

## REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

### Foster and Adoptive Home Placement

RCW 74.13.031(2)

December 1, 2017

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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’s success in:

- (a) Meeting the need for adoptive and foster home placements;
- (b) Reducing the foster parent turnover rate;
- (c) Completing home studies for legally-free children; and
- (d) Implementing 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:**

- At the end of FY 2017, there were 4,957<sup>1</sup> licensed foster homes in the state.
- There were 1,228<sup>2</sup> unlicensed home studies completed, which included unlicensed relatives and suitable others, and adoption home studies.
- There were 1,155<sup>3</sup> licensed foster homes with at least one Hispanic or caregiver of color at the end of FY 2017.
- 1,339<sup>4</sup> adoptions were finalized.

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

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

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<sup>1</sup> Children’s Administration Source FamLink PQR 863- August 2017 - Adoptions Finalized

<sup>2</sup> DLR 2017 Statewide Report

<sup>3</sup> Children’s Administration Source FamLink PQR 863- August 2017 - Adoptions Finalized

<sup>4</sup> Children’s Administration Source FamLink PQR 863- August 2017 - Adoptions Finalized

**(c) Continued implementation and operation of the Apple Health Core Connections managed health care program:**

- In 2016, CA transitioned children and youth in foster care, adoption support and Extended Foster Care (EFC) programs into a single managed care health plan called Apple Health Core Connections (AHCC). AHCC also receives technical support from the Fostering Well-Being Unit at the Health Care Authority to ensure children receive seamless physical and behavioral health care coordination. AHCC replaces efforts previously covered by the Passport Program and expands services provided by Fostering Well-Being. Behavioral Health will be integrated into AHCC in 2018.

## **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.”

CA policies and procedures demonstrate our agency values to support caregiver 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.

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. Potential foster families who make an initial inquiry typically respond after they have seen or heard the recruitment message approximately seven times. Three strategies are used in recruitments:

### **1. General Recruitment**

This strategy helps build public interest and awareness across a general audience with an emphasis toward older children. 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 and civic groups;
- 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**

This strategy uses data and demographics of the children and youth in care to recruit resources specific to need. Targeted recruitment is culturally-competent and community-based. CA targeted recruitment partners with private child placing agencies (CPA), business, faith, community and civic leaders, utilizing messaging and media that shares CA 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 with the local or regional Recruitment, Development and Support (RDS) team.

### **Partnering with Recruitment Contractors**

During FY 2017, CA continued our foster parent recruitment and retention contract work with EWU Fostering Washington and Olive Crest Fostering Together. These agencies continue to help recruit prospective foster families, track their inquiries, complete training and submit licensing applications either through the Division of Licensed Resources (DLR) or one of the CPAs. Both contractors received a one-year contract extension effective July 1, 2017.

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 in Idaho for eight 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 DLR and the Caregiver Core Training provided by the Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence at the University of Washington, School of Social Work. 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 contractor liaisons and mentors helps ensure prospective foster parents continue the required process to obtain their license. Without this support, prospective foster parents can get lost in the process. The contract provides incentives for increases in the number of applications from prospective foster parents. During the second measurement period of their contracts, both contractors received incentive payments. During the third and final measurement period of the two-year contracts, neither contractor was able to achieve the established performance outcome and no incentive payments were issued.

The contracts focus specifically on recruitment homes for:

- Racially and ethnically diverse children;
- Siblings;
- Youth over the age of 13 and youth in EFC;
- Children with challenging emotional and behavioral difficulties;
- Children birth to three;
- Medically fragile children; and
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (LGBTQ) children and youth.

### **Recruitment, Development and Support (RDS) teams**

Based on the model of Family-to-Family developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, CA continues to build and strengthen RDS teams in each region. RDS teams are multi-disciplinary and engage the expertise of CA, Olive Crest and EWU, CPAs, the Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence, tribes, foster parents, community partners and stakeholders. The teams review local, regional and state data, identifying the trends and demographics of the children who have entered care and 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 continued to implement 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.

