

# **Report to the Legislature**

Children's Administration  
Annual Quality Assurance Report, Fiscal Year 2015  
July 1, 2014 through June 30, 2015

RCW 43.20A.870 and RCW 74.13.260

May 15, 2016

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## **Children's Administration Overview**

### **Safe, healthy individuals, families and communities**

State law requires the Department of Social and Health Services Children's Administration to produce this annual Quality Assurance Report on its efforts to enhance child safety and permanency and to support child and family well-being.

This is the 19<sup>th</sup> report detailing performance outcome data under RCW 43.20A.870 and RCW 74.13.260 that shows performance in the following specific service areas.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Children's Administration provides or oversees provision of services and supports throughout the public child welfare continuum of care. Its roles include:

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

The Administration tracks performance in many areas of service delivery and oversight in an effort to improve outcomes. This report addresses only the measures required by state law.

Additional performance information is available at  
<https://www.dshs.wa.gov/data/metrics/CA.pdf>

Children’s Administration is accountable to the legislature and to the public for continuing to improve the child welfare system. The Administration recognizes no government entity alone can ensure the safety of children. The Administration relies on mandated reporters such as community-based service providers, faith communities, schools and caring individuals to speak up on behalf of vulnerable children by reporting suspected child maltreatment.

The data in this report comes from the federally mandated State Automated Child Welfare Information System, which in Washington is called FamLink.

Measures are reported by federal fiscal year, October 1, 2013 through September 30, 2014 as required by the federal Administration for Children and Families and by state fiscal year, July 1, 2014 through June 30, 2015 to meet state legislative requirements. The data source and reporting period are noted for each measure. Federal targets in this report reflect federal requirements in place beginning with this year’s report. These federal measures use an entry cohort approach, which requires the state to wait 12 months to determine whether the outcome being measured occurs. The year label reflects the year of the cohort being measured, which means that federal fiscal year 2014 is the most recent data available.

**Performance measures in this report and summary of outcomes**

The following measures are included in this report:

Measure	2015 Target* / Federal Target**	Performance***
Timely response in emergent referrals	≥ 98.5%*	98.6%
Timely response in non-emergent referrals	≥ 97%*	98.4%
Children who did not experience recurrence of abuse	≥ 94.0%**	90.3%
Children who are abused or neglected while in the placement and care authority of the state	≤ 6.8 days/100,000**	6.93 days/100,000
Foster homes receiving health and safety checks	≥ 10%*	13.0%
Children visited every month by their worker	≥ 98%*	97.7%
Children achieving permanency within 12 months of placement	≥ 37.9%**	32.9%
Median number of days children are placed in care	Previous year 479	495
Percentage of children who remain safely with their family for 12 months following reunification	≥ 93%**	95.3%

\*Targets are established by the Children’s Administration to set a standard for performance.

\*\*Federal Targets are established by the Administration for Children and Families.

\*\*\*State measures report performance through SFY2015. Federal measures report performance through FFY2014 because the measures look forward 12 months to see if the outcome being measured occurred in FFY2015.

## Safety

**Goal: Children will be safe from abuse and neglect**

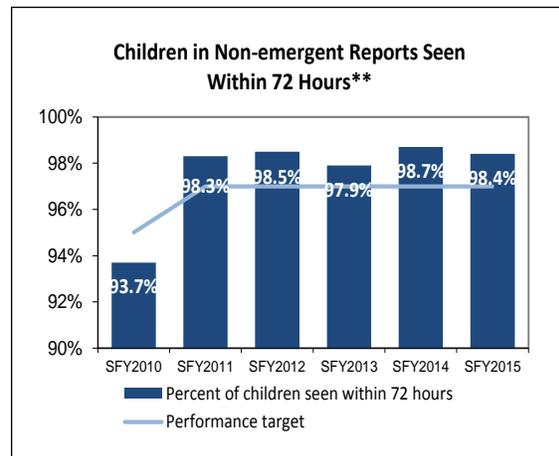
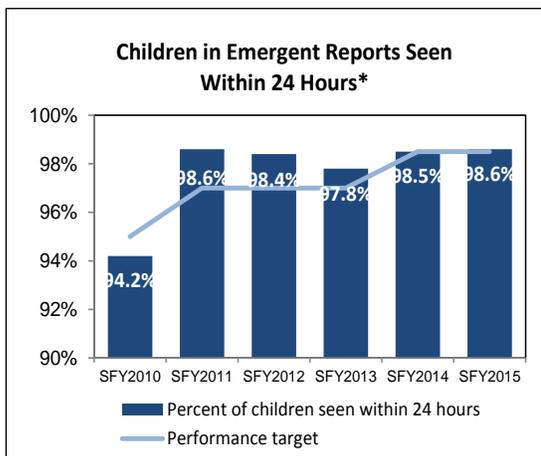
**Objective: Initiate timely CPS response**

