

**Report to the Legislature**

**Foster and Adoptive Home Placement**

RCW 74.13.031(2)

December 1, 2016

Children's Administration  
Division of Program & Practice Improvement  
PO Box 45710  
Olympia, WA 98504-5710  
(360) 902-8400

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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 (FY) 2016, CA activities related to recruitment and retention resulted in the following:

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

- There were 5,081<sup>1</sup> licensed foster homes, of which 1,180 were newly licensed.
- There were 1,824 relative home studies completed.
- There were 562<sup>2</sup> licensed foster homes with families of color at the end of FY 2016.
- 1,419<sup>3</sup> adoptions were finalized.

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

- During FY 2016, CA completed a Request for Proposals (RFP) to procure contractors to deliver foster parent recruitment and retention services within Children’s Administration’s three regions. A two-year foster parent recruitment and retention contract was signed with both Eastern Washington University (EWU) (Fostering Washington) and Olive Crest (Fostering Together). EWU serves Region 1 and Olive Crest serves both Regions 2 and 3.

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<sup>1</sup> Children’s Administration Source FamLink Production Query Report (PQR) 863 - August 2016 Licensed Foster Homes

<sup>2</sup> Children’s Administration Source FamLink PQR 863 - August 2016– Newly Licensed Foster Homes

<sup>3</sup> Children’s Administration Source FamLink PQR 863- August 2016 - Adoptions Finalized

**(c) Completing home studies for legally-free children:**

- CA provided adoption home study services to 2,220<sup>4</sup> families during FY 2016, 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.

## **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. National reporting on foster care recruitment continues to underscore the need for ongoing recruitment messaging, as potential foster families, who make an initial inquiry, 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 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.

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<sup>4</sup> Children’s Administration Source FamLink PQR 863- August 2016 – Finalized Adoptions

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

## **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.

### **Partnering with Recruitment Contractors**

During FY 2016, CA completed a Request for Proposals (RFP) to procure contractors to deliver foster parent recruitment and retention services within Children's Administration's three regions. A two-year foster parent recruitment and retention contract was signed with both Eastern Washington University (EWU) (Fostering Washington) and Olive Crest (Fostering Together). EWU serves Region 1 and Olive Crest serves both Regions 2 and 3.

Olive Crest is a licensed non-profit agency in Bellevue, Washington. Olive Crest's Fostering Together program has held previous regional and statewide recruitment contracts with CA.

EWU's Fostering Washington program is headquartered in Cheney, Washington. EWU also partners with the Idaho Child Welfare Research and

Training Center (ICWRtC) and has provided foster parent recruitment services for Idaho for seven years.

Both Olive Crest and EWU focus on diligent recruitment of foster families within their regional areas to develop interest and applications from prospective foster parents who can meet the placement needs of children entering out-of-home care. The current recruitment contracts require the contract staff to attend orientation classes presented by the Division of Licensed Resources and the Caregiver Core Trainings provided by the Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence. Recruitment contract staff are essential to the support of prospective foster parents as they begin the process of required training and the licensure application. Support from the contractor's liaisons and mentors helps ensure foster parents continue the required process to obtain their license. Without this support, prospective foster parents can easily get lost in the process. The contract provides incentives for increases in the number of applications from prospective foster parents. During the first measurement period of their contracts, both contractors received incentive payments.

The recruitment contracts focus recruitment efforts for:

- Racially and ethnically diverse children;
- Siblings;
- Youth over the age of 13 and youth in extended foster care;
- Children with challenging emotional and behavioral difficulties;
- Children birth to three;
- Medically fragile children; and
- Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual, Transgender and Questioning children and youth.

CA partners with both EWU and Olive Crest to develop diligent recruitment plans. These recruitment efforts and plans are created in conjunction with local Recruitment Development and Support (RDS) teams. Contractors develop ongoing recruitment messages that are culturally competent and tailored to meet the needs of children who cannot be placed with relatives or kin and must be 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 and EWU, Child Placing Agencies (CPA), the Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence, tribes, foster parents, community partners and stakeholders. RDS teams review local, regional and state data, identifying the trends and demographics of the children who have entered

care, together with data on existing numbers of foster parents and their current placement availability. 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, Olive Crest and EWU have developed a variety of general recruitment efforts to share information, build interest and develop awareness of the need for foster families in their respective regions of the state.

