

*Partners for Our Children is committed to improving the lives of Washington state foster children through rigorous research, analysis and evidence-based innovation. The organization, founded in 2007, is a collaborative effort of the University of Washington School of Social Work, Washington State Department of Social and Health Services and private funders.*

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Building a Case for Change

## Building a case for change

Every night, about 10,000 children in Washington State are in out-of-home care. Partners for Our Children was founded in 2007 to bring together the best minds from the academic and child welfare communities, state leadership and the private sector to improve the lives of these children. Here are some highlights from our work:

**Powerful data:** Thanks to a first-of-its-kind data sharing agreement with DSHS, Partners for Our Children has been able to analyze 10 years of data on the children that DSHS serves. In addition, DSHS gave us access to birth parents and the social workers for specific surveys so we could learn directly from them.

**Independent analysis of new casework practice:** DSHS asked us to determine if the state's new child welfare casework practice model — Solution Based Casework — improves outcomes for children and their families. The purpose of this new model is to better engage parents in the process of helping them become better parents. We completed the baseline survey in 2008, just before DSHS implemented SBC, and we begin follow up surveys this year. Visit our Knowledge Center at [www.partnersforourchildren.org](http://www.partnersforourchildren.org) for the full baseline report.

**Survey reveals extreme poverty of families in child welfare system:** The SBC study — the most comprehensive survey to date of parents with children in our state's child welfare system — found that 68% of these families need help in getting food for their families, 62% need help getting clothing, and 47% need help finding a place to live. Nearly half have an annual income of less than \$10,000. These findings raise serious policy issues for state decision makers, including what role if any child welfare services should have in providing basic concrete needs for families. Visit our Knowledge Center at [www.partnersforourchildren.org](http://www.partnersforourchildren.org) for the full report.

**Recruiting and retaining foster parents:** From 2000-2007, the number of children in out-of-home care increased by 17%, while the number of new foster home licenses decreased. The good news is that at the same time, the

number of children placed with relatives — a preferred type of placement — increased. Even so, there is still a need for foster parents, especially those who are in the same community and reflect the same ethnic and racial characteristics of the children in care. DSHS asked Partners for Our Children to look into the best practices and factors associated with the success of recruitment and retention of foster parents. Our report — in our Knowledge Center at [www.partnersforourchildren.org](http://www.partnersforourchildren.org) — recommends strategies and highlights several CA initiatives now underway.

**Sharing data to make change:** POC is analyzing 10 years of state data to determine the current rate of child-family reunification and to identify the factors that influence successful reunifications. We're working closely with the court and child welfare system to give them the data they need to make cross-system process change.

**Bringing everyone to the table:** We believe it's important to create opportunities where every member of the child welfare community can speak freely and frankly about critical issues affecting children, and have access to the best available data. In that spirit, we have held convenings on issues ranging from youth aging out of care to performance based contracting.

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