CA's widely recognized recruitment logo and branding "Foster Parenting – You can too" has continued throughout the year. Initially developed in 2007 in consultation with the National Resource Center "AdoptUsKids," it is widely recognized in communities and prominently displayed at the annual Seattle Mariners' We Are Family event and continues to build upon a consistent and positive message about foster parenting across Washington state. The brand supports a consistent and positive message about foster parenting found on all of CA printed recruitment materials and also appears on our contractors' printed



recruitment material signifying the partnership between the agencies. The logo appears on the CA foster parent recruitment page as a hyperlink so families can quickly access the CA 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.

A new recruitment tool, "It Takes A Village" was developed this year in partnership with CA, EWU and Olive Crest. The flyer carries recruitment information and gives concrete examples of how individuals, families and communities can help support local foster parents. Local offices and both contractors can include contact information on the cards.

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. Ongoing efforts made by our contractors during FY 2017 have been wide reaching and included speaking engagements in communities, distribution of various recruitment materials at events and partnership with stakeholders in the community including:

- Local fairs and businesses and special topic discussions, conferences, sports events and complexes, farmer's markets, health departments community groups and recreation, rodeos, child development and child care centers, YMCA, eye centers, parades, craft bonanzas, school

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distributions, restaurants, Craig's List, post offices, laundromats, grocery stores, libraries, the ARC, 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,

- 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, powwows and tribal gatherings, African-American community events, businesses and places of worship;
  - Gatherings and events for LGBTQ youth; Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) events and meetings;
  - Sports events including Seattle Mariners, Tacoma Rainiers, Wenatchee Apple Sox, Yakima Pippins, Gonzaga Bulldogs and the Spokane Indians;
  - Church services, faith leader meetings, faith conventions;
  - Media outlets, online and community bulletin boards, public service announcements, television interviews, radio interviews, broadcasts and public service announcements, newspapers, interviews and guest articles, magazines (i.e., Seattle's Child and Parent's Map); Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram and Tag Board;
  - School districts, local schools and back-to-school events;
  - Local community therapy programs focused on children with specific needs, i.e. children with autism and other challenging behaviors.

fostering  
together  
Our Community...Our Children

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

Each year, Governor Jay Inslee recognizes National Foster Care Month in Washington state with a signed proclamation declaring May as Foster Care Month and recognizing caregivers of children who live in out-of-home care. The Governor also recognized May 18, 2017 as Kinship Caregiver Day, with an official proclamation; 46 percent of children in out-of-home care live with relatives and kinship care providers.

All three regions celebrated National Foster Care Month in May hosting a wide variety of events to honor and recognize foster parents with foster parent



appreciation events and dinners held across the state. Regions and local offices hold their own recognition events. 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 9<sup>th</sup> annual "We Are Family" day event at Safeco Field on May 7, 2017. This year attendance at the event nearly equaled the 2016 attendance record of 3,358 with 3,118 foster parents, relative caregivers, agency personnel, community partners and stakeholders gathering to recognize foster parents and watch the Mariners take on the Texas Rangers. The early morning caregiver recognition ceremony once again expanded its attendance with nearly 900 people in attendance. The Mariners donated their largest event space, the Outdoor Corner, to host the pre-game activities.

CA then Field Operations Director, Connie Lambert-Eckel, welcomed caregivers at the morning recognition. Governor Inslee, together with Mrs. Inslee, addressed the crowd, sharing Washington's appreciation of foster parents and relative caregivers who open their hearts and homes to children during a time of crisis.



Steve Cishek - Pitcher, Seattle Mariners  
Photo by Meri Waterhouse

For the second year, Mariner's pitcher Steve Cishek participated in the "We Are Family Ceremonial First Pitch," delivered by 11-year-old Jordan Morris, an adoptee from Washington's foster care system. Mr. Cishek also greeted caregivers and children while taking pictures and signing autographs.

