



Services for Parents to Reunify Families

Proposed Final Report

Joint Legislative Audit & Review Committee

January 9, 2008

Cynthia L. Forland



Presentation Overview

- Background
- Study Mandate and Approach
- What We Learned
- Statutory Compliance Issues

Parents Might Need Services to be Reunited with Their Children



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- Under state law, children may be placed in foster care if they have been: abandoned, abused, neglected, or have no one to care for them.
- Parents must be working to correct their deficiencies early on, since the state must take action to terminate parental rights once a child has been in the state's care for 15 months.

Study Mandated by SHB 1333 of 2007



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- JLARC to “analyze gaps throughout the state in the availability and accessibility of services identified in the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act.”
- Study focused on services to parents that enable the state to return their children.
- Federal and state law requires the state to make “reasonable efforts” to reunify families, but that term is not defined.

What Do Availability and Accessibility Mean?



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- **Availability**—Do appropriate service providers: Exist? Accept parents of foster children as clients? Have the capacity to serve the parents needing their specific services?
- **Accessibility**—Are parents of foster children able to: Get to the specific services? Participate in those services? Complete those services?

JLARC Conducted Three Surveys

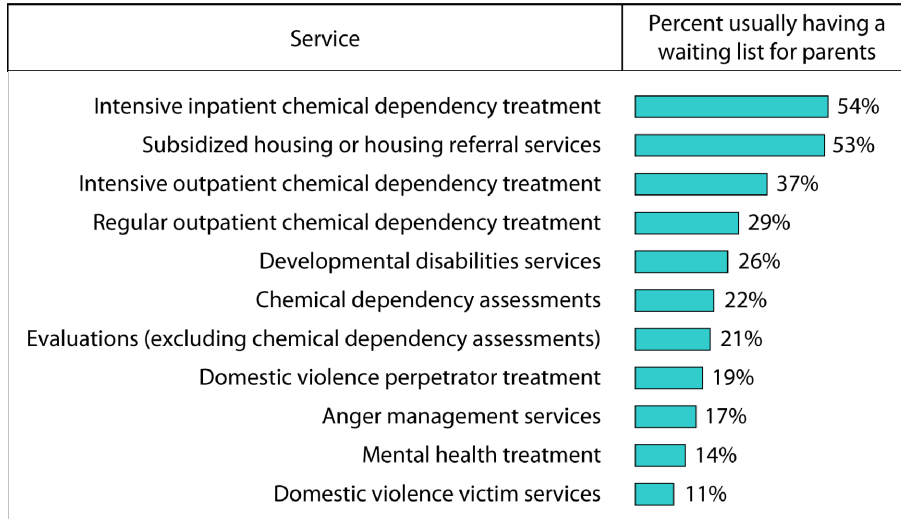


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- Survey of **parents** with children who were in foster care
- Survey of **service providers** who work with parents with children in foster care
- Survey of **DSHS social workers** who work with families with children in foster care

Service Provider Respondents Commonly Report Waiting Lists for Parents



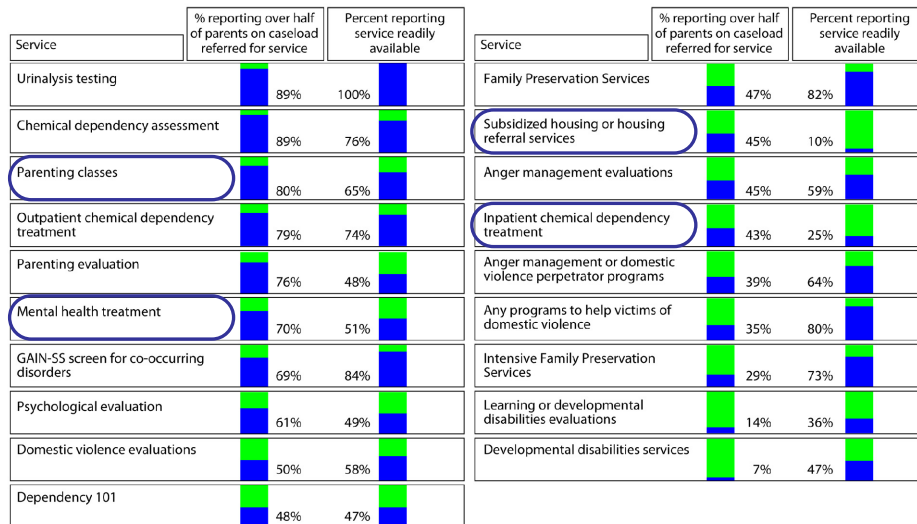
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Social Worker Respondents Report Variations Between Referrals and Service Availability



