served with this program is limited due to the contract amount. On a national level, NWAE registered 93 children/youth with AdoptUSKids.org in FY 2018.

Between January and June 2018, there were 952 inquiries on Washington children/youth placed with AdoptUSKids, a 26.8 percent increase from the previous reporting period, with 34 children placed during this time period.

DCYF also contracts with NWAE to provide front-end communication responses to adoption inquiries. In FY 2018, NWAE processed and approved 1,554 inquiries on Washington children from home studied families. Additionally, staff responded to 1,066 inquiries from families who had not yet completed a home study. NWAE's website, [www.nwae.org](http://www.nwae.org), had a total of 149,901 visitors during FY 2018. Average session duration remains strong, with users spending 4:29 minutes on the site and visiting an average of 6.02 pages per session.

DCYF Adoptions has a Facebook page [www.facebook.com/WAStateAdoptions](https://www.facebook.com/WAStateAdoptions) with more than 1,400 followers. This social media site is used to promote profiles of legally-free children/youth who are in need of permanency and to advertise monthly consortium events. This site is also used to share educational materials to foster and adoptive families.

### ADOPTION RECRUITMENT WITHIN THE REGIONS

*Kids Fests* are held in community centers. The concept behind a Kids Fest is to provide an opportunity for children and prospective adoptive parents to meet and interact in a casual, friendly environment. Kids Fests are usually hosted by NWAE, although some local DCYF offices such as Spokane and Bellevue also sponsor a Kids Fest in their community. NWAE also hosted a July 14 Studio Day event that brought together professional photographers and youth who want to showcase their personality through professional portraits. It is difficult to correlate the number of children and youth adopted from these events. These events highlight the need in communities for placements for children and youth. While a family may not be matched with a child at Kids Fest, they may eventually adopt another child from DCYF.

*Adoption Consortiums* are events that bring together both state and private agency staff to provide information about a child/youth or siblings, learn about waiting adoptive families, and additional recruitment options. Prior to 2016, consortiums were held in a few areas of the state and very little information was shared statewide about children, youth, and adoptive placements. Beginning in June 2016, consortium meetings now occur every month and include at least one office from every region. DCYF Child and Family Welfare Services (CFWS) and adoption staff, DCYF Licensing Division staff, adoptive families, private agencies, and GALs/CASAs participate through video conferencing technology. Typical attendance includes two to five private agencies, 12 or more DCYF staff, and one to three families. Consortiums build relationships

with community partners and interregional linkages on behalf of children and youth. NWAEE attends all consortium events and acts as a consultant for workers.

Typically, DCYF hosts in-person consortiums twice a year, one on the western side of the state and the other on the eastern side. These allow DCYF to interact with community partners (private agencies and CASA) and prospective adoptive families to identify permanency options for children/youth in DCYF's care. These in-person events are also used to provide two to four hours of training on barriers to permanency with community partners. These events have increased communication between DCYF staff as well as with community partners to better serve DCYF's children/youth. Evaluations are provided at the end of every event with positive comments and requests to continue. The FY 2018 event was held in Ellensburg, and was attended by 95 staff, private agencies, CASAs, and families. The regional leads report an increase in the number of adoptive placements due to statewide consortium events. These events allow families the opportunity to see children and youth across the state. The wider statewide recruitment efforts of matching families with children and youth is working better than the local resources and having children and youth remain in care due to lack of local resources.