Ten individuals accompanied Governor and Mrs. Inslee onto the field for pictures with the Mariners and the mascot, Mariner Moose. One hundred and thirty foster and kinship caregiver families received free tickets for the game courtesy of the Mariners. For the second year, 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 donated free passes to the aquarium, the Pacific Science Center offered free passes and promoted their new free access program for youth in foster care; the YMCA provided free swim 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 3,118 in attendance. Owners of a local photo booth and cotton candy machine provided free pictures and cotton candy for children and caregivers. 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 Jumbotron shared information with the crowd about the need for foster families across Washington.

Spanish radio stations across the state continued their partnership with CA in 2017 on foster care recruitment programming with the Commission on Hispanic Affairs through radio KDNA 91.1 FM. This ongoing work has been successful in sharing information with the Hispanic community of the need for more Hispanic and Spanish-speaking foster parents. This year broadcasts featured a partnership between CA and the local CPA in the recruitment and support of foster families. These broadcasts show an increase in the number of Spanish speaking families calling the state foster parent hotline after each broadcast. This effort will continue in 2018.

### **Foster Home Recruitment Challenges**

Washington continues to be challenged in recruiting an adequate supply of quality, safe and nurturing foster families. Reports available at the federal level show that an inadequate supply of foster homes challenges public child welfare agencies nationally. Factors that impact foster care recruitment in Washington state and other states include:

- Children and youth entering 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.
- Negative press about foster children and problems in the child welfare system discourage prospective families from learning more about the positive outcomes for children in care.
- Families who provide foster care experience changing life circumstances and decide they can no longer be a resource for foster children.
- More than half of the children adopted from foster care are adopted by licensed foster parents or their relatives who become 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.

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

Northwest Resource Associates (NWRRA) manages all initial inquiries from families who express interest in foster parenting through the SRIC [Becoming a Foster Parent](#) website or through the 1-888-KIDS-414 statewide phone line. Most prospective foster parents utilize an online inquiry when seeking information about foster parenting. The SRIC posted an average of 505 electronic inquiries during 2017. This was a decline from the record posted in 2016; however, online inquiries still remain strong. The monthly average for phone line inquiries increased 20 percent from 30 calls per month in 2016 to 36 calls per month in 2017.

Over the last two years, prospective foster parents have demonstrated a preference for using an online method of inquiry. Spanish-speaking families continue to prefer telephone inquiry, as they are able to communicate in Spanish with SRIC staff. Only those families who are 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 above). 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 above). Some prospective families inquire directly through a licensor at DLR.

CA questioned the process that prospective foster parents must move through in order to become licensed. In an effort to examine this question more thoroughly, CA convened a multi-disciplinary team to participate in a Value Stream Mapping event. This team included CA DLR staff, RDS team leads, the DLR administrator, foster parents, representatives from Olive Crest and EWU and the Alliance. The team made recommendations to implement changes in the process between recruitment of foster parents through licensure. The team developed an action plan to impact bottle-necks identified in the process. The plan also resulted in enhanced communication between partners, and more readily accessible information and training to potential applicants.

The process has been streamlined so that families were more quickly routed to the contractor staff who add them into the SRIC system for follow-up and support as they move into foster parent training. Some prospective foster families inquire directly to a CPA. These agencies provide their own tracking and 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; they offer individualized assistance for families who need help with the application. SRIC provides families with information about upcoming classes, activities, support groups and resources that can support them in the process of becoming licensed.