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For Most Services, 80% or More of Parent Respondents Report Being Able to Participate



	Percent able to participate	Of those able to participate, percent completing service
GAIN-SS screen for co-occurring disorders	100%	100%
Intensive Family Preservation Services	100%	88%
Domestic violence perpetrator treatment	100%	67%
Outpatient substance abuse treatment	97%	78%
Urinalysis testing	96%	95%
Dependency 101	96%	95%
Mental health treatment	96%	67%
Family Preservation Services	96%	83%
Alcohol or drug evaluation	92%	96%
Learning or developmental disabilities evaluation	91%	100%
Parenting classes	91%	87%
Domestic violence victim services	91%	80%
Anger management evaluation	90%	97%
Psychological evaluation	86%	100%
Parenting evaluation	86%	93%
Domestic violence evaluation	83%	93%
Inpatient substance abuse treatment	82%	87%
Anger management services	70%	79%
Developmental disability services	50%	100%

Less than 80% able to participate

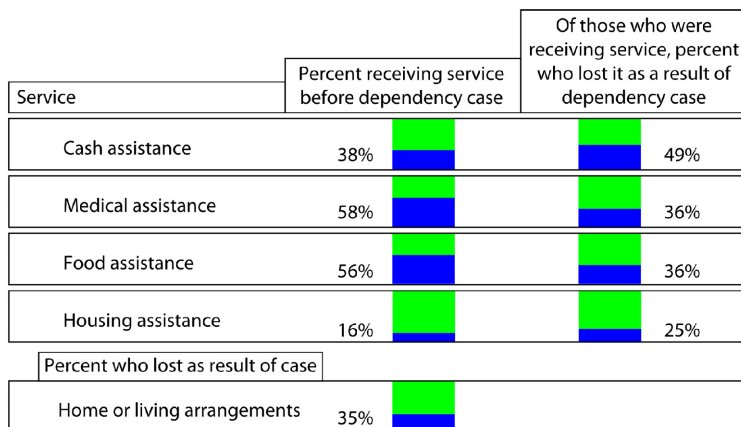
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Some Parents Report Losing Other Supports as Result of Case



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Outside Reviews: Positive Results and In-Progress



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- Federal government has found state in compliance with requirements for services for children and families.
- Independent accreditation review is still in progress, but has raised concerns about compliance with some standards for parent services in certain areas of state.

DSHS Newly Required (2007) to Notify Court if Parent Unable to Access Services



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Recommendation #1: DSHS should develop plan for reporting on its compliance with new requirement to notify court.

- Plan should include reporting on the number of instances when parents cannot access services, and the reasons why.

DSHS, AOC, OFM concur.

State Law Restricts Reasons Why Visitation May be Limited



STATUTORY
COMPLIANCE

- By state law, parent-child visits may not be limited as a sanction for a parent's failure to comply with court orders or services.
- Statewide, 33% of social worker respondents reported visits are always, often, or sometimes restricted or canceled *because* the parent is out of compliance with the service plan.

Limits on Parent-Child Visits May be Occurring in Conflict with State Law



STATUTORY
COMPLIANCE

Recommendation #2: DSHS and AOC must ensure that agency and court staff are adequately informed of the statutory restriction on limiting visitation as a sanction for parent's failure to comply with court orders or services.

DSHS, AOC, OFM concur.

Contact Information



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