



IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF  
**HEALTH & WELFARE**

State of Idaho  
Department of Health and Welfare  
Division of Family and Community Services  
Child and Family Services Program

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First Annual Legislative Foster Care Report for SFY 2016

A copy of this report is posted at

<http://www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov/Children/AbuseNeglect/tabid/74/Default.aspx>

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## **Background**

The 2016 Annual Foster Care Report published by the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare Child and Family Services (CFS) program is intended to provide the Idaho Legislature with information regarding the state's foster care system, as well as the current functioning of the system.

This report is provided by the Child and Family Services program pursuant to Idaho Code, Title 16, Chapter 16, Section 1646, which states:

The state department of health and welfare shall submit an annual report regarding the foster care program to the germane standing committees of the legislature no later than ten (10) days following the start of each regular session. On or before February 15 of each year, the state department of health and welfare shall appear before the germane standing committees to present the report. Such report shall include, but need not be limited to, the number of children that are in the department's legal custody pursuant to this chapter, the number of such children who have been placed in foster care, how many times such children have been moved to different foster care homes and the reasons for such moves, best practices in foster care, goals to improve the foster care system in Idaho to ensure best practices are adhered to, a description of progress made with regard to the previous year's goals to improve the foster care system and any other information relating to foster care that the legislature requests. If a member of the legislature requests additional information between the time the report is received by the legislature and the time the department appears to present the report, then the department shall supplement its report to include such additional information.

## **Overview of the Child and Family Services Program**

Child and Family Services' primary commitment and responsibility is the safety, well-being, and permanency of children who are victims of child abuse, neglect, or abandonment. As an agency, we believe that the best approach to support and protect children is to strengthen families so they can safely parent their children and meet the child's needs for permanency and well-being.

Efforts are specifically directed at ensuring families participate in identifying and implementing appropriate solutions to identified concerns, and at addressing family needs, using their ethnic and linguistic background, and unique values and strengths. Some children in out-of-home placements are not able to return home safely, so concurrent planning from the time of removal promotes timely permanence for children and youth. Concurrent planning involves a plan to reunify, as well as an alternate plan should reunification not be possible.

This family-centered approach is reflected in our daily work with families and is supported by federal law, state law, and public policies that place a high priority on family unity, involvement, and privacy.

Child and Family Services program responsibilities fall into four broad areas:

- Receiving reports of abuse or neglect
- Assessing allegations of abuse and neglect

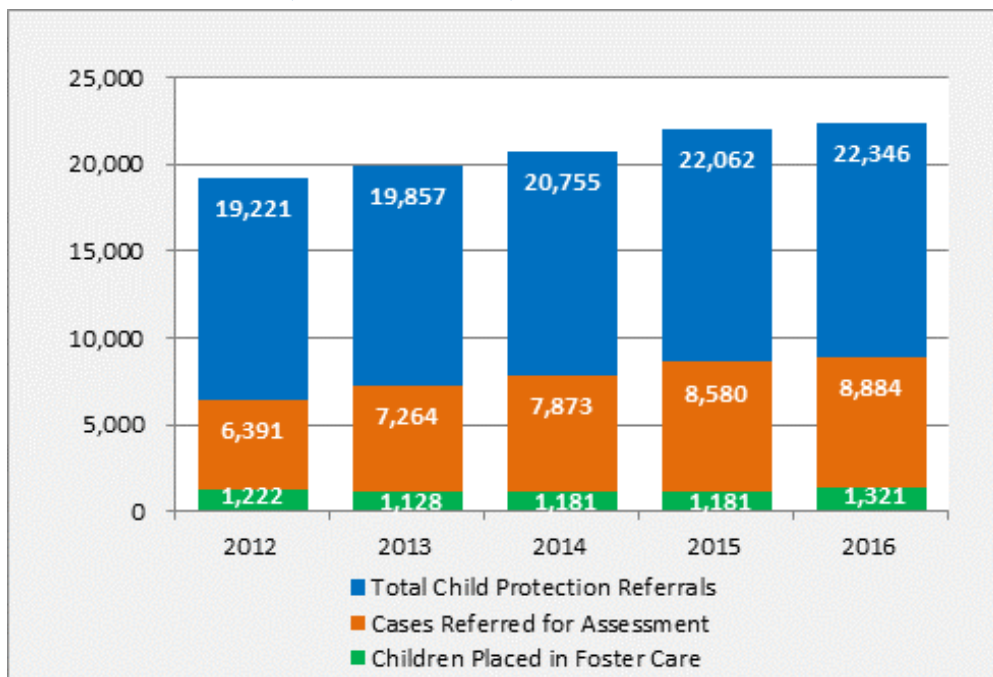
- Providing ongoing case management services to children; either in their own homes or in out of home placements
- Assuring that children have safety and permanency in their own homes or other permanent homes

### Receiving Reports of Abuse or Neglect

The Child and Family Services program has a Centralized Intake Unit in Boise to which all reports of child abuse or neglect throughout the state are directed. Each report is assessed to determine whether the allegations fall under the statutory definitions of abuse, abandonment, or neglect. Once that determination is made, the report is prioritized for a response. Referrals involving a life-threatening and/or emergency situation require an immediate response. Other reports receive a priority which requires a response within either 24 or 72 hours. On all reports requiring an immediate response, CFS coordinates the response with local law enforcement. The ability to take and respond to child abuse and neglect reports operates 24/7 across the state.

Table 1 (below) contains a breakdown of the referrals received, assessments assigned, and number of children placed in foster care as a result of a removal, and are organized by state fiscal year for the last five years. The table shows 2012-2016 trends in the number of maltreatment reports assessed each year in the state. For the last five years, the number of assessments completed by CFS has increased, as has the number of referrals received each year.

**Table 1: Referrals, Assessments, and Children Placed in Foster Care by SFY**



During state fiscal year 2016, CFS received a total of 22,346 referrals regarding concerns of abuse, neglect, or abandonment. Of these, 8,884 were assigned for a safety assessment, and 1,321 children were placed into foster care.

**Table 2: Referrals by Maltreatment Types**

Referrals by Type and SFY					
Referral Type	SFY 2012	SFY 2013	SFY 2014	SFY 2015	SFY 2016
Information & Referral	12474	12368	12750	13069	13413
Neglect	4031	4757	5393	6333	6255
Physical Abuse	1859	1995	2084	2209	2080
Sexual Abuse	441	611	518	431	545
Other	416	126	10	21	53
<b>Total</b>	<b>19,221</b>	<b>19,857</b>	<b>20,755</b>	<b>22,063</b>	<b>22,346</b>

Table 2 illustrates neglect accounts for the majority of referrals to CFS that meet priority guidelines, and is the most frequent reason children are removed from their homes. Information and Referral is the designation given to referrals containing concerns regarding the welfare of a child that are screened out because they do not meet the definition of abuse, neglect, or abandonment. These referrals may be referred to other entities or agencies.