**Measured by: Children seen face-to-face by a worker following a report of abuse or neglect requiring a face-to-face response**

When an intake caseworker receives a report of suspected child abuse or neglect, he or she must determine, based on the information provided, whether the report meets the legal sufficiency to warrant a face-to-face CPS response. The caseworker must establish if the information indicates that some type of abuse or neglect may have occurred and if he or she has enough information to identify and locate the child or children involved.

Reports meeting the sufficiency screen and criteria for either an emergent or a non-emergent response are screened in for investigation or family assessment response (FAR). Emergent response cases do not go to FAR. When a child or group of children meets the legal criteria for an emergent response or is determined to be at “imminent risk” of harm, a caseworker must initiate an investigation and make face-to-face contact with the child within 24 hours of receipt of the report. Reports meeting the criteria for non-emergent response require caseworkers to make face-to-face contact with the child within 72 hours from receipt of the report.

During state fiscal year 2015, 98.6 percent of children in emergent reports were seen within 24 hours. Of the children in non-emergent reports, 98.4 percent were seen within 72 hours. Performance for both measures met or exceeded the targets established for state fiscal years 2013-15. Children’s Administration continues its efforts to improve child safety, evidenced by the Results Washington target established at the beginning of state fiscal year 2014 that 98.5 percent of children in emergent reports will be seen within 24 hours.



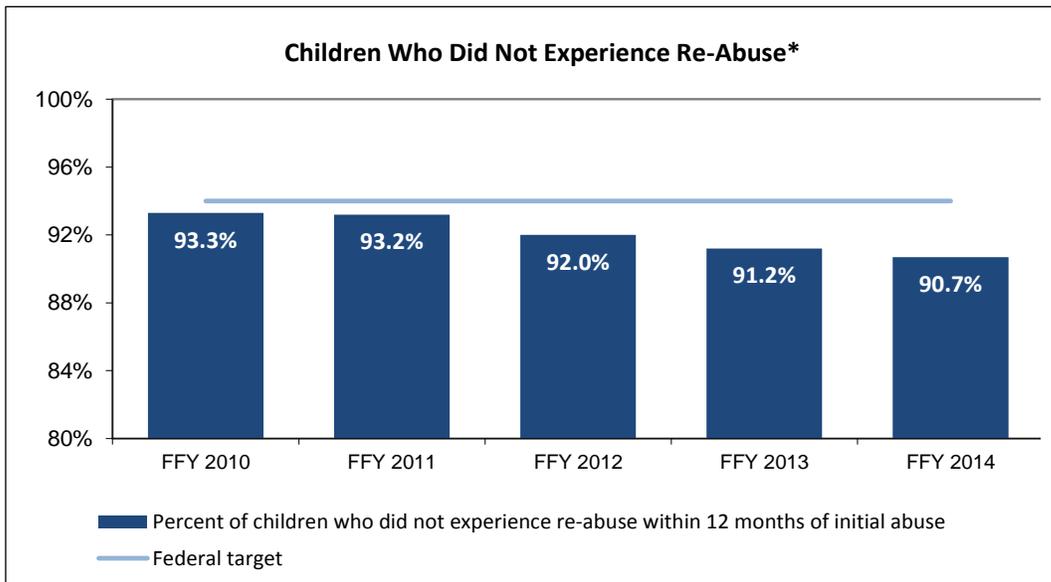
\*Average annual percentage of children in emergent CPS reports seen or attempted to be seen within 24 hours. Excludes Division of Licensed Resources (DLR) CPS reports. Source: FamLink

\*\*Average annual percentage of children in non-emergent CPS reports seen or attempted to be seen within 72 hours. Excludes Division of Licensed Resources (DLR) CPS reports. Source: FamLink

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

A child is considered the victim of re-abuse or recurrence when he or she has experienced a founded allegation of abuse or neglect within twelve months of a previous finding of abuse or neglect, excluding reports in the first fourteen days.