During 2016, CA has continued recruitment messaging with the widely recognized “Foster Parenting – You can too” branding. This logo and slogan was initially developed in 2007 in consultation with the National Resource Center “AdoptUsKids.” It is widely recognized in communities and continues to build upon a consistent and positive message about foster parenting across Washington state. The brand is carried on all of CA’s printed recruitment materials and also appears on our contractor’s printed recruitment material signifying the partnership between the agencies. The logo appears on CA’s foster parent recruitment page as a hyperlink allowing families to quickly access CA’s foster parent inquiry form. It also appears on Olive Crest’s website <http://fosteringtogether.org> and its 30 Facebook pages as well as EWU’s website <http://www.ewu.edu/css/fostering-washington> and their corresponding Facebook recruitment pages.



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

Recruitment efforts share the message across 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 our contractors during FY 2016 have been wide reaching and have included speaking engagements across the communities and distribution of various recruitment materials at events and locations, including:

- Local fairs and businesses, churches across many denominations, conferences, sports events and complexes, health departments community groups and recreation, YMCA, eye centers, parades, craft bonanzas, school distributions, Craig's List, post offices, laundromats, grocery stores, farmer's markets, 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; Hispanic radio and newspapers, Pow-wows and tribal gatherings, African-American community events, businesses and places of worship;
- Gatherings and events for Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender and Questioning (LGBTQ) youth; PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) events and meetings
- Sports teams: Seattle Mariners, Tacoma Rainiers, Wenatchee Applesox and a new partnership developed with the Spokane Indians;
- 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); Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram and Tag Board;
- 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 a wide variety of events to honor and recognize foster parents with many foster parent appreciation events and dinners held across the state. Many of these events include partnerships with local businesses, community partners and individuals who are helping support

foster parents and share the message of foster parent recruitment at their place of business.

In recognition of National Foster Care Month and Washington's foster and adoptive parents and relative caregivers, the Seattle Mariners hosted the 8<sup>th</sup> annual "We Are Family" day event at Safeco Field on May 1, 2016. This year attendance at the event broke the 2015 attendance record of 2,800 with 3,358 foster parents, relative caregivers, agency personnel, community partners and stakeholders gathering to recognize foster parents and watch the Mariners take on the Kansas City Royals. The early morning caregiver recognition ceremony tripled in size with 600 people in attendance.

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 once again made a surprise visit appearing on Safeco Field with the "We Are Family" representatives, greeting staff and dignitaries. A foster youth alumni shared words of appreciation for their caregivers. One youth was selected to throw out the ceremonial first pitch which he threw directly over home plate to Steve Cishek, the Mariners' closer.

Ten individuals accompanied Governor and Mrs. Inslee onto the field for pictures with the Mariners and the mascot, Mariner Moose. One hundred foster families received free tickets for the game courtesy of the Mariners. Forty families received free concession gift cards courtesy of the International Association of Machinists Seattle District 160. All caregiver families at the morning event were treated to free popcorn and Cracker Jacks through the generosity of Center Plate's General Manager, Steve Dominguez. The Seattle Aquarium once again donated free passes to the aquarium and the YMCA provided free passes for the month of May to foster parents.

Nearly 40 giveaways were donated for the event including specially designed Mariner t-shirts for all 3,358 in attendance. A local Girl Scout troop funded and developed Art Boxes that were gifted to children in attendance. Foster parents and relative caregivers were recognized by the Mariners during the game. CA and many other foster care agencies and community partners hosted recruitment and caregiver support booths during the game to help bring awareness about foster care, recruitment and to say thank you to caregivers. The Mariners' announcer and Jumbo-Tron shared information with the crowd about the need for foster families across Washington.

Several statewide Spanish radio foster care recruitment broadcasts have continued in 2016 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. This year broadcasts featured a Spanish speaking foster parent who shares her family's journey to becoming foster parents. These broadcasts have been successful with a continued increase in Spanish speaking families calling the state foster parent hotline after each broadcast. This effort will continue in 2017.

### **Targeted Recruitment**

RDS teams identify specific demographics of 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**

EWU and Olive Crest partner with CA on various child specific recruitment strategies to help recruit foster, relative and adoptive families for specific children in foster care. CA's regional placement desk staff continue to partner with Olive Crest and EWU to post general information about a child or sibling group who is waiting for a placement on the restricted foster parent Facebook pages. This partnership helps identify available foster parents when children are waiting for a placement. Caregivers 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. This effort has allowed CA and our contractors to expand the reach for child specific recruitment.

