

**Report to the Legislature**  
**Foster and Adoptive Home Placement**

RCW 74.13.031(2)

December 1, 2015

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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.

In addition, the report must include a section entitled “Foster Home Turn-Over, Causes and Recommendations.”

During fiscal year 2015, CA activities related to recruitment and retention resulted in the following:

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

- There were 4,945<sup>1</sup> licensed foster homes, of which 1,035 were newly licensed.
- There were 1,125<sup>2</sup> licensed foster homes with families of color at the end of FY 2015.
- 1,390<sup>3</sup> adoptions were finalized.

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

- CA continued statewide support services for foster parents through the recruitment and retention 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:**

- CA provided adoption home study services to 2,220<sup>4</sup> families during FY 2015, all of whom will have a home study completed prior to the finalized adoption.

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

- CA implemented the Fostering Well-Being (FWB) program in 2010 to improve healthcare services for children in out-of-home care. This program provides care coordination services through a network of nursing staff and regional medical consultants.

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<sup>1</sup> Children’s Administration Source FamLink Production Query Report (PQR) 863 - August 2015 Licensed Foster Homes

<sup>2</sup> Children’s Administration Source FamLink PQR 863 - August 2015– Newly Licensed Foster Homes

<sup>3</sup> Children’s Administration Source FamLink PQR 863- August 2015 - Adoptions Finalized

<sup>4</sup> Children’s Administration Source FamLink PQR 863- August 2015 – Finalized Adoptions

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

# Foster Family Recruitment

CA works to continuously strengthen, improve and diversify recruitment efforts to seek potential foster and adoptive families. We seek a diverse pool of safe, quality prospective 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 CA leadership team emphasizes the message and belief that: “recruitment and support of foster families is everyone’s business at CA.”

Recruitment of prospective foster families is a complex, demanding and ongoing 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 efforts are framed by three types of recruitment strategies:

## 1. General Recruitment

These strategies help build public interest and awareness across a general audience. The messaging appeals to prospective families and their desire to help make a difference for children. These messages are:

- Delivered on a frequent basis both statewide and within local communities;
- Used to build awareness and maintain messaging of the agency’s ongoing need for foster families;
- Focused on a wide variety of families;
- Preparing the audience for more targeted recruitment; and
- Helping build a positive public perception for the agency.

## 2. Targeted Recruitment

These strategies focus on recruitment efforts based on the data and demographics of the children and youth in care, as well as current foster/adoptive families. Targeted recruitment is culturally competent and community based. CA targeted recruitment partners with private child placing agencies (CPA), business, faith and community leaders utilizing messaging and media that shares CA’s need for specific types of foster parents. Targeted recruitment efforts focus on:

- Neighborhoods and communities where children frequently enter out-of-home care;
- Utilization of partnership between the child welfare agency and community-based recruitment teams;
- Areas where experienced foster families live;
- Faith-based communities and organizations;
- Other community groups or individuals who may have specific skills to meet the needs of children and youth in foster care.

### 3. Child Specific Recruitment

This strategy focuses on recruitment of foster, adoptive and kinship families for specific children and youth in foster care, or as needed for children with unique needs, developed in conjunction with the local/regional Recruitment, Development and Support (RDS) team.

CA's policies and procedures demonstrate our agency values to support caregivers' families in successfully meeting the needs of the children in their care. CA recruitment philosophy is based on the knowledge that satisfied and supported foster and adoptive parents make the best recruiters.

During FY 2015, CA completed a multi-year statewide parent recruitment and retention contract with Olive Crest (Fostering Together), a licensed non-profit agency in Bellevue, Washington. Olive Crest's statewide recruitment contract has been in place since October of 2012. Their agency was staffed with twenty-eight recruiter/liasons engaged across the state delivering recruitment activities through general, targeted and child specific recruitment activities.

The Olive Crest contract continued its focus on diligent recruitment of foster families across the state and developing an ample supply of foster families to meet the placement needs of children entering out-of-home care. The recruitment contract continues to incentivize recruitment of:

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

Other areas of recruitment focus also include:

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

The contract with Olive Crest has developed a consistent statewide message in each region of the state and utilized local consultation to address recruitment needs within specific areas.

CA and Olive Crest develop diligent recruitment planning based on a multi-dimensional strategy to encompass successful recruitment through ongoing general, targeted and

child specific efforts. Recruitment efforts and messages are ongoing, culturally competent and tailored to meet the needs of children who cannot be placed with relatives or kin and are being placed in out-of-home care.

CA continues to build and strengthen RDS teams in each region. RDS teams built from the Annie E. Casey model of Family-to-Family, are multi-disciplinary in nature and engage the expertise of CA, Olive Crest Fostering Together, CPAs, the Alliance for Child Welfare, tribes, foster parents, community partners and stakeholders. RDS teams provide focus and direction to identify recruitment needs based on local office data, demographics of children entering care and existing foster parent information. Recruitment, training, and support services for foster families are closely linked to encourage both recruitment of new families and retention of veteran foster families.

### **General Recruitment Efforts**

CA and Olive Crest have produced general recruitment efforts to share information, build interest and develop awareness of the need for foster families across the state. These efforts are built on a recruiting theme and then tailored for local communities with data on the number of children who currently need placement in their area.

