

Out-of-Home Services

Survey Report

2009

Department of Health and Social Services

Office of Children's Services

Introduction

The Department of Health and Social Services, Office of Children's Services, maintains a system of support for families when there are concerns for the safety of the children. The agency engages in a family assessment when there are concerns for neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional injury to children. Services are provided to enable children to remain in their homes when safety can be assured with a safety plan in place and a program of out-of-home care is provided when children cannot safely be maintained in their homes.

When children cannot safely remain in their own homes, the agency seeks relative placement whenever possible. Parents are encouraged to work with the agency in achieving their case goals in a timely manner. When children are unable to be reunited with their parents, the Office of Children's Services works toward a permanency goal such as guardianship, adoption, or other planned living arrangements for the child.

The Office of Children's Services strives to provide quality services to parents and children. To ensure ongoing services are of good quality, the agency seeks information from families who have received services. To gain this information, a survey is conducted annually of parents throughout the state whose children have been in out-of-home care. The survey seeks parents' opinions about the quality of services they have received and the assistance they received from their caseworker while their children were placed outside their home.

Survey Methods

The survey was conducted by telephone. Parents were selected randomly from a list of families with open cases in which children had been placed in out-of-home care. Some of the parents who were contacted had children who were out-of-home at the time of the survey, while some parents' children had recently been reunified with them. Survey participants whose children were returned home were asked to respond to the survey questions regarding the experiences they had during the time their children were in out-of-home care.

A survey instrument was developed to guide the conversation and record parents' responses. To protect the families' privacy and confidentiality, messages were not left for parents. Up to four attempts were made to reach each parent. Participation in the survey was voluntary. Parents were assured that the information gathered would only be used in combination with responses from other participants and that no individual would be identified in any use of the information.

Survey Respondents

There were 102 parents who completed the telephone survey. Table 1 presents the number of parents who participated in the survey by role and region.

Table 1

Survey Respondents' Role by Region, Number, and Percent						
Region	Mother	Percent	Father	Percent	Both	Percent
Northern	16	73%	5	23%	1	4%
Southcentral	23	82%	5	18%	0	0%
Anchorage	29	67%	14	33%	0	0%
Southeast	5	56%	4	44%	0	0%
Total	73	72%	28	27%	1	1%

Findings

The responses of the interviews with parents were documented during the interview process. The information was then placed into a database and compiled so that no individual respondent could be identified.

There was opportunity at the end of the conversation with parents allowing for any additional comments parents wished to make. The comments received by parents were compiled, analyzed, and sorted for presentation. The comments received from parents are presented in narrative form at the end of this report.

- **Which description best describes where you reside?**

Respondents were asked to choose from the following descriptions: remote community or village that is off the road system; rural or small town; and city or large metropolitan area. Fairbanks, Anchorage, and Juneau were considered to be city or metropolitan areas. Table 2 presents the areas where respondents resided.

Table 2

Survey Respondents' Geographic Residence by Region, Number, and Percent								
Region	Remote Community or Village	Per- cent	Rural Area or Small Town	Per- cent	City or Metro Area	Per- cent	Out- of- State	Per- cent
Northern	4	18%	2	9%	16	73%	0	0%
Southcentral	8	28%	12	43%	8	29%	0	0%
Anchorage	0	0%	0	0%	43	100%	0	0%
Southeast	0	0%	3	33%	5	56%	1	11%
Total	12	12%	17	17%	72	70%	1	1%

- **Are one or more of your children in out-of-home placement?**

In some cases one or more children will be in out-of-home placement, while other children can be maintained in the home. The children's placement status was determined by asking participants if they had one or more of their children in out-of-home placement. Table 3 presents the responses to the children's placement status.

Table 3

Children's Placement Status by Region, Number, and Percent						
Region	All Out- of-Home	Percent	All In- Home	Percent	Out-Of- Home and In-Home	Percent
Northern	12	55%	6	27%	4	18%
Southcentral	16	57%	10	36%	2	7%
Anchorage	24	56%	9	21%	10	23%
Southeast	6	67%	1	11%	2	22%
Total	58	57%	26	25%	18	18%

- **How long have your children been in out-of-home care?**

The agency strives to reunite children as soon as progress on the case plan indicates the children can safely be returned home. Respondents were asked the length of time their children had been in out-of-home care. Table 4 presents the responses.