### **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.

- 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 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.

During FY 2016, CA has worked to develop strong partnerships between EWU serving Region 1 and Olive Crest serving Regions 2 and 3 and the corresponding RDS teams. FamLink data supports that foster families are needed statewide to maintain placement of children within their own communities.

### **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 [www.dshs.wa.gov/fosterparents](http://www.dshs.wa.gov/fosterparents) or through the 1-888-KIDS-414 statewide phone line. This year CA has doubled its monthly average of electronic inquiries from 300 in 2015 to 609 in 2016. The monthly average for phone line inquiries has declined from 72 calls in 2015 to and 30 calls per month in 2016.

Prospective foster parents may now be more comfortable with online utilization and prefer that method of inquiry. CA has also identified an issue in which prospective families were calling, but were not logged into the SRIC system; this issue has been addressed and those families will now be directed to the SRIC phone line. Only those inquiring or calling with stated interest in learning more about foster parenting are added to the SRIC system.

SRIC routes each inquiry electronically to Olive Crest or EWU and the regional recruiter or liaison responds to each inquiry within 24 business hours. Both

contractors also add prospective families to the SRIC who have made contact directly with Olive Crest via their online website or call the agency about fostering (those inquiries are included in the numbers in the paragraph above). Some prospective families inquire directly through a licenser at the Division of Licensed Resources (DLR) or a private CPA and are not immediately added to the SRIC. When EWU and 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 or EWU can request their information be “suspended” in the SRIC. The contractors’ liaisons/mentors provide twice a month contact with the prospective family through the recruitment, training and licensing process. SRIC provides 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 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 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. EWU, Olive Crest, CA and the Alliance are committed to ensuring potential foster parents receive timely services.

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

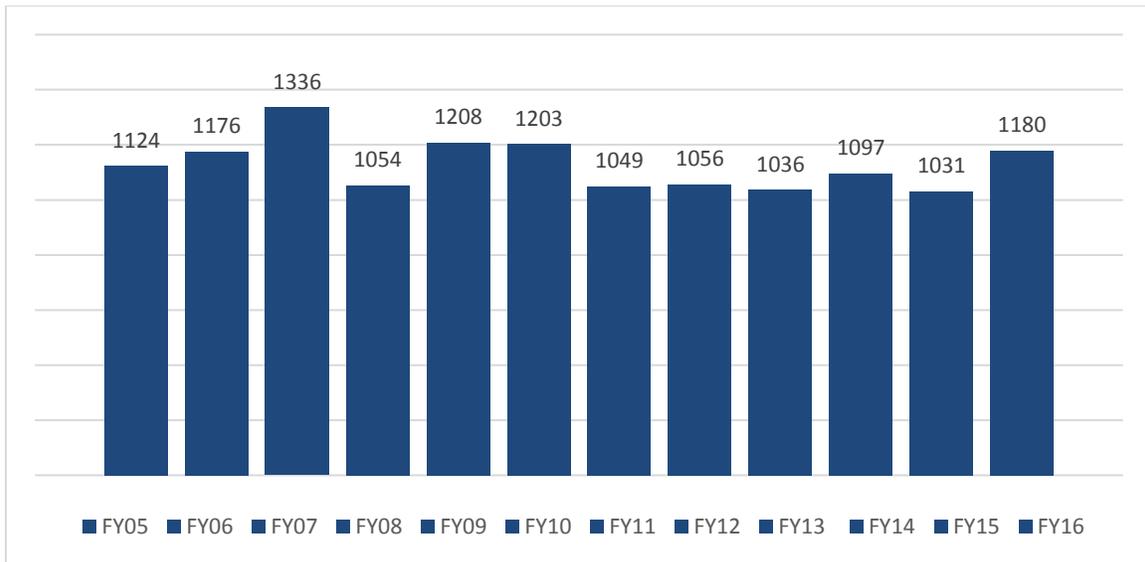
The top responses include:

	<b>How Families Heard about Foster Care Need</b>
1.	Other Foster or Adoptive Parents
2.	Recruitment Events
3.	CA's Foster Parent Website/Internet Search
4.	EWU or Olive Crest's Recruitment staff
5.	CA staff
6.	Church
7.	Other – not specified

#### **Foster Care License Applications**

A data report for FY 2016 that tracks and reports foster care applications received by both Children's Administration and by the Child Placing Agencies has been developed from CA's electronic case management system FamLink. In FY 2016, FamLink reported a statewide total of 1,807 applications received for a new foster care license. This data can also be broken down by region as requested.