During 2015, CA has continued recruitment messaging with the successful “Foster Parenting – You can too” branding. This slogan and logo was initially developed in 2007 in consultation with the National Resource Center “AdoptUsKids.” The brand is carried on all of CA’s printed recruitment materials and also appears on Olive Crest’s printed recruitment material, signifying the partnership between the agencies. The logo appears on CA’s foster parent recruitment page, Olive Crest’s website <http://fosteringtogether.org> and its 36 Facebook pages. It is widely recognized in communities and continues to build upon a consistent and positive message about foster parenting across the state.



General recruitment efforts by Olive Crest set the stage for more targeted recruitment efforts and help create a positive perception of the foster care program.

This recruiting effort shares the message in regional areas and local communities that foster families are needed in all areas for children of all ages and of diverse backgrounds. Efforts made by Olive Crest during FY 2015 have been wide reaching, both on a statewide level, regionally and in local communities. Recruitment outreach in each region includes speaking engagements across the communities and distribution of various recruitment materials at events and locations, including:

- Local fairs, conferences, sports events and complexes, community recreation, YMCA, eye centers, parades, craft bonanzas, school distributions, Craig's List, post offices, laundromats, grocery stores, churches, libraries, book sales, garage sales, consignment shops, pizza stores, retirement meetings, WIC programs, community bulletin boards, coffee shops, local businesses, youth programs, hospitals, medical offices, housing authority, law enforcement, fire stations, restaurants, car rentals, auto malls, beauty and barber salons, business clubs, women's clubs, etc.;
- Ethnic and culturally diverse gatherings specific to Hispanic, Native American, African American;
- Gatherings and events for Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender and Questioning (LGBTQ) youth;
- Seattle Mariners, Tacoma Rainiers, and new partnership development with the Wenatchee Apple Sox for Foster Family Fun Night on August 5, 2015 in Wenatchee;
- Church services, faith leader meetings, faith conventions;
- Media outlets, online and community bulletin boards, public service announcements, television interviews, radio interviews and broadcasts, newspapers, magazines (i.e., Seattle's Child and Parent's Map); and
- School districts and local schools.

### **National Foster Care Month and Recruitment Events**

Governor Jay Inslee recognized National Foster Care Month in Washington with a signed proclamation declaring May as Foster Care Month and recognizing 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.

In recognition of National Foster Care Month and Washington's foster and adoptive parents and relative caregivers, the Seattle Mariners hosted the 7<sup>th</sup> annual "We Are Family" day event at Safeco Field on April 26, 2015. This year attendance at the event doubled with 2,800 foster parents, relative caregivers, agency personnel, community partners and stakeholders gathering to recognize foster parents and watch the Mariners take on the Minnesota Twins.

Assistant Secretary Jennifer Strus welcomed caregivers at the morning recognition. Trudi Inslee, Washington's First Lady, addressed the gathering, expressing appreciation to caregivers, including relative caregivers, for their work and dedication to the children

in their care. Governor Inslee made a surprise visit, greeting staff and dignitaries. Foster care alumni youth shared words of appreciation for their caregivers. One youth was selected to throw out the ceremonial first pitch.

Ten individuals accompanied Mrs. Inslee onto the field for pictures with the Mariners and the mascot, Mariner Moose. Fifty foster families received free tickets for the game courtesy of the Mariners. All caregiver families were treated to free popcorn and Cracker Jacks through the generosity of Center Plate's General Manger, Steve Dominguez. The Seattle Aquarium donated free passes to the aquarium to all families in attendance.

Multiple giveaways were donated for the event including specially designed Mariner tee shirts for all 2,800 in attendance. Foster parents and relative caregivers were recognized by the Mariners during the game. CA and many other foster care agencies hosted recruitment booths during the game to bring awareness about foster care, recruitment and to say thank you to caregivers.

Several statewide Spanish radio foster care recruitment broadcasts have continued in 2015 in partnership with the Commission on Hispanic Affairs through KDNA 91.9 FM. These efforts have been successful in sharing information to the Hispanic community of the need for more Hispanic and Spanish speaking foster parents. These broadcast appear to have been successful with a documented increase in Spanish speaking families calling the state foster parent hotline after each broadcast. This effort will continue in 2016 and expand to include a Spanish speaking foster parent as part of the broadcast to help answer caller questions.

The recruitment partnership continued this year with the Washington State Office for Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH) and Olive Crest with one regional presentation given in Everett. Washington's partnership between CA and ODHH was recognized by the National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment (NRCDR). The NRCDR interviewed staff and shared an article on the NRCDR website about the success targeted recruitment with the deaf population and those who are American Sign Language (ASL) proficient. Deaf and ASL skilled families continue to attend both the Orientation and the Caregiver Core Trainings to become licensed. Deaf children and youth are a small percentage in CA's foster care population. The recruitment and licensing of deaf and ASL skilled families allows CA to place children in families who can support their unique needs and special requirements for communication access. One more presentation is planned for 2016 in the Tri-Cities area.

Early in the year, CA completed a significant recruitment effort in partnership with Wagner's European Café and Bakery, of Olympia. The bakery utilized the "Foster Parenting – You can too" logo on a cookie to help promote foster care recruitment in Thurston County. Wagner's sold cookies at the bakery, provided recruitment materials and had recruiters on hand to answer questions. Twenty percent of the sales from this campaign generated over \$700, helping support Camp To Belong. The success and



replicability of this general recruitment effort was shared with RDS teams across the state.