Cases of neglect may include inadequate supervision, or situations in which the physical environment poses health or safety hazards that directly affect the health and safety of a child, and often involve a parent’s unmet mental health or substance use issues.

**Table 3: Sources of Maltreatment Referrals**

Referrals by Source and SFY										
Referral Source	2012		2013		2014		2015		2016	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
School Personnel	3278	17.1%	3133	15.8%	3205	15.4%	3484	15.8%	3726	16.7%
Parent/Substitute	2769	14.4%	2807	14.1%	2921	14.1%	3182	14.4%	2839	12.7%
Relative	1777	9.2%	1964	9.9%	2157	10.4%	2180	9.9%	2477	11.1%
Private Agency	1708	8.9%	2291	11.5%	2429	11.7%	2506	11.4%	2337	10.5%
Law Enforcement	2167	11.3%	1945	9.8%	2114	10.2%	2321	10.5%	2294	10.3%
Friend/Neighbor	1488	7.7%	1811	9.1%	1789	8.6%	1669	7.6%	1670	7.5%
Hospital	911	4.7%	1066	5.4%	1126	5.4%	1155	5.2%	1322	5.9%
Child Protection	564	2.9%	886	4.5%	927	4.5%	981	4.4%	946	4.2%
Medical	646	3.4%	548	2.8%	695	3.3%	695	3.2%	860	3.8%
Anonymous	1020	5.3%	1003	5.1%	979	4.7%	1108	5.0%	859	3.8%
Other	2893	15.1%	2403	12.1%	2413	11.6%	2781	12.6%	3016	13.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>19221</b>		<b>19857</b>		<b>20755</b>		<b>22062</b>		<b>22346</b>	

Table 3 identifies the sources of all maltreatment reports received by the Centralized Intake Unit during the past five state fiscal years. School personnel and parents are the primary reporting sources for maltreatment reports.

Idaho Code, Title 16, Chapter 16, Section 1605(1) provides direction regarding mandatory reporting in the state of Idaho for physicians, hospital staff, coroners, schools, daycares, and any

other persons having reason to believe a child has been subjected to maltreatment must report to law enforcement or the department. An exception is made for "duly ordained minister of religion." Failure to report as required in this section of Idaho Code is a misdemeanor.

## **Assessing Child Safety**

A Comprehensive Safety Assessment is completed for all child protection referrals that meet Child and Family Services Priority Response Guidelines for assessment. The primary purpose of the assessment is to assure the child's safety and determine whether the child and family are in need of services to address identified safety threats. The Comprehensive Safety Assessment includes a robust information collection process, and includes a face to face contact and interview with the child. Information is also collected by the social worker through interviews with the parents/caregivers and relevant collateral contacts such as extended family members, law enforcement, school staff, medical professionals, and service providers. The assessment includes application of standardized criteria, along with social worker's critical analysis of the information and conclusion regarding the child's safety.

Upon completion of a Comprehensive Safety Assessment, the agency must determine whether maltreatment has occurred and whether the child is safe or unsafe. Whenever a child is determined to be unsafe the case remains open for services. If the child is determined to be safe the case is closed with no additional intervention.

Whenever possible, efforts are made to safely maintain children in their homes. However when a safety threat exists, a safety plan must be put into place to manage the child's safety. Actions in a safety plan must address the safety threat to the child and are specific to the family's circumstances. Safety actions might include respite care, supervision and monitoring, resource acquisition, and homemaker services. If the child is assessed to be in immediate danger, law enforcement is charged with the decision for removal. When a child is removed, Child and Family Services makes placement arrangements for the child.

## **Removal from the Home**

Efforts are made to minimize the trauma of removing a child from the home by an immediate search for any relatives who could serve as a placement resource for the child or children. The Idaho Child Protective Act requires that the Department first considers, consistent with the best interests and special needs of the child, placement with a fit and willing relative. If a suitable relative cannot be found, the child is placed in a fictive kin (individuals with a significant relationship with the child) or a non-relative foster care placement.

There are only a few methods in which a child can be removed from his/her home in Idaho. The first is when law enforcement makes the determination a child is in a dangerous situation and therefore they declare the child to be in imminent danger. Circumstances which justify a declaration of imminent danger may include: when the home environment poses a significant health and safety hazard to the child; when the child has serious physical injuries as the result of maltreatment; or when there is no caregiver in the home to care for the child.

The second way for a child to be removed from his/her home is through a petition to the court from the department indicating it is unsafe for the child to remain in their home. A judge determines whether or not to enter an Order of Removal. An example of when the department may submit a petition to a judge is when caregivers are not providing adequate supervision to a child due to the caregiver's mental health or substance use issues, and a safety plan cannot adequately address the child's safety needs while in the home.

Another method of removal is through a Rule 16 Expansion Order. In Idaho, juvenile offenses are governed by the Juvenile Corrections Act and the Idaho Juvenile Rules. Rule 16 of the Idaho Juvenile Rules allows for the court to expand a Juvenile Corrections Act proceeding into a Child Protective Act proceeding when the court has reasonable cause to believe that the juvenile living within the state comes within the jurisdiction of the Child Protective Act.

Cases involving the removal of children from their home enter the court system. The Idaho Child Protective Act gives the court responsibility for determining whether the removal of the child is warranted and for making other key decisions as those cases move through the court process. The first court hearing is the shelter care hearing, and must be held within 48 hours of the child's removal, excluding weekends and holidays. At the shelter care hearing, the court determines if the child should be returned to their home or placed in the temporary custody of the department pending an adjudicatory hearing. Adjudicatory hearings are required to be held within thirty (30) days of the child's entering foster care. At the hearing, the judge makes a determination as to whether the evidence indicates abuse, neglect, abandonment, or an unstable home environment has occurred, and determines whether the child should remain in foster care or return home.

If a child is under the age of twelve (12) years, the court will appoint a guardian ad litem for the child. For children twelve (12) years and older, the court appoints counsel to represent the child(ren), and in certain circumstances, may also appoint a guardian ad litem for the child(ren).

As shown in Table 1, there were 1,321 children in 2016 that entered foster care as a result of maltreatment or an unstable home environment. Table 4 below indicates the number of children in foster care on the last day of each state fiscal year for the last five years. The point-in-time number of children in foster care in Idaho has ranged from 1,289 to 1,395.



