



Office of Protection and Safety

2006 Annual Report

Department of Health and Human Services
Nebraska Health and Human Services System

MESSAGE FROM CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHSS) is committed to ensuring that children are protected from abuse and neglect. The DHHS Division of Children and Family Services' Child Welfare Unit focuses on the outcomes of safety, permanency, and well-being for the children and families we serve.



We believe the best way to ensure these outcomes are met is to have the active involvement and assistance of the family. To do that, DHHS uses Family-Centered Practice – a family-driven, community-oriented, strength-based, highly individualized planning and problem-solving process that respects, supports, and strengthens families. This approach involves the family in identifying its strengths and addressing unmet needs. In implementing this practice we are better able to serve the children and families with whom we work and to meet their needs.

In June of 2006, Governor Dave Heineman established initiatives to ensure continued improvements in case management and services for children and families involved with DHHS. The Governor's initiatives place a priority on establishing permanency for children, especially from birth to age five; resolving 600 cases where children were never removed from home or had safely returned home but were still state wards; working with Nebraska K-12 schools to decrease referrals of truancy cases to DHHS; exploring the cross-training of workers to decrease caseloads; and building stronger relationships with our partners in the child welfare system.

We are encouraged to see progress in improving permanency for children who are state wards. For example, the number of children placed with relatives has grown from 1,562 in 2003 to 2,326 in 2006. This is a 48.9% increase over the last three years. In addition, the number of finalized adoptions reached an all-time high of 456 in 2006. This is a 53.5% increase from 2003 to 2006.

This annual report for the Child Welfare Unit includes data, accomplishments, and challenges in four areas: safety, permanency, well-being, and community safety. It includes information about both child welfare services (child abuse and neglect and status offenders) and the Office of Juvenile Services (misdemeanor and felony delinquency).

In July 2007, Nebraska's HHS System experienced a large change. Three agencies – Services, Finance, and Support; Regulation and Licensure; and Health and Human Services – merged into one Department of Health and Human Services. This change creates a more accessible, effective, and efficient department with improved accountability. In the wake of these changes we will continue to prioritize the outcomes of safety, permanency, and well-being for the children and families we serve as we continue to focus on the Governor's initiatives. We will work towards expanding our partnerships and collaborations with law enforcement, the courts, providers, and communities, and most importantly, the families themselves.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christine Z. Peterson". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Christine Z. Peterson
Chief Executive Officer

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INTRODUCTION

The Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Office of Protection and Safety works collaboratively to ensure that abused, neglected, dependent, or delinquent children and youth it serves are safe from harm or maltreatment in a permanent and caring environment with a stable family, and that communities are safe from harm. This work involves addressing the needs of children in situations where abuse or neglect is suspected or adjudicated, who are dependent or voluntarily relinquished, who fall under Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children or the Interstate Compact for Juveniles, or who come to the agency through the court as juvenile or status offenders.

OFFICE OF PROTECTION AND SAFETY'S MISSION: Nebraska's Protection and Safety System works collaboratively to ensure that the abused, neglected, dependent, or delinquent populations it serves are safe from harm or maltreatment in a permanent and caring environment with a stable family, and that communities are safe from harm.

On any given day, the Office of Protection and Safety is working with approximately 7,500 children and their families. Because of this public trust and our commitment to these children, our paramount concern is their safety, permanency, and well-being.

OFFICE OF PROTECTION AND SAFETY'S THREE PRIORITY OUTCOMES:

- *SAFETY:* Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect and children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.
- *PERMANENCY:* Children have permanency and stability in their living situations and the continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for families.
- *WELL-BEING:* Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs. Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational, physical, and mental health needs.

To provide for the safety, permanency, and well-being of the children we serve as well as the safety of communities, we use a *Family-Centered Practice*. Family-Centered Practice is a family-driven, community-oriented, strength-based, highly individualized planning and problem solving process aimed at helping people achieve their outcomes by assisting them in meeting their unmet needs.

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

The Office of Protection and Safety is committed to improving the work it does with children and families, and to evaluating the level at which it is currently performing in order to make such improvements. In July 2004, HHS established performance evaluation measures that related to the safety of and permanency for the children the Office of Protection and Safety serves. In recent years, we have been monitoring our performance according to these state-established goals in addition to national goals established by the Federal Government.

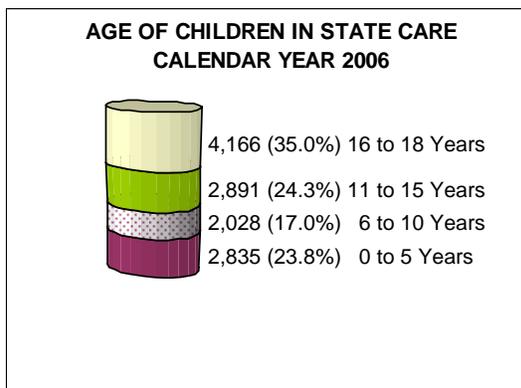
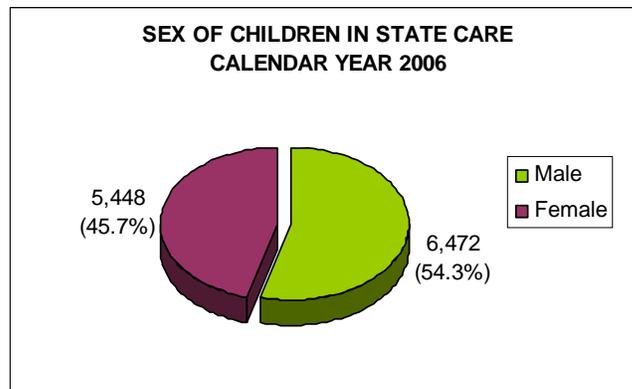
Not only do we recognize the importance of monitoring our performance in the work we do with children and families, but we believe that reporting the findings to key stakeholders and the community at large is critical to maintaining public and legislative accountability. For that reason, the Office of Protection and Safety began writing and distributing annual reports documenting our performance in serving children and families. The first report was written in 2005.

The data in this report reflect the calendar year from January 1, 2006 until December 31, 2006, unless otherwise specified. The data are from Health and Human Services' Nebraska Family Online Client User System (N-FOCUS) unless otherwise specified. N-FOCUS collects and reports federally mandated Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) and voluntary National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) data, as well as other information and electronic communications which are useful to workers, supervisors, and administrative staff responsible for decision-making and quality assurance. N-FOCUS is a fully automated source of information regarding referrals, case related activities, contracts and licensing actions, as well as other case specific data.

OVERVIEW OF CHILD DEMOGRAPHICS

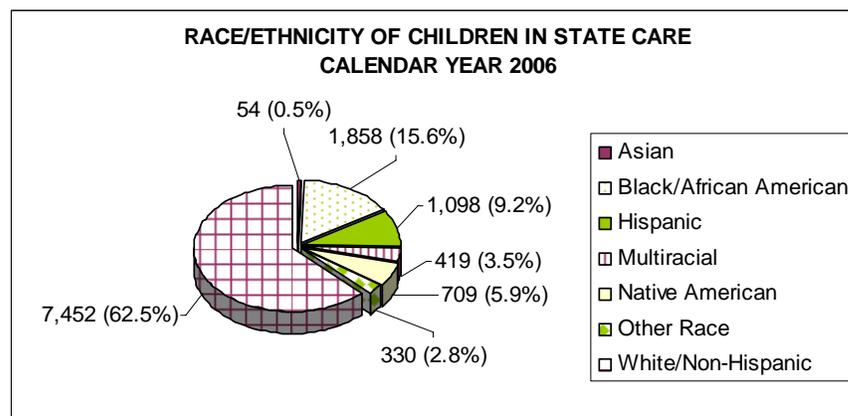
Throughout 2006, there were 11,920 children in the state's legal custody. Of these children, 45.7% were female and 54.3% were male.

The majority (35.0%) of youth in state care during 2006 were between 16 and 18 years of age. The second most prevalent age group (24.3%) consisted of children between the ages of 11 and 15 years, with children between the ages of zero and 5 years closely following at 23.8% of the total population. Children between the ages of 6 and 10 years comprised 17.0% of the total population in state care.



The majority (62.5%) of children in state care were identified as being White (non-Hispanic). African American children comprised 15.6% of the population, Hispanic youth comprised 9.2%, Native American youth comprised 5.9%, and Asian youth comprised 0.5%. A small percent of youth (3.5%) were identified as being multiracial, and 2.7% of youth were identified as being of some other race or ethnicity not mentioned in the categories above.

Throughout 2006, there were 11,920 children in the state's legal custody.



Compared to the population of children in Nebraska, according to the United States Census Bureau 2005 *American Community Survey*, there was a slight overrepresentation of youth within specific racial categories under state care. For example, whereas African American youth comprise 5.1% of Nebraska's child population, they comprised 15.6% of the population of children in state care. Native American youth comprise only 1.1% of Nebraska's child population, yet they comprised 5.9% of the population of children in state care. White non-Hispanic youth, however, comprise 78.8% of Nebraska's child population, but only made up 62.5% of the population of children under state care. The percent of Asian youth under state care was approximately half (0.7%) that of the percentage of Asian youth in the state (1.5%).¹

¹ United States Census Bureau. (2005). *American Community Survey*. Washington, D.C.: United States Census Bureau.

PRIORITY OUTCOME: SAFETY

A priority of the Office of Protection and Safety is that children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect. Nebraska law requires any person who has reason to believe that a child has been physically or sexually abused or neglected to make a report to HHS or law enforcement. Once referrals of suspected abuse or neglect are received, Protection and Safety staff work with the families, children, relatives, law enforcement, school personnel, and any other professionals who might be involved in or concerned about the welfare of the specific children, to evaluate their safety and to help families establish or build safety for their children if such assistance is needed.

Not only is child safety the primary factor in determining the appropriate response of Protection and Safety staff to child abuse or neglect referrals, but it is continually evaluated throughout the life of a case. Such measures are taken not only to ensure a child's safety throughout the time the family is involved with HHS, but to also secure the child's safety beyond the family's involvement with HHS, once the case is closed.

Lastly, we recognize that intervening in a family's life can be very intrusive. To lessen this impact, the Office of Protection and Safety adheres to a Family-Centered Practice that involves a number of principles. One important factor in a Family-Centered Practice is that families are actively involved in and often take the lead in working to establish safety for their children and family. Ideally, while this work is being done, the child remains safely in the home whenever possible and appropriate.

REFERRALS AND INVESTIGATED REPORTS OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Many referrals of child abuse or neglect are received through the HHS Child Abuse/Neglect Hotline. This 24-hour hotline was established to receive information about cases of suspected child abuse or neglect. Referrals sources may include but are not limited to neighbors, relatives, teachers, and other professionals and community members.

**Help STOP
Child Abuse**

Call the Abuse/Neglect Hotline at
1-800-652-1999

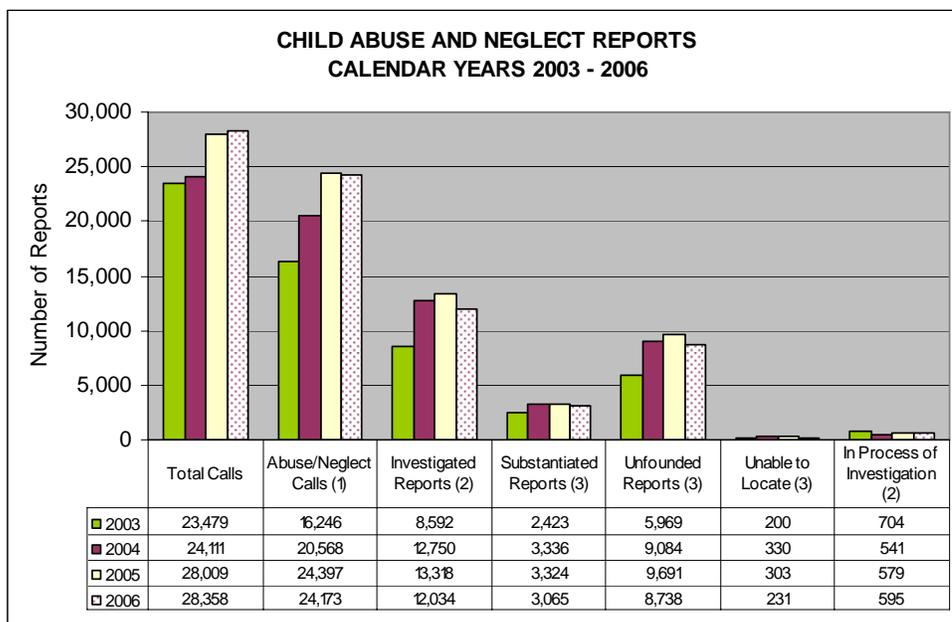
*Do not use e-mail to report cases of abuse.
If there is an emergency call local law enforcement immediately*



A priority of the Office of Protection and Safety is that children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.

Over the last three years, the number of calls received by the Child Abuse/ Neglect Hotline has grown. In 2006, the hotline received 28,358 calls, the majority (85.2%) of which involved reports of child abuse or neglect. Over half (52.2%) of the child abuse or neglect reports received were investigated or were in the process of being investigated at the end of the year. Nearly three-quarters (72.6%) of investigated child abuse or neglect reports were unfounded (that is, the Department determined that there was not a preponderance of evidence that the allegation occurred). One-quarter (25.5%) of investigated reports were substantiated. Substantiated reports (including court pending or court substantiated cases, or cases in which the Department concluded that, by the preponderance of evidence, the alleged abuse or neglect occurred based upon an investigation). One-fifth (20.1%) of substantiated reports were court pending at the time of data collection. Last, in a small percent of investigated cases (1.9%), Protection and Safety workers were unable to locate the individuals or families involved in the report, and therefore were unable to further investigate the report.

Over the last three years, the number of calls received by the Child Abuse/ Neglect Hotline has grown.

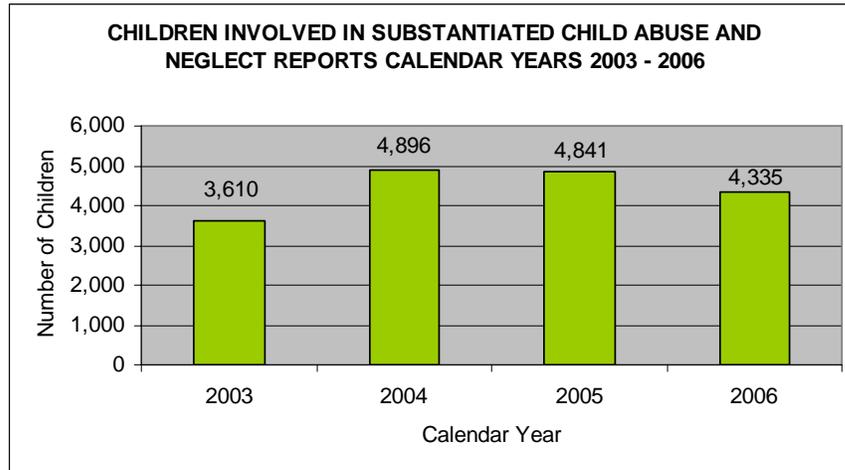


Notes. 1 denotes the number of "Total Calls" that were Abuse/Neglect Calls. 2 denotes the number of reports generated from "Abuse/Neglect Calls" that were investigated or in process of investigation. 3 denotes the number of "Investigated Reports" that were substantiated, unfounded, or unable to locate. "Substantiated Reports" indicates reports in which a finding of Court Substantiated, Court Pending, or Inconclusive was made.