Under the federal target for recurrence of abuse and neglect set by the Administration for Children and Families, 94 percent of children who have experienced a founded allegation of abuse or neglect will be safe from an additional founded allegation within twelve months. For children with a founded allegation of abuse or neglect in FFY 2014, 90.7 percent of these children were safe from re-abuse in the following 12 months.



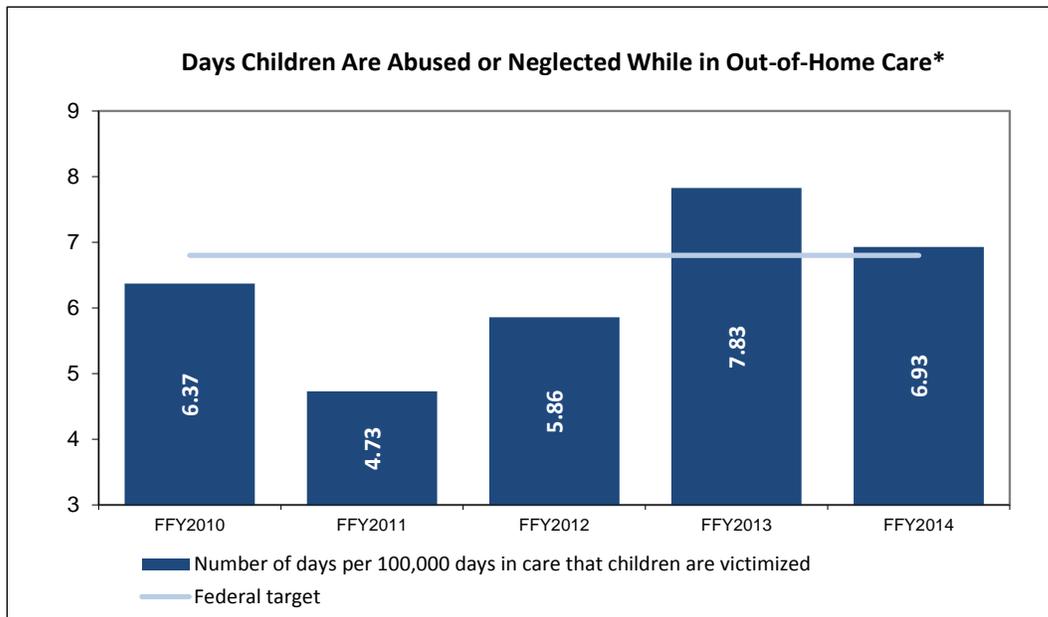
\*Percentage of children with a founded allegation of abuse or neglect who did not have a new founded allegation within 12 months, excluding reports in the first 14 days. “Founded” means that an investigation concluded that the maltreatment was more likely than not to have occurred. For reports with multiple allegations, the report is considered founded if any of the allegations are founded. The federal target for this measure is 94.0% percent or more children will be free from additional founded allegations. Source: FamLink data reported to NCANDS<sup>1</sup> and Results Washington; Child and Family Services Review measure calculation.

<sup>1</sup> The National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) is the federal data collection system that gathers information from all states about reports of child abuse and neglect. The data are used to examine trends in child abuse and neglect across the country.

**Objective:** Improve safety for children placed in out-of-home care  
**Measured by:** Children who are abused or neglected while in the placement and care authority of the state

Children’s Administration works diligently to ensure caregivers licensed to provide care for children and the homes in which they live are safe and stable. Those responsible for caring for children must undergo background checks, participate in education and training and demonstrate competency in skills associated with caring for and nurturing vulnerable children.

The federal target for this measure is set very high at 99.9932 percent of the days children are in the placement and care authority of the state they will be free from abuse and neglect. Because this target is so high, the measure has been converted into the number of days per 100,000 days that children are abused. Washington was just above the target for federal fiscal year 2014 and strives to reduce the days children are victimized to fewer than 6.8 days per 100,000 days in the care and custody of the state.