Table 4

Length of Time Child in Out-of-Home Care by Region, Number, and Percent						
Region	Less Than One Year	Percent	One-Two Years	Percent	More than Two Years	Percent
Northern	11	50%	7	32%	4	18%
Southcentral	14	50%	9	32%	5	18%
Anchorage	16	37%	15	35%	12	28%
Southeast	4	44%	1	11%	4	45%
Total	45	44%	32	31%	25	25%

- **Where are the children placed?**

When children have to be placed outside of their home, the agency seeks relatives, foster homes, and other appropriate temporary placements. Relatives who are able to provide care for a child are asked to become involved. When relatives are not able to care for a child, the agency seeks a foster home in the child's community. Respondents were asked to indicate the type and location of their child's placement. Tables 5 and 6 present the responses to child placement questions

Table 5

Children's Type of Placement Setting by Region, Number, and Percent						
Region	Foster Care	Percent	Relative Care	Percent	Other Care	Percent
Northern	14	64%	6	27%	2	9%
Southcentral	13	46%	15	54%	0	0%
Anchorage	27	63%	14	32%	2	5%
Southeast	5	56%	2	22%	2	22%
Total	59	58%	37	36%	6	6%

- **Where are the children placed (location)?**

Table 6

Location of Children's Placement by Region, Number, and Percent						
Region	Parent's Community	Percent	Another Region in State	Percent	Another State	Percent
Northern	17	77%	4	18%	1	5%
Southcentral	13	46%	14	50%	1	4%
Anchorage	41	95%	2	5%	0	0%
Southeast	3	33%	5	56%	1	11%
Total	74	72%	25	25%	3	3%

- **Were you asked about relatives that your children could be placed with?**

Parents are asked to provide names of family members who may be able to provide care during the time children must be out of their homes. When children can be placed immediately with relatives, it provides a familiar setting for the child when removal from their homes is necessary. Table 7 presents the responses of parents regarding involvement in the search for a relative placement.

Table 7

Parents Asked About Relative Placement by Region, Number, and Percent				
Region	Yes-Was Asked	Percent	No-Was Not Asked	Percent
Northern	18	82%	4	18%
Southcentral	26	93%	2	7%
Anchorage	38	88%	5	12%
Southeast	7	78%	2	22%
Total	89	87%	13	13%

- **Have your children been in more than one placement since they were removed from your home?**

Children benefit from a stable placement when they are not able to be in their own homes. The initial foster home is intended to be stable until the agency achieves the child’s permanency goal. There are times when children will experience placement disruption. Table 8 presents the parents’ responses to stability of their children’s placements.

Table 8

Children with Multiple Placements By Region, Number and Percent				
Region	Yes	Percent	No	Percent
Northern	12	55%	10	45%
Southcentral	22	79%	6	21%
Anchorage	31	72%	12	28%
Southeast	5	56%	4	44%
Total	70	69%	32	31%

- **If your child had multiple placements, how many placements have they experienced since leaving your home?**

Stability of placement is important to enable a child to remain in the same familiar surroundings, continue in their same school, and after school programs. Respondents were asked how many placements their child experienced prior to returning to their care. Table 9 presents the parents’ responses to number of placements their children experienced.

Table 9

Placements Child Experienced by Region, Number, and Percent						
Region	One-Two	Percent	Three-Five	Percent	6 or More	Percent
Northern	6	50%	5	42%	1	8%
Southcentral	9	41%	11	50%	2	9%
Anchorage	12	39%	12	39%	7	22%
Southeast	1	20%	3	60%	1	20%
Total	28	40%	31	44%	11	16%

- **What type of visitation schedule do you have?**

While children are in out-of-home care, a regular schedule of visitation is arranged which supports the parent-child relationship while maintaining safety for the child. Visits may be supervised or unsupervised depending on the status of the family case. Table 10 presents the responses from parents for types of visitation schedules.