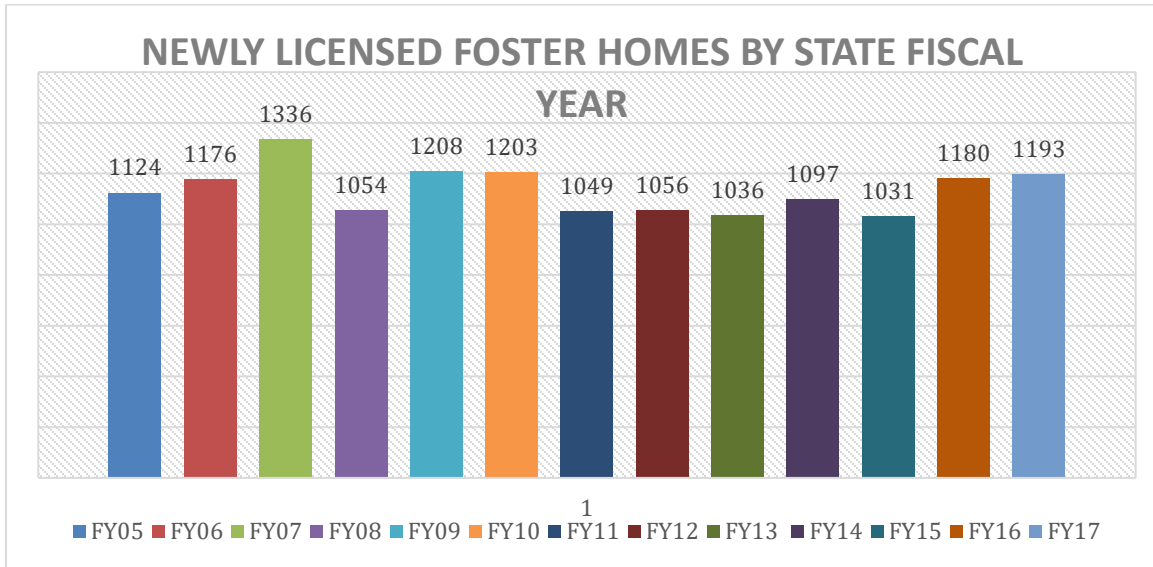
Recruitment of new foster parents relies on all system partners to provide recruitment as well as timely training and licensure of prospective foster parents. Each of the steps within the process are critical to not only bringing in qualified families that can meet the needs of the diverse group of children 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. Per Denise Goodman, senior consultant for the Annie E. Casey Foundation, states can expect to complete a foster care license on approximately 8-10 percent of the families who initially inquire. Some learn that fostering is not for them, others are only 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, both Olive Crest and EWU track responses from prospective families about how they heard about the need for foster families in Washington. These responses were recently compiled and include:

1. Other foster or adoptive parents
2. Direct contact with EWU or Olive Crest recruitment staff
3. CA foster parent website or internet search
4. EWU or Olive Crest websites
5. CA staff
6. Church
7. Social media
8. Other – not specified

**NEWLY LICENSED FOSTER HOMES BY STATE FISCAL YEAR<sup>5</sup>**



**Foster Care License Applications**

FamLink, CA’s data management system, tracks and reports new foster care applications received by CA and CPA. For FY 2017, FamLink reported a total of 2,069 new foster care applications. This is an increase of 262 applications (14.50%) over those reported in FY 2016.

In FY 2017, 1,193 new foster homes were licensed by DLR or by a CPA in Washington. This number does not reflect home studies completed as an update,