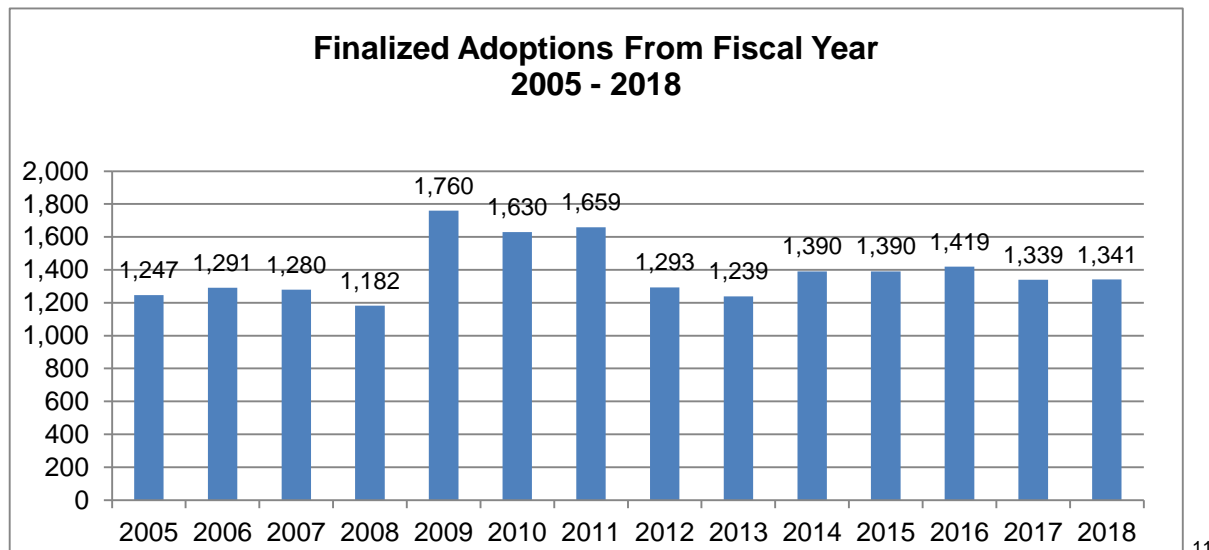
*Wendy's Wonderful Kids (WWK)* through the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption (DTFA) provides recruiters who assist DCYF staff with recruitment activities for legally-free children/youth in need of permanent homes. In FY 2018, this program expanded from three counties to covering the entire state with the addition of 24 WWK workers based on a legislative decision to provide \$500,000 in funding. This contract with DTFA was completed in January 2018 and will expire in June 2019. WWK centers on child-focused recruitment strategies.<sup>10</sup> WWK workers have monthly contact with the child/youth to discuss permanency options. They screen inquiries they receive and provide that information to the DCYF case worker, the regional DCYF permanency lead, and the statewide adoption program manager. WWK began statewide in January 2018 with 24 workers. They served 113 children, of which 15 were matched with potential permanent homes. Of the 113 youth, 72 are active youth which equates to three per WWK worker. The contract with WWK focuses on legally-free youth in need of permanent homes, and WWK is not receiving referrals from the regions to warrant 24 full time workers. Based on information from the regions, this is most likely because the number of legally-free children/youth not in permanent placements is around 200.

## FINALIZED ADOPTIONS

Permanency through adoption was established for 1,341 children in the care and custody of DCYF during FY 2018. From 2014 to 2018, completed adoption numbers have remained fairly consistent.

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<sup>10</sup> The Governor's proposed 2019-2020 budget provides funds to contract for specialized, enhanced adoption placement services for youth who are legally-free



Based on legislation, DCYF has the use of a forecasted budget, Purchase of Service (POS) funding,<sup>12</sup> as a resource for the following adoptive placements:

- Out-of-state private agency placements where funding is needed for monthly health and safety visits as well as adoption finalization costs
- Out-of-state private agency home studies
- In-state home studies for legally-free youth that DCYF Licensing Division is unable to complete
- Short-term intensive in-home services and assessments to assist adoptive families in learning to adapt to challenging child behaviors

## **BARRIERS TO ADOPTION & ADOPTION RECRUITMENT OF FAMILIES**

### **REASONS FOR BARRIERS TO PERMANENT PLACEMENT**

There are several reasons that contribute to the lack of permanent placement for legally-free children/youth in need of an adoptive home:

- Workers not registering legally-free children/youth with WARE/NWAE and with WWK. While required, workers report that they are too busy to complete the short computer generated form, do not know how to complete the form, or do not know about WARE. Increased training on the registration has been provided by NWAE to staff, and NWAE also will work with staff to complete the form
- High caseworker turnover
- High caseload numbers in adoption units
- Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children regulations and contracting issues
- An increase of appeals by biological parents regarding termination of parental rights
- Youth is on the run and/or has behavioral issues that need to be stabilized

<sup>11</sup> DCYF Source info FamLink Adoption Finalization report.

