

[PRINTER-FRIENDLY FORMAT](#)

Tacoma, WA - Monday, September 24, 2007

[< Back to Regular Story Page](#)

State still behind on foster care

Comprehensive study of foster parents gives Washington mixed grades

SEAN ROBINSON; The News Tribune

Last updated: September 21st, 2007 01:24 AM (PDT)

Almost two-thirds of the foster children in Washington didn't receive scheduled monthly visits from state social workers in 2006, and 17 percent got no visits the entire year, according to a study released Thursday.

Results of the "Benchmark Report," completed as part of a legal settlement in a case known as Braam v. Washington, could propel the matter back into litigation. Lawyers for foster children in the case say they plan to return to court in November, citing the state's failure to meet its obligations.

"It's absolutely reasonable to expect that kids get at least one visit every month," said Casey Trupin, one of the attorneys representing foster children in the case.

While pointing to the state's shortcomings, the survey also notes that 79 percent of foster parents reported monthly contact with the child's social worker, and 86 percent said they received adequate training as foster parents.

"It shows we're moving in the right direction to make improvements in the lives of kids," said Cheryl Stephani, assistant secretary of children's administration, a division of the state Department of Social and Health Services.

Regarding monthly visits to foster children, Stephani said she expects those numbers to improve as DSHS hires more workers. She noted that caseworkers focus on particular groups of children deemed to need visits most, and added that 90-day health and safety visits to foster homes occur far more consistently.

In coordinated news releases and public statements Thursday, state leaders and Braam lawyers gave contrasting interpretations of the survey.

"Foster parents and caregivers give caseworkers high marks," was the headline on the state's news release.

"Foster parent survey shows major changes needed to protect foster kids," was the headline from the attorneys.

Described by both sides as the most comprehensive survey of foster parents in the nation, the report gathered opinions and answers from 1,200 foster parents in Washington, chosen at random.

The number of foster parents who responded raised another concern for attorneys. Survey workers tried to contact 3,800 foster parents, using contact information provided by DSHS, but 986 – about 25 percent – couldn't be reached. The phone numbers didn't work, and the individuals didn't have listings in local telephone directories.

Stephani said DSHS is examining the data, and noted that some of the nonworking numbers might belong to foster parents and caregivers who no longer are active. She said those names were included in the lists provided to researchers at Washington State University who conducted the survey.

Sean Robinson: 253-597-8486

sean.robinson@thenewstribune.com

Originally published: September 21st, 2007 01:24 AM (PDT)

[Privacy Policy](#) | [User Agreement](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [About Us](#) | [Site Map](#) |