\*Number of days per 100,000 days in the care and custody of the state that children are abused or neglected.  
 Source: FamLink data submitted to AFCARS<sup>2</sup> and NCANDS; Child and Family Services Review measure calculation.

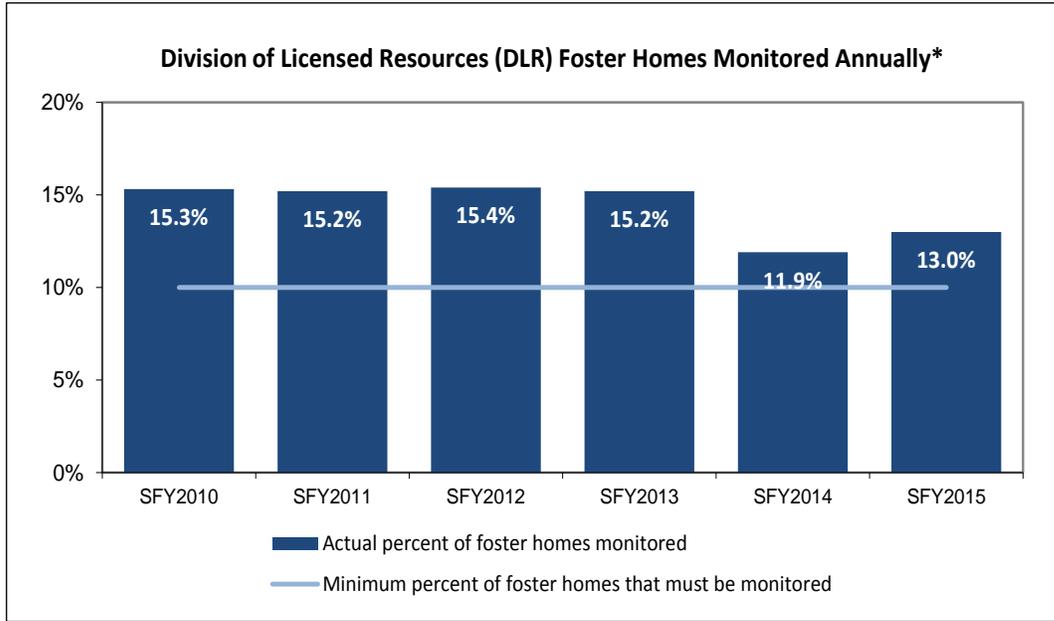
<sup>2</sup> The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) is the federal data collection system that collects case-level information from state and tribal Title IV-E agencies on all children in foster care and those who have been adopted with Title IV-E agency involvement.

**Objective: Improve safety for children placed in out-of-home care**  
**Measured by: Foster homes receiving health and safety checks**

Washington state law requires the department to monitor a random sample of no less than 10 percent of the total number of family foster homes licensed by Children’s Administration by July 1 of each year and to report the results annually (RCW 74.13.260; RCW 74.13.031(6)).

In state fiscal year 2015, 13.0 percent of licensed homes received a health and safety check. Those caring for children must meet minimum licensing standards as must the homes in which children live. Homes must be free of known safety hazards. For example, if the home accepts placement for children under the age of six years, fireplaces or wood stoves must be surrounded by safety fences. All homes must keep medications secured and foster parents must be trained in First Aid and CPR.

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



\*Percentage of Division of Licensed Resources (DLR) foster homes with a health and safety check completed by the Division of Licensed Resources, annually. Source: FamLink

