

Monday, February 4, 2008



Search

GO

[News Release Listing](#) | [DSHS Main Page](#) | [Search](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Privacy](#)**Contact: Cheryl Stephani, 360-902-7821, stephcs@dshs.wa.gov****Contact: Karen Lee, 360-902-7892, leekp@dshs.wa.gov****December 05, 2007****DSHS Shows Gains in Work with Foster Children**

OLYMPIA -- The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) second annual Performance Data Report on Braam agreement benchmarks shows continued progress in reducing the risk of multiple moves for children in foster care. The data shows an 11 percent reduction in unstable placements.

The department believes their emphasis on placing children with relatives is contributing to decreasing placement changes. The report references research that children who are placed with relatives are significantly less likely to experience another move while in care. Thirty-eight percent of Washington children in out-of-home placements are with relatives compared to 29.5 percent in 1998.

The report measures changes between fiscal years 2005 and 2007 on 27 benchmarks, eight of which have improved over the last fiscal year. Two others met the mandated benchmark, and seven demonstrated no improvement over the reporting period. The report shows that the number of children in out-of-home care has increased 16 percent since fiscal year 2004. It is important to note that improvement is occurring at a time when workers are seeing a growth in children coming in to state care. The number of Children's Administration (CA) case-carrying and case support staff is not automatically adjusted when caseloads grow.

"This report should be considered in the context of the entire child welfare system," said Cheryl Stephani, assistant secretary for the CA. "The Braam settlement agreement relates to improving the stability and well-being of children in the foster care system and other out-of-home placements, but DSHS is responsible for a much larger system. Safety and protection of all children receiving our services is our main priority. This is why we have heavily invested in dramatically improving our response time for reports of abuse and neglect."

The investment is paying off. Social workers are investigating allegations of abuse or neglect within 24 to 72 hours, depending on the severity of the allegation, over 95 percent of the time. The faster response time is showing a 25 percent decline in repeat abuse and neglect.

Stephani acknowledged that the department has not yet reached the Braam settlement goals regarding monthly visits to children in foster care or in reducing social worker caseloads. "But we are on a steady course to improve performance," she said. "In the short time frame of the last one-and-a-half years, we have made significant progress. But clearing the high bar in the time frame set by the Braam Panel is not realistic. There are 54 measurements - not prioritized - and some of the conditions set by the Panel are difficult to accomplish even in a five- to seven-year time frame."

Here are some of our accomplishments:

- From 2005 through the end of 2008, the department will have hired more than 400 social workers, supervisors, and staff to support their work.
- Almost 80 percent of children under state supervision but living with their parents are receiving monthly visits from their social worker. This is up from 56.4 percent in September 2006.
- Since April of this year, monthly visits are required for children under six, placed in unlicensed relative care. About 73 percent of those children are visited monthly. Before April, 62 percent were visited.
- Based on CA worker's documentation - as recently as last month, social workers had "eyes on the child" on 60.3 percent of children.
- CA is developing a new federally approved, automated case-management information system that will replace its current outdated, obsolete data system.

In addition, our performance on the Child Health and Education Tracking (CHET) screenings is improving. CHET is a process of gathering records and information to develop customized plans for children. While 47 percent of eligible children have been screened within 30 days of placement, many more have been screened within 90 days. For fiscal year 2007:

- 66 percent were screened within 45 days of placement.
- 73 percent within 60 days of placement.
- 79 percent within 90 days of placement.

Other measurements outside Braam include a recent workload study conducted by a national, independent firm. The study, performed by Walter R. McDonald & Associates, Inc., in collaboration with the American Humane Association, is one of the most comprehensive in the country. Findings show that staff is working hard to keep children safe and provide for their ongoing needs, but still find it difficult to accomplish all the case-related work required by federal and state laws, policies and good practice. Workers in Washington who provide child welfare services spend almost 70 percent of their time on tasks related specifically to a child or family higher than has been found in similar studies in most other states.

"The department remains fully committed to improving the care and safety of children and families as evidenced by its commitment to the new initiatives, the workload study, and continuing work to make progress on the numerous Braam benchmarks," said Stephani.

Modification Date: December 5, 2007 For more ways to get in touch with the Department of Social and Health Services go to the DSHS Contact Information web page.

Technical Site Comments: DSHS Webmaster.