**Table 4: Children in Foster Care by SFY**

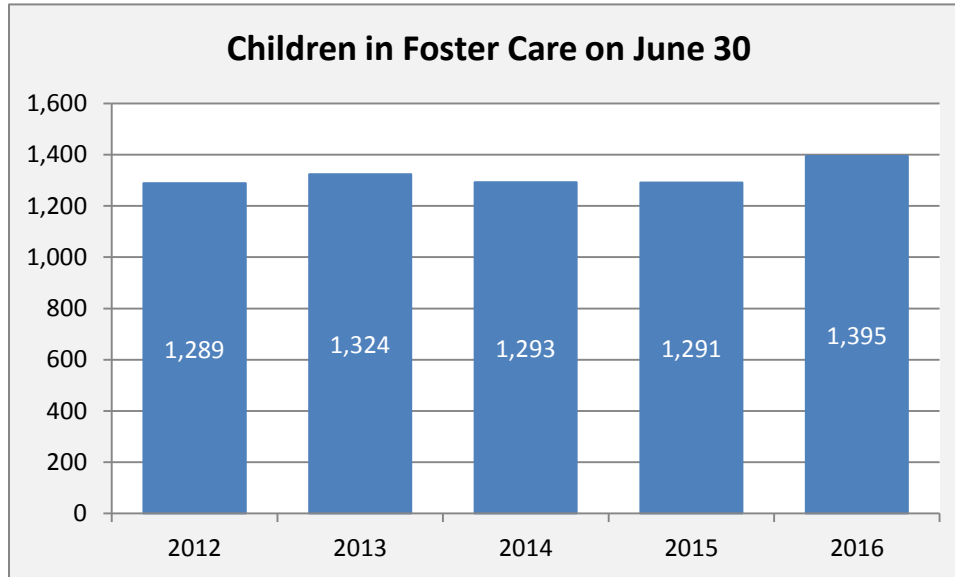


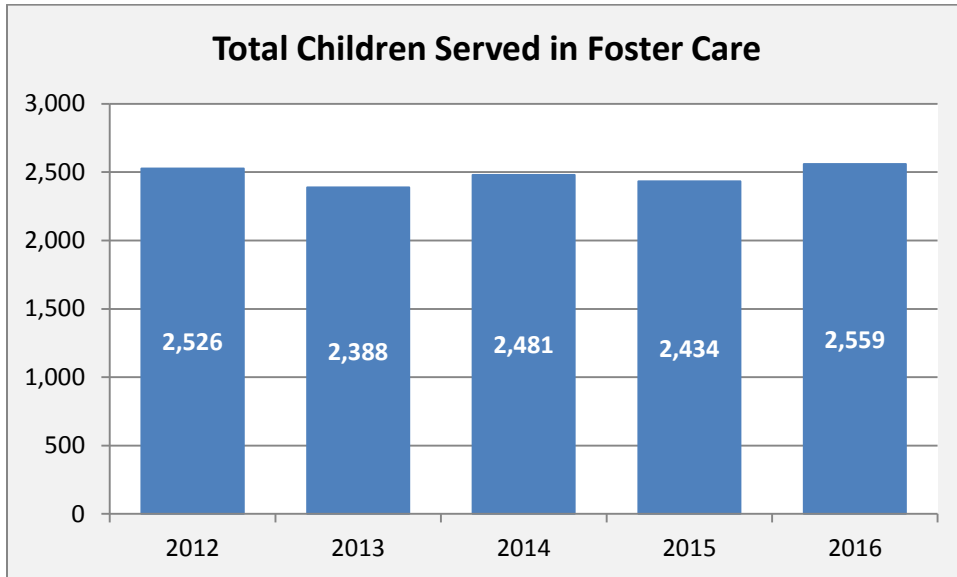
Table 5 includes a breakdown of the removal reasons for children who entered foster care during the last five state fiscal years.

**Table 5: Removal Reasons by SFY**

Removal Reason Breakdown by SFY										
Removal Reasons	2012		2013		2014		2015		2016	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Neglect	956	78.2%	921	81.6%	960	81.3%	947	80.2%	1084	82.1%
Physical Abuse	145	11.9%	101	9.0%	102	8.6%	163	13.8%	146	11.1%
Sexual Abuse	46	3.8%	41	3.6%	48	4.1%	19	1.6%	37	2.8%
Abandonment	28	2.3%	37	3.3%	43	3.6%	31	2.6%	28	2.1%
Homeless	28	2.3%	18	1.6%	26	2.2%	19	1.6%	22	1.7%
Voluntary Placement	19	1.6%	10	0.9%	2	0.2%	2	0.2%	4	0.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1222</b>		<b>1128</b>		<b>1181</b>		<b>1181</b>		<b>1321</b>	

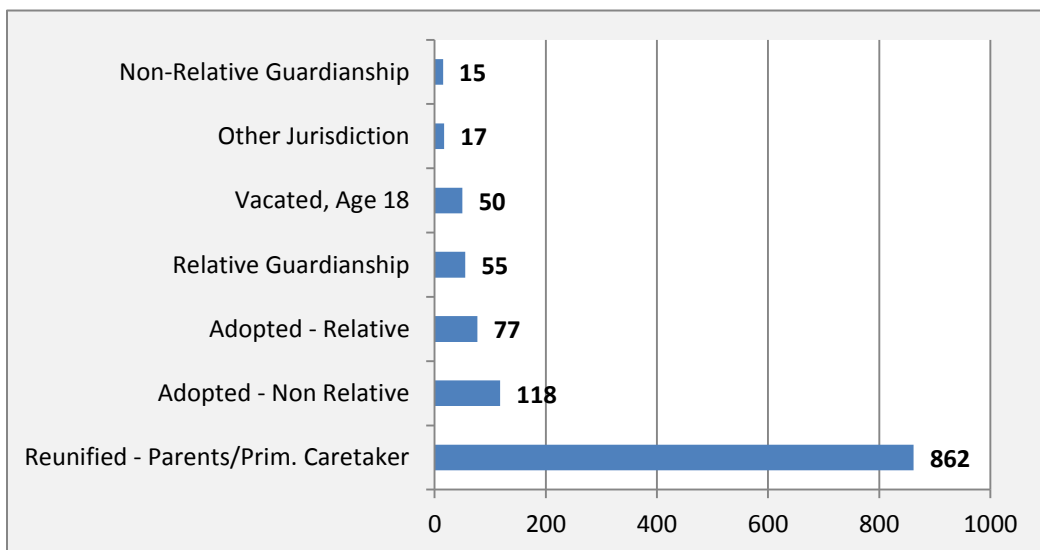
The data shown in Table 6 illustrates the total number of children served through the foster care program during the last five state fiscal years. The number of children served in foster care over the past five years has remained steady at an average of 2,477 children per year.