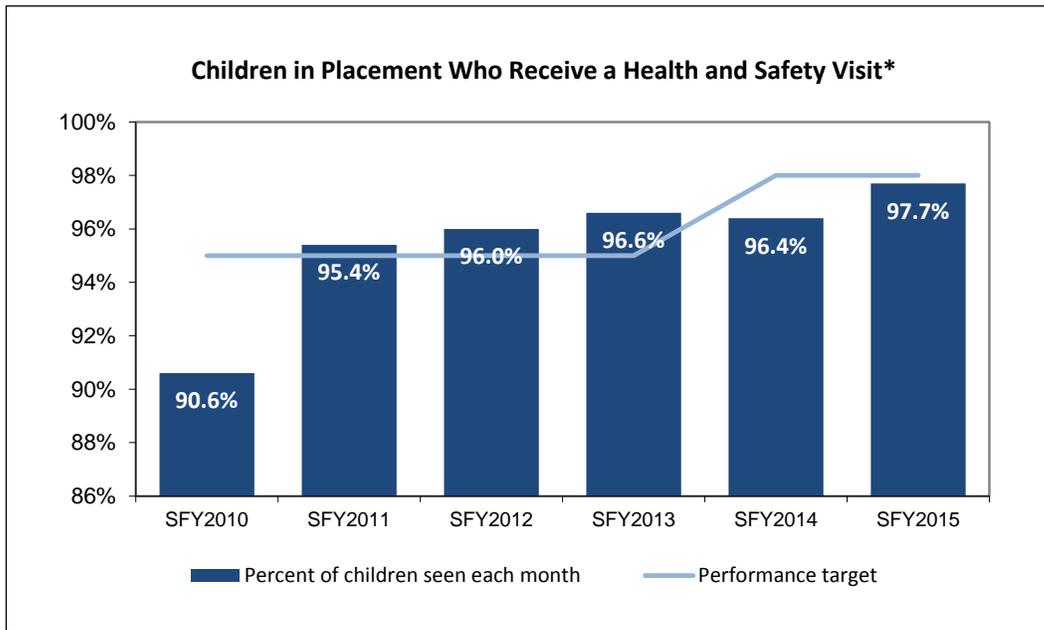
**Objective: Increase worker visits with children**  
**Measured by: Children visited every month by their worker**

In order to monitor the health and safety of children in out-of-home care, caseworkers are required to visit children in person at least once a month, with the majority occurring in the child’s out-of-home placement.

Face-to-face contact with children permits workers to assess a child’s health and well-being, evaluate the home, including the child’s personal space, and determine how well a child is adjusting to his or her placement. While monthly in-person visits are the minimum requirement, Children’s Administration workers often make additional contact with children through telephone calls, case staffings, court hearings and other personal visits.

Children’s Administration strives to see children in out-of-home care at least once during the calendar month with a private and individual face-to-face health and safety visit. Children’s Administration continues to strive to improve performance in this area as evidenced by its strategic plan target that 98 percent of children in out-of-home care will be seen monthly. This target was established at the beginning of state fiscal year 2014 and we made substantial progress in FY2015 toward this target.

Workers completed monthly visits with nearly 98 percent of children in out-of-home placements during fiscal year 2015.



\*The annual average percentage of children receiving a health and safety visit from their social worker each month during the state fiscal year. Source: FamLink

## Permanency

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

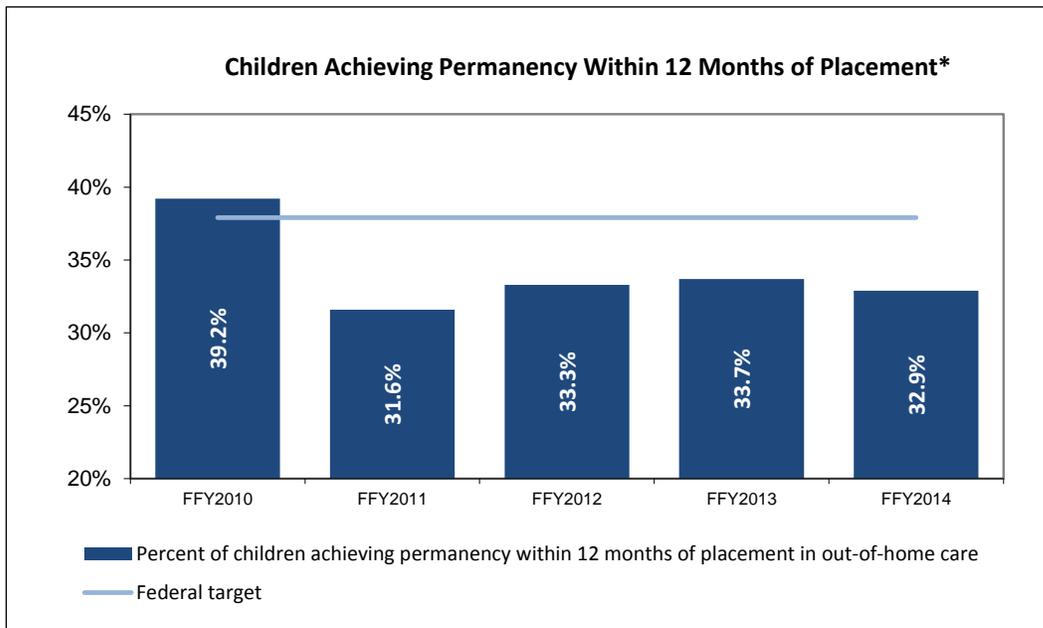
**Objective: Increase permanency for children in out-of-home care**