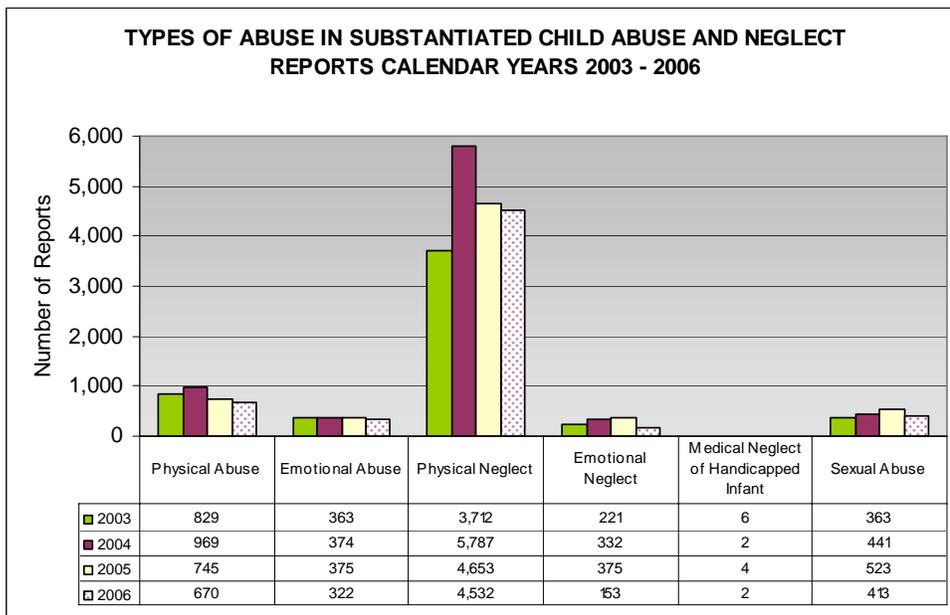
Types of Substantiated Abuse and Neglect

Over the last two years, the number of children involved in substantiated reports of child abuse or neglect has decreased from 4,896 children in 2004 to 4,335 children in 2006.

Please note, however, that at the time this data collected 595 reports were in process of investigation. Once investigations are completed, the substantiation rate of reports will change.



Over the last few years, a larger percent of cases handled by the Office of Protection and Safety have involved physical neglect. In 2006, physical neglect was present in 83.0% of cases. The second most common type of abuse in 2006 was physical abuse (present in 12.3% of cases), followed by sexual abuse (present in 7.6% of cases) and emotional abuse (present in 2.8% of cases). Obviously, when comparing the number of children involved in substantiated reports of abuse or neglect and the prevalence of some types of abuse such as physical neglect, one can see that any given case may and often does involve multiple types and occurrences of maltreatment.



STATE SAFETY PERFORMANCE MEASURES

The Office of Protection and Safety measures its performance in ensuring the safety of the children it serves in multiple ways. These measures include providing appropriate and timely responses to calls received by the Child Abuse/Neglect Hotline, timely completion and documentation of initial assessments, and timely service provision to children and families.

Intake Performance Measures

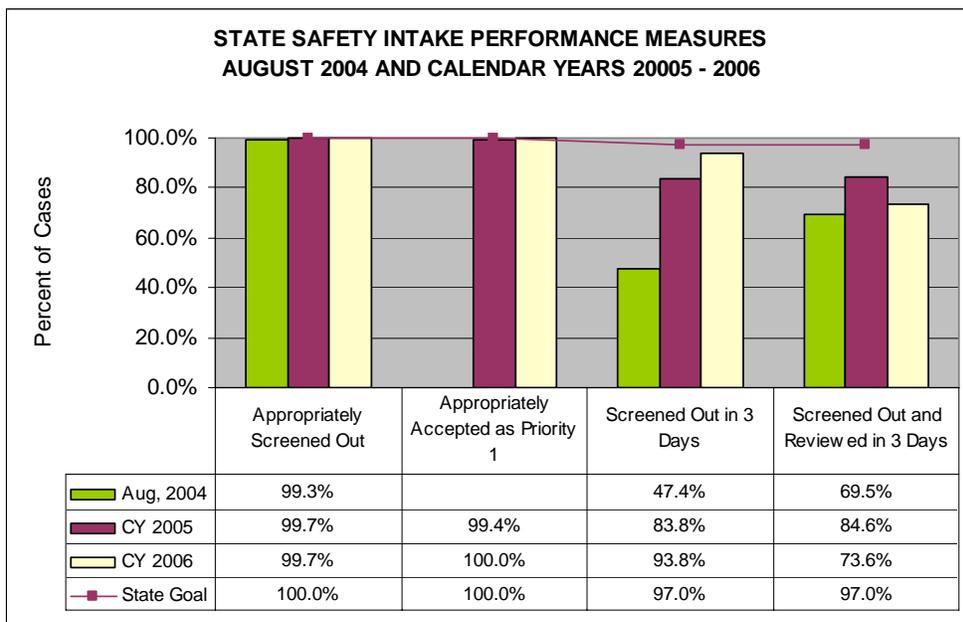
For the last two years, Protection and Safety staff has appropriately screened 99.7% of the reports of child abuse and neglect received. In 2006, for the very first time, the state reached its goal of appropriately accepting calls as Priority 1 calls (that is, calls that involve instances of serious danger or threats to a child's safety and, therefore, necessitate an immediate response from a Protection and Safety worker) in 100.0% of hotline calls.

Additionally, in the last three years, Protection and Safety supervisors improved in screening out cases in which Protection and Safety services were not needed within 3 days of receiving a call; a 10.0% increase from 2005 and a 46.4% increase from August 2004. However, the percent of cases that were screened out *and reviewed* within 3 days decreased by 11.0%, from 84.6% in 2005 to 73.6% in 2006.

- **PRIORITY 1:**
 - Face-to-face contact with a child within 24 hours (with the state goal of doing so in 100.0% of cases); and
 - Completed documentation and service provision within 10 working days (with the state goal of providing necessary services within 10 working days in 95.0% of cases).

- **PRIORITY 2:**
 - Face-to-face contact with a child within 5 working days; and
 - Completed documentation and service provision within 20 days (with the state goal of completing both in 90.0% of cases).

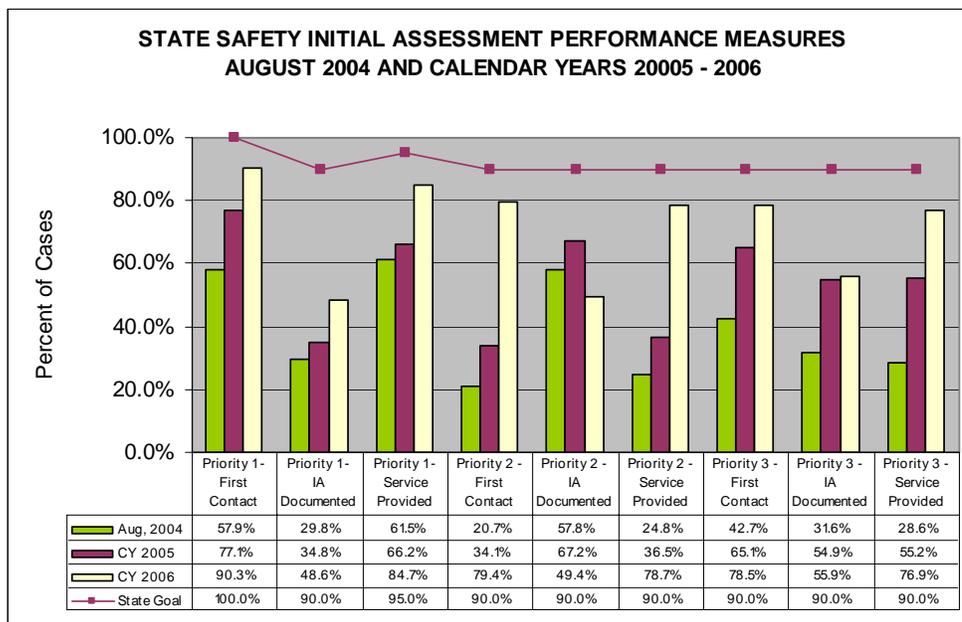
- **PRIORITY 3:**
 - Face-to-face contact with a child within 10 working days; and
 - Completed documentation and service provision within 30 days (with the state goal of completing both in 90.0% of cases).



Initial Assessment Performance Measures

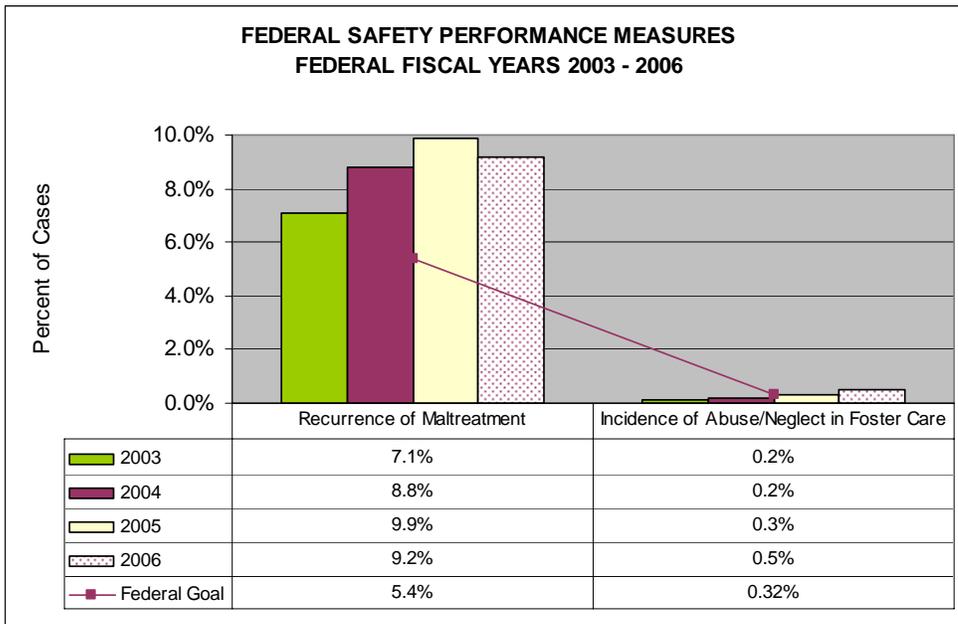
Once an intake is accepted for initial assessment, Protection and Safety staff are expected to make contact with the child(ren) and family involved in the report to complete the assessment, document the information gleaned from the assessment, and arrange for and provide the necessary services. The timeframe in which these actions are to be completed vary by the priority level of the report (that is, the higher the level of danger or risk to a child's safety, the shorter the time for intervention).

The Office of Protection and Safety improved in all of these measures in 2006, with the exception of completing documentation for Priority 2 cases (decreasing by 17.8% from 67.2% in 2005 to 49.4% in 2006). However, the two areas in which the most significant improvements were made were making contact in Priority 2 cases within 5 working days (improving 45.3% from 34.1% in 2005 to 79.4% in 2006) and service provision in Priority 2 cases within 20 days (improving 42.2% from 36.5% in 2005 to 78.7% in 2006). Overall, the data suggest that Nebraska is definitely improving its performance in the established state goals, although performance in documentation and review tend to fall behind that of face-to-face contact and service provision.



FEDERAL SAFETY PERFORMANCE MEASURES

The Federal Performance Measures also address safety for children under state care. Federal measures not only consider the timely investigation of child abuse or neglect reports (as do state measures), but they also consider the recurrence of maltreatment by parents or caregivers and maltreatment by foster parents or facility staff members. Nebraska submits this data to the Federal Government annually. The Federal Government then uses this and other data related to the federal performance measures for a number of purposes, including the Annual Child Welfare Report to Congress, the data profile related to the federal Child and Family Services Reviews, and federal program funding allocations. The Federal Performance Measures are calculated using the Federal Fiscal Year Calendar of October 1, 2005, through September 30, 2006.



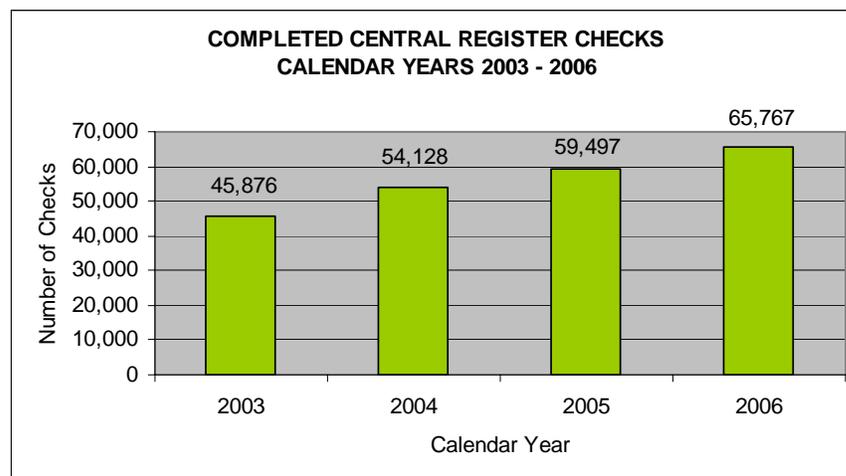
The Federal Performance Measure regarding the recurrence of maltreatment sets the goal of maltreatment reoccurring in less than 5.4% of cases. Nebraska has not met this goal in the last three years. However, while the recurrence of maltreatment grew in small increments each year from 2003 to 2005, it decreased for the very first time from 9.9% in 2005 to 9.2% in 2006.

Nebraska has also not met the federal goal of abuse and neglect by foster parents or facility staff members occurring in less than 0.32% of cases. In 2006, maltreatment by foster parents or facility staff occurred in 0.5% percent of cases.

CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT CENTRAL REGISTER

HHS is required by state law to maintain a computerized record of individuals found to be responsible for child abuse or neglect. This computerized record is called the Central Register. The Office of Protection and Safety conducts Central Register checks when a request has been received in writing. This request must include the individual's signature allowing their name to be checked in the register. A majority of the checks are completed as a requirement for employment. Employers most often making the request are group home providers, schools, child care agencies, and other entities that work with children.