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



In FY 2016, 1,180 new foster homes were licensed by the Division of Licensed Resources (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.

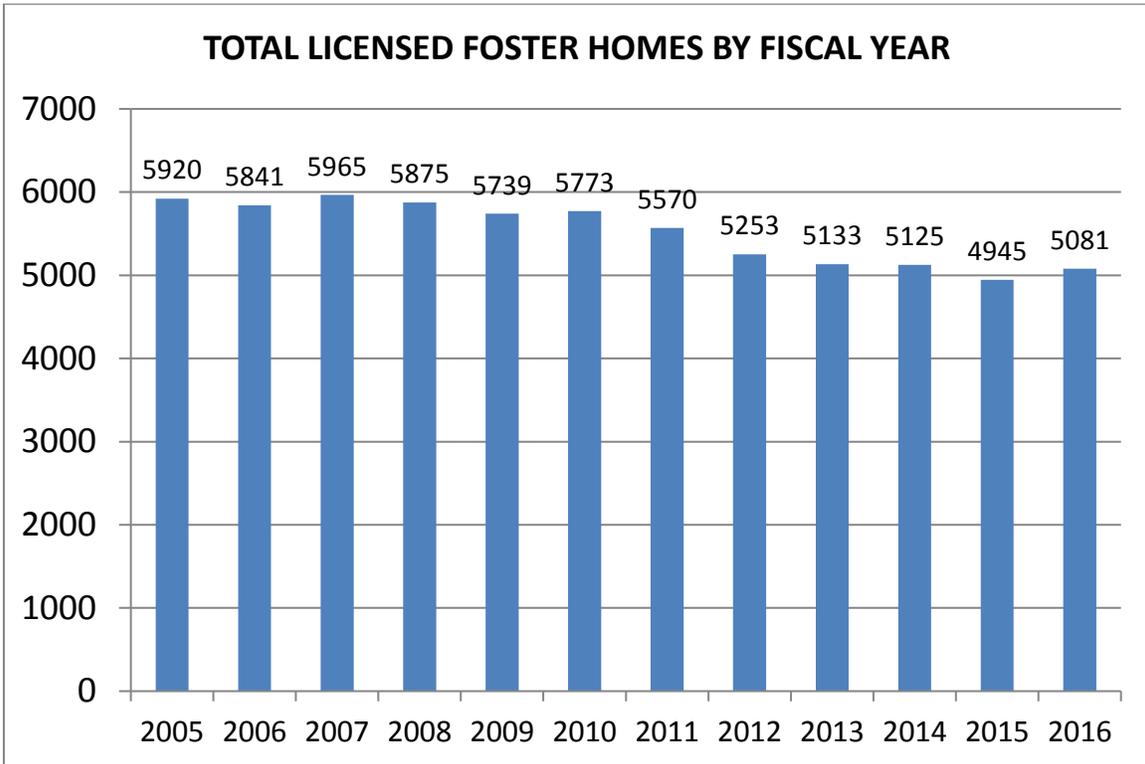
DLR has posted slow and steady growth in licensed foster homes during FY 2016. The data shows a total of 5,081 licensed foster homes in June 2016 compared to 4,934 licensed foster homes in July 2015 (an increase of 147 licensed foster homes).

### **Foster Home Turnover: Causes and DLR Recommendations**

There is a small overall upward trend in the total number of licensed foster homes in Washington over the last fiscal year. However, there is still a need for a greater number of licensed foster homes. 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. There have been permanency efforts that have led to achieved permanency for children in care that have resulted in

<sup>6</sup> Data updated 8/9/16. Source: famlinkdw\_common.dbo.rptfosterhomes  
Data include DLR licensed. Adoptive home and other provider types. Counts identify first foster home license date.

foster home closures. Homes previously licensed by DLR who are 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.