**Table 6: Children Served in Foster Care by SFY**



During the state fiscal year 2016, 1,194 children exited foster care. Of these children, 862 (72%) were reunified with their parents/caregiver. As shown in Table 7, “Other Jurisdiction” could include children placed in the custody of the Department of Juvenile Corrections or another agency/jurisdiction, or tribe transfer.

**Table 7: Children Exiting Foster Care in SFY 2016**



## Placements in Foster Care

Managing the removal and determining the placement of the child is a responsibility that is taken very seriously. The department's goal is to limit the distress and damage a child experiences, and reduce the potential to permanently impact the child. Placement in relative homes is prioritized. When a child enters foster care, CFS immediately begins to search for relative/fictive kin placement options capable of keeping siblings together. Child and Family Services workers obtain relative information from the birth parents and child, immediately contacting and assessing the relatives to determine if they are a viable placement option. This process can be completed the same day a child is placed in foster care or can occur later in the case.

The Child and Family Services program strives to place siblings together. The sibling bond is important and is separate from the bond between parents and their children. When children are placed in foster care they experience many losses. They often are able to understand why they cannot be with their parents, but do not understand why they cannot be with their siblings. Adult adoptees and foster care alumni both describe the loss of sibling contact as the most devastating loss they experienced.

The most common reason siblings are not placed together when they first enter foster care is due to a lack of foster homes that can accommodate all of the siblings. When this happens, CFS looks for opportunities to reunite the siblings in one home, while maintaining contact through sibling visits. Child and Family Services' practice related to sibling placement is evaluated on an ongoing basis through internal Case Record Reviews and federal Child and Family Services Reviews. In order to meet sibling placement expectations, CFS must demonstrate concerted efforts have been made to place siblings together, or if they are not placed together, they have regular contact. Compelling reasons for sibling separation in placements must be documented.

If there are no local relative/fictive kin placement options, a child is typically placed with a non-relative foster parent, unless the child has significant mental health, behavioral and/or developmental needs requiring group home or residential care. Ideally, CFS matches the child with an appropriate foster family that has the skill, knowledge, and expertise in meeting needs similar to the child's and is in the same community in an effort to maintain the child's connections. Due to a decline in foster homes and limited placement resources, this can be challenging.

The child's best interests are the primary consideration in all placements. Child and Family Services developed a definition based on a review of laws and policies in states where the term was already defined. Factors identified as important to consider in placement determinations by experts in attachment, permanency, and adoption were also considered.

Child and Family Services defines "best interest" as eight factors which, when combined, identify the current and potential individual needs of a child. The factors are the child's:

- 1) Emotional/behavioral needs.
- 2) Medical/physical needs.
- 3) Educational/developmental needs.
- 4) Cultural/religious needs.

- 5) Trauma history and past experiences.
- 6) Relationships with parents, relatives, siblings, and current caretakers.
- 7) Interests and community connections.
- 8) Family placement preferences.

Child and Family Services workers are mindful of the importance of maintaining relative and sibling connections, and the impact of placement changes on a child's attachment and overall development when making placement recommendations and policy decisions. Therefore, no single best interest factor is considered more or less important than the others. The weight placed on any one factor is highly dependent on the identified needs of a particular child or sibling group.

### **Placement Changes in Foster Care**

Child and Family Services practice emphasizes placement stability and limiting the number of moves for children in foster care. When children experience placement changes, they can develop distress, loss, and an absence of belonging, all of which can result in feelings of distrust and a fear of forming healthy relationships and attachments with others. A planned placement change is the foreseen placement of a child with a relative, fictive kin, non-relative foster parent, or group home or residential care. The social worker and provider(s) have made advanced arrangements for the placement of a child, which includes transitional planning. Reasons for planned placement changes include:

- Placement with siblings
- Placement with a relative/fictive kin
- Placement with a non-relative foster family
- Child's treatment needs
- Permanency placement
  - Pre-adoptive placement
  - Guardianship

Planned moves include a transition plan to assist the child with the move. The child's current relationship with the new caregiver, the child's emotional and developmental needs, the proximity of the new placement to the birth family, and the willingness and ability of the two families to engage in the transition can impact the transition plan. Planned transitions typically include visitation with the new placement including overnight visits. The new caregiver may also be asked to participate in treatment with the child. Time frames for transition vary based on each child's age, needs, and case circumstances.

An unplanned placement change is an unexpected disruption in the child's placement. The following are examples of unplanned placement changes:

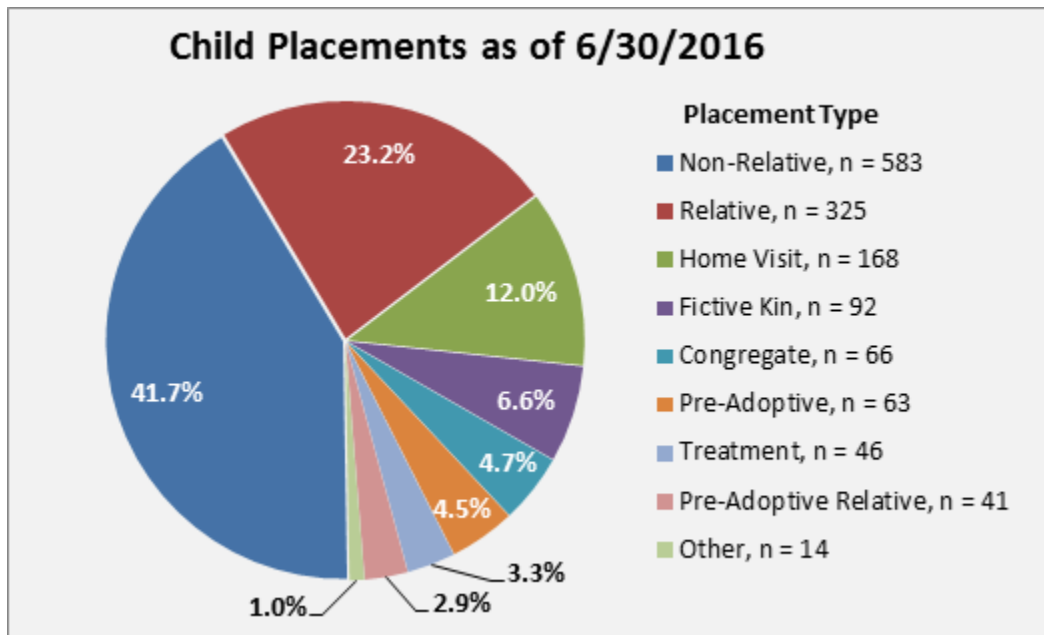
- Foster family's request
- A safety issue in the foster home (allegations of abuse or neglect)
- Child's treatment needs requiring a higher level of care
- Hospitalizations
- Detention

To reduce foster parent requests for placement changes, CFS makes efforts to provide supportive services or other resources to assist foster families to care for children and avoid placement disruptions. In some instances, foster families may be unable to meet a child’s needs due to significant behavioral issues and request that the child be moved.