**Measured by: Children achieving permanency within 12 months of placement in out-of-home care**

Children's Administration works to achieve permanency for children as quickly as is safely possible. We work to reunify children with their families of origin when safety assessments show, and parents demonstrate, that they are able to safely care for their children and when reunification is in a child's best interest. When children cannot be safely reunified, we work to achieve permanency through adoption and guardianship as quickly as possible.

Children's Administration uses the Child Safety Framework, which focuses on increasing child safety throughout the life of a case. This framework includes all decisions made from intake through permanency, including the plan to return a child to his or her home.

In federal fiscal year 2014, 32.9 percent of children who had been removed from their parents' care due to abuse or neglect were able to achieve permanency within 12 months of placement.

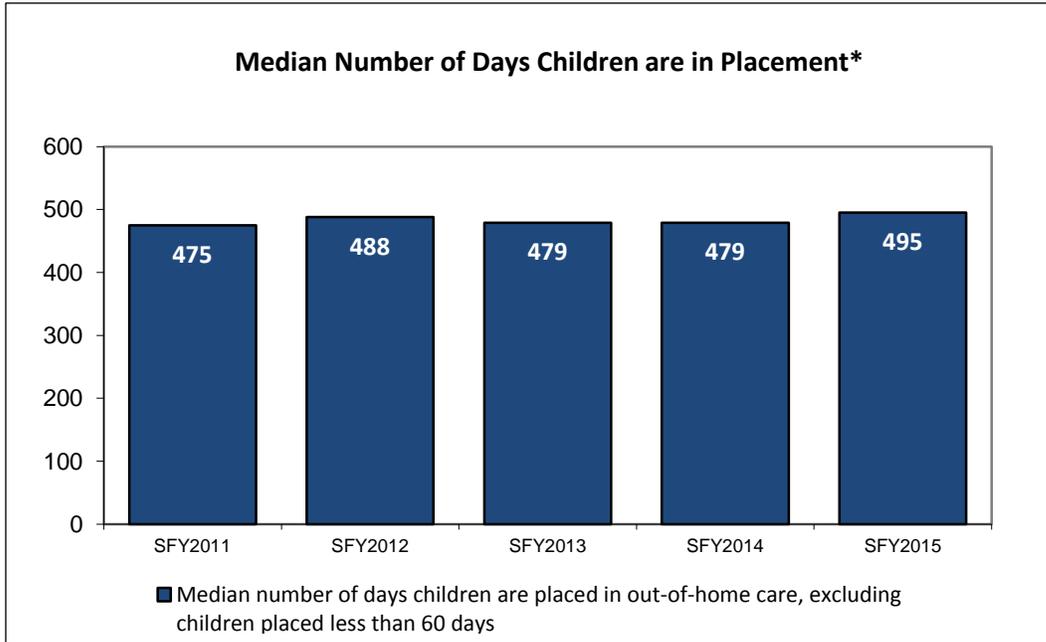


\*Percent of children discharged to permanency within 12 months of placement into out-of-home care. The federal target is 37.9 percent, based on the observed performance needed to avoid a federal Program Improvement Plan. Source: FamLink data submitted to AFCARS; Child and Family Services Review measure calculation.

**Objective:** Decrease length of stay without increasing re-entry  
**Measured by:** Median number of days children are placed in care

When children must be placed into out-of-home care to keep them safe and stable, Children’s Administration strives to move them into permanent homes as quickly as is safely possible.