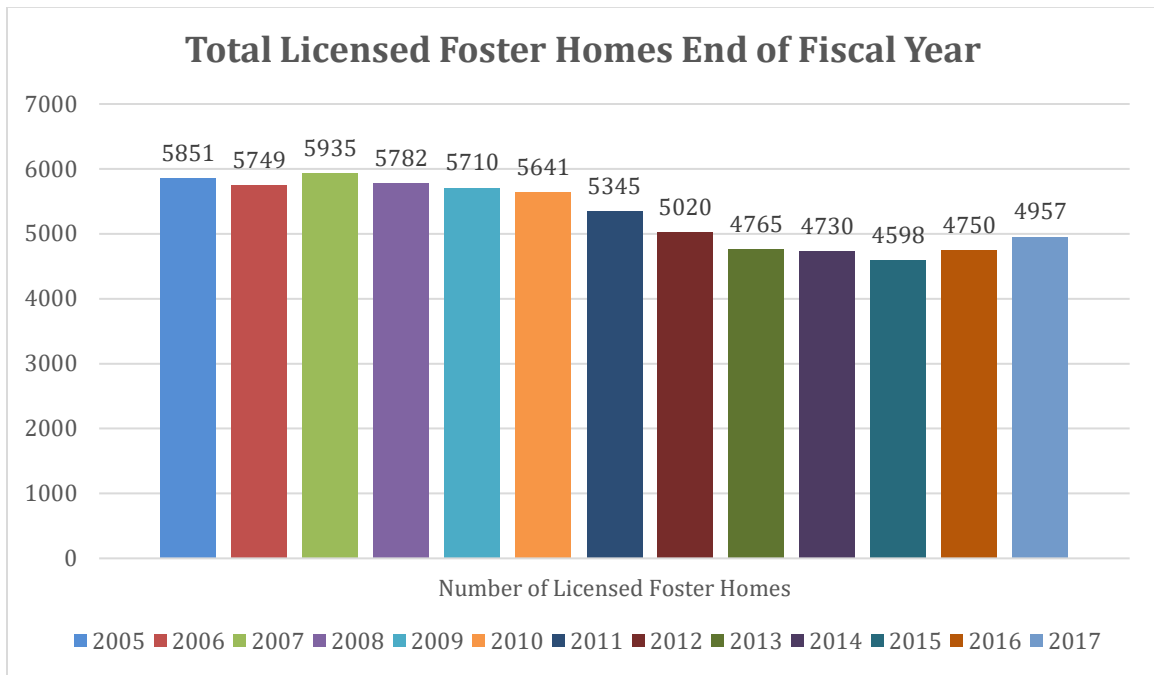
<sup>5</sup> Data updated 8/9/17. Source: famlinkdw\_common.dbo.rptfosterhomes  
 Data include DLR licensed. Adoptive home and other provider types. Counts identify first foster home license date.

due to significant household changes, changes in residence or adoptive home study updates for subsequent adoptions.

DLR posted slow and steady growth in licensed foster homes during FY 2017. The data shows a total of 4,957 licensed foster homes at the end of June 2017 compared to 4,750 licensed foster homes at the end of June 2016 (an increase of 207 licensed foster homes). In addition, a report was developed during FY 2017 that allows for much more accurate reporting on licensed foster homes.

### Foster Home Turnover: Causes and Recommendations

There was a small overall upward trend in the total number of licensed foster homes in Washington over the last fiscal year. Permanency efforts to decrease length-of-stay have resulted in some foster home closures. Homes previously licensed by DLR who are now licensed by one of the tribes are not reflected in the data below.



## Retention

The chart below 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>6</sup>

LICENSED FOSTER HOME RETENTION BY YEAR FIRST LICENSED <sup>1</sup>							
FY10	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14	FY15	FY16	FY17
1203	1164	1006	843	399	362	307	192
100.0%	96.8%	83.6%	70.1%	33.2%	30.1%	25.5%	16.0%
	1049	1010	875	700	367	324	292
	100.0%	96.3%	83.4%	66.7%	35.0%	30.9%	27.8%
		1056	1019	888	720	364	325
		100.0%	96.5%	84.1%	68.2%	34.5%	30.8%
			1036	1008	884	677	325
			100.0%	97.3%	85.3%	65.3%	31.4%
				1096	1061	920	747
				100.0%	96.8%	83.9%	68.2%
					1031	1001	859
					100.0%	97.1%	85.8%
						1180	1147
						100.0%	97.2%
							1195
							100.0%

	Year Licensed
	Retention 1 Year
	Retention 2 Years
	Retention 3 Years
	Retention 4 Years
	Retention 5 Years
	Retention 6 Years
	Retention 7 Years

<sup>6</sup> All data updated 9/14/17. Source: famlinkdw\_common.dbo.rptfosterhomes  
Data include DLR licensed, adoptive home and other provider types. Counts identify first foster home license date

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:

- 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 regional and statewide Foster Parent Consultation (1624) Team meetings and annual foster parent survey results.
- CA foster parent listserv which disseminates information, resources and updates directly to caregivers' email addresses.
- Caregiver Connection; a monthly newsletter produced in partnership between CA and the Alliance for Child Welfare.
- 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.
- Collaboration with the Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence to identify and offer courses that may assist foster parents to effectively skill-build in order to meet the increasingly challenging behaviors of some children and youth in care.