<sup>12</sup> The POS program is a successful means to pay for the supervision of adoptive placements of high needs children/youth until the adoption is finalized. The POS program was designed in the late 1980s and provides funding to private agencies outside of Washington state to offset the cost of recruitment, training, transitioning and supervision of adoptive placements for eligible children and youth. This adoption recruitment program is Title IV-E reimbursable

- Transfer of case to adoptions from ongoing CFWS unit is not timely. This can be due to several factors:
  - Timely filing of termination order
  - CFWS retaining parent case because one sibling is legally free and the others are not
  - Preparing for a termination trial involves a high volume of work and once the hearing is over, the CFWS worker reprioritizes work focus on other families who need immediate casework attention that may have been delayed while trial preparation was occurring instead of preparing the case for transfer to adoptions staff.

## REASONS FOR DELAY IN ADOPTION

There continue to be delays in adoptions for children/youth who are placed in permanent homes. Based on feedback from the regional Adoption Area Administrators, the following are statewide barriers to completions of adoptions and/or reasons for the decrease in number of adoptions in FY 2018:

- The number of appeals over termination of parental rights has increased. An adoption will not be finalized until the appeal process is complete and this can take approximately 18 months.
- The identified adoptive placement does not have a completed home study. Due to current FamLink<sup>13</sup> limitations, at this time, DCYF is unable to identify if a child is in an adoptive placement, therefore cannot provide data on how many adoptive homes do not have a home study.
- Caregivers who struggle with caring for children and youth who have experienced trauma based on physical and medical neglect, and a reluctance to adopt due to lack of post-adoption resources and assistance. Although post-adoption services have changed over time in response to identifying resource need, gaps in services remain. Current services include:
  - Beginning January 2019, medical coverage through Apple Health Core Connections will provide integrated services. Coverage for a child will include medical, mental, and behavioral health.
  - Up to \$1,500 per child for adoption-related expenses.
  - Pre-authorized counseling services have been expanded and now include individual counseling, parental counseling, in-home evidence based practices, and may include intensive in-home WRAP services.
  - Training for caregivers is available through the Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence and Apple Health Core Connections.
  - Families may negotiate a monthly cash payment that removes barriers to adoption. The maximum for the monthly cash payment is based on legislatively mandated caps.
- Attorneys now being assigned to every child/youth who has been legally free for more than six months has increased the workload of adoption workers. The attorneys request discovery on each case which requires redaction and disclosure of a file that can take days to complete. Identifying information about the biological parents and siblings is redacted. Since the biological parent is no longer a party to the dependency when the child/youth becomes legally-free, information cannot be disclosed in discovery for a legally-free child unless it directly impacts the child.
- High case worker turnover.
- High caseload numbers in adoption units.

<sup>13</sup> DCYFs child welfare information system

- Cases are transferred into adoption units with denied home studies that are not addressed timely or become contested adoption cases. A contested adoption case is a case where the court has ordered continued placement of a child/youth in a home with a denied home study by DCYF Licensing Division. DCYF cannot consent to an adoption in those cases and cannot move the child/youth because the placement is court ordered. Delayed completion of home studies creates contested adoption cases. Courts are reluctant to move a child/youth when a home study is completed and denied when the child/youth has been in a placement for a year or longer without a home study. These are typically cases where the home study was not completed within the first 90 days of placement because:
  - The home study referral was not made in a timely manner.
  - The caregiver did not complete paperwork or background checks delaying home study completion.
  - A home study was completed and denied within the first six months of placement but DCYF did not make a request to the court to move the child.