### **Targeted Recruitment**

RDS teams identify specific demographics on children entering care and from that data, begin to identify the trends of children who enter care. The team reviews data for the areas, communities and neighborhoods where children enter care to create a focus on the need for foster parents within those areas in conjunction with information about the availability of existing foster families who have placement availability. 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**

Olive Crest partners with CA on various child specific recruitment strategies to help recruit foster, relative and adoptive families for specific children in foster care. Over this year, a new partnership has emerged between CA's regional placement desk staff and the Olive Crest local liaisons. Placement desk staff contact the Olive Crest liaison to post general information about a child or sibling group who is waiting for a placement on the restricted foster parent Facebook pages. Foster parents have faster access to the information and placement needs even late at night. These efforts require strong partnership between the worker and the recruiter to coordinate information that can be shared about the child or youth without violating confidentiality. Child specific recruitment has historically been used most frequently for older youth who have experienced multiple placement disruptions or for adoption recruitment planning.

### **State Recruitment Information Center (SRIC)**

Northwest Resource Associates (NWRA) manages all initial inquiries from families who express interest in foster parenting through the SRIC online website or through the 1-888-KIDS-414 statewide phone line. A monthly average of 300 electronic inquiries and 72 calls per month are routed through the SRIC and NWRA. Only callers with stated interest in learning more about foster parenting are added to the SRIC system.

SRIC routes each inquiry electronically to Olive Crest and the regional recruiter or liaison responds to each inquiry within 24 business hours. Olive Crest also adds prospective families to the SRIC who have made contact directly with Olive Crest via their online website or call the agency about fostering. Some prospective families inquire directly through a licenser at the Division of Licensed Resources (DLR) or a private CPA and have not been added to the SRIC. When Olive Crest staff connect with these prospective families, they are added to the SRIC to ensure tracking of the family as they move through the training. Because some families inquire directly to a CPA (and those agencies provide their own training) they are not identified in the SRIC system until their license is issued.

Any prospective or active foster family who does not wish to be contacted by Olive Crest can request their information be "suspended" in the SRIC. Olive Crest liaisons provide

twice a month contact with the prospective family through the recruitment, training and licensing process. SRIC provide families with information about upcoming classes, activities, support groups and resources that can support them in the process of becoming licensed.

Recruitment of new foster parents relies on all system partners to provide recruitment as well as both timely training and licensure of prospective foster parents. Each of the steps within the process are critical to not only bring in qualified families that can meet the needs of the diverse group of children in care but to provide timely and accessible application, training and timely licensure.

Nationally, child welfare agencies recognize the loss of large numbers of prospective families between inquiry and licensure. Some learn that fostering is not for them, others are interested in information and some are unable to become licensed due to criminal history or other barriers. Some families drop out because they view the process as intimidating and or interpret delays as a lack of need for foster homes. Olive Crest, CA and the Alliance are committed to ensuring potential foster parents receive timely services.

In FY 2015, 6,306 prospective foster parents made an inquiry about becoming a foster parent.

- Region 1: 1,573
- Region 2: 2,355
- Region 3: 2,378

Through the SRIC database, Olive Crest tracks responses from prospective families about how they heard about the need for foster families in Washington. The top responses include:

	<b>How Families Heard about Foster Care Need</b>
1.	Friend
2.	Recruitment Event
3.	CA's Foster Parent Website
4.	DLR or CA Staff or Internet Search
5.	Adoptive Parent
6.	Church

Since 2011, there has been a slow and steady increase in the number of newly licensed foster parents. CA DLR staff track all applications. Applications submitted to a CPA are not tracked by DLR staff.

### **Communication with Caregivers**

Foster parents, relative caregivers, adoptive families, social work staff, tribes and community partners continue to be served by the Caregiver Connection. This newsletter is produced by CA in partnership with the Alliance. First issued in 2005, the Caregiver Connection is now delivered electronically each month to over 9,000 subscribers and reaches an estimated eighty percent of foster parents. It contains feature stories, policy information, resources, answers to frequently asked questions and other information that might be helpful available to caregivers.

Olive Crest also utilizes online communication to share information with foster parents through their website, the Northwest Resource Associates SRIC data tracker system and their 36 established Facebook pages. Olive Crest's liaisons provide printed copies of caregiver information at support group meetings and in local offices for those families who do not have email.

### **Support Groups**

Support groups remain the backbone of the caregiver support system. When asked, foster parents report they would like to have greater access to support groups that are a fit with their busy lives. Most groups are facilitated by the foster parent recruiter liaisons with Olive Crest, some operate independently and six of them are part of the constellation of Mockingbird Foster Parent Hub Homes. Support groups are based within a local community. They provide opportunities for networking, training, sharing of resources, activities and advice. Veteran foster parents mentor newer foster parents within their hub or area, sharing information and their experiences. They also help inform and support new caregivers with child behavioral and emotional issues.

Olive Crest also utilizes restricted Facebook support groups that are secure for the individuals and 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 placed with them. Olive Crest has added a new Facebook page offering support and information for prospective foster parents in the training and licensure process. Veteran foster parents also share their knowledge, supports and skills in these discussions. Resources, information, social connections and respite care are shared among the participants. As of June 30, 2015, Olive Crest was operating 108 in-person or online support groups under the contract with CA.