### 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	FY16
1124	1080	944	804	483	416	358	230	185	161	108	91
100.0%	96.1%	84.0%	71.5%	43.0%	37.0%	31.9%	20.5%	16.5%	14.3%	9.61%	8%
	1176	1142	995	841	462	384	310	173	154	127	85
	100.0%	97.1%	84.6%	71.5%	39.3%	32.7%	26.4%	14.7%	13.1%	10.8%	7.23%
		1336	1270	1105	915	485	387	317	184	155	130
		100.0%	95.1%	82.7%	68.5%	36.3%	29.0%	23.7%	13.8%	11.6%	9.7%
<b>Legend</b>			1054	1016	889	743	383	324	278	154	137
1st yr			100.0%	96.4%	84.3%	70.5%	36.3%	30.7%	26.4%	14.6%	13.0%
2nd yr				1208	1171	1020	836	386	340	282	157
3rd yr				100.0%	96.9%	84.4%	69.2%	32.0%	28.1%	23.3%	13.0%
4th yr					1203	1164	1006	843	396	358	302
5th yr					100.0%	96.8%	83.6%	70.1%	32.9%	29.8%	25.9%
6th yr						1049	1010	875	700	366	323
7th yr						100.0%	96.3%	83.4%	66.7%	34.9%	32.0%
8th yr							1056	1019	886	718	360
9th yr							100.0%	96.5%	86.9%	81.0%	50.1%
10th yr								1036	1008	882	673
11th yr								100.0%	97.3%	85.1%	66.8%
12th yr									1097	1061	921
									100.0%	96.7%	86.8%
										1031	1001
										100.0%	97.1%
											1180
											100.0%

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.

Reasons for license closure that CA seeks to address include:

<sup>7</sup> All data updated 8/9/16. Source: famlinkdw\_common.dbo.rptfosterhomes  
Data include DLR licensed, adoptive home and other provider types. Counts identify first foster home license data.

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

CA is using the following key strategies to address retention:

- Support through recruitment and retention contract providers, quarterly statewide 1624 meetings and annual foster parent survey results.
- Continued process improvement related to the home study process for families caring for relatives or children and youth known to them. This has resulted in the home study process being implemented earlier in the life of the placement, thereby providing earlier supports to families.
- An increased emphasis on timeliness of completed home studies.
- Collaboration between DLR staff and CA staff from the data unit to develop reports that lead to increased data integrity and accountability.
- Implementation of WAC changes to allow a medical exemption for foster families with severe medical reaction prohibiting the flu vaccination.

(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.)

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.

### **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 continues to be produced by CA in partnership with the Alliance. First issued in 2005, the Caregiver Connection is now delivered electronically each month to over 9,400 subscribers and reaches an estimated 80 percent of foster parents. It contains feature stories, policy information, resources, answers to frequently asked questions and other information that might be helpful to caregivers.

EWU and Olive Crest also utilize online communication to share information with foster parents through their websites as well as through a wide network of social

media sites including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Both EWU and 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. CA's coordinated health care manager, Apple Health Core Connections also shares electronic information on foster child health related issues to caregivers.

### **Support Groups**

Support groups remain the backbone of the caregiver support system. When asked, foster parents report they continue to appreciate local support groups. 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 and the EWU Resource Peer Mentors. Some operate independently and Mockingbird is increasing its number of Foster Parent Hub Homes and constellations. 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.

Both EWU and Olive Crest also utilize restricted Facebook support groups that are secure for the individuals and groups participating. They are monitored by the contractor's staff and offer a significant opportunity for foster families to gain information and support for the children placed with them. Pages exist 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. Currently 34 Facebook groups exist across Washington to serve foster families and relative caregivers.

As of June 30, 2016, the contractors were offering 55 support groups located across Washington under the recruitment and retention contract with CA.

### **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 2016, the team will have completed nine 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 2016 CAFPT team include:

- Sharing information with caregivers statewide on the implementation of the new coordinated care health program for foster children through Apple Health Core Connections.
- Partnering with CA management to contact foster parents who had received notices about overpayments. For many caregivers the notices were rescinded and the overpayment voided.
- Highlighting the lack of available childcare for foster parents in numerous areas around the state.
- Updating information on CA's Adoption Support internet site to help inform adoptive parents on the benefits and limitations of Washington's Adoption Support Program.
- New and updated CA policy information will be shared with the CAFPT.
- Partnering with CA management to update information on the Prudent Parenting Guide. Prudent Parenting information was embedded throughout applicable CA policies.
- Partnering with the Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence to develop the on-line Prudent Parenting training for foster parents and CA staff.
- Implementation by the Alliance of more weekend and evening foster parent training classes. The Alliance also responded to increase the number of Caregiver Core Training Classes (CCT) with 11 additional classes scheduled in FY 2017, bringing the total to 169 CCT classes.

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 and EWU liaisons, foster parent support groups and the Olive Crest and EWU Facebook pages.