During the 2016 legislative session changes were made to the Child Protective Act regarding notification of placement changes. In SFY17, CFS began sending written notification to foster parents regarding placement changes. Child and Family Services is committed to preventing unannounced moves, unless there are safety concerns and to ensuring clear communications and expectations with foster parents regarding placement changes.

Table 8 (below) contains information regarding the 1,398 children who were in foster care on June 30, 2016 and where they were placed. The majority of those children were in non-relative foster care placements.

**Table 8: Child Placements on June 30, 2016**



The number of placements for children who were served in foster care during SFY16 is depicted in Table 9 below. As highlighted in the data, over 88% of children had fewer than two (2) placement changes. Of these children more than 65% had only one (1) placement setting therefore experiencing no placement changes while in foster care.

**Table 9: Number of Placement Changes for Children in SFY16**

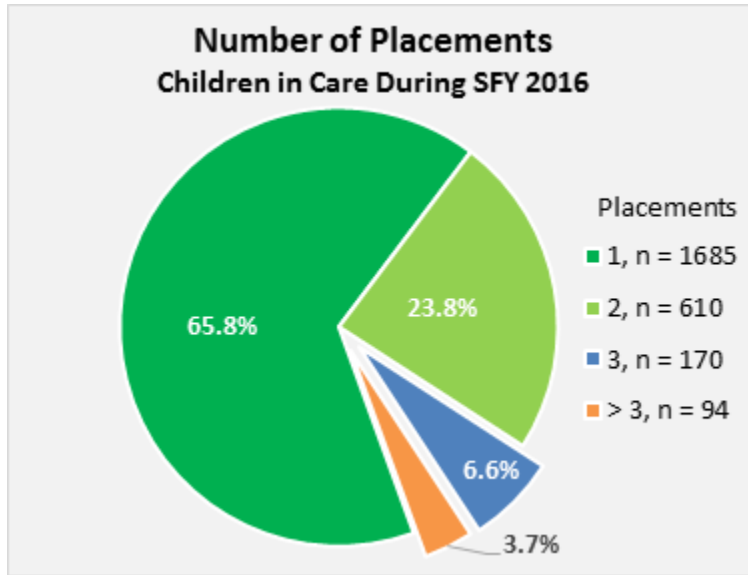


Table 10 provides information regarding placement change reasons for children served in foster care during the 2016 state fiscal year. As identified in the table, more than 50% of the reasons for placement changes were documented as “placement change.” In an effort to better identify reasons children experience moves, changes were made to the database system to improve tracking in SFY17.

**Table 10: SFY16 Placement Changes Reasons**

Placement End Reasons	#	%
Placement Change	739	56.5%
Placed With Relative	142	10.9%
Foster Parent Request	134	10.2%
Move to Relative Placement	81	6.2%
Level Change	51	3.9%
Child's Behavior	34	2.6%
Pre-Adoptive Placement	28	2.1%
Change in Foster Family's Circumstance	27	2.1%
Licensing Issue	21	1.6%
Runaway	18	1.4%
Allegations of Abuse in Foster Home	17	1.3%
Placed in DJC Shared Custody	9	0.7%
Sibling Move	4	0.3%
Child's Parent Request	2	0.2%
Case Transfer	1	0.1%
Total	1308	100%

## Provision of Ongoing Case Management Services

Once a child has been placed in foster care, social workers monitor the family's progress in achieving the objectives spelled out in the service plan, and regularly assess the safety, permanency, and well-being of the child. Case management responsibilities include:

- Making monthly contact with children, parents, and foster families.
- Communicating with service providers to ensure family members are receiving services.
- Transporting or making transportation arrangements for children and their families.
- Arranging and supervising visits between children and parents, and between children and their siblings.
- Working on the alternative plan, which includes ongoing contacts with relatives, and home studies of relatives residing in-state and out-of-state.
- Conducting specialized recruitment to locate an adoptive family for children unable to remain with the foster parents.
- Preparing required court reports and testifying in court hearings.
- Documenting casework activities into CFS's child welfare information system (iCARE).

## Periodic Court Hearings

Federal and state law require a court hearing to review the case progress must be held no later than six months from the date of removal. Hearings may be held more frequently at the discretion of the court.

At 12 months from the date of removal, a permanency hearing must be held. At that time, CFS presents its recommendation for permanency. The permanency options include:

- Reunification
- Legal guardianship with a relative or non-relative
- Adoption by a relative or non-relative
- Another planned permanent living arrangement (this is only a permanency option for youth age sixteen (16) years and older)

For every child who has been in out-of-home care for at least 15 of the child's last 22 months, the state is obligated by state and federal law to file a petition to terminate parental rights. If compelling reasons exist for not terminating the parents' rights, those reasons must be approved by the court; otherwise the court will order the filing of a petition for termination of parental rights. Parents may choose to voluntarily terminate their parental rights, or their rights may be removed through an involuntary court process.

## Permanency Decision Making

The Child and Family Services program is responsible for placing a child in foster care in a safe environment until such time reunification can occur. As shown in table 7 most children in foster care are eventually reunified with their families. Efforts are also made from the time of removal to make sure the child is living in an environment which has the potential for permanency in the event they cannot be reunified. The permanency potential of the child's placement is evaluated at each court hearing and by placement selection committees within CFS. Permanency placement recommendations, by CFS standard, are not made by a single individual. They are

made by placement selection committees, with the court being ultimately responsible for finalizing all adoptions and guardianships. The placement selection process is a model which incorporates various steps, depending on the specific case circumstances.

The process involves an assessment of the child's needs and consideration of best interest factors, including: emotional/behavioral needs; medical/physical needs; educational/developmental needs; cultural and religious needs; trauma history and past experiences; relationships with parents, relatives, siblings, and current caregivers; the child's interests and community connections; and child and family placement preference. The goal is to make a recommendation that is in the child's best interests.

Determinations relating to where and with whom children are placed are subject to judicial review by the court, and when contested by any party, judicial approval. The court also finalizes all adoptions and guardianships.