The Department continues to receive a growing number of requests for Central Register checks. In 2006, the Office of Protection and Safety completed 65,767 Central Register checks.

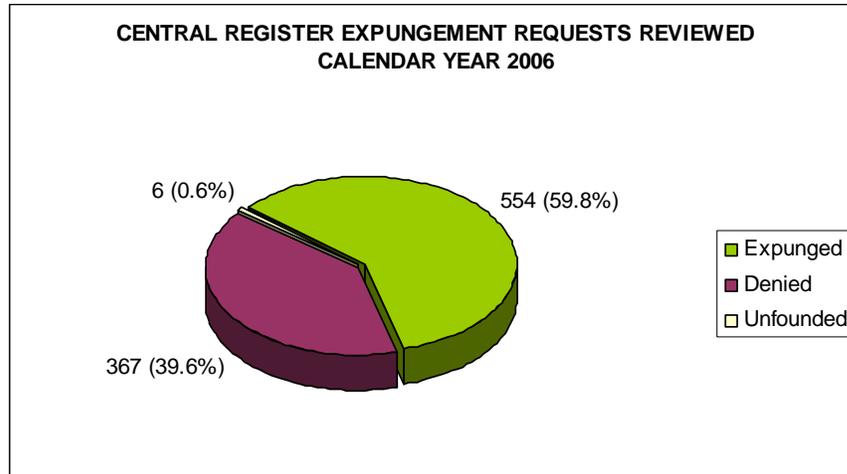


This number represents a 10.5% increase over the number of register checks completed in 2005, and a 43.4% increase over those completed in 2003.

Expungements from the Central Register

When it has been determined by a preponderance of evidence, by court conviction, or by juvenile court adjudication that child abuse or neglect has occurred, the individual responsible for the abuse is notified in writing that his/her name is being entered into the Central Register. Individuals are given the opportunity to request their name to be removed, amended, or expunged from the Register if they believe the information is inaccurate or has not been maintained in a manner consistent with law.

Requests for expungements are processed by Protection and Safety staff members in the HHS Central Office. Central Office staff and HHS attorneys review the case files and any information presented by the individual.



Staff make the initial decision to expunge the individual's name or deny the request. If a request is denied, individuals have the right to request an administrative hearing to have the information reviewed a second time by an administrative hearing officer. The administrative hearing officer then makes a recommendation on the case to the HHS Director. The HHS Director makes the ultimate decision of whether or not to accept an individual's requests, and remove, amend, or expunge an individual's name from the Central Register. If a request is denied, individuals have the right to further appeal the decision to District Court.

In 2006, there were 927 expungement reviews requested. Of these requests, 59.8% were accepted and 39.6 % were denied. In 0.6% of cases, the expungement review was terminated in the midst of the review process, which resulted in an "unfounded" review.

OFFICE OF JUVENILE SERVICES

The Office of Juvenile Services' (OJS) community-based services and programs are part of the Office of Protection and Safety. OJS is designed to work with children who have committed a delinquent act. The functions of OJS include administration of the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Centers (YRTC) in Kearney and Geneva and juvenile community supervision services. These services include case management, direct supervision of

OFFICE OF JUVENILE SERVICES' MISSION: To provide individualized supervision, care, accountability, and treatment in a manner consistent with public safety to those youth committed to a Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center.

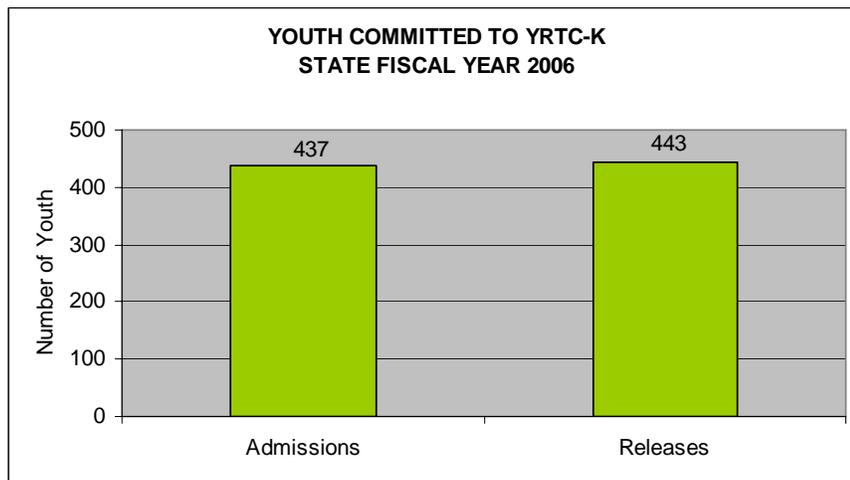
paroled youth from the YRTC's, and juveniles committed by the courts for direct community placement. There are a range of contracted residential and non-residential services and programs utilized to meet the custody and treatment needs of juveniles and their families.

Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Centers

Youth between the ages of 12 and 18 years who have been adjudicated as a juvenile offender and committed to HHS-OJS custody may be placed in a YRTC. State wards may also be placed in a YRTC for safe keeping before the hearing process for juvenile offenders. The mission of the YRTC's is to provide individualized supervision, care, accountability, and treatment in a manner consistent with public safety to those youth committed to the centers.

YRTC-Kearney (YRTC-K) is the rehabilitation and treatment center for males. It offers a variety of educational, recreational, community service, and treatment programs, including psychological, chemical dependency, trauma, and sex offender treatment programming. In State Fiscal Year 2006 (i.e., July 1, 2005 – June 30, 2006), there were 437 youth admissions to YRTC-K and 443 releases, with an average daily population of 194 youth. The average length of stay at YRTC-K was approximately 7 months.

Throughout the 2006 State Fiscal Year, 1,920 youth provided 44 local organizations with 4,720 labor hours of volunteer service. These services included activities under the "Adopt-A-Road" campaign and the Salvation Army.



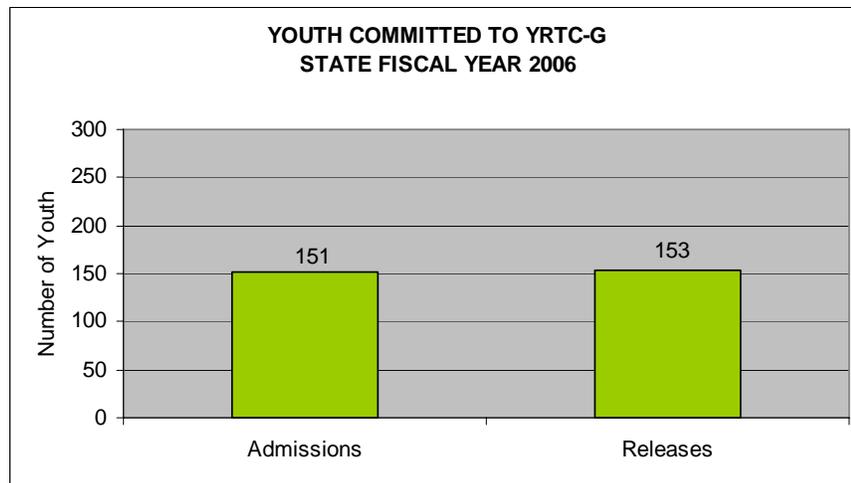
YRTC-Geneva (YRTC-G) is the rehabilitation and treatment center for females. It also offers a variety of educational, recreational, community service, and treatment programs, most recently including a "Mother and Babies Program" and a gender-responsive treatment program (both new additions to YRTC-G programming in 2006). YRTC-G's gender-responsive programming takes into account the specific treatment needs of young girls and shapes both its content and delivery of services around these identified needs.

Throughout the 2006 State Fiscal Year, 1,920 youth provided 44 local organizations with 4,720 labor hours of volunteer service.

During State Fiscal Year 2006, there were 151 youth admissions to YRTC-G and 153 releases, with an average daily count of 88 youth. The average length of stay at YRTC-G was 8 months.

Youth at the YRTC-G also volunteered throughout the year in various capacities, including crocheting and donating baby blankets and clothing to local women's shelters, volunteering at the Geneva Recycling Center, "Adopt-A-Highway," and the local retirement home and Senior Center.

YRTC-G was recently reaccredited in January 2006, through the American Correctional Association.



Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory

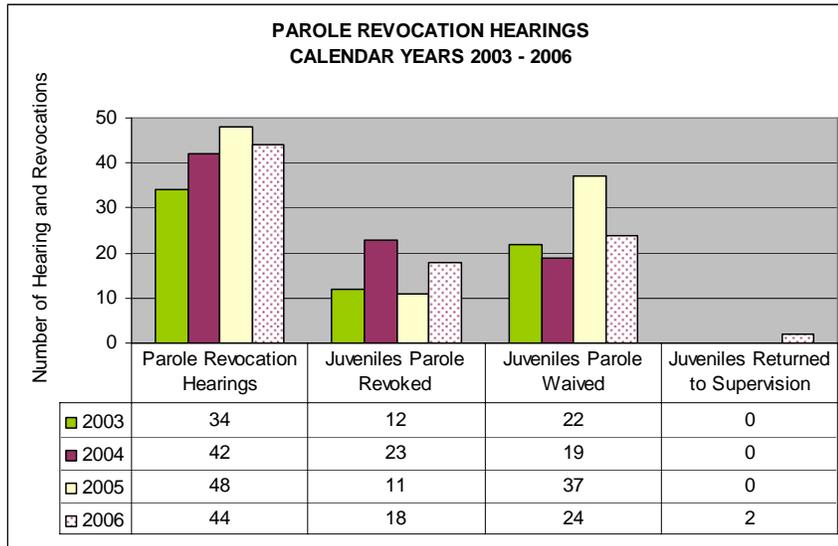
HHS collaborated with State Probation Administration to implement the Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI), a unified assessment tool for juvenile delinquents. Statewide implementation of this tool occurred in March 2006. The YLS/CMI is a dynamic, comprehensive, and research-based risk and needs assessment that can help identify factors that are important for the rehabilitation of a particular juvenile offender (e.g., factors related to physical health, mental health, substance abuse, education, social skills, and other areas of life). It also aids in determining which interventions or programs would be most beneficial for the youth (e.g., social skills training, anger management, remedial education, substance abuse treatment, etc.). In other words, the YLS/CMI provides concise information for the case manager and other staff regarding what issues the youth needs to work on most and drives treatment planning and resource allocation.

Parole Revocation Hearings

Youth who were placed in a YRTC are paroled from the YRTC when they have completed their youth treatment program and are released with "Conditions of Liberty" under the supervision of an HHS-OJS Juvenile Services Officer. Parole may be revoked when a youth has violated their Conditions of Liberty.

The number of parole revocation hearings conducted annually decreased from 48 hearings in 2005 to 44 hearings in 2006. Over the last three years, these numbers have remained somewhat consistent, ranging from 34 hearings to 48 hearings. In

the majority (54.5%) of parole revocation hearings conducted in 2006, juveniles waived their right to a formal hearing. In 40.9% of the cases a formal parole revocation hearing was conducted and juveniles' parole was revoked. In only two cases did juveniles remain on parole and return to supervision.



PRIORITY OUTCOME: PERMANENCY

The Office of Protection and Safety firmly believes that every child has the right to live in a safe, supportive, stable, and permanent home. Preservation of the family and a permanent home are very important to the well-being of a child.

Recognizing this, on June 21, 2006, Governor Dave Heineman directed the HHS System to take specific actions to ensure continued improvements in case management and services provided to children and families. The Governor's initiatives emphasized the need to establish permanency for children involved in the HHS System in a safe and timely manner.

GOVERNOR HEINEMAN'S INITIATIVES:

1. HHS will place a priority on resolving the cases of children between the ages of zero and five. As of May 2006, there were 1,455 such children in Nebraska's custody.
2. HHS will place a priority on achieving permanent placements for children who have spent 15 or more of the last 22 months in state care. As of May 2006, nearly half of the children in Nebraska's child welfare system met or exceeded those parameters.
3. HHS will prioritize the resolution of the approximately 600 cases identified in May 2006, where children were either never removed from home, or have been living safely at home for seven or more months but have not yet been released from state custody by the judicial system.
4. HHS will begin working with Nebraska's K-12 schools to decrease the number of truancy cases referred to the state so front-line workers can focus on protection and safety issues. In 2005, HHS caseworkers handled more than 750 cases involving truancy, curfew violations, ungovernable youth, and runaways.
5. HHS will explore the feasibility of cross-training current workers for a concentrated, coordinated effort to decrease caseloads over a defined period of time.
6. HHS will work to build stronger relationships with other partners in the child welfare system to encourage greater cooperation with Nebraska's courts, county attorneys, and law enforcement agencies.

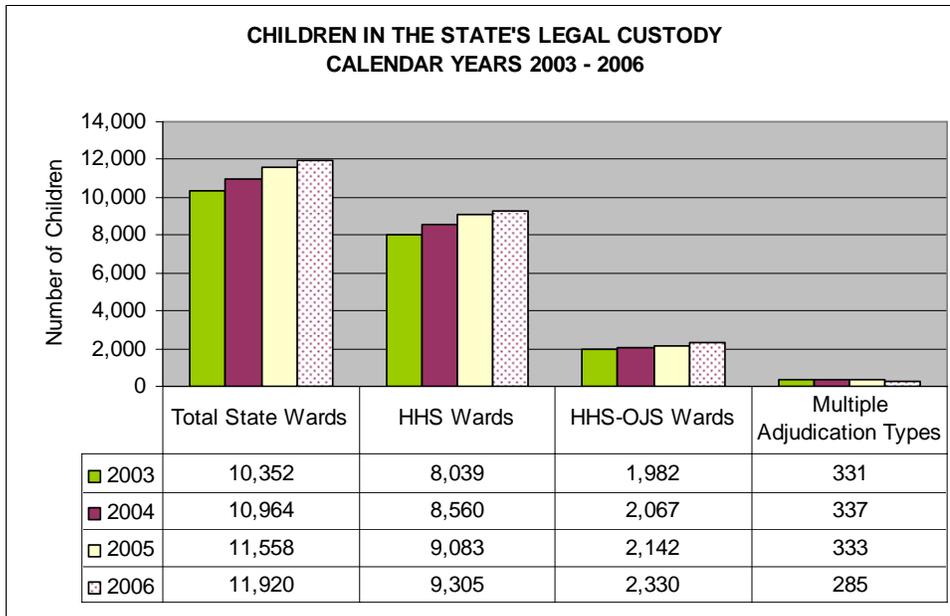
In the latter half of 2006, the Office of Protection and Safety focused many of its efforts on resolving cases involving the priority populations identified in the Governor's initiatives. By the end of 2006, 35.2% of the cases identified by Governor Heineman as high priority have been resolved.

Subsequently, not only has the Office of Protection and Safety made significant strides in resolving a large number of these priority cases, but we have also made some noteworthy improvements in establishing safety and permanency for the overall population we serve. In December 2006, HHS safely resolved more cases than it had received that month for the first time since October 2003.