DCYF's plan for increased focus on more timely referrals and improvements to the home study process (see short-, mid-, and long-term tasks identified on page six) will address this issue.

- Cases are being transferred into adoption units prematurely, when permanency planning staffing's have not taken place and children/youth are not in stable or appropriate placements. As a part of this, the needs of the caregivers and children/youth are not being assessed prior to transferring the case and the adoption units must then address these needs before an adoption can be finalized.
- The 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 with the prospective adoptive family is time intensive and difficult to complete more quickly within current staffing levels.
- Cases are being transferred into adoption units where the child is legally-free, but refuses to be adopted and/or has significant behavioral issues resulting in group care placement(s) and/or tendency to run away from placements. The adoption workers must prioritize the safety of these youth, and completing adoptions on stable cases becomes a secondary priority. To address this, DCYF is:
  - Providing training to workers on having difficult conversations with children and youth including an in-depth conversation on permanency and what that means, such as "Unpacking the No" training.
  - Utilizing POS monies to provide intensive in-home services for three months to work with prospective adoptive families on dealing with youth impacted by trauma.
  - Asking regions to assign an adoption worker solely to adoption cases with stable placements rather than splitting all adoption caseloads with stable and unstable placements.
- Delayed case transfer between CFWS and Adoptions which directly impacts finalization. In the electronic legally-free file process, delayed case transfer is the number one barrier to timely creating a legally-free case. Headquarters is working with regional management to improve case transfers.
- A significant amount of time can elapse between the filing of a termination of parental rights petition and the termination hearing.
- 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 and extended adoption support programs. The eligibility requirements for some programs are determined by the youth's age at time of adoption.

These issues also impact DCYF's ability to meet the federal requirement of timely adoptions within 24 months.

## TAKING STEPS TO IMPROVE THE ADOPTION SYSTEM

To address these issues, some regional adoption staff have routine meetings with the Administrative Office of the Courts to address permanency delays. In some areas, the court requires early reviews to track the child's movement toward adoption finalization. DCYF provides monthly data on adoption, and legally-free cases and facilitates workgroups with staff and stakeholders to identify and create strategic work plans to address barriers to adoption. NWAEE has increased training within regions on WARE/NWAEE registrations.

In March 2018, DCYF implemented a pilot project in Regions 5 and 6 (Region 3 prior to the DCYF transition) to increase the timeliness of case transfer to adoptions by using two donated clerical positions to create electronic legally-free files and pre-adoption disclosure folders. The outcomes of this project include:

- An increase in timeliness of case transfers to adoption units at the time a child/youth becomes legally-free
- A sharp decrease in paperwork responsibilities for adoption workers
- Cost savings in terms of FTEs and use of supplies and equipment

This change has led to the adoption of 31 children in less than five months from date of termination of parental rights within those regions within the project timeframe (six months). DCYF plans to expand this program statewide in FY 2019.

Other than the delays caused by appeals of termination of parental rights orders, home study issues are the leading cause of delays in adoptions. Completing home studies on families within 90 days of placements is a goal that DCYF Licensing Division is working toward.<sup>14</sup> Increasing the contracted amount with NWRA for youth-directed recruitment would allow additional children/youth to be served (the current contract limits the number to 40 youth statewide).

## FOSTERING WELL-BEING & APPLE HEALTH CORE CONNECTIONS

DCYF has two primary mechanisms to ensure caregivers have access to information regarding a child or youth's physical and behavioral health needs.

- The Fostering Well-Being (FWB) program is a collaborative effort between the Health Care Authority, Aging and Long-Term Support Administration, and DCYF. FWB serves children and youth in tribal custody who do not opt into the Apple Health Core Connections (AHCC) managed care plan and undocumented children who are not eligible under Medicaid rules for Medicaid managed care.
- AHCC is contracted with the Health Care Authority to administer a single managed care plan for children and youth in foster care, adoption support, Extended Foster Care, and alumni of care to age 26.