### **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 2016, Washington had 100 slots for campers, with 96 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 and quality licensed foster families is a daily and ongoing commitment of CA and our recruitment contractors, EWU's Fostering Washington program and 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, EWU and 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. These issues continue to impact the total numbers of foster parents and the actual beds that are available for children at any given time:

- Foster families frequently adopt the child in their care and close their license;
- Fewer stay-at-home parents coupled with families who lead complex and busy lives;
- Foster parenting is more complex and requires more time and effort on the part of caregivers; they frequently take a break between placements and not accepting children;
- 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.
- Negative press regarding foster parents.

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 2015, over 50 percent of children in foster care in Washington were adopted by their foster parents. Adoption is a social, legal and lifelong permanent commitment for children. 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 of the potential adoptive home. 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 meetings, 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, Kids Fest and contracting with community partners for child specific recruitment.

As of July 31, 2016, there were 1,388<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

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<sup>8</sup> Children's Administration Source: FamLink PQR 863 August 2016 Legally-free Children

together both state and private agency staff to provide information about a child or children, learn about waiting adoptive families and additional recruitment options. A workgroup was formed in January 2016 to improve and standardize the use of consortiums across the state. Beginning in June 2016, consortium meetings occur every month and are now statewide. CA Child and Family Welfare Services (CFWS) and adoption staff, DLR staff, families and private agencies participate through video conferencing technology which is set up for use in at least two offices in every region. Approved adoptive families are also invited to participate. Consortiums build relationships with community partners and inter-regional linkages on behalf of children.

### **Local and National Adoption Exchanges**

Children's Administration contracts with the Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE) to provide adoption recruitment through the use of local and national adoption exchanges. The Washington Adoption Resource Exchange (WARE) 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. The WAREKids website serves only Washington children and only Washington families with approved home studies have access to the website. The identified goal is to attempt to place children in a permanent home in their community; if that is not possible, then within Washington state. Children listed on the WAREKids website are also concurrently listed on the Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE) which covers the states of Washington, Alaska, Idaho and Oregon.

During FY 2016, there were 238<sup>9</sup> children served on the Northwest Adoption Exchange. Of those, 90 children were registered on WARE and 28 children were placed into permanent homes. There are 52<sup>10</sup> children on hold with potential pending placements and 149<sup>11</sup> children are still in need of matching with a family. The majority of the children registered on the exchange are older than 12 years of age.

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<sup>9</sup> Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2016

<sup>10</sup> Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2016

<sup>11</sup> Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2016

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 are concurrently registered with WARE and NWAE without the 90-day wait as long as the child is legally-free. The [NWAE website](#) also provides recruitment on a national level.

### **Child Specific Recruitment**

CA contracts with NWAE to provide comprehensive child specific recruitment activities for children who need an adoptive family and for whom other recruitment activities have not been successful. NWAE subcontracts with six to seven private Child Placing Agencies (CPA) 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 2016, 20<sup>12</sup> children were enrolled in the program, four<sup>13</sup> children were placed with adoptive families, four children are on hold pending placement with an adoptive family, 14<sup>14</sup> children are still waiting to be matched with a family and two<sup>15</sup> children were withdrawn at the request and/or in consultation with the social service specialist. During FY 2016, a total of 168 family contacts were made.

On average, the children placed for adoption through SARP have been in temporary foster care for 5.5 years and are 12 years and older at the time of placement. Child-specific recruitment continues to increase the probability of finding a permanent adoptive family for children when regular recruitment methods have failed.

### **Kids Fest**

Kids Fests are events held in community centers and are attended by families interested in adoption, case workers and children who are in need of a permanent placement. The concept behind Kids Fests is to provide an opportunity for children and prospective adoptive parents to meet and interact in a casual, friendly environment. Activities such as face painting, arts and crafts,

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<sup>12</sup> Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2016

<sup>13</sup> Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2016

<sup>14</sup> Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2016

<sup>15</sup> Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2016

basketball and karaoke, provide opportunity for both adults and children to interact in a non-threatening environment. Kids Fests are usually hosted by NWAEE, although some local offices also sponsor a Kids Fest in their community. In November 2015, NWAEE hosted our fall Kids Fest in Tacoma. Twenty-one children and 25 families attended. The average age of children in attendance was 12 years.

### **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 outside 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. Any child in need of a permanent placement with a permanent plan of adoption can be eligible for this program. 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.