*...every child has the right to live in a safe, supportive, stable,
and permanent home.*

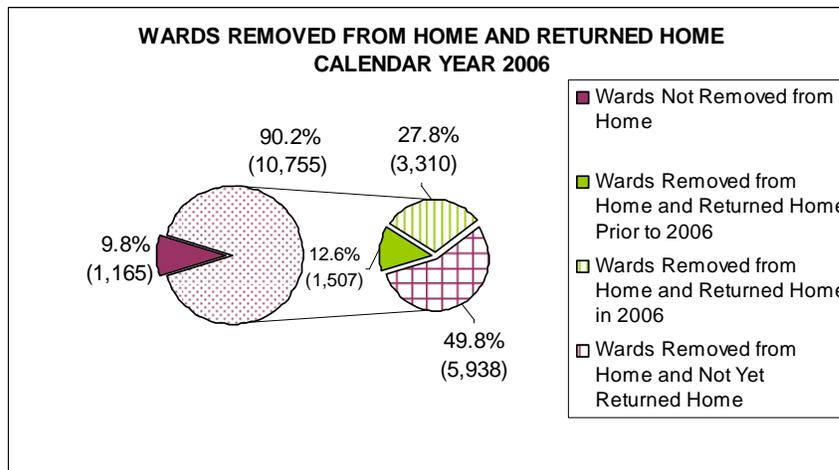
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES AND HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES-OFFICE OF JUVENILE SERVICES STATE WARDS

The Office of Protection and Safety continues to experience an increase in the total number of children and youth committed to its care as state wards in the last three years. During 2006, there were 11,920 children in the state's legal custody, which equates to a 15.2% increase from the 10,352 children in the state's legal custody in 2003. However, whereas the increase in state wards has typically been approximately 5.0% to 6.0% from year to year from 2003 to 2005, the increase in state wards between 2005 and 2006 was only 3.1%. These percents may suggest a promising trend.



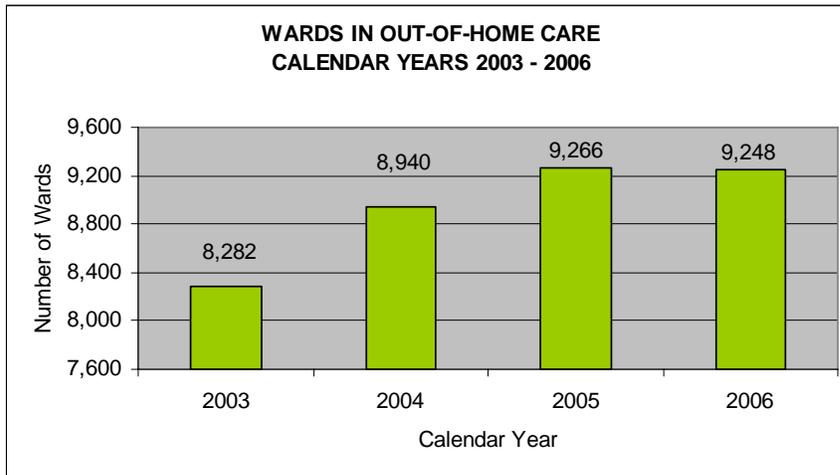
In-Home Care

Maintaining children in the families' home while the children are under state care, whenever possible, is prioritized if the children's safety can be assured. Of the 11,920 children who fell under the state's legal custody, 9.8% (1,165 children) were never removed from their parental home. Of the 90.2% (10,755) wards who were removed from their parental home, 12.6% (1,507) were removed from and returned home prior to 2006 and 27.8% (3,310) were removed from and returned home in 2006. Over half (49.8%) of the overall youth removed from home remained in out-of-home care in 2006.



Out-of-Home Care

When safety cannot be established in the home, out-of-home placement becomes necessary. Out-of-home settings include residential treatment centers, group homes, and foster care. Assessment of a child's individual needs determines the



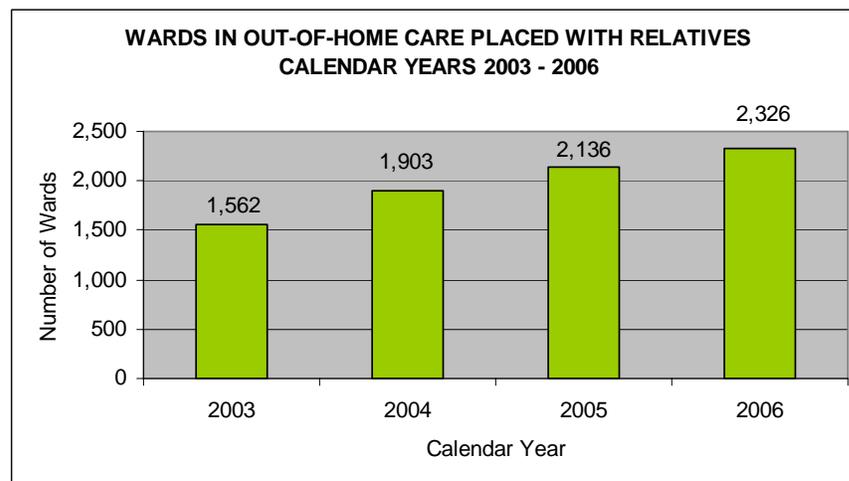
type of placement setting in which they are placed. In 2006, the number of wards placed in out-of-home care was 9,248, which equates to 77.6% of the total population of children in state care.

Youth Placed with Relatives

When children must be removed from the home, placing the child with a relative often helps to decrease the psychological trauma of being removed from his/her home. It provides a child with familiarity, permanency, predictability, a sense of belonging, and roots. Thus, a home of a relative is a preferred placement option when compared to the prospect of being placed with a stranger. Shared history alone helps a child maintain a sense of personal identity and connectedness to the only world he or she has known. Relative placements are also likely to serve as far more permanent placements than their unrelated foster home counterparts.

Nebraska continues to improve in identifying and placing children with their relatives. The number of children placed with relatives has consistently grown over the last three years,

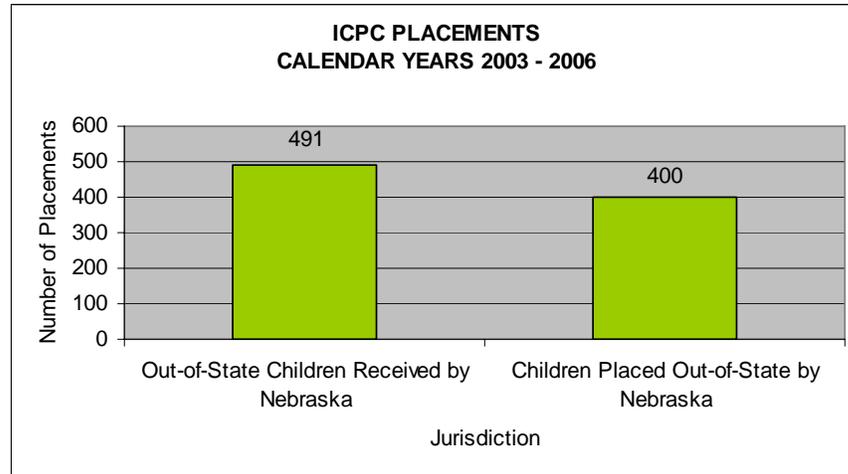
from 1,562 children placed with relatives in 2003 to 2,326 children placed with relatives in 2006. These numbers represent a 48.9% increase in the number of youth placed with relatives over the last three years.



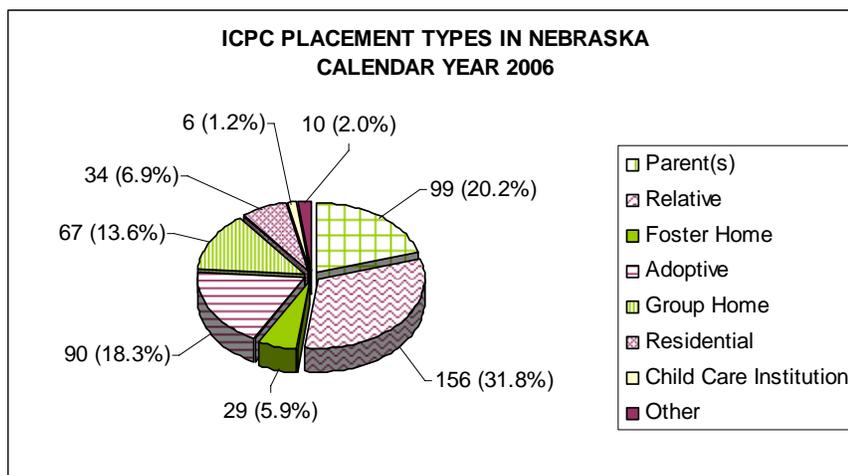
Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children

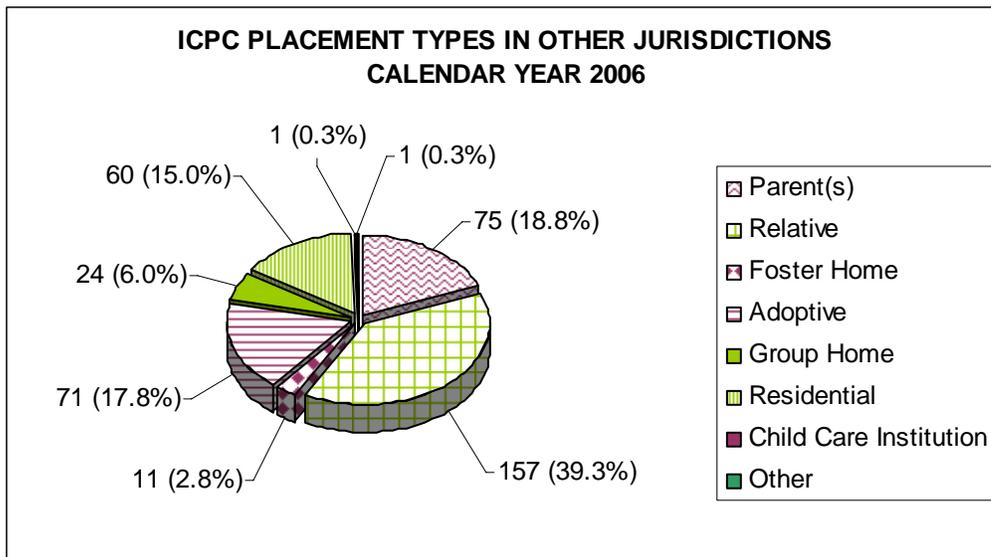
The Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) is a uniform law enacted by all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The ICPC establishes uniform legal and administrative procedures governing the placement of children from one state or jurisdiction into another state or jurisdiction. An ICPC is required for all children placed from one state or jurisdiction into another except when a child is sent out of state by a parent, stepparent, grandparent, adult brother or sister, adult uncle or aunt, or his or her guardian, and placed in the care of a relative or other non-agency guardian in another state. ICPC placements can be made by private citizens, state agencies, courts, tribes, and private agencies. The majority of Nebraska's ICPC children are placed by public agencies.

In 2006, the State of Nebraska placed 400 children in out-of-state placements. Four hundred ninety-one children were placed in Nebraska from out of state through the ICPC.



The majority (73.6%) of the agreements for children, both in and out of Nebraska, were for placements with a parent, relative, or in an adoptive home.





STATE PERMANENCY PERFORMANCE MEASURES

As mentioned above, Nebraska continues to experience a high proportion of youth placed in out-of-home care. In recent years, the Office of Protection and Safety has taken measures to establish and maintain permanency for the children we serve and to ultimately reduce the number of children placed in out-of-home care and the amount of time children remain in out-of-home care. State performance measures related to permanency include frequent contact between caseworkers, children, and families, reunification of children with their parents whenever possible, and adoption of children for whom reunification is no longer an option.

Visitation

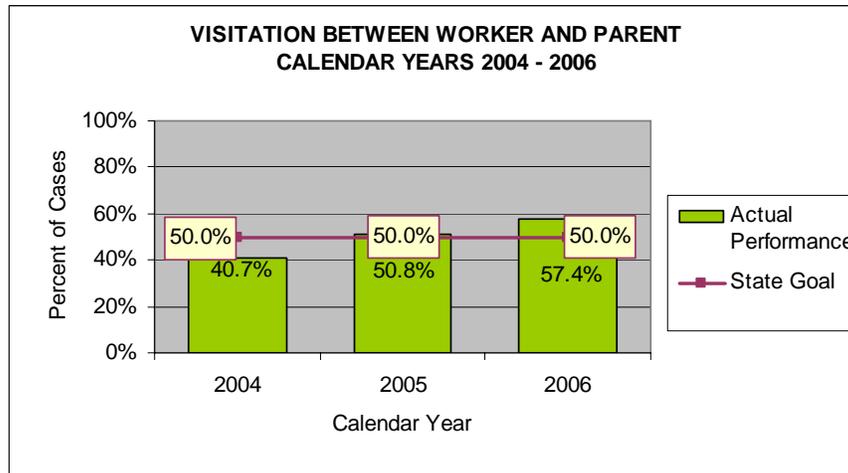
Research on family connections and visitation has shown that frequent, purposeful, and consistent visitation for children in foster care constitutes best practices in child welfare.² According to this research, visitation helps maintain the parent-child connection and preserves the continuity of the relationship. More frequent parent-child visitation is associated with shorter placements in foster care and an increased likelihood that children will be returned to their parents' care. Last, when provided on a regular basis, visitation decreases a child's behavioral problems in foster care.

Caseworker visitation with the child and parent also helps the caseworker assess, plan for, and deliver services. It provides opportunities for the worker to understand the strengths and needs in the parent's ability to care for the child as well as the nature of the bond and relationship between the parent and child. Assessment of parent-child visitation becomes a key component for determining services that can improve, strengthen, and enhance family relationships, and which will lead to a resolution of safety and risk concerns.

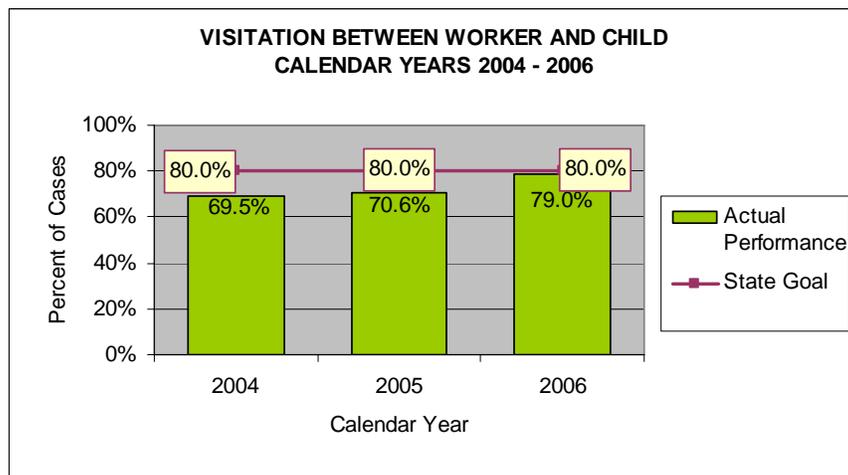
For these very reasons, Protection and Safety workers are expected to visit with the children and parents in their caseloads on a monthly basis at minimum. The Department has set internal goals to assist workers in meeting this expectation over

² Cited in Hess, P. (2003). *Visiting between children in care and their families: A look at current policy*. New York, NY: National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning. Available online at <http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/>. Accessed March 14, 2007.

time. The state goal for worker visitation with children is that visits will be conducted monthly in at least 80.0% of cases. In regard to workers' visits with parents, the goal is that such visits will be conducted monthly in at least 50.0% of the cases. Protection and Safety workers have improved at these measures in the last three years.