The median length of stay measure indicates the median number of days children spend in out-of-home care for children placed more than 60 days.



\*Median number of days children are placed in out-of-home care on the last day of the state fiscal year, for children in DCFS custody placed more than 60 days. Source: FamLink Monthly Metrics report

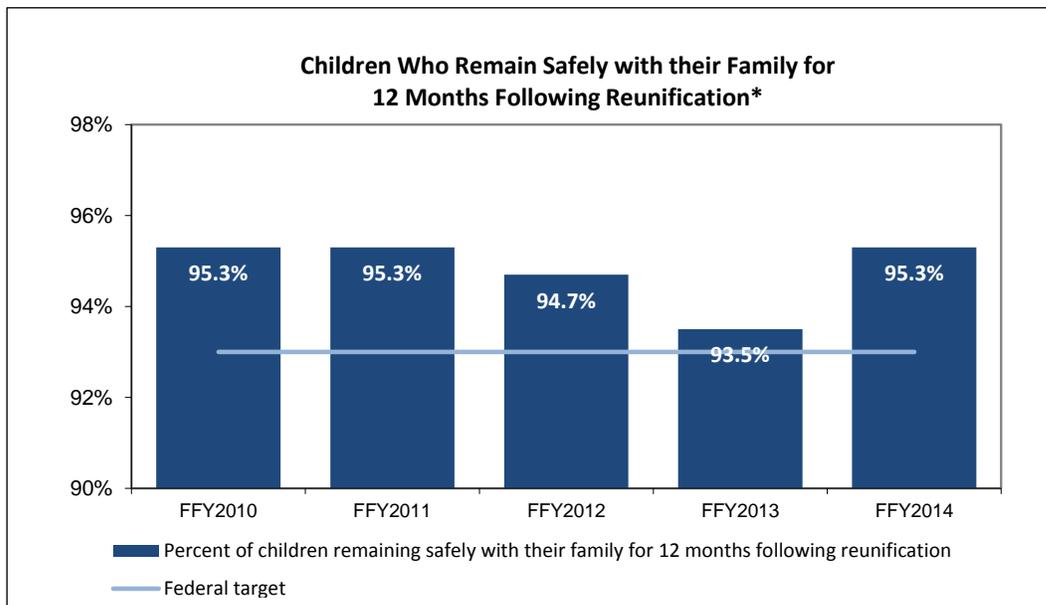
**Objective: Decrease length-of-stay without increasing re-entry**  
**Measured by: Children remaining safely at home following reunification**

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

Children’s Administration does not act alone in making the decision to remove a child from his or her parents’ care. Child Protective Services (CPS) makes recommendations to a court that a child needs to be placed in the home of a substitute caregiver due to safety threats. The courts, not CPS, make the decision on whether to remove children from their parents. Likewise, the decision to return children to the homes from which they have been removed is a serious legal decision. Child welfare professionals must assess whether or not a family has succeeded in eliminating safety threats so a child may return home.

Children’s Administration puts in place safety plans designed to control and manage safety threats when children are returned to parental care and to prevent children from returning to out-of-home care.

For children who were returned home in federal fiscal year 2014, 4.7 percent of these children came back into out-of-home care within 12 months of their return home. 95.3 percent of these children were able to remain safely at home for 12 months following reunification, exceeding the federal target of 93 percent or higher.



\*Of all children who enter care in a 12-month period who discharged from out-of-home care within 12-months to reunification, the percent that did not re-enter out-of-home care within 12 months from the date of discharge. The federal target is 93 percent, based on the observed performance needed to avoid a federal Program Improvement Plan. Source: FamLink data submitted to AFCARS; Child and Family Services Review measure calculation

***Conclusion***

As the public child welfare system for Washington state, Children's Administration is held to very high standards for improving child safety, permanency and child and family well-being.

In addition to continuous quality improvement efforts designed to meet the requirements of federal, state and judicial oversight entities, the Administration engages in ongoing self appraisal. Children's Administration workers are dedicated to doing the best possible work for vulnerable children, not because of mandates, but because it is the work to which we are committed.

Children's Administration will continue to engage in continuous quality improvement efforts and to increase research-based efforts to protect children and preserve families.