### **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 9,400 subscribers and reaches an estimated 80 percent of foster parents and relative caregivers. The newsletter 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. Apple Health Core Connections, the program providing medical care for children in care, also shares electronic information on foster child health related issues to caregivers.

### **Support Groups**

Support groups, whether in person or online, remain the backbone of the caregiver support system. 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; 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. A number of churches have stepped forward to support foster parents by hosting support groups in their facilities. Many offer child care and a meal for those attending.

Both EWU and Olive Crest continue to 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 35 Facebook groups exist across Washington to serve foster families and relative caregivers.

As of June 30, 2017, the contractors were offering 53 support groups located across Washington under the recruitment and retention contract with CA.

### **CA Foster Parent Consultation (1624) 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. During its October 2017 meeting, the team recognized and celebrated ten 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, issues of importance to foster parents and services for 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 2017 CAFPT team's discussions include:

- Discussions on visitation: planning, communication with caregivers and contractor challenges;
- At the request of FPAWS credited training hours were increased for foster parents before completing the licensing process;
- Transportation of children with inappropriate car seats;
- Factors that delay permanency;
- Transitions when children change placements;
- CA's new Foster Parent online application, "Our Kids;"
- Concerns related to retaliation against foster parents;
- Caregivers and children's social media issues;
- Lack of mental health services for children with significant issues;
- Inconsistency in training resources for caregivers;
- Lack of available child care and respite for foster parents impact placements;
- Team representatives met with Secretary Ross Hunter to learn about the new Department of Children, Youth and Families;
- Review of the new DLR emergency WACs.

Often, 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. In 2016, CA Division of Program and Policy began sharing policy updates with 1624 members and, more broadly, with foster parents via the Foster Parent Listserv.

### **Camp to Belong (CTB)**

CA continues to work with its contractor, Foster Family Connections, to offer [Camp to Belong](#) each year at Miracle Ranch in Port Orchard, WA. This year, camp was changed from August to June due to scheduling at the facility. This change resulted in an improved camp experience as volunteer counselors were more readily available. CTB 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 CTB 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 2017, Washington had 100 slots for campers; 92 children participated. Lynn Price, the National Founder of the International Camp to Belong program attended the Washington CTB this year.

### **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, CPA 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;
- Assumptions about lack of qualifications and apprehension about the emotional and financial costs of investing in children as a volunteer; and
- 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. CA 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 uses variety of methods and 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>7</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. 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**

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. 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

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<sup>7</sup> Children's Administration Source: FamLink PQR 863 August 2016 Legally-free Children

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>8</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>9</sup> children on hold with potential pending placements and 149<sup>10</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.

Prior to FY 2015, children were registered with WARE for at least 90 days before being registered with 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 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>11</sup> children were enrolled in the program, four<sup>12</sup> children were placed with adoptive families, four children are on hold pending placement with an adoptive family, 14<sup>13</sup> children are still waiting to be matched with a family and two<sup>14</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.

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<sup>8</sup> Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE); Source Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2016

<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

<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

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 held in community centers and attended by families interested in adoption. Caseworkers and children who are in need of a permanent placement also attend Kids Fest. The concept behind Kids Fest 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, 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 the 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 (POS)**

The 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.