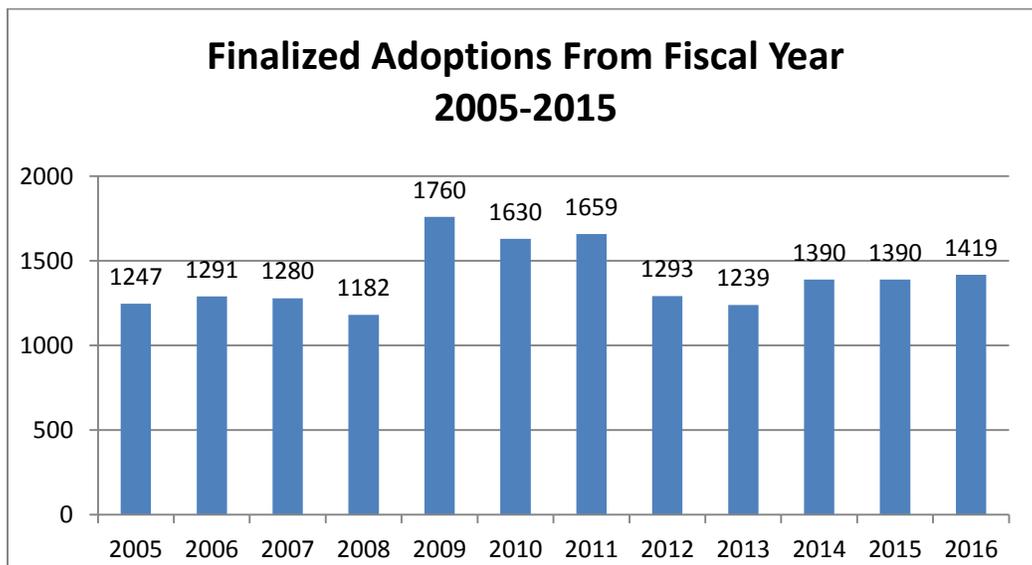
In FY 2016, approximately 20 children were referred to the program. Adoptions have been finalized for 14 children during this fiscal year and three children were moved to new homes. There are currently 15 children pending adoption finalizations in the POS program.

A review of the POS Program in 2014 allowed CA to expand the program to address barriers to adoption. In 2014-2015, monies were used to complete an adoption home study or home study update in private agency homes. In 2015, the POS Program provided short-term intensive family intervention to adoptive families who had an adoptive placement but were not willing to finalize the adoption due to behavioral concerns of the child. Three families 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, guardianships and non-parental custody agreements with foster parents or relatives. Permanency through adoption was established for 1,419 children in the care and custody of CA during fiscal year 2016, a slight increase over the previous two years through

consistent and diligent efforts. Between 2009 and 2011 when CA focused on a “permanency push” to establish permanency for children, a high number of adoptions were finalized. 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 2016, CA continued to focus efforts on permanency which has resulted in an adoption number consistent with FY 2014 and 2015.



There are currently 1,388 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 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 2016 resulted in 1,419 children achieving permanency. The goal of the agency continues to be developing permanency plans that are in the best interests of a child.

## **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.

Since 2012, 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 three home studies (a relative home study, a foster licensing home study for families choosing to be foster licensed, and then 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 home study process utilizes many tools to make a critical assessment and requires:

- Completion of Caregiver Core 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, Aging and Long-Term Support 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. After April 1, 2016, these staff are available to children and youth in out-of-home placement who are not enrolled in the Apple Health Core Connections program. Primarily, these are children in tribal custody and medically fragile children in the Medically Intensive Children's Program.
- 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 ongoing and appropriate health care services that address their medically fragile conditions.
- In calendar year 2015, the Fostering Well-Being Care Coordination Unit made over 15,000 contacts on behalf of 2,047 children.
- Between January and April 2015, Children's Administration worked with the Health Care Authority and the Fostering Well-Being program to draft a request for proposal (RFP) to create a single managed health care plan for children in foster care, adoption support, extended foster care, and alumni of foster care. In August 2015, Coordinated Care of Washington was selected as the successful bidder and work began on creation and implementation of the Apple Health Core Connections program to serve

approximately 23,000 children, youth, and young adults who are or were involved in the Washington state child welfare system.

- Children and youth in the eligible populations were enrolled on April 1, 2016 and 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 provides 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 development for 2017:
    - 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.
  - Programs in development for 2018: Full integration of all behavioral and physical health care services.