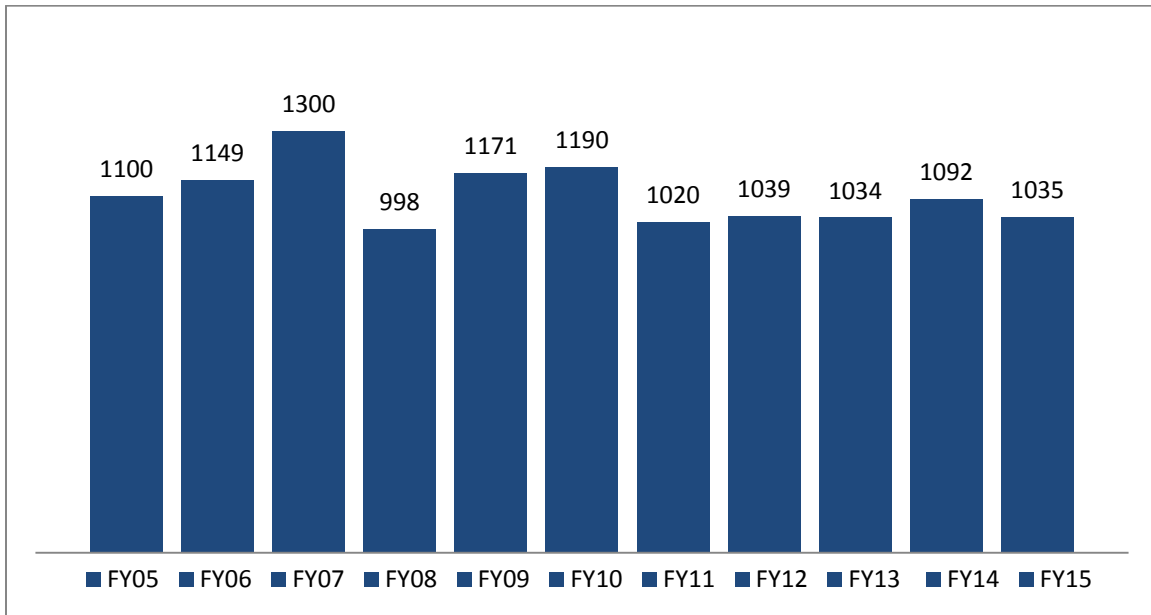
## **Foster Home Recruitment Challenges**

Washington is not alone among states that continue to be challenged in recruiting an adequate supply of quality, safe and nurturing foster families. Factors that impact foster care recruitment in Washington state and other states:

- Children in out-of-home care present with more difficult and challenging behaviors and issues.
- Foster parents assume more responsibilities now than foster parents years ago. 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 and knowledge about the child is highly valued and they are often asked or encouraged to:
  - Meet with the social service specialist 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 staffings;
  - Provide a written report for the court and attend hearings.
- 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.
- More than half of the children adopted from foster care are adopted by licensed foster parents or their relatives who became 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.

Over the last year, CA has focused attention on the statewide recruitment contract developed with Olive Crest in 2012. CA's leadership team decided not to extend the statewide recruitment and retention contract, but rather chose to develop a Request for Proposals (RFP) seeking a contract with a provider in each region. The RFP was announced on March 9, 2015 with a full procurement process that included both evaluation of written bids and oral presentations. Oral presentations were conducted for the top two bidders in each region. The successful bidders and new contractors for Region 1 is Eastern Washington University (Fostering Washington) and Olive Crest's Fostering Together program for Regions 2 and 3. The new contracts became effective July 2015 and both programs are now completing transition work and connecting with their communities and the local and regional RDS teams.