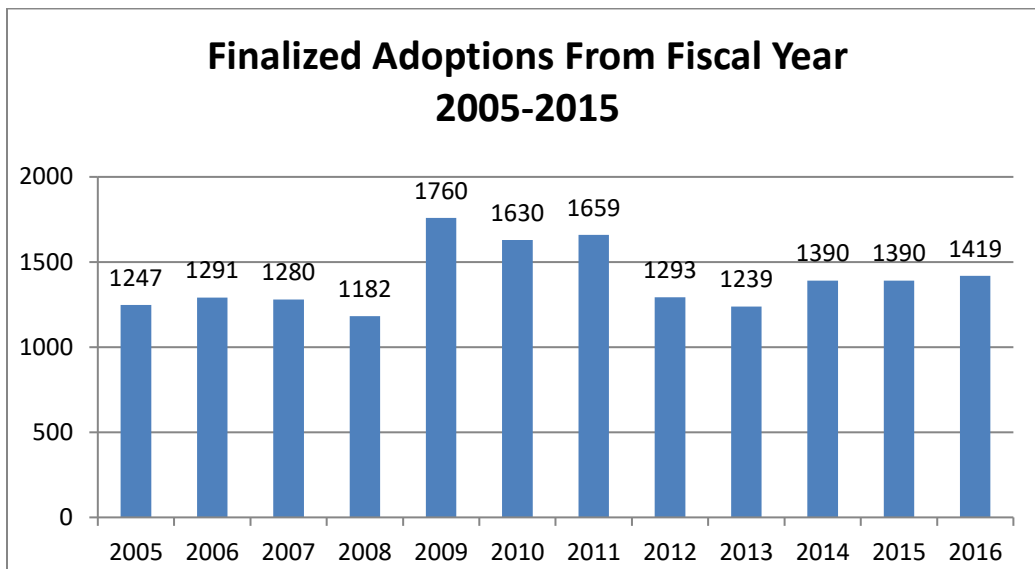
In FY 2016, approximately 20 children were referred to the program. Adoptions have been finalized for 14 children during this fiscal year and three children were moved to new homes. There are currently 15 children pending adoption finalizations in the POS program.

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

CA 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. Caseworkers 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**

CA 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 FamLink. 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 and Apple Health Core Connections**

### **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 physical and behavioral health care needs of fee for service and tribal children in out-of-home placement.

### **Major Components of FWB**

- Issuance of medical identification cards (ProviderOne) within three working days of placement notification.
- Washington State Immunization Information System reports are mailed to caregivers within three working days of placement notification.
- Healthcare reports are mailed to caregivers of children under age 13 within three working days of initial placement notification.
- Medical records are requested for the last two years for all children in out-of-home placement for more than 30 days. Records are uploaded into FamLink.
- Six Regional Medical Consultants continue to be a vital resource for social service specialists, caregivers and local medical providers.
- Fostering Well-Being program specialists 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, FWB remained available to provide physical and behavioral healthcare coordination for children and youth in out-of-home placement who are not enrolled in the Apple Health Core Connections managed care program. Primarily, these are children in

tribal custody and medically fragile children in the Medically Intensive Children's Program.

- Health education materials are mailed to caregivers including information about recognizing symptoms of trauma and how to support a child who is exposed to trauma.
- In calendar year 2016, FWB made over 9,300 contacts on behalf of 1,732 children.

### **Apple Health Core Connections**

- On April 1, 2016, the Apple Health Core Connections (AHCC) program was implemented. AHCC serves approximately 23,000 children, youth and young adults who are or were involved in the Washington state child welfare system. Follow this link to the [AHCC Annual Report](#) for additional information and data about the program.
- Children and youth enrolled in AHCC currently receive:
  - Physical and behavioral health care coordination.
  - Access to a 24/7 nurse advice line.
  - A program to support healthy pregnancy.
  - Healthy Kids Club for children 12 and younger to support and promote healthy habits.
  - "Cent Accounts" for extended foster care, alumni of foster care and adoption support populations that 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 continued development and implementation for 2017 and 2018:
    - a2A – adolescent to Adult: This program will provide resources for this population to understand their physical and behavioral health care benefits now that they are adults. This service will be available for most youth and young adults until age 26. Adoption Success: This program will provide supports to adoptive families to coordinate physical and behavioral health care services for children served in the adoption support program until age 21.
  - Full integration of all behavioral and physical health care services by October 2018.