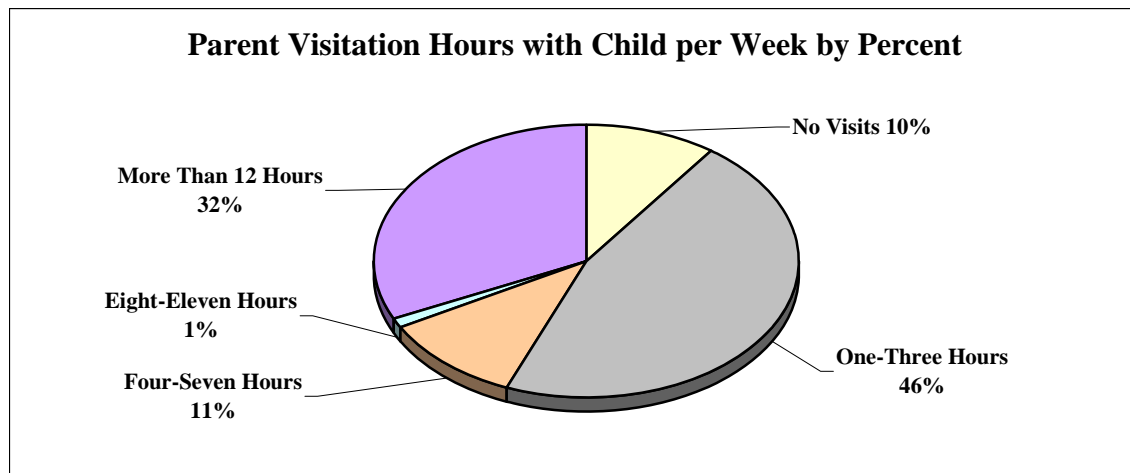
Table 10

Type of Visitation Schedule by Region and Number								
Region	Supervised		Not Supervised		Open Visitation		No Visitation Allowed	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Northern	7	32%	7	32%	5	23%	3	13%
Southcentral	13	46%	4	14%	10	36%	1	4%
Anchorage	16	37%	10	23%	12	28%	5	12%
Southeast	5	56%	0	0%	3	33%	1	11%
Total	41	40%	21	21%	30	29%	10	10%

- **How many hours of visitation do you have with your children per week?**

Schedules for visits are flexible to accommodate parents' work schedules and parents who are participating in case plan services. Figure 1 presents the parents' reports on hours of visitation they have with their children each week.

Figure 1



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- **Are you satisfied with the visitation schedule? If no, what changes would you like to see in the schedule?**

Respondents were asked to indicate their satisfaction with the visitation schedule and also to provide comments. Several respondents commented they were very satisfied with their established visitation schedules. Some respondents were provided phone cards, bus passes, travel and lodging arrangements. There were several respondents who were not satisfied with their established visitation schedules. Many of these respondents stated visits were not long enough. They indicated a desire to spend more quality time with their children so they could strengthen and rebuild trust with them. Numerous respondents remarked that the agency needs to modify the visitation schedule to accommodate parents when visits are cancelled without notice, when parents are in treatment, when sibling groups are separated and when children are living in different communities. Other parents reported concerns when a child is placed out-of-state and when staff or foster parents are not available to facilitate supervised visits. Table 11 presents the responses to parents' satisfaction with the visitation schedule.

Table 11

Parent Satisfaction With Visitation Schedule by Region, Number, and Percent				
Region	Yes-Satisfied	Percent	No-Not Satisfied	Percent
Northern	10	46%	12	54%
Southcentral	13	48%	14	52%
Anchorage	24	56%	19	44%
Southeast	5	63%	3	37%
Total	52	52%	48	48%

- **Were your children able to remain in their same school?**

Maintaining children in their same school enables them to have stability while in out-of-home placement. Some respondents commented that their children remained in the same school because their children were placed in foster homes in their own communities. Many of the respondents indicated that their children did not remain in the same school because their children were placed in foster homes outside of their communities. Table 12 presents the parents' responses to whether their children were able to remain in their own schools.