## **Best Practices in Child Welfare**

The Child and Family Services program is dedicated to employing best practices in child welfare service delivery and policy development. Child and Family Services routinely uses research and guidance on best practices, promising practices, and evidenced-based practices during leadership meetings to inform and guide statewide policy and practice related decisions. In SFY 2016, there were nine (9) Program Manager meetings, ten (10) Child Welfare Subcommittee meetings, and six (6) Supervisor Workgroup meetings. These statewide leadership team meetings resulted in several revisions and additions to Idaho child welfare policy and practice over the last year.

Revisions to the Standard for Comprehensive Safety, Ongoing, and Reassessment were made regarding assessing the safety of children who are the subject of a report of child abuse or neglect and who reside in or visit homes outside of Idaho during the safety assessment process.

Revisions to the Concurrent Planning Standard and Permanent Placement Selection are in the process of being completed. These revisions will incorporate changes made during the 2016 Idaho legislative session including placement priorities for children in foster care and youth involvement in permanency planning.

Revisions to the Infant Toddler Standard were made regarding updates to the referral process for children ages birth to three for Infant Toddler Program services, as well as the process for appointing a surrogate parent.

Revisions to the Well-Being Standard are in the process of being completed. These revisions will incorporate the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act, as well as consistency with federal expectations of timeframes around well-being requirements.

Revisions to the written materials provided to parents who have a child placed into foster care are in the process of being updated. Specifically, information regarding parental rights and responsibilities and a basic overview of what a parent can expect when working with CFS will be included in these materials. These materials will be consistent statewide and a process for ongoing revision will be put in place.



Quarterly statewide all-staff video conferences, known as “fireside chats,” were implemented to facilitate ongoing communication and ensure feedback loops regarding important issues related to CFS practice planning and implementation, and questions are delivered at all levels of the program.

A Child Welfare Executive Steering Committee was developed to help ensure the completion of the department’s strategic plan initiative to transform the child welfare system to improve outcomes for children. Committee members include: department and division leadership; representatives from the Governor’s Office, the Attorney General’s Office, and the judiciary; legislators; a foster parent; a CASA Director; a Keeping Children Safe Panel member; and the Executive Director of the Idaho Children’s Trust Fund.

A survey of adoptive parents receiving Idaho adoption assistance benefits was completed. The results are being compiled and will be used to identify program and policy needs for ensuring quality customer service and support to families willing to provide permanency for children in foster care.

Court report templates were revised to include legislative changes made during the last legislative session, as well as assure consistency with the comprehensive safety assessment and reassessment of safety.

The Child and Family Services program has been conducting internal case record reviews since 2004 to evaluate practices in the program. This rigorous internal case record review process assesses statewide performance in the areas of safety, permanency, and well-being. Over SFY 2016, 136 cases statewide were reviewed using the On-Site Review Instrument. In addition to the internal review, CFS also started a federal Child and Family Services Review, which looks at these same areas with federal oversight and measures.

The output of the federal Child and Family Services Review will highlight areas needing improvement within the Idaho child welfare system. Beginning in the second half of SFY 2017, CFS will develop a Program Improvement Plan aimed at identifying themes, trends, strengths, and will target areas for improvement. The plan will include goals, interventions, key activities, baselines, timeframes, performance measures, and reporting periods. The plan will be developed in collaboration with internal and external partners, including social workers, supervisors, managers, courts, tribes, law enforcement, guardians ad litem, youth, parents, foster parents, contractors, and community service providers.

## **Plan for Improvement**

Improvement efforts for the Child and Family Services program are captured in two plans: the Strategic Plan for the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare and the program-specific Child and Family Services Plan. These plans are aligned to meet the need for improvement by both the department and the child welfare system.

The Strategic Plan lays the foundation for the department to address state and community issues with a vision that is coordinated with internal and external partners. The plan sets a prioritized timeline for meeting measurable objectives to attain goals that better serve the people of Idaho.

The Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) is a five-year plan which sets forth the vision and the goals to be accomplished to strengthen Idaho's overall child welfare system. The plan's goals and objectives rest within the framework of the Child and Family Services Review outcomes and systemic factors established by the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997. The CFSP covers the full array of child welfare services from prevention and protection through permanency and well-being. As required by federal regulations (45 CFR 1357.16), CFS engages agencies, organizations, and individuals in the ongoing CFSP-related consultation and coordination process (e.g. Court Improvement Program, tribes, youth, families, foster parents, law enforcement, educators, and community behavioral health providers).

Data used to establish and measure progress on the CFSP goals include qualitative and quantitative findings from:

- Federal case record reviews
- State-conducted case record reviews
- Independent Living case record reviews and National Youth in Transition (NYTD) results
- Indian Child Welfare Act case record reviews
- Feedback from internal and external stakeholders

Federal, state-conducted, Independent Living, and Indian Child Welfare Act case record reviews consist of in-depth reviews of case documentation and court documents, in addition to case-related interviews with children, parents, foster parents, social workers and supervisors for the purpose of evaluating safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for children and families, as well as state compliance with federal guidelines.

Additional quantitative data used to monitor performance include a state profile provided by the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The November 2015 profile indicates Idaho's child welfare system met all of the federal performance indicators for permanency, re-entry into foster care, placement stability, maltreatment in foster care, and recurrence of maltreatment.

In the past year, CFS has made a number of policy and practice improvements. The goals and progress made in each area are highlighted below.

## Goal 1

**Idaho will develop a robust, sustainable, and effective foster care program.**

### *Progress on Goal 1*

- Revised foster parent application and licensing forms.
- Enhanced collaboration with Eastern Washington University to collect and use data to drive foster parent recruitment strategies.
- Expanded the Resource Peer Mentor Program to provide additional mentoring and coaching to foster families.
- Provided foster parents additional training in the following topics: human trafficking, grief & loss, and caring for children who have experienced trauma, normalcy for children in foster care, and trust-based relational intervention strategies.
- Revised the Child Welfare Foster Care Academy for all new workers.
- Provided Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention statewide training.
- Improvements were made to foster parent recruitment messaging.

## Goal 2

**The child welfare program will retain a highly skilled workforce that has the training, resources, and support to address the safety, permanency and well-being of the families served.**

### *Progress on Goal 2*

- Continued partnership with Idaho State University (ISU) to provide training to child welfare social workers, supervisors, leadership, and community stakeholders.
- Continued evaluation of workforce development efforts through pre- and post-training evaluations, staff discussions, surveys, and ISU performance reports.
- Established the Workforce Recruitment and Retention panel with several universities and colleges in Idaho to promote higher education in social work, improve child welfare recruitment, and promote the availability of college-level courses relating to child welfare and child trauma.
- Developed a new curriculum for new supervisors which covers topics such as Strength-Based Supervision, Family Centered Practice, as well as the department required Supervisor Training and Resource Program.