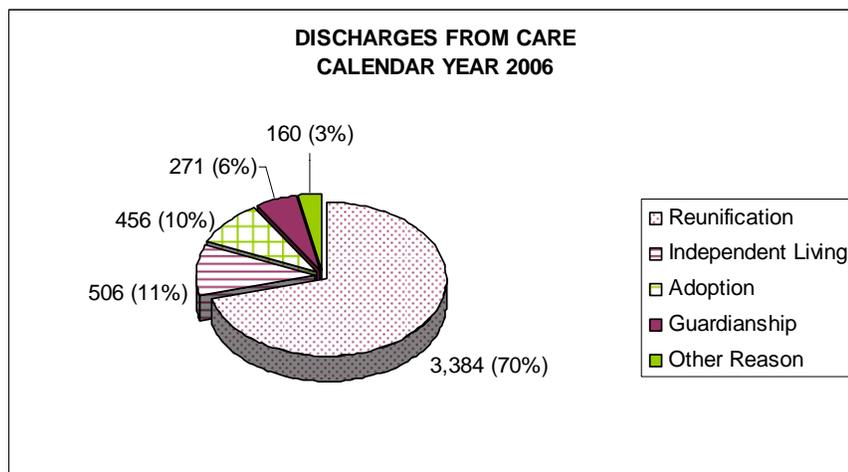


In 2006, workers were at 79.0% of the state goal for child visitation. In regard to visits with parents, workers met the 50.0% goal in 2005 and continued to exceed at this goal reaching 57.4% in 2006.



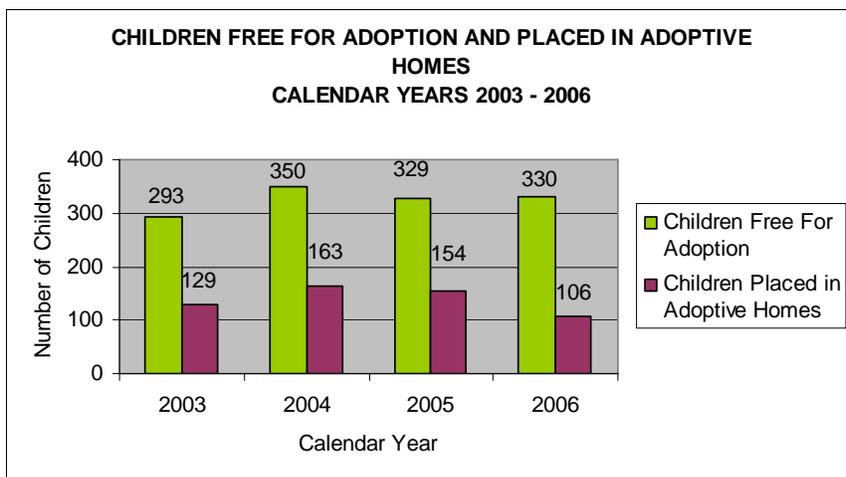
Reunification

Sometimes a child must be removed from their home and placed in out-of-home care. The goal of the Office of Protection and Safety when discharging the child from state care is to return the child safely back into their homes if appropriate. In 2006, 4,777 children safely exited state care. Of these children, the majority (70.9%) were reunified with their family and returned to their home.



Adoption

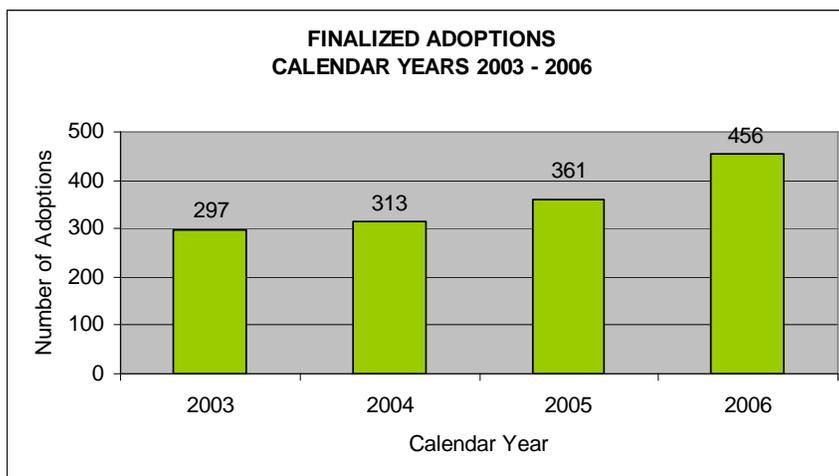
There are times when reunification with the family of origin is simply not in the best interest of a child, despite the best efforts of workers and struggling families. In such cases, adoption is most often the preferred placement option. It is likely to be the most permanent and will serve as the placement alternative that provides children with the greatest sense of belonging. For that reason, Nebraska has had an increased emphasis on adoption in recent years and will continue to strive to increase the number of adoptions finalized in future years.



In 2006, there were 330 children legally free for adoption. This number has remained somewhat constant over the last two years. The number of children legally free for adoption who have been placed in adoptive homes, however, has

decreased from 154 children in 2005 (or 46.8% of the children free for adoption that year) to 106 children in 2006 (or 32.1% of children free for adoption that year).

Nebraska was one of 21 states to receive a federal Adoption Incentive Award of \$50,000 in 2006.



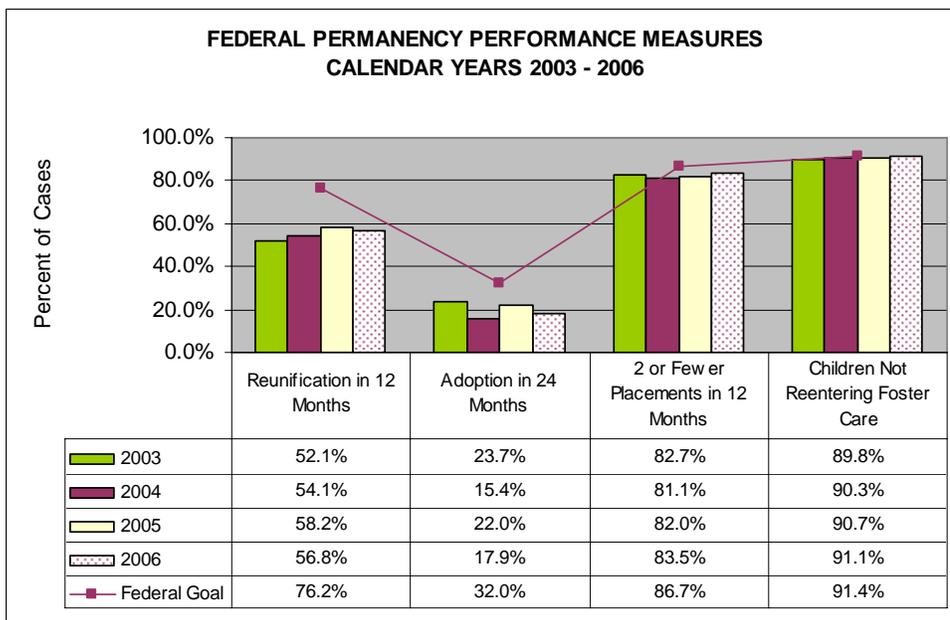
On a positive note, the number of finalized adoptions in 2006 reached 456 adoptions, an all-time high in the last three years. This number equates to a 53.5% increase in finalized adoptions from 2003 to 2006.

As a result of the high adoption rate, Nebraska was one of 21 states to receive a federal Adoption Incentive Award of \$50,000 in 2006.

FEDERAL PERMANENCY PERFORMANCE MEASURES

The Federal Performance Measures also address permanency and stability for children in out-of-home care in a manner similar to the state. Federal measures consider timeliness of reunification, timeliness of adoption, the permanency for children in foster care for long periods of time, and the placement stability for children who safely exit state care.

In recent years, Nebraska has been working toward reaching these federal goals. In Federal Fiscal Year 2006 though, the percent of children who were reunified with their parents within 12 months of entering the system actually decreased for the first time in the last three years by 1.4%. The number of children adopted within 24 months of entering the system also decreased by 4.7%. Nebraska experienced an increase in the percent of children who experienced two or less placements within 12 months (from 82.0% in 2005 to 83.5% in 2006) and the percent of children who have not reentered foster care (90.7% in 2005 to 91.1% in 2006). In fact, Nebraska is only 0.3% shy of meeting the federal performance measure of 91.4% of children not reentering foster care.



PRIORITY OUTCOME: WELL-BEING

One of the priority outcomes of the Office of Protection and Safety is to assist families in enhancing their capacity to provide for children's needs. The Department works to ensure that children in its custody receive the appropriate services to meet their educational, physical, and mental health needs, and does so through a variety of avenues.

INDEPENDENT LIVING

The John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) offers assistance to help current and former foster care youth achieve self-sufficiency. In 2006, the total number of youth served by the Preparation for Adult Living Skills (PALS) Specialists in the CFCIP was 585. Nebraska's Chafee Program also includes six Transitional Living Programs, where 151 youth were served in semi-independent living environments in Scottsbluff, Kearney, Norfolk, North Platte, Omaha, and Lincoln. Each of the programs offers life skills training, housing, educational assistance, vocational training and support, and transportation as needed. All of the contractors are using the Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment, after which an Individualized Transitional Living Plan is developed with each youth.

EDUCATIONAL AND TRAINING VOUCHERS PROGRAM

The Educational and Training Vouchers Program (ETV) provides resources specifically to meet the education and training needs of youth aging out of foster care. During 2006, 134 Nebraska foster and former foster care youth have gone on to post-secondary education using ETV funds.

FORMER WARD PROGRAM

The Former Ward Program (FWP) assists former wards of the state in continuing their education through room and board assistance. The goal is for youth to remain in a foster home while finishing high school. An average of 134 youth received monthly assistance through the FWP in 2006. The total amount of assistance given in 2006 was \$578,845 with an additional \$53,544 in Medicaid coverage for these youth.



One of the priority outcomes of the Office of Protection and Safety is to assist families in enhancing their capacity to provide for children's needs.

SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN ACHIEVING OUTCOMES

In an effort to meet our priority outcomes the Office of Protection and Safety must support the children and families with whom we work in multiple ways.

We must work to ensure that the necessary services and community supports are in place and accessible for families across the state. To do so, we must collaborate with other agencies at the local, state, and national level to identify, establish, or enhance such services. Furthermore, we must secure funding and resources to continue the availability and accessibility of services across the state. These services are not limited to those dealing solely with child abuse or neglect issues, but they may stretch along a range of issues that affect the children and families with whom we work, such as substance abuse and domestic violence.

Additionally, we must monitor our performance in our service provision, and we must work to ensure that we have the necessary resources to provide quality services. By ensuring that quality services are available, accessible, and offered to the children and families we serve, we are able to help families achieve safety, permanency, and well-being for themselves and their children.

FOSTER HOMES AND AGENCIES

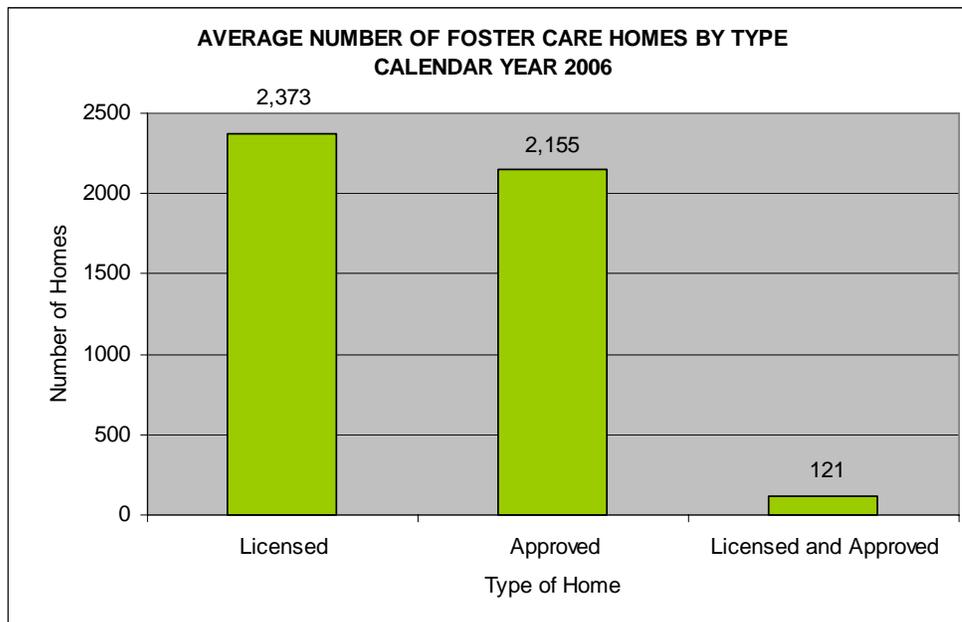
The Office of Protection and Safety is responsible for establishing, maintaining, and enforcing standards for foster homes, child caring agencies, and child placing agencies. Licensing homes and agencies which meet specific criteria is one way to enforce these standards.

For the most part, foster homes are designed to be temporary placements for children when their own families are in crisis and unable to provide for their safety. Some homes may be group homes which operate under the auspices of an organization and provide 24-hour care for twelve or fewer foster children in a residential setting. Adoptive homes that serve as more permanent placements for children also fall under the category of foster homes because they are legally providing foster care services until adoption is finalized. In 2006, there was an average of 4,649 foster care homes. Just over half of these homes (53.6%) were licensed homes.

Aside from licensing foster homes, the Office of Protection and Safety also “approves” homes. Approved homes are designed for the placement of children with a relative or family friend. While these are not necessarily licensed homes, they are “approved” in that they meet specific criteria, including background checks. Of the 4,649 foster care homes in 2006, just under half (48.9%) are approved homes. In fact, a small percent of foster care homes (2.6%) are both licensed and approved foster care homes.

In effort to meet our priority outcomes the Office of Protection and Safety must support the children and families with whom we work in multiple ways.