## NEWLY LICENSED FOSTER HOMES BY STATE FISCAL YEAR<sup>6</sup>

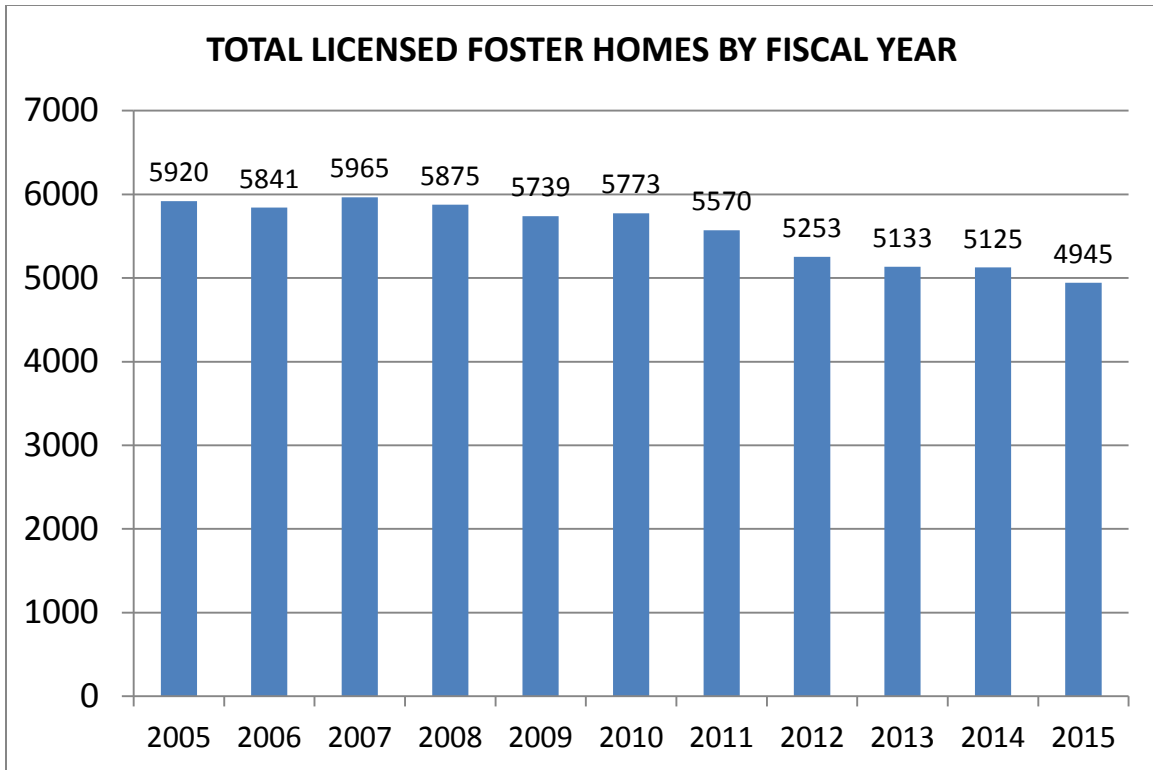


In FY 2015, 1,035 new foster homes were licensed by DLR or by a private CPA in Washington. This number does not reflect home studies completed as an update, due to significant household changes, changes in residence or adoptive home study updates for subsequent adoptions.

### FOSTER HOME TURN-OVER: CAUSES AND DLR 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 and increases in relative placements. Resource shortages are being felt in other states across the country. It is also important to note that there are system changes that have reduced the number of homes reflected in the data below. Families with dependency guardianships no longer are required to maintain a foster home license. The department has entered into intergovernmental agreements with three tribes to license their own homes, rather than be contracted as a CPA, as allowed in statute. Homes previously licensed by DLR now licensed by one of the tribes are not reflected in the data below. A data cleanup effort was made during FY 2015 resulting in closure of duplicate providers who should have been closed during 2009-2015; this explains the decline in licensed foster homes reflected in the table below.

<sup>6</sup> Data after SFY09 updated 8/4/14. Source: FamLink Production Data Warehouse. Data includes DLR licensed, adoptive home and other provider types. Counts identify first foster home license date where application was not incomplete or withdrawn.



#### **Retention**

The chart on the next page shows the retention of homes remaining licensed since 2005. Foster homes are re-licensed every three years. The number of homes continuing licensure from year to year remains high until year three when many foster families choose not to renew their license or let the license lapse.

LICENSED FOSTER HOME RETENTION BY YEAR FIRST LICENSED<sup>7</sup>

FY05	FY06	FY07	FY08	FY09	FY10	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14	FY15
<b>1100</b>	1039	887	721	472	388	330	214	168	146	102
<b>100.0%</b>	94.5%	80.6%	65.5%	42.9%	35.3%	30.0%	19.5%	15.3%	13.3%	9.27%
	<b>1149</b>	1098	946	798	462	367	297	194	167	135
	<b>100.0%</b>	95.6%	82.3%	69.5%	40.2%	31.9%	25.8%	16.9%	14.5%	11.7%
		<b>1300</b>	1227	1062	879	482	385	325	217	168
		<b>100.0%</b>	94.4%	81.7%	67.6%	37.1%	29.6%	25.0%	16.7%	12.9%
<b>Legend</b>			<b>998</b>	961	830	684	380	316	268	166
1st yr			<b>100.0%</b>	96.3%	83.2%	68.5%	38.1%	31.7%	26.9%	16.6%
2nd yr				<b>1171</b>	972	854	705	389	325	301
3rd yr				<b>100.0%</b>	83.0%	72.9%	60.2%	33.2%	27.8%	25.7%
4th yr					<b>1190</b>	1154	1002	840	441	389
5th yr					<b>100.0%</b>	97.0%	84.2%	70.6%	37.1%	32.7%
6th yr						<b>1020</b>	985	859	687	408
7th yr						<b>100.0%</b>	96.6%	84.2%	67.4%	40.0%
8th yr							<b>1039</b>	<b>1005</b>	<b>879</b>	<b>719</b>
9th yr							<b>100.0%</b>	96.7%	84.6%	69.2%
10th yr								<b>1034</b>	1006	889
11th yr								<b>100.0%</b>	97.3%	86.0%
									<b>1092</b>	1058
									<b>100.0%</b>	96.9%
										<b>1035</b>
										<b>100.0%</b>

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, death in the family, family commitments, etc.).
- The foster parent did not respond to renewal notices and the foster home license is subsequently closed.
- A move or change in employment.

<sup>7</sup> Counts after SFY09 updated 8/04/15. 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.