Table 12

Children Attended Same School While in Care by Region, Number, and Percent				
Region	Yes-Same School	Percent	No-Changed School	Percent
Northern	11	69%	5	31%
Southcentral	9	36%	16	64%
Anchorage	13	42%	18	58%
Southeast	3	33%	6	67%
Total	36	44%	45	56%

- **Have children been able to maintain their community activities such as after school visiting with friends and other recreational activities?**

To maintain stability in their lives, it is important that children continue in community activities such as recreational activities and participation in after school programs. Table 13 presents parents' responses to children being able to continue their community activities.

Table 13

Children Maintained Community Activities While In Care by Region, Number, and Percent				
Region	Yes- Maintained	Percent	No-Did Not Maintain	Percent
Northern	18	82%	4	18%
Southcentral	17	61%	11	39%
Anchorage	27	63%	16	37%
Southeast	8	89%	1	11%
Total	70	69%	32	31%

Have your child’s cultural activities been supported and maintained while in placement?

The Office of Children’s Services encourages and supports children in remaining connected to their culture through participation in cultural events and activities. Many of the respondents commented that their children were placed with relatives who supported and helped their children retain their Native language, cultural and religious practices. Table 14 presents the parents’ responses to their children’s cultural and heritage being maintained.

Table 14

Children’s Cultural Activities Supported While In Care by Region, Number, and Percent				
Region	Yes Supported	Percent	No-Not Supported	Percent
Northern	18	82%	4	18%
Southcentral	24	86%	4	14%
Anchorage	35	81%	8	19%
Southeast	7	78%	2	22%
Total	84	82%	18	18%

- **Are you familiar with your case plan?**

The case plan is developed jointly by the parents and the caseworker. Issues to be addressed are identified and services plans are developed. The case plan is used to assist parents in tracking their progress in receiving services and achieving case goals. Table 15 presents the responses to parents’ familiarity with the case plans.

Table 15

Parents are Familiar With Case Plan by Region, Number, and Percent				
Region	Yes Familiar	Percent	No Not Familiar	Percent
Northern	15	68%	7	32%
Southcentral	27	96%	1	4%
Anchorage	40	93%	3	7%
Southeast	9	100%	0	0%
Total	91	89%	11	11%

- **Were you asked to give your ideas and suggestions when the case plan was developed?**

When the Office of Children’s Services involves parents in the development of their case plan, it provides an opportunity for the parents and caseworker to identify needs and services. Table 16 presents the parents’ responses to whether the agency sought their involvement in case plan development.

Table 16

Parents Were Asked for Input on Case Plan by Region, Number, and Percent				
Region	Yes Asked	Percent	No Not Asked	Percent
Northern	13	59%	9	41%
Southcentral	23	82%	5	18%
Anchorage	32	74%	11	26%
Southeast	8	89%	1	11%
Total	76	74%	26	26%

- **Did you feel your input was considered when the case plan was written?**

Parents are encouraged to share their ideas during the case plan development process and their input should be considered when the final plan is developed. Some respondents stated they participated in the case planning process and their input was considered. Several respondents remarked they did not participate in the case planning process and their input was not considered. These respondents stated they received a pre-filled case plan and were told to engage in services the agency indicated they needed. Table 17 presents the parents’ responses to whether they felt that their input was considered in the case planning process.

Table 17

Parents’ Input On Case Plan Was Considered by Region, Number, and Percent				
Region	Yes Considered	Percent	No-Not Considered	Percent
Northern	12	55%	10	45%
Southcentral	21	75%	7	25%
Anchorage	29	67%	14	33%
Southeast	5	56%	4	44%
Total	67	66%	35	34%

- **Did you receive a copy of the case plan?**

When the case plan is completed, the caseworker should provide the parents with a written copy. The case plan acts as a guide for parents in helping them track their progress in achieving the case plan goals and objectives. Table 18 presents the responses to parents' receipt of their case plans.