### Goal 3

**Children will only be placed in foster care when they are unsafe and a sufficient safety plan cannot be managed in the home; children will return home after a removal as soon as a sufficient safety plan can be maintained in the home.**

#### *Progress on Goal 3*

- Drafted statewide guidelines to support child welfare social workers to apply the Comprehensive Safety Assessment with fidelity and consistency throughout the state.
- Developed a quality assurance tool for conducting reviews on the fidelity of the application of the Comprehensive Safety Assessment. Use of the tool is expected to begin during the first calendar quarter of 2017.
- The program is currently collecting information on safety-related services needed to support families who are able to keep their children safe in their home with the support of family preservation services.

### Goal 4

**The child welfare program will have a functional, sustainable, and inclusive feedback loop for our Continuous Quality Improvement system that values stakeholder and family engagement.**

#### *Progress on Goal 4*

- In November 2015, CFS hosted a statewide stakeholder meeting in Boise at which CFS staff presented information and data regarding new and updated practice standards, proposed legislative changes, implementation of practice initiatives, as well as an update on progress on established goals from the previous stakeholder meeting held in October 2014. Participants had an opportunity to work in groups to provide feedback regarding their assessment of strengths, challenges, and opportunities for the stakeholder group to work with CFS to make progress toward the strategic plan goals. A notable suggestion from this group was the need for local stakeholder meetings as opposed to the larger statewide meeting approach. As a result, the agency will focus on developing representative stakeholder groups in each of the three hub-based areas of the state to inform the statewide functioning of the child welfare system.
- In June 2015, CFS launched a statewide expansion on the use of Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) meetings which are designed to increase family participation in case planning. Family Group Decision Making meetings were implemented to address the protection and care needs of children by involving both family members and professionals in the service plan development process. Through the FGDM process, the family group is positioned to lead decision making, and CFS staff support family group plans which address the concerns of the department. Family Group Decision Making meetings recently began being prioritized for case planning purposes for children ages 0-6, and are additionally utilized for safety and permanency planning purposes. The 0-6 age range is being targeted because 40% of the department's substantiated cases are for

children ages 0-5, and internal data reflects that the 4-6 age group shows a longer reunification time.

## **Goal 5**

**The Department will be given party status in Child Protective Act (CPA) cases and the Department will have legal representation in all CPA cases.**

### *Progress on Goal 5*

- At this time the Department continues to collaborate with legislators regarding the need to amend the Child Protective Act to make the Department a party to all CPA actions.

## **Goal 6**

**The program will modernize the child welfare information system - this effort will serve to improve the program's technology platform and related software applications to support the delivery of child welfare services in the most cost effective and time sensitive manner.**

### *Progress on Goal 6*

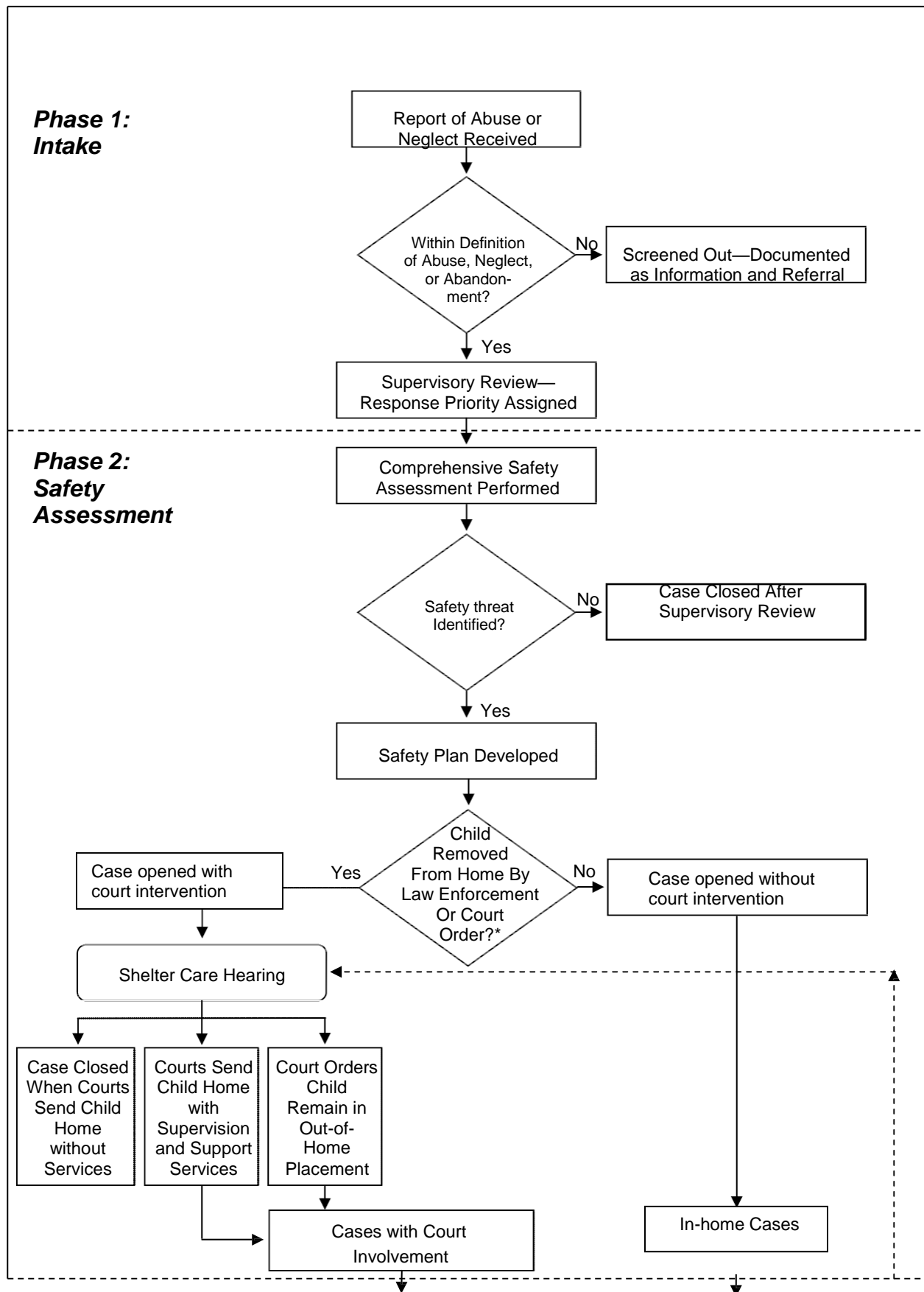
- The Data Quality Improvement Initiative (DQI), established in April 2015, continued its work in SFY 2016 by providing training and reports to child welfare managers and supervisors, promoting the importance of reliable data in making program decisions. From July 2015 to June 2016, all seven regions showed improvement in the timeliness of data entry into the child welfare information system (iCARE). Further improvements in timeliness of data entry are anticipated and further refinements of DQI tools are underway.
- In January 2016 a portal was opened to allow the Criminal History Unit (CHU) direct access to data elements within the iCARE database. This tool has been used by CHU for 15,000 searches allowing rapid access to time sensitive data to assist in conducting background checks.
- In January 2016 automated financial reports were brought online to allow regional staff to easily and accurately monitor expenditures for budget tracking.
- Currently in development is a portal to allow automated referrals of secure information to law enforcement jurisdictions throughout the state.