Reasons for license closure that CA seeks to address include:

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

CA uses key strategies to address these issues:

1. Increased and enhanced foster training through the Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence, a partnership with the University of Washington and Eastern Washington University. A new caregiver curriculum has been developed to respond to the training needs of caregivers and this curriculum was implemented in April 2014. Core competencies were established and a new training policy was developed in response to caregiver needs for both pre-service and in-service training. The curriculum also strongly encourages an experiential component prior to licensure. Workgroup members included key stakeholders, including Alliance staff, DLR, foster parent caregivers, a representative of the Foster Parent Association of Washington State (FPAWS) and private agency staff. Feedback continues to be enthusiastic from trainees which include licensed providers as well as unlicensed caregivers.
2. Support through recruitment and retention contract providers, quarterly statewide 1624 meetings and annual foster parent survey results.
3. An improved home study process after children have been placed in relative or suitable other homes. Additional program information provided to unlicensed families has also eliminated the requirement for caregivers to attend foster parent orientations.

New administrative rules regarding licensing requirements were implemented for foster families. The intent of the new rules was to simplify the requirements for licensed foster families while maintaining health and safety standards for children and youth in out-of-home care. Foster parents can more easily find necessary information and be able to understand and interpret them. The new administrative rules which have eliminated some requirements for licensed families have been well received.

There are new requirements for families who care for children under the age of two to obtain pertussis immunizations and influenza vaccinations for people living in the household. This requirement was made at the recommendation of CA medical consultants and in accordance with recommendations from the Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control. This requirement was met with some resistance in the foster parent community. However, the data reflect that the great majority of families requesting a change in age on their license due to the immunization requirements were not accepting placements of children under the age of two. CA is currently in the emergency rule writing process to add a medical exemption for families with severe medical reactions prohibiting the flu vaccination.

#### **CA Foster Parent Consultation Team (CAFPT)**

The CAFPT, also known as the 1624 Team, continues to meet quarterly. The team is composed of CA staff appointed by the Assistant Secretary and regionally elected foster



parents and representatives from FPAWS. In October 2015, the team will have completed eight years of consultation work. The CAFPT was established in response to ESHB 1624 enacted in 2007. Foster parents and regional leadership from CA meet in two locations within each region (mirroring the former six regions) to ensure the foster parent voice is heard throughout the state. Meetings include discussions about 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 statewide CAFPT meeting. The quarterly statewide CAFPT meetings are convened through video and teleconference. Agendas are set by those involved in the meeting.

Highlights of the 2015 CAFPT team include:

- Updating information on utilization of the child's medical card with assistance from the Fostering Well-Being's Care Coordination Unit (FWB-CCU) when a medical provider or pharmacist denies coverage to a child or asks the foster parent to pay out of pocket.
- Development of protocols for foster parents when a visit transporter or a worker arrives with a car seat incorrectly installed or the wrong size seat for the child. Foster parents should report to the visitation agency supervisor or the CA worker's supervisor if their staff do not know how to correctly install a car seat. A visit report form was created. All visit supervisors must provide one to the foster parent at each visit; it bears the name of the contracted agency and visit supervisor. Updated training was scheduled for staff and contractors. Foster parents can offer to help by demonstrating the correct installation procedure. Also, foster parents can decline to allow the child to be transported in a car seat that is not legal for the age/size of the child. CA reviewed all car seats and outdated car seats were replaced.
- Collaboration on building stronger partnerships with social workers to improve communication and understanding. Submission of FAQs to be placed on the CA foster parent webpage. Foster parent representatives offered consultation over concerns that the Alliance training webpage was difficult to use. The Alliance applied information from foster parents to make the system easier to use and navigate. A regional listing of resources has been developed and placed on CA's foster parent website. Regions will update information as new resources are identified.
- An all staff memo to social workers about responding timely to phone calls and email messages. Workers are to update their voicemail and email messaging when out of the office and offer callers the opportunity to push "0" to speak with someone directly.
- Foster parent representatives offered consultation and recommendations about the WAC change related to the flu immunization.
- A tip sheet for foster parents on supporting a child when testifying in court was obtained from Region 3 and shared with the statewide team.

- Late night calls from placement desk staff in Region 2 North were appearing on caller identification from out of the country or distant states. CA staff reviewed issue with CA's phone carrier to correct the situation. Also, staff using personal cells with out-of-state numbers were directed to no longer use those phones.
- Lack of permanent plans for some children in care for extended time periods. CA's Assistant Secretary discussed concerns with the local assistant attorney generals about the urgency of moving cases as quickly as possible through the court system.
- Clarification that approved 18-year-olds can provide respite for foster families.

Periodically the foster parent regional representatives are successfully resolving issues or concerns at the regional level with no need to bring items to the state meeting for discussion.

Information and materials from the CAFPT meetings are distributed to foster parents across the state through the regional representatives, the Caregiver Connection, Foster Parent Listserv, Olive Crest liaisons, foster parent support groups and the Olive Crest Facebook pages.

In addition to the regional and statewide meetings and conference calls, 36 meetings are planned for CA consultation with foster parents during state fiscal year 2016.

### **Camp To Belong**

CA 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, WA. Camp To Belong is a nonprofit camp providing a five-day summer camp experience for siblings who are not able to live together while placed in out-of-home care. The Washington camp is part of a national Camp To Belong network operated throughout the United States and Australia. Activities are designed to strengthen and increase the bonds between siblings. CA provides financial support and assists in coordinating statewide transportation for campers to and from the camp site. Foster Family Connections provides camp administration, logistical support and raises private money to help fund camp activities. In FY 2015, Washington had 100 slots for campers, with 92 children attending camp. 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, developing and supporting a pool of diverse, safe, caring, quality licensed foster families is a daily and ongoing commitment of CA and our current contractor, Olive Crest's Fostering Together program. A wide variety of recruitment and retention and support efforts occur on a regular basis across the state in collaboration with local staff, Olive Crest, child placing agencies and community partners in child welfare. Recruitment efforts are developed to be responsive to the local community. Recruitment of foster parents continues to be challenged by a number of factors that are frequently shared by potential foster parents:

- 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; and
- 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 remains a lack of awareness about the need for more foster families. Foster parent recruitment efforts are ongoing and are delivered across the state and to each community. Together with strong support from current foster parents who encourage others to become licensed, these efforts create a multi-pronged strategy for on-going successful foster care recruitment and retention.