In 2006, the Office of Protection and Safety also licensed 43 child caring agencies and 30 child placing agencies. Child caring agencies are agencies that provide care for children in buildings maintained by an organization for that purpose. Child placing agencies are agencies authorized to place children in foster family or adoptive homes.



COLLABORATIONS WITH OTHER AGENCIES AND SERVICES

Collaboration with other agencies is a priority of the Office of Protection and Safety as it is necessary to ensuring adequate services are available and accessible to the children and families we serve throughout the state. For that reason, we have collaborated with various agencies that are related to or involved in the prevention, investigation, assessment, and treatment of child abuse and neglect.

Nebraska Alliance for Drug Endangered Children

In 2005, the Attorney General’s Office, State Patrol, County Attorney’s Association, Crime Commission, HHS, and Child Advocacy Centers across the state collaborated to form the Nebraska Alliance for Drug Endangered Children. This group addresses methamphetamine laboratories and other substance abuse to which children could potentially be exposed. One of the first achievements of the Alliance was to develop the Nebraska’s Chem-L Protocol, which defines "best practice" for law enforcement, HHS caseworkers, the medical community, and foster care providers to coordinate efforts on behalf of children who have been exposed to methamphetamine. In 2006, the Alliance sponsored a conference introducing the Chem-L Protocol to the community. Conference topics included general information on methamphetamine use, methamphetamine use in Nebraska, the intersection of methamphetamine use with child abuse and neglect, and responses to cases in which these factors are present. Conference attendees included doctors, health professionals, child advocates, caseworkers, law enforcement, prosecutors, and other professionals.

Committee on the Education of Children and Youth in Out-of-Home Placements

In recent years, HHS has participated in the Nebraska Department of Education's (NDE) Ad Hoc Committee on the Education of Children and Youth in Out-of-Home Placements, along with representatives from public schools, group homes, and detention facilities. The mission of the Committee is to provide guidance and direction to the policymakers and stakeholders of Nebraska in the development and implementation of educational opportunities for children and youth in out-of-home placements. The Committee works to promote effective communication, coordination, and collaboration between the key systems (e.g., child welfare/juvenile justice and education) involved in the education of children and youth in out-of-home placements, and to promote the successful transition of these youth from out-of-home placements into the public school system or other education programs.

In 2004, the Committee took an active role in the development of NDE's standards for interim schools (i.e., schools located in detention facilities and other facilities such as group homes). In 2006, the Committee focused on developing and disseminating resource materials on these standards to schools and other agencies involved in the education of children in out-of-home placements and providing technical assistance to schools on assessing these youth. The Committee also focused on developing and implementing an evaluation process to monitor the impact of these standards, in addition to other standards regarding special education programs, and to monitor schools' compliance with these standards.

In June of 2006, the Committee sponsored an annual conference on partnering for the education of students in out-of-home placements. The event was a day-long workshop and included numerous break-out sessions. Sessions emphasized the need for collaboration between public schools and interim schools and included information on special education programs, conducting student assessments in interim schools, academic advancement plans and curriculum, and other topics relevant to students in out-of-home placement.

Collaborations through the Child Abuse Prevention Treatment Act

The Child Abuse Prevention Treatment Act (CAPTA) provides federal funding to states in support of activities related to the prevention, assessment, investigation, prosecution, and treatment of child abuse. It also provides grants to public agencies and nonprofit organizations for demonstration programs and projects. In 2006, CAPTA funds in Nebraska were used to support a variety of collaborative projects, including:

- *Child Advocacy Centers:* CAPTA funds in the past helped establish Child Advocacy Centers (CACs) in several sites across the state. CACs provide coordinated, multidisciplinary services and support to abused children and their non-offending family members in a safe and child-friendly environment. CAC activities include conducting forensic interviews and exams, and providing children and families with medical and legal advocacy and support, mental health services, and more. CACs also offer services to the general public, including community education and professional training on child abuse. CAPTA funds continue to support the continuation and further development of centers in Lincoln, Omaha, Scottsbluff, Kearney, Grand Island, North Platte, and Norfolk.

- *Prevent Child Abuse Nebraska Annual Conference:* CAPTA funds are used to support the Prevent Child Abuse Nebraska Annual Conference. The conference is open to nurses, educators, Protection and Safety staff, and other service providers who work with children and child abuse and neglect issues. Individuals with expertise in the area of child abuse and neglect or related topics speak at the conference.
- *Child Abuse Activities:* CAPTA funds continue to be used to support Child Abuse Awareness Month activities through the state.
- *Child Abuse Prevention Fund Board:* CAPTA funds paid for a part-time staff person to support the work of the Nebraska Child Abuse Prevention Fund Board. The staff person provides technical assistance to grantees, evaluates programs that received grants through the Board, assists the Board in reviewing proposals for future grants, and assists in preparing the Board's annual report.
- *Technical Assistance, Consultation, and Training for Child Abuse and Neglect Investigation and Treatment Teams:* CAPTA funds continue to support technical assistance, consultation, and training for child abuse and neglect investigation and treatment teams.

Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Programs

Domestic violence and child abuse often occur simultaneously in families.³ For this reason, in some community-based domestic violence programs, service provision to adult victims of domestic violence and victims of child abuse are often coordinated. During State Fiscal Year 2006, HHS administered funding to provide support for domestic violence intervention programming throughout Nebraska. Grantees included 22 community-based domestic violence programs and the Omaha, Winnebago Santee, and Ponca tribes for the combined amount total of \$1,347,300. Collectively, these programs operate a toll-free crisis hotline and 41 shelter sites statewide. Services provided by these sites include temporary housing, emergency transportation, crisis counseling and support, emergency financial assistance, access to medical treatment, and legal advocacy, including assistance with obtaining domestic violence protection orders. These programs also provide child-specific services, including children's groups, one-on-one matches or mentoring, and child advocacy.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

The Office of Protection and Safety is committed to improving the work it does with children and families, and to evaluating the level at which it is currently performing in order to make such improvements. In an effort to ensure adequate practice and policy are being carried out, the Office of Protection and Safety implemented a Quality Assurance System. The quality assurance process includes formal reviews of all of the steps Protection and Safety workers complete when working with children and families, including intakes, initial assessments, out-of-home setting assessments, home studies, and criminal background checks. Ongoing case file reviews are also conducted, and parent satisfaction surveys are collected on a quarterly basis. Additionally, the Department is in the midst of developing a process for the review of group homes and foster care providers. This will ensure children are cared for in the least restrictive environment that meets the needs of the child

³ Straus, M. A., Gelles, R. J., & Smith, C. (1990). *Physical violence in American families: Risk factors and adaptations to violence in 8,145 families*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

and family and in the closest proximity to their homes, and that they receive adequate education on a continuous basis.

The information gleaned from the various reviews and surveys conducted by the Office of Protection and Safety enable us to identify potential trends in the data and to establish any actions necessary to improve our work. For example, data from the parent satisfaction surveys collected over the last two quarters of 2006 suggest that parents' satisfaction with caseworkers' performance is fairly average (3.8 on a scale of 1.0 to 5.0, with 1.0 indicating a lack of satisfaction and 5.0 indicating full satisfaction). The concepts on which parental satisfaction is gauged – such as clear communication, positive value, and established trust between caseworker and parents – could be improved.

In 2005, Nebraska also began conducting a state version of the federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR). We completed our second state review in 2006. Nebraska's version of the review mirrors the federal version. The purpose of the CFSR is to: (1) evaluate the Office of Protection and Safety's conformity with federal child welfare requirements; (2) determine what is actually happening to children and families as they are engaged in services; and (3) enhance the Department's capacity to help children and families achieve positive outcomes. Conducting state CFSRs not only allows us to measure our effectiveness in meeting federal outcomes related to safety, permanency, and well-being on a more frequent basis, but it also prepares us for upcoming federal reviews. The next federal review is scheduled for July 2008.

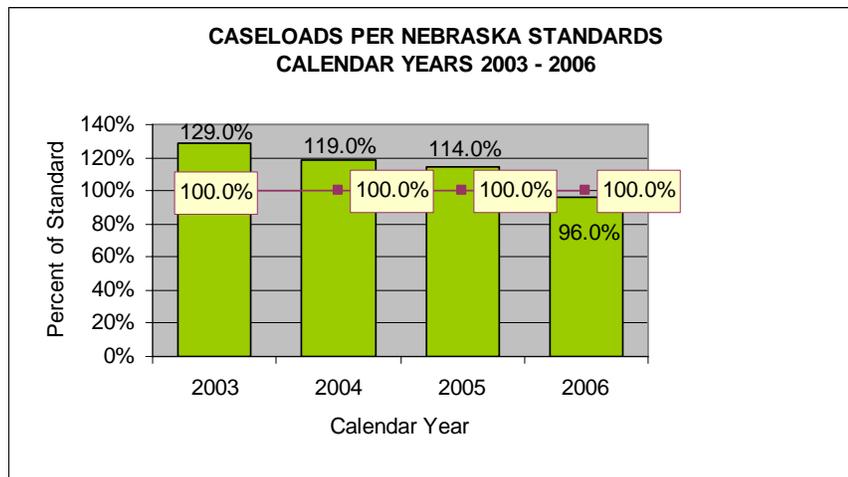
CASELOADS

To be able to provide quality services to the children and families we serve, and to help families achieve safety, permanency, and well-being for themselves and their children, the Office of Protection and Safety must have enough resources to meet the demand. One critical resource to achieve these outcomes is that of human resources – the front line workers and supervisors who carry out the work on a daily basis.

In 1992, in joint effort with the Department of Public Administration at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, the State of Nebraska developed standards for how many children and families can be adequately served by each worker. These standards were shaped by national standards established and later revised by the Child Welfare League of America in 2003. The Office of Protection and Safety monitors its caseloads by comparing them to both state and national standards.



In the last three years, worker caseloads have reduced, despite the ever-increasing number of wards in state care each year. In 2003, worker caseloads were at 129.0% of the Nebraska standard. Currently, the Department is operating at 96.0% of the state established standard. That is, according to the 1992 Nebraska caseload standards, there is sufficient number of staff to provide adequate and quality services to the children and families we serve.



RESOURCES

OFFICE OF PROTECTION AND SAFETY AT A GLANCE

CALENDAR YEAR 2006

CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT REPORTS

Reports Received: **24,173**
 Reports Accepted for Investigation: **12,629**
 Substantiated Reports: **3,065**

WARDS IN STATE CARE

Total Wards in State Care: **11,920**
 Wards in In-Home Care: **2,672**
 Wards Placed with Relatives: **2,326**
 Wards in Other Out-of-Home Care: **6,922**
 Number of Foster Care Homes: **4,649**

DISCHARGES FROM STATE CARE

Reunification: **3,384**
 Independent Living: **506**
 Adoption: **456**
 Guardianship: **271**
 Other Reason: **160**

TYPES OF SUBSTANTIATED ABUSE

Physical Abuse: **670**
 Emotional Abuse: **322**
 Physical Neglect: **4,532**
 Emotional Neglect: **153**
 Medical Neglect of a Handicapped Infant: **2**
 Sexual Abuse: **413**

FEDERAL PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Recurrence of Maltreatment: **9.2%**
 Abuse and Neglect in Care: **0.5%**
 Reunification within 12 Months: **56.8%**
 Adoption within 24 Months: **17.9%**
 2 or Less Placements within 12 Months: **83.5%**
 Children Not Reentering Care: **91.1%**

ADOPTION

Children Free for Adoption: **330**
 Placements in Adoptive Homes: **106**
 Finalized Adoptions: **456**

FEDERAL GRANT AWARDS FFY 2006

Awards	Federal	State	Total
Title IV-B, Subpart 1	\$1,777,131	\$592,377	\$2,369,508
Title IV-B, Subpart 2	\$1,658,873	\$552,958	\$2,211,831
Chafee Foster Care Independence Program	\$1,617,445	\$0	\$1,617,445
Family Violence Prevention	\$925,687	\$0	\$925,687
Chafee Education and Training Voucher	\$552,763	\$0	\$552,763
Adoption Incentive Payment Program	\$50,000	\$0	\$50,000
Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act	\$198,250	\$0	\$198,250
Child Abuse Investigation and Prosecution	\$143,282	\$0	\$143,282
Safe and Stable Caseworker Visitation	\$179,526	\$0	\$179,526
Total	\$7,102,957	\$1,145,335	\$8,068,766

EXPENDITURES SFY 2006

Expenditure	Federal	State	Total
IV-E Foster Care	\$6,363,561	\$4,299,243	\$10,662,803
IV-E Adoption Subsidy	\$7,058,683	\$4,773,941	\$11,832,624
State Subsidized Adoption	\$0	\$5,828,902	\$5,828,902
Domestic Violence Program	\$1,217,696	\$1,302,300	\$2,519,996
Educational Assistance for Wards	\$0	\$16,360,219	\$16,360,219
Child Welfare	\$400,586	\$103,123,907	\$103,524,493
Adoption and Safe Families Act	\$745,532	\$0	\$745,532
Office of Juvenile Services	\$1,130,361	\$20,886,662	\$22,017,023
Medicaid - Child Welfare	\$53,866,659	\$36,407,614	\$90,274,273
Social Services Children and Family	\$0	\$176,488	\$176,488
Total	\$70,783,077	\$193,159,276	\$263,942,353