## Appendix A: Summary of Required Court Hearings

<u>Hearing</u>	<u>Purpose</u>	<u>Time Requirement</u>
Shelter Care Hearing	To determine if the removal of a child from his/her home is warranted. The court must find that it is contrary to the welfare of the child to remain in his/her home. The court must also determine that reasonable efforts have been made to prevent removal unless there are aggravating circumstances, such as the parent abandoning the child, committing murder, or committing felony assault against a child.	Within 48 hours of removal.
Adjudicatory Hearing	Following investigation of referrals, to determine whether the evidence indicates abuse or neglect has occurred and to determine whether the child should remain in foster care.	Within 30 days of the petition requesting removal.
Plan Review	To review the service plan developed by the Department. The court can approve, reject, or modify the plan.	Within 60 days of removal or 30 days of the court order taking custody of the child, whichever comes first.
Review Hearings	To review child protection cases while the child remains in the Department's legal custody.	Held at six (6) month intervals.
Permanency Hearing	To review the permanency plan developed by the Department, which contains its final recommendation regarding reunification and permanent placement of the child.	Twelve (12) months after removal or the court accepts jurisdiction for a case, whichever comes first.
Guardianship Hearing	To appoint a guardian for the child if the child's permanency plan is guardianship.	Thirteen (13) months after removal, unless an extension is approved by the court.
Termination Hearing	To determine if termination of parental rights is in the child's best interests. The court must find that reasonable efforts to achieve reunification have been made, but these efforts have failed.	To be initiated when a child has been in out-of-home care more than 15 of the last 22 months.
Adoption Finalization	To approve the adoption of a child. The child remains in Department custody and review hearings continue until the adoption is finalized.	Within 24 months of removal.

\*The hearings listed above are those which are required to be held by state and federal law. Additional hearings are often held at the discretion of the court to assess case status and progress.

## Appendix B: Child Welfare Process Flow Chart

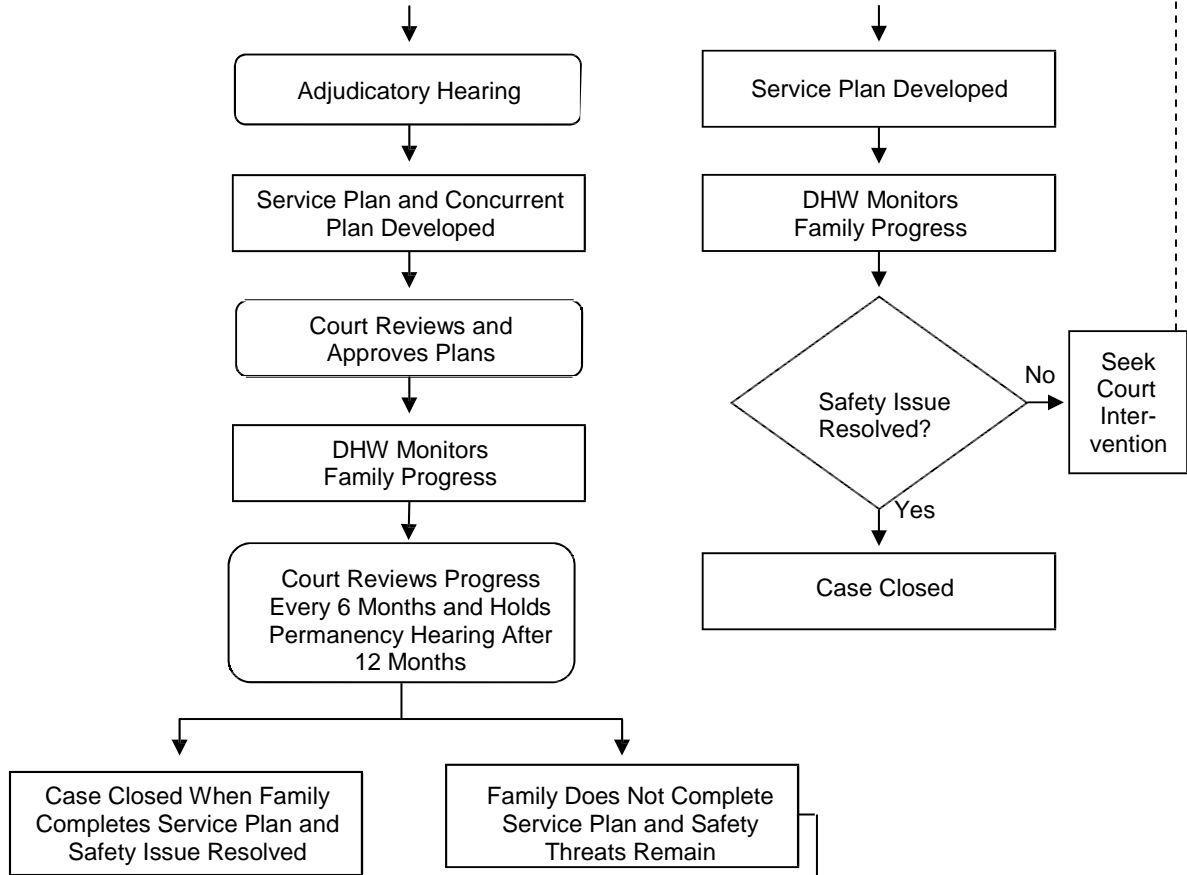


\* The majority of children enter foster care via a declaration of imminent danger by law enforcement. Less frequently, the Department may file a petition with the court requesting removal. In this circumstance, a judge makes a determination to sign an order for removal.

**Phase 3: Case Management**

*Cases with Court Involvement*

*In-home Cases*



**Phase 4: Termination/Permanency**