## **Adoption Recruitment**

In 2014, over sixty percent of children in foster care in Washington were adopted by their foster parents. Adoption is a social and legally permanent measure for children that provides a lifelong commitment. 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 work with difficult issues and carefully assess readiness and suitability. Parents interested in adoption must participate in a thorough assessment that includes review and exploration of personal matters 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 including:

- Maintaining the best interests and needs of the child;
- Making placement decisions with known and available information;
- Critically assessing a family’s willingness and ability to meet the child’s specific needs rather than their own needs to be a parent; and
- Making placement decisions that are in the best interests of the child currently 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 home study report prior to being considered as an adoptive family. Department staff use many tools and critical thinking to make a recommendation for approval or denial. 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, using local and national adoption exchanges and contracting with community partners for child specific recruitment.

As of July 31, 2015, there were 1,529<sup>8</sup> legally-free children with a permanent plan of adoption. Over half of these children are in placement with a permanent adoptive family and are awaiting finalization of their adoption.

### **Adoption Consortiums**

Adoption consortiums are often the first step in recruitment for a child in need of a permanent adoptive family. 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 additional recruitment options. Consortiums are held in each region 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 CA 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) 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. In 2013, WARE launched an online registration form to streamline the WARE child registration process.

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

During FY 2015, there were 180<sup>9</sup> new children registered with WARE. During this past year, 110<sup>10</sup> children registered with WARE were placed with permanent families. This is an increase of over 30 children when compared to those placed by WARE in FY 2014.

Prior to FY 2015, children were registered with WARE for at least 90 days before being registered with the NWAE. Beginning in FY 2015, children can be concurrently registered with WARE and NWAE without the 90 day wait as long as the child is legally-free. The [NWAE website](#) provides recruitment on a national level. NWAE served 157<sup>11</sup> children throughout the fiscal year; this number fluctuates as new children are registered. At the end of the fourth quarter, 79<sup>12</sup> children were placed with permanent families through NWAE, an increase of 30 children from FY 2014. There are 66<sup>13</sup> children on hold with

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<sup>8</sup> Children's Administration Source: FamLink PQR 863 August 2015 Legally-free Children

<sup>9</sup> Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2015

<sup>10</sup> Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2015

<sup>11</sup> Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2015

<sup>12</sup> Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2015

<sup>13</sup> Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2015

potential pending placements and 133<sup>14</sup> children are still in need of matching with a family. The majority of the children registered on the exchange are older with only 11 children under the age of 11 and 90 children ages 12 years and older.

### **Child Specific Recruitment**

CA contracts with NWAEE to provide comprehensive recruitment activities for children who need an adoptive family and for whom other recruitment activities have not been successful. NWAEE subcontracts with six to seven private CPAs forming a partnership to provide a 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 2015, 13<sup>15</sup> children were enrolled in the program, 6<sup>16</sup> children were placed with adoptive families, 6<sup>17</sup> children are still waiting to be matched with a family and 1<sup>18</sup> child was withdrawn at the request and/or in consultation with the social service specialist.

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

### **Purchase of Service**

The Purchase of Service (POS) program is a successful means to pay for supervision of adoptive placements of high needs children 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 adoption recruitment program is Title IV-E reimbursable. Child eligibility is in part based upon WARE registration and the length of time the child is 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 2015, 40 children were referred to the program which resulted in 30 child-specific contracts for adoptive placements. Adoptions have been finalized for seventeen

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<sup>14</sup> Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAEE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2015

<sup>15</sup> Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAEE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2015

<sup>16</sup> Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAEE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2015

<sup>17</sup> Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAEE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2015

<sup>18</sup> Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAEE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2015

children during the fiscal year and ten children were moved to new homes. There are currently nineteen children pending adoption finalizations.

In 2014, the POS program was expanded to pay for the completion of adoption home studies and adoption home study updates by private agencies when the cost of a new home study or update was a barrier to adoption finalization. The eligibility and program requirements include:

- The family was licensed prior to September 2012;
- The family has been identified as the adoptive family by the CA worker;
- The child has been in the adoptive home for at least three months; and
- DLR is unable to complete the home study or adoption update.

Three families have had adoptive home studies completed or updated since this program was initiated.