REFERRALS AND INVESTIGATED REPORTS OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT BY COUNTY

County	Total Calls	Abuse/Neglect Calls ¹	Investigated Reports ²	Substantiated Reports ³	Unfounded Reports ³	Unable to Locate ³	In Process of Investigation ²						
Adams	396	330	83.3%	253	76.7%	30	11.9%	216	85.4%	7	2.8%	12	3.6%
Antelope	28	28	100.0%	23	82.1%	6	26.1%	17	73.9%	0	0.0%	2	7.1%
Blaine	1	1	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	100.0%
Boone	8	8	100.0%	7	87.5%	1	14.3%	6	85.7%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Box Butte	138	132	95.7%	113	85.6%	30	26.5%	81	71.7%	2	1.8%	8	6.1%
Boyd	7	7	100.0%	7	100.0%	3	42.9%	4	57.1%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Brown	40	40	100.0%	35	87.5%	2	5.7%	33	94.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Buffalo	1999	1383	69.2%	439	31.7%	52	11.8%	386	87.9%	1	0.2%	16	1.2%
Burt	37	34	91.9%	28	82.4%	2	7.1%	26	92.9%	0	0.0%	5	14.7%
Butler	84	82	97.6%	72	87.8%	29	40.3%	43	59.7%	0	0.0%	2	2.4%
Cass	152	146	96.1%	134	91.8%	30	22.4%	104	77.6%	0	0.0%	3	2.1%
Cedar	12	12	100.0%	12	100.0%	0	0.0%	12	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Chase	16	16	100.0%	13	81.3%	4	30.8%	9	69.2%	0	0.0%	1	6.3%
Cherry	74	72	97.3%	59	81.9%	6	10.2%	51	86.4%	2	3.4%	0	0.0%
Cheyenne	134	132	98.5%	90	68.2%	13	14.4%	75	83.3%	2	2.2%	26	19.7%
Clay	29	29	100.0%	26	89.7%	3	11.5%	22	84.6%	1	3.8%	0	0.0%
Colfax	24	24	100.0%	21	87.5%	4	19.0%	16	76.2%	1	4.8%	0	0.0%
Cuming	32	32	100.0%	23	71.9%	3	13.0%	20	87.0%	0	0.0%	2	6.3%
Custer	150	131	87.3%	96	73.3%	16	16.7%	79	82.3%	1	1.0%	8	6.1%
Dakota	218	206	94.5%	171	83.0%	37	21.6%	133	77.8%	1	0.6%	13	6.3%
Dawes	119	111	93.3%	97	87.4%	9	9.3%	87	89.7%	1	1.0%	3	2.7%
Dawson	241	237	98.3%	209	88.2%	20	9.6%	182	87.1%	7	3.3%	4	1.7%
Deuel	9	9	100.0%	5	55.6%	0	0.0%	5	100.0%	0	0.0%	4	44.4%
Dixon	19	19	100.0%	16	84.2%	4	25.0%	12	75.0%	0	0.0%	3	15.8%
Dodge	320	307	95.9%	250	81.4%	32	12.8%	215	86.0%	3	1.2%	6	2.0%
Douglas	9917	8229	83.0%	3,274	39.8%	907	27.7%	2265	69.2%	102	3.1%	118	1.4%
Dundy	10	10	100.0%	10	100.0%	1	10.0%	9	90.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Fillmore	34	34	100.0%	30	88.2%	12	40.0%	18	60.0%	0	0.0%	2	5.9%
Franklin	14	14	100.0%	11	78.6%	0	0.0%	11	100.0%	0	0.0%	1	7.1%
Frontier	7	7	100.0%	6	85.7%	0	0.0%	6	100.0%	0	0.0%	1	14.3%
Furnas	41	41	100.0%	39	95.1%	4	10.3%	35	89.7%	0	0.0%	1	2.4%
Gage	147	143	97.3%	133	93.0%	31	23.3%	101	75.9%	1	0.8%	2	1.4%
Garden	5	5	100.0%	5	100.0%	1	20.0%	4	80.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Garfield	8	8	100.0%	7	87.5%	2	28.6%	5	71.4%	0	0.0%	1	12.5%
Gosper	11	11	100.0%	9	81.8%	2	22.2%	7	77.8%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Grant	4	4	100.0%	4	100.0%	0	0.0%	4	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Greeley	10	10	100.0%	8	80.0%	1	12.5%	7	87.5%	0	0.0%	1	10.0%
Hall	706	640	90.7%	471	73.6%	91	19.3%	367	77.9%	13	2.8%	40	6.2%
Hamilton	35	35	100.0%	27	77.1%	3	11.1%	24	88.9%	0	0.0%	6	17.1%
Harlan	17	17	100.0%	16	94.1%	5	31.3%	10	62.5%	1	6.3%	0	0.0%
Hayes	2	2	100.0%	1	50.0%	0	0.0%	1	100.0%	0	0.0%	1	50.0%
Hitchcock	18	18	100.0%	14	77.8%	0	0.0%	14	100.0%	0	0.0%	2	11.1%
Holt	100	100	100.0%	83	83.0%	12	14.5%	71	85.5%	0	0.0%	2	2.0%
Howard	30	30	100.0%	24	80.0%	4	16.7%	18	75.0%	2	8.3%	5	16.7%
Jefferson	60	60	100.0%	51	85.0%	11	21.6%	40	78.4%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%

Notes. 1 denotes percent when compared to "Total Calls." 2 denotes percent when compared to "Abuse/Neglect Calls." 3 denotes percent when compared to "Investigated Reports." "Substantiated Reports" indicates reports in which a finding of Court Substantiated, Court Pending, or Inconclusive was made.

REFERRALS AND INVESTIGATED REPORTS OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT BY COUNTY (CONT.)

County	Total Calls	Abuse/Neglect Calls ¹		Investigated Reports ²		Substantiated Reports ³		Unfounded Reports ³		Unable to Locate ³		In Process of Investigation ²	
Johnson	20	20	100.0%	20	100.0%	5	25.0%	15	75.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Kearney	37	37	100.0%	28	75.7%	1	3.6%	26	92.9%	1	3.6%	6	16.2%
Keith	100	99	99.0%	92	92.9%	7	7.6%	83	90.2%	2	2.2%	2	2.0%
Keya Paha	2	2	100.0%	2	100.0%	1	50.0%	1	50.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Kimball	46	45	97.8%	35	77.8%	2	5.7%	33	94.3%	0	0.0%	5	11.1%
Knox	45	41	91.1%	31	75.6%	2	6.5%	28	90.3%	1	3.2%	4	9.8%
Lancaster	6730	5712	84.9%	2,071	36.3%	972	46.9%	1071	51.7%	28	1.4%	52	0.9%
Lincoln	1604	1504	93.8%	628	41.8%	98	15.6%	526	83.8%	4	0.6%	41	2.7%
Logan	11	11	100.0%	8	72.7%	0	0.0%	8	100.0%	0	0.0%	2	18.2%
Loup	2	2	100.0%	2	100.0%	1	50.0%	1	50.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Madison	1250	895	71.6%	296	33.1%	46	15.5%	246	83.1%	4	1.4%	31	3.5%
McPherson	1	1	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Merrick	25	25	100.0%	21	84.0%	3	14.3%	16	76.2%	2	9.5%	0	0.0%
Morrill	66	65	98.5%	60	92.3%	16	26.7%	44	73.3%	0	0.0%	2	3.1%
Nance	15	15	100.0%	12	80.0%	3	25.0%	6	50.0%	3	25.0%	1	6.7%
Nemaha	40	40	100.0%	37	92.5%	2	5.4%	35	94.6%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Nuckolls	17	17	100.0%	17	100.0%	1	5.9%	15	88.2%	1	5.9%	0	0.0%
Otoe	126	124	98.4%	119	96.0%	11	9.2%	108	90.8%	0	0.0%	1	0.8%
Pawnee	2	2	100.0%	2	100.0%	0	0.0%	2	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Perkins	14	14	100.0%	13	92.9%	0	0.0%	12	92.3%	1	7.7%	1	7.1%
Phelps	52	52	100.0%	50	96.2%	7	14.0%	42	84.0%	1	2.0%	0	0.0%
Pierce	66	59	89.4%	53	89.8%	6	11.3%	47	88.7%	0	0.0%	1	1.7%
Platte	307	286	93.2%	239	83.6%	45	18.8%	183	76.6%	11	4.6%	5	1.7%
Polk	6	6	100.0%	6	100.0%	1	16.7%	5	83.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Red Willow	139	135	97.1%	115	85.2%	10	8.7%	105	91.3%	0	0.0%	7	5.2%
Richardson	56	54	96.4%	51	94.4%	9	17.6%	38	74.5%	4	7.8%	0	0.0%
Rock	4	4	100.0%	3	75.0%	0	0.0%	3	100.0%	0	0.0%	1	25.0%
Saline	67	65	97.0%	62	95.4%	16	25.8%	46	74.2%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Sarpy	705	637	90.4%	536	84.1%	162	30.2%	363	67.7%	11	2.1%	11	1.7%
Saunders	77	77	100.0%	68	88.3%	32	47.1%	36	52.9%	0	0.0%	3	3.9%
Scotts Bluff	727	674	92.7%	546	81.0%	93	17.0%	447	81.9%	6	1.1%	53	7.9%
Seward	74	72	97.3%	68	94.4%	27	39.7%	41	60.3%	0	0.0%	1	1.4%
Sheridan	47	47	100.0%	41	87.2%	3	7.3%	37	90.2%	1	2.4%	1	2.1%
Sherman	18	18	100.0%	16	88.9%	3	18.8%	13	81.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Sioux	1	1	100.0%	1	100.0%	0	0.0%	1	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Stanton	22	22	100.0%	18	81.8%	2	11.1%	16	88.9%	0	0.0%	2	9.1%
Thayer	20	20	100.0%	19	95.0%	4	21.1%	14	73.7%	1	5.3%	0	0.0%
Thomas	5	5	100.0%	5	100.0%	0	0.0%	5	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Thurston	118	95	80.5%	22	23.2%	12	54.5%	10	45.5%	0	0.0%	49	51.6%
Valley	23	23	100.0%	20	87.0%	4	20.0%	16	80.0%	0	0.0%	3	13.0%
Washington	65	65	100.0%	59	90.8%	7	11.9%	52	88.1%	0	0.0%	3	4.6%
Wayne	26	26	100.0%	22	84.6%	2	9.1%	20	90.9%	0	0.0%	2	7.7%
Webster	20	20	100.0%	18	90.0%	2	11.1%	16	88.9%	0	0.0%	1	5.0%
Wheeler	1	1	100.0%	1	100.0%	0	0.0%	1	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
York	96	92	95.8%	79	85.9%	24	30.4%	54	68.4%	1	1.3%	2	2.2%
Total	28,358	24,173	85.2%	12,034	49.8%	3,065	25.5%	8,738	72.6%	231	1.9%	595	2.5%

Notes: 1 denotes percent when compared to "Total Calls." 2 denotes percent when compared to "Abuse/Neglect Calls." 3 denotes percent when compared to "Investigated Reports." "Substantiated Reports" indicates reports in which a finding of Court Substantiated, Court Pending, or Inconclusive was made.

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES AND OFFICE OF JUVENILE SERVICES STATE WARDS BY COUNTY

County	Total State Wards	HHS Wards	HHS-OJS Wards	Multiple Adjudication
Adams	221	150	63	8
Antelope	24	20	2	2
Arthur	1	1	0	0
Boone	8	3	4	1
Box Butte	37	16	16	5
Boyd	10	9	1	0
Brown	4	3	1	0
Buffalo	186	134	43	9
Burt	25	15	10	0
Butler	68	61	6	1
Cass	133	107	23	3
Cedar	20	20	0	0
Chase	15	14	0	1
Cherry	5	5	0	0
Cheyenne	88	74	12	2
Clay	28	22	6	0
Colfax	41	29	11	1
Cuming	19	12	6	1
Custer	64	57	6	1
Dakota	169	77	90	2
Dawes	26	10	11	5
Dawson	204	169	28	7
Deuel	5	1	4	0
Dixon	28	16	11	1
Dodge	300	233	59	8
Douglas	3,937	3,174	701	62
Dundy	5	5	0	0
Fillmore	57	53	2	2
Franklin	17	16	1	0
Frontier	10	6	4	0
Furnas	35	29	3	3
Gage	117	91	23	3
Garden	8	4	4	0
Garfield	8	7	1	0
Gosper	12	8	3	1
Greeley	13	13	0	0
Hall	421	323	91	7
Hamilton	40	26	14	0
Harlan	6	5	1	0
Hayes	1	1	0	0
Hitchcock	12	10	0	2
Holt	36	29	5	2
Hooker	1	1	0	0
Howard	35	26	9	0
Jefferson	63	37	25	1
Johnson	22	18	4	0
Kearney	17	15	2	0
Keith	56	50	5	1
Kimball	34	33	1	0

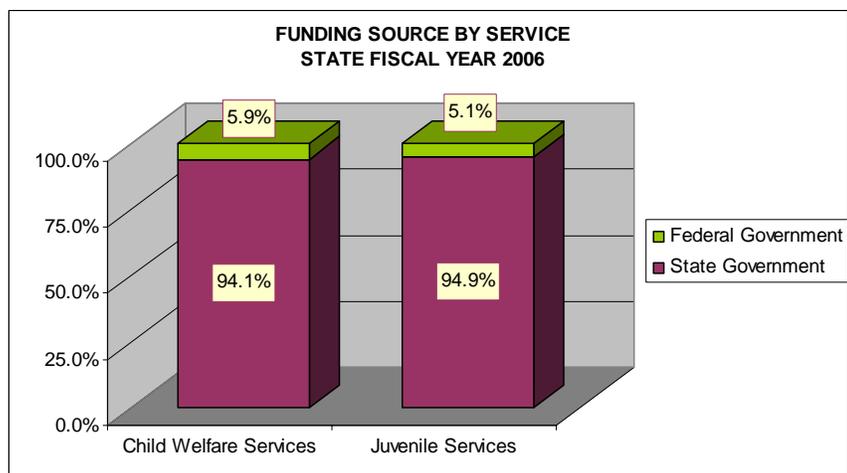
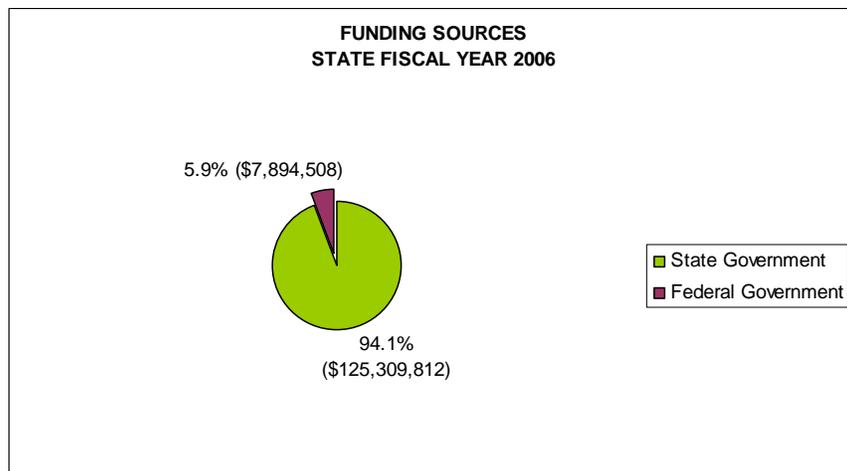
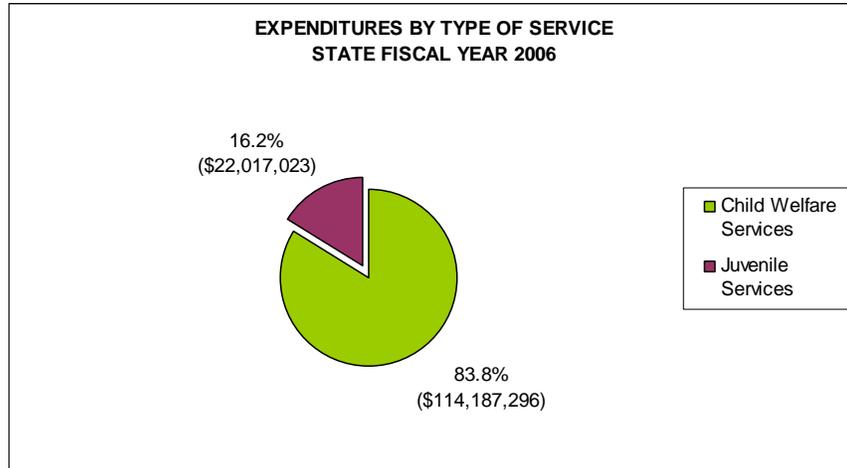
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES AND OFFICE OF JUVENILE SERVICES STATE WARDS BY COUNTY (CONT.)