Table 18

Parents Received a Copy of Case Plan by Region, Number, and Percent						
Region	Yes- Received	Percent	No-Did Not Receive	Percent	Unsure- If Received	Percent
Northern	16	73%	5	23%	1	4%
Southcentral	26	93%	1	4%	1	3%
Anchorage	39	91%	3	7%	1	2%
Southeast	7	78%	2	22%	0	0%
Total	88	86%	11	11%	3	3%

- **What suggestions do you have for how we can improve the case plan development process for families?**

Respondents expressed the importance of workers listening to them. They stated when workers sit down with them to develop the case plan, they want an opportunity to contribute to the conversation and have their thoughts and ideas included in the case plan. Other respondents commented that the case planning development can be improved by workers taking time to walk them through the process step by step. Respondents stated they want to understand the required tasks and activities and who will assist them in accessing the identified services. A few of the respondents noted they do not want to be made to feel like they are being judged by workers while trying to comply with the case plan.

- **What is the permanent plan for your children?**

Some respondents indicated that they were familiar with their child’s goals. They stated that the worker informed them that the goal had changed to adoption, other planned living arrangements, or remained reunification. Several respondents whose children’s goals changed stated they were not in agreement with the agency’s decision. There were several respondents who indicated that they were unsure what the goals were for their children.

Table 19

Child’s Permanent Goal by Region, Number, and Percent						
Region	Return Home	Percent	Adoption or Guardianship	Percent	Other or Unsure	Percent
Northern	19	86%	2	9%	1	5%
Southcentral	19	68%	5	18%	4	14%
Anchorage	30	70%	8	18%	5	12%
Southeast	5	56%	2	22%	2	22%
Total	73	71%	17	17%	12	12%

- **Were services identified to help you and your family?**

To support families in making the needed changes to enable children to return home, the agency works with the parents to identify services. Respondents were asked if the agency had worked with them to identify their services needs. Table 20 presents the responses.

Table 20

Services Identified For Family by Region, Number, and Percent				
Region	Yes-Services Identified	Percent	No-Services Not Identified	Percent
Northern	15	68%	7	32%
Southcentral	23	82%	5	18%
Anchorage	35	81%	8	19%
Southeast	6	67%	3	33%
Total	79	77%	23	23%

- **Did the agency offer support and assistance in accessing these services such as assisting with appointments, transportation, or bus tokens?**

To assist families with accessing services, the agency provides support such as bus tokens, taxicab vouchers, and service referrals. Table 21 presents the parents' responses to whether the agency offered support with accessing services.

Table 21

Support and Assistance in Accessing Services by Region, Number, and Percent				
Region	Yes- Support Provided	Percent	No-Support Not Provided	Percent
Northern	15	68%	7	32%
Southcentral	20	71%	8	29%
Anchorage	33	77%	10	23%
Southeast	7	78%	2	22%
Total	75	73%	27	27%

- **Were there services that you would like to have received but were not able to? If so, please describe them and why you were not able to receive the services.**

The agency works with the parents to identify and refer the parents for services which can address the issues that brought the family to the agency's attention. There are instances when families need services that the agency does not provide due to lack of availability of a particular service in the community, inability to fund the service, or extended waiting lists for services. Table 22 presents the parents' responses for needed service provision.

Table 22

Parents Would Like To Have Received Additional Services by Region, Number, and Percent				
Region	Yes-Needed Additional Services	Percent	No-Did Not Need Additional Services	Percent
Northern	7	32%	15	68%
Southcentral	5	18%	23	82%
Anchorage	8	19%	35	81%
Southeast	1	11%	8	89%
Total	21	21%	81	79%

- **Have the services been helpful to you and your family? Why or Why not?**

The majority of the respondents commented about the services they received. The services included substance abuse treatment, domestic violence education, anger management groups, individual therapy, parenting education classes, and mental health services for children. Respondents remarked that the services they participated in were very helpful to them and to their children. Many of them stated the services helped change their attitudes, and their lifestyles, strengthen their parenting skills, and improve the mental health of their children. Many of them said after the successful completion of services, they were reunified with their children.

Some respondents commented that they had not been helped by services because the agency did not provide the services they needed. A few of them had difficulty in accessing services on their own. Other respondents said services that they received were not appropriately matched to their needs or to the needs of their children. Table 23 presents the parents' responses to helpfulness of services.