The POS Program has also expanded to provide short-term intensive family intervention to those adoptive families who have an adoptive placement but are not willing to finalize the adoption due to behavioral concerns of the child. The eligibility requirements include:

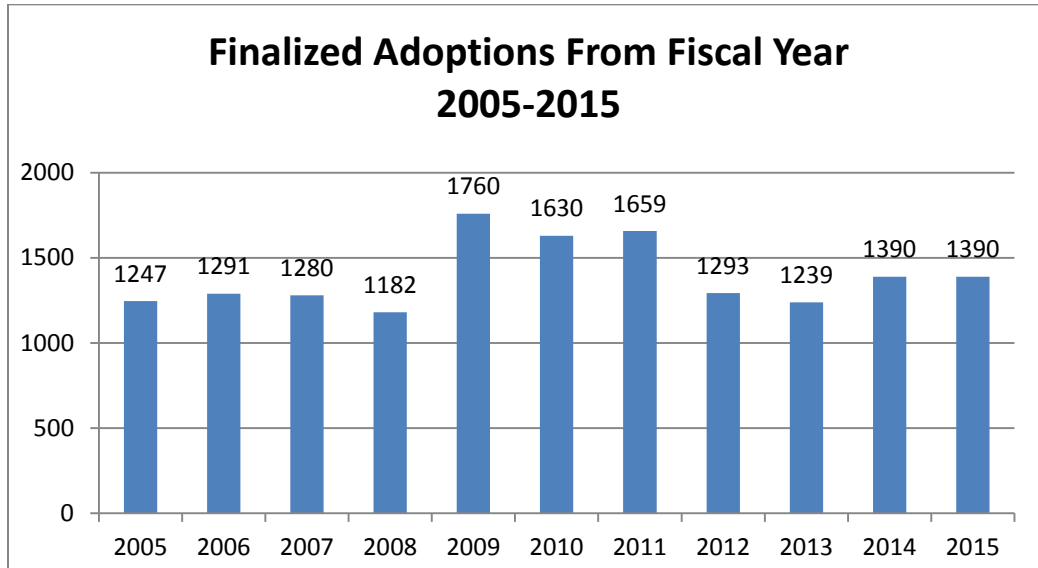
- The child has been placed for at least six months in the adoptive home;
- The CA worker has identified the family as the adoptive resource for the child;
- The family is refusing to finalize the adoption based on the child's behaviors;
- The family agrees to cooperate with intensive short term (less than three months) family therapy.

In FY 2015, three families have participated in the program and of those, two families moved forward with adopting the child. One family decided not to be the adoptive resource for the child.

## **Finalized Adoptions**

The Children's Administration continues to make every effort to establish permanency for children unable to return to the care and custody of their birth parents. Permanency is achieved through adoption, third party custody and guardianships with foster parents or relatives. Permanency through adoption was established for 1,390 children in the care and custody of CA during fiscal year 2015. Between 2009 and 2011, CA 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. In 2014, CA focused a three month period on finalizing permanency options for children. This included contracting with private agencies for backlogged home study completion and a temporary increase in field staff to assist in addressing high case numbers. The result is

reflected in the increase in adoptions for 2014. In FY 2015, CA has continued to focus efforts on permanency which has resulted in an adoption number consistent with FY 2014.



There are currently 1,529 legally-free children in need of permanency; CA continues to complete over 1,000 adoptions annually. Reasons for legally-free children remaining in out-of-home care include:

- The current caregiver has been identified as a potential permanent family but an adoptive home study has not been completed or updated.
- The child and prospective adoptive family may need services to stabilize a placement prior to finalizing an adoption.
- 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 with current staffing levels.
- The change in legislation mandating that every child who has been legally-free six months or longer is appointed legal counsel has increased adoption workload. Overall, newly appointed attorneys are requesting discovery information even on cases with pending adoption finalization. Workers must complete the discovery request, which includes redacting the entire legally-free case file, before the adoption can proceed.
- Though recruitment efforts are underway, an adoptive family has not yet been identified for a child, youth or sibling group.
- Preparing and transitioning children into adoptive families involves several factors, including:
  - Age of the child or youth;
  - Needs of the child (educational, medical, emotional, social, behavioral);

- 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.
- Intensive recruitment is often required for children with higher needs.
- 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.
- 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 over 18 months.

### **Summary**

CA continues to focus on achieving permanency for children in foster care. The continued focus on permanency through adoption in FY 2015 resulted in 1,390 children achieving permanency. The goal of the agency continues to be developing permanency plans that are in the best interests of a child. Each child remains the central element in adoption decision-making.

## **Home Studies for Legally-free Children**

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 in CA's electronic case management system. 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 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 an adoption support application and adoption finalization.

CA 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 foster licensing home study for families choosing to be foster 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 and requires:

- 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 and History**

The Fostering Well-Being (FWB) program is a collaborative effort between the Health Care Authority, the Aging and Disability Services Administration and CA. 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.

### **Major Components of FWB**

- Medical identification cards are issued to all children in out-of-home placement within three working days of placement notification.
- Washington State Immunization Information System reports are mailed to caregivers within three working days of placement notification.
- Medical records are requested for the last two 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 service specialists and caregivers regarding individual health questions and concerns.
- Six Regional Medical Consultants continue to be a vital resource for social service specialists, caregivers and local medical providers.
- Healthcare reports are mailed to caregivers of children under age 13 within three working days of initial placement notification.

- Early and Periodic Screening Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT) or Well-Child Exam reminder alerts are sent to social service specialists via FamLink.
- Health education materials including information about recognizing symptoms of trauma and how to support a child who has been exposed to trauma are mailed to caregivers.
- A healthcare review of medically fragile children is completed to ensure they are connected to on-going and appropriate health care services that address their medically fragile conditions.
- In CY 2014, the Fostering Well-Being Care Coordination Unit made over 14,000 contacts on behalf of 1,638 children.