County	Total State Wards	HHS Wards	HHS-OJS Wards	Multiple Adjudication
Knox	7	4	0	3
Lancaster	2,228	1,694	505	29
Lincoln	434	376	47	11
Logan	1	1	0	0
Madison	257	168	78	11
Merrick	39	30	6	3
Morrill	28	23	5	0
Nance	13	10	3	0
Nemaha	24	19	5	0
Nuckolls	9	8	1	0
Otoe	58	41	16	1
Out of State	6	1	2	3
Pawnee	3	2	1	0
Perkins	2	2	0	0
Phelps	69	47	21	1
Pierce	33	29	4	0
Platte	139	100	37	2
Polk	15	9	6	0
Red Willow	78	60	14	4
Richardson	41	34	6	1
Rock	2	2	0	0
Saline	100	73	25	2
Sarpy	654	584	52	18
Saunders	83	62	21	0
Scotts Bluff	385	313	66	6
Seward	95	82	12	1
Sheridan	27	14	12	1
Sherman	11	9	2	0
Stanton	19	13	6	0
Thayer	14	6	8	0
Thomas	4	4	0	0
Thurston	137	84	8	45
Valley	19	17	2	0
Washington	65	46	19	0
Wayne	9	5	4	0
Webster	13	13	0	0
York	107	82	24	1
Total	11,920	9,305	2,330	285

OFFICE OF PROTECTION AND SAFETY BUDGET

The Office of Protection and Safety's budget is calculated using the State Fiscal Year Calendar. The budget includes expenditures for both child welfare services and juvenile services, with the majority of expenditures (82.5%) being associated with child welfare services.

A large percentage (89.0%) of the services provided by the Office of Protection and Safety are state funded, although the Department does receive some federal dollars. A larger percentage of juvenile services (5.1%) are funded with federal dollars than that of child welfare services (0.4%), although both are still relatively small amounts in comparison to state dollars.



Note. Child Welfare services include SP 30 IV-E Foster Care and SP 48 Child Welfare.

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN 2006

The Office of Protection and Safety has accomplished some noteworthy achievements in 2006.

Child Abuse Prevention Plan

In August of 2006, HHS's Office of Protection and Safety, in collaboration with the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation's Prevent Child Abuse Nebraska and the Nebraska Child Abuse Prevention Fund Board, presented a statewide child abuse prevention plan. This plan purpose of this plan is to:

- serve as a snapshot of the problem of child abuse and neglect in Nebraska;
- identify evidence-based and promising practices in the prevention of child abuse and neglect;
- include different levels of intervention focused on primary and secondary prevention;
- assist communities in the planning and implementation of programs aimed at preventing child abuse and neglect;
- assist funders in making decisions about investing their resources; and
- serve as a call to action for all citizens, organizations, and groups interested in the safety and well-being of Nebraska's children.

Nebraska Children's Summit: Improving the Court System for Abuse/Neglect and Foster Care Children

In September 2006, interdisciplinary teams from across the state gathered to learn about the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges' best practice model on the judicial response to child abuse and neglect. These regional teams were led by judges and comprised of county attorneys, guardians ad litem, child advocates, HHS representatives, and members of Nebraska's Foster Care Review Board. After participating in this conference, each team will continue their efforts in improving the court system for abused, neglected, and foster care children in their region by assessing their current practice, identifying areas of needed improvement, and implementing best practice.

Home Visitation Program

The Office of Protection and Safety received funding to establish a Home Visitation Program. The Home Visitation Program is an early intervention program for families that have been identified as being at high risk for abuse and neglect. In the program parents and children are visited in their home by trained personnel who provide a combination of information, support, or training regarding child health, development, and care. Two pilot sites for the program were selected – one in Scottsbluff and the other in Omaha.

Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory

HHS collaborated with the State Probation Administration to implement the Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI), a unified assessment tool for juvenile delinquents. Statewide implementation of this tool occurred in March 2006. The YLS/CMI is a dynamic, comprehensive, and research-based risk and needs assessment that can provide case managers and other Protection and Safety staff with information about the critical issues the youth with whom they work need to address, and the necessary treatment and resources to allow the youth to do so.

Automated Card Access and Security Camera Systems

The growing installation of automated card access and security camera systems in youth facilities across the country has led HHS-OJS to examine the potential use of these types of systems in our own YRTCs. A committee was established to assess the feasibility of installing these systems in our facilities and, based upon its findings, funding was approved for the installation of these systems at the YRTC-K. Although the updated system is being implemented in stages, it has already proven to be of assistance in managing the youth residing at the facility.

Indian Child Welfare Act Specialist

HHS recently hired an Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) Specialist to provide consultation to Protection and Safety staff as well as tribal members in situations involving Indian children and families. This position is a welcome addition to the Office of Protection and Safety and will support Nebraska's compliance with the Federal and State Indian Child Welfare Acts.

Placing Children in Out-of-Home Care with Relatives

Although the increase in placing children in out-of-home care with relatives was addressed earlier in this report, it is a noteworthy enough accomplishment to list here as well. In 2006, there were 2,326 children placed with relatives. This is a 48.9% increase in the number of youth placed with relatives in the last three years.

Governor Heineman's Initiatives

The Office of Protection and Safety is also pleased with its progress on the Governor's initiatives. Since these initiatives were established, we have resolved 35.2% of the high priority cases identified by the initiatives.

ANTICIPATED FOCUS FOR 2007

The Office of Protection and Safety is committed to enhancing and improving the services we provide to children and families. Thus, we have developed some new and exciting plans for 2007 to assist us in meeting this goal.

Nebraska Safety Intervention System

Nebraska has been working with the National Resource Center for Child Protective Services (the Resource Center) to improve our response to child abuse and neglect. The Resource Center is funded by the Children's Bureau within the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. With the assistance of the Resource Center, the Office of Protection and Safety will be implementing an improved safety intervention system known as the Nebraska Safety Intervention System. Implementation will be phased in across the state in 2007.

The Nebraska Safety Intervention System increases focus on the safety of all children in the home using a structured, in-depth information gathering and decision-making process. Although determining whether a specific incident of child maltreatment occurred is important in assessing the overall safety of the child, this determination will be only one part of the assessment process. Protection and

Safety workers will also gather information about child functioning, discipline, general parenting practices, and adult functioning. The assessment process will be used throughout families' involvement with HHS at important decision points. Safety of the children throughout the life of the case is an important emphasis. Another important component of the new process is increased involvement of the supervisor in providing oversight and direction of the work.

Families who may have service needs, but whose children are safe, will be encouraged to develop informal supports or be referred to community resources. Families whose children are determined to be unsafe will be offered ongoing services designed to decrease identified safety threats and enhance parental protective capacities. In keeping with the Department philosophy of least intrusive and least restrictive intervention whenever possible, an increased emphasis will be on in-home services whenever those services can be provided safely. Additionally, informal supports and services will be based on behavioral, change-based interventions, rather than compliance-based case planning.

The Office of Protection and Safety is excited about this improved safety intervention system. We believe it is a promising approach to improving safety for the children and families we serve.

In-Home Services

Another focus in 2007 for the Office of Protection and Safety will be strengthening the provision of in-home services. As stated in the Department's priority safety outcome, children are first and foremost protected from abuse and neglect, and children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate. However, we know that there can sometimes be multiple barriers to keeping children safe in their homes, including the behavioral health needs of the parents, parental substance abuse, and other related issues. Data indicate that in 2006 a large percent of children (44.3%) were removed from their home due to neglect. Additionally, a significant percent (23.3%) of children were removed due to parental abuse of substances.

A systematic change in the assessment of families will be implemented during 2007. A partnership is being forged in the HHS System between the Offices of Protection and Safety and Behavioral Health, and Medicaid, to ensure that a comprehensive assessment of the family occurs each time a child is deemed to be in a situation that is unsafe. Each division will be assuring that providers who conduct evaluations and provide services to families identified in which a child has been determined to be



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unsafe will be using evidence-based practice interventions whenever possible to address safety concerns, ensure children are safe in the family home, and facilitate the provision of in-home services.

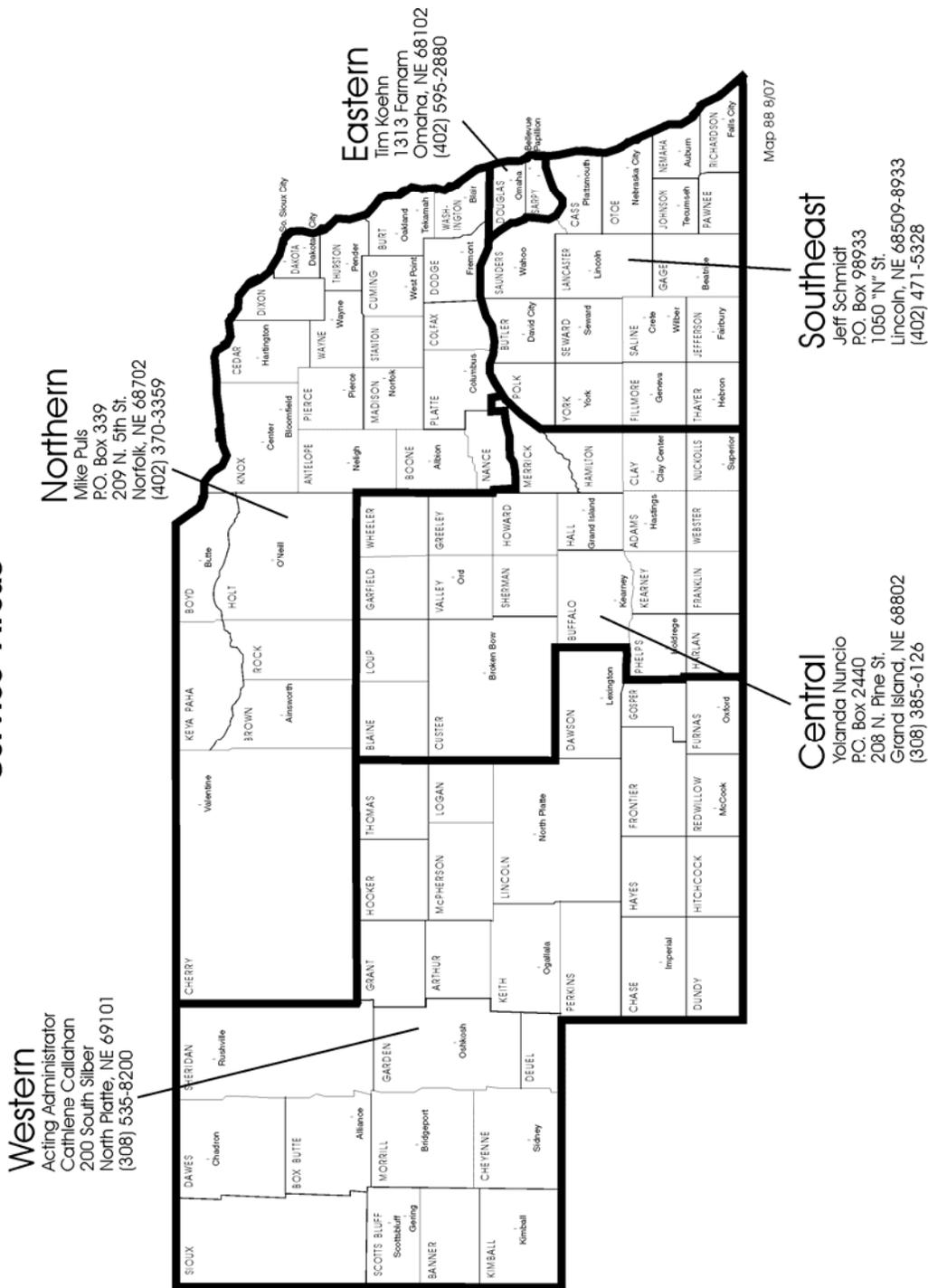
In addition, the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, University of Nebraska at Omaha, and the University of Nebraska Medical Center Munroe-Meyer Institute for Genetics and Rehabilitation will be providing technical assistance, training, research, and data collection to measure the effectiveness of this change in the system through the Children's Mental Health and Substance Abuse Statewide Infrastructure Grant.

HHS System Reorganization

Nebraska's HHS System has also developed some new and exciting plans to enhance and improve the services it provides, and to ultimately help people build better lives. In 2007, the three agencies that currently fall under the HHS System – Services, Finance, and Support; Regulation and Licensure; and Health and Human Services – will merge into one Department of Health and Human Services. This change will create a more accessible, effective, and efficient department with improved accountability. Under this new structure, we will continue to prioritize the outcomes of safety, permanency, and well-being for the children and families we serve.

NEBRASKA HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICE SYSTEM SERVICE AREAS

Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services Service Areas



CREDITS FOR THIS REPORT

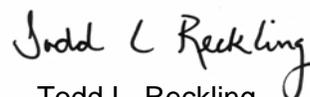
Todd Reckling, *Administrator, Office of Protection and Safety*
Sherri Haber, *Deputy Administrator of Operations, Office of Protection and Safety*
Chris Hanus, *Deputy Administrator of Programs, Office of Protection and Safety*
Lori Harder, *Protection and Safety Administrator, Office of Protection and Safety*
Frank Fornataro, *Business Analyst, Office of Protection and Safety*
Lori Koenig, *Business Analyst, Office of Protection and Safety*
Suzanne Schied, *Program Coordinator, Office of Protection and Safety*
Rachel West, *Program Specialist, Office of Protection and Safety*
Allison Wilson, *Program Coordinator, Office of Protection and Safety*
Michelle Eby, *Integrated Care Coordination Unit Administrator*
Jeanne Atkinson, *Public Information Officer, Communications and Legislative Services Division*
Marla Augustine, *Public Information Officer, Communications and Legislative Services Division*
Maisun Allahiq, *Graphics Artist, Support Services Division, Finance and Support*
Judy Barker, *Graphics Artist, Support Services Division, Finance and Support*

Thank You from the Administration of the Office of Protection and Safety

This second annual report reflects some of the emerging trends regarding the permanency, safety, and well-being of Nebraska's children and families, such as the decreasing number of children who are state wards.

We know that progress is being made in many areas, and we also understand that more improvements are called for and will be accomplished.

It's possible to achieve better outcomes for families because our partners – the advocates, individuals, and organizations we work with every day – are as committed as we are to keeping children safe. I would like to personally thank everyone who has collaborated with us on the issues that affect Nebraska's children and families.


Todd L. Reckling
Administrator