Table 23

Services Received Were Helpful by Region, Number, and Percent				
Region	Yes-Helpful	Percent	No- Not Helpful	Percent
Northern	9	41%	13	59%
Southcentral	22	79%	6	21%
Anchorage	34	79%	9	21%
Southeast	4	44%	5	56%
Total	69	68%	33	32%

- **Do you understand the activities and changes that remain to be made in order to have your case closed?**

Throughout the case process the worker reviews with the parents the progress which is being made on the case plan and the remaining areas to be addressed. Involving the parent in this process insures that there is mutual understanding of the goals to be achieved. Table 24 presents the parents' responses to their understanding of the case process.

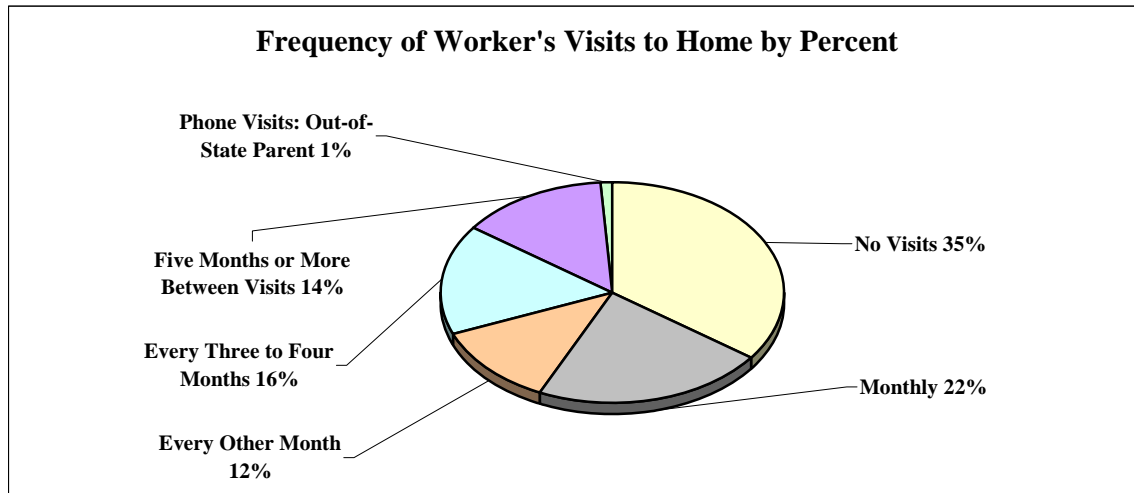
Table 24

Parents Understand Activities and Changes Needed by Region, Number, and Percent				
Region	Yes- Understand	Percent	No-Do Not Understand	Percent
Northern	15	68%	7	32%
Southcentral	23	82%	5	18%
Anchorage	34	79%	9	21%
Southeast	5	56%	4	44%
Total	77	75%	25	25%

- **How often does your worker visit in your home?**

Consistent caseworker visits with parents in their home and at the agency office support the development of a working relationship between the caseworker and parent. These visits facilitate discussion on the parents' progress and case needs. Respondents were asked to indicate how frequently the worker visited them in their homes and the frequency of the parents' visit at the agency office. The parents' reports of the frequency of worker visits is presented in figures 2 and figure 3.

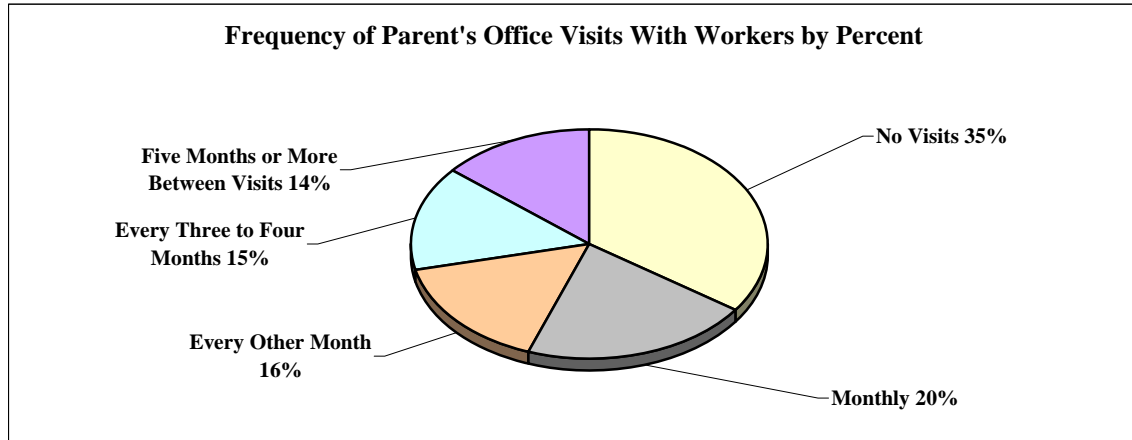
Figure 2



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- **How often do you visit with your worker in their office?**

Figure 3



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- **How helpful are the visits when they occur?**

Respondents were asked to rate how helpful the worker visits are when they occur in the home or office. Most respondents commented the worker visits were not sufficient or consistent to address their needs. A few of the respondents expressed frustration that they were not being supported or assisted by the worker in making progress on their case plans. Other respondents indicated they received regular phone calls and e-mails from workers which were helpful. A number of respondents indicated that workers do not visit regularly, but they do call or e-mail them. Table 25 presents the parents' responses to helpfulness of visits.

Table 25

Helpfulness of Home and Office Visits by Region, Number, and Percent						
Region	Very and Somewhat Helpful	Percent	Helpful	Percent	Not Very Helpful	Percent
Northern	6	33%	4	22%	8	45%
Southcentral	9	43%	8	38%	4	19%
Anchorage	14	37%	10	26%	14	37%
Southeast	1	12%	2	25%	5	63%
Total	30	35%	24	28%	31	37%

- **Do you and your caseworker discuss your case plan when you meet?**

There were numerous respondents who commented that their workers regularly discussed the case plan and their progress when visits occurred. A number of respondents mentioned that they had not discussed their case plan progress with their workers, because the workers had not met with them in their homes or at the office. Table 26 presents parents' responses to discussion of the case plan during visits.

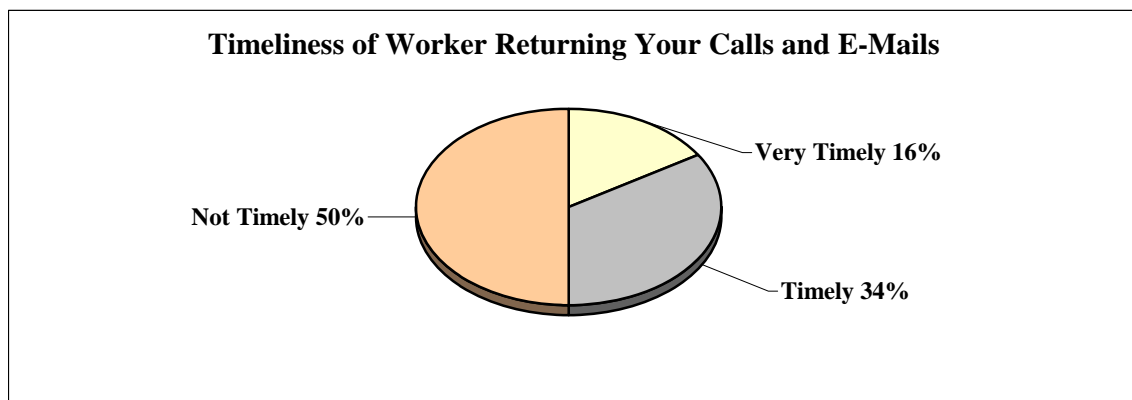
Table 26

Case Plan Discussed During Visits by Region, Number, and Percent				
Region	Yes-Discussed	Percent	No-Not Discussed	Percent
Northern	9	41%	13	59%
Southcentral	19	68%	9	32%
Anchorage	33	77%	10	23%
Southeast	5	56%	4	44%
Total	66	65%	36	35%

- **How timely is your worker in returning your calls and e-mails?**