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<sup>14</sup> Currently, if a worker refers for a home study on the 30<sup>th</sup> day (max allowed by policy) the Licensing Department is expected to complete it within 120 days of receiving the application



FWB and AHCC provide physical and behavioral health care coordination for their covered populations. These programs also provide case workers and caregivers with information regarding a child or youth's physical and behavioral health care needs to ensure the case worker and caregivers have appropriate information to support and care for the child or youth.

## MAJOR COMPONENTS OF FOSTERING WELL-BEING

- FWB program specialists and clinical nurse advisors provide integrated behavioral and physical health care coordination as well as consultation with case workers and caregivers regarding individual health questions and concerns.
  - After implementation of AHCC on April 1, 2016, FWB remained available to provide physical and behavioral healthcare coordination for children and youth in out-of-home placement who are not enrolled in AHCC.
  - FWB is available to assist youth regarding their physical and behavioral health care as they transition into Extended Foster Care or adult services.
- Provides consultation to AHCC managed care leadership and case management staff around Medicaid policy and rules and provides expert medical opinion to support continuity of medical and behavioral health care.
- Provides clinical input and review of physical and behavioral health related child welfare policies.
- Reviews Child Health and Education Tracking (CHET) screens of all initially placed children and youth in DCYF custody to identify medically fragile cases and expedite referrals to AHCC managed care.
- Serves as a consultant to DCYF licensing staff during:
  - Medically Fragile Group Home (MFGH) initial licensing and comprehensive review processes
  - Renewal site visits
  - Fatality reviews
- Teams with appropriate staff at the Health Care Authority on all potential denials for any Medicaid fee-for-service prior authorization requests.
- Six Regional Medical Consultants are a vital resource for social service specialists, caregivers, and local medical providers to draft Adoption Support "At Risk" medical provider statements and provide in-depth medical consultation.
- A specialized Medicaid eligibility unit at Health Care Authority partners with FWB, DCYF, and AHCC to send caregivers' reports from the Washington State Immunization Information System reports and healthcare reports of Medicaid services the child received prior to entering out-of-home placement (reports are only mailed to caregivers for children under the age of 13). The reports are mailed to caregivers within three working days of placement notification.
- Health education materials are mailed to caregivers including information about recognizing symptoms of trauma and how to support a child who is exposed to trauma.
- In the 2017 calendar year, FWB made more than 9,600 contacts on behalf of 4,104 children.

## APPLE HEALTH CORE CONNECTIONS

- On April 1, 2016, the AHCC program was implemented. AHCC serves approximately 23,000 children, youth, and young adults who are or were involved in the Washington State child welfare system (see the [AHCC Annual Report](#) for additional information and data about the program).
- Children and youth enrolled in AHCC currently receive:
  - Physical and behavioral health care coordination
  - Access to a 24/7 nurse advice line
  - A program to support healthy pregnancy

- Healthy Kids Club for children 12 and younger to support and promote healthy habits
- “Cent Accounts” for extended foster care, alumni of foster care, and adoption support populations that provide money on a prepaid debit card when certain healthy actions are taken (i.e., getting an annual well-child check)
- Prepaid cell phones (250 minutes/month) for extended foster care, alumni of foster care, and adoption support populations with unlimited minutes of access to Coordinated Care and the 24-hour nurse advice line
- Programs in continued development and implementation:
  - a2A – adolescent to Adult: This program will provide resources for this population to understand their physical and behavioral health care benefits now that they are adults. This service will be available for most youth and young adults until age 26
  - Adoption Success: This program will provide supports to adoptive families to coordinate physical and behavioral health care services for children served in the adoption support program until age 21
- Full integration of all behavioral and physical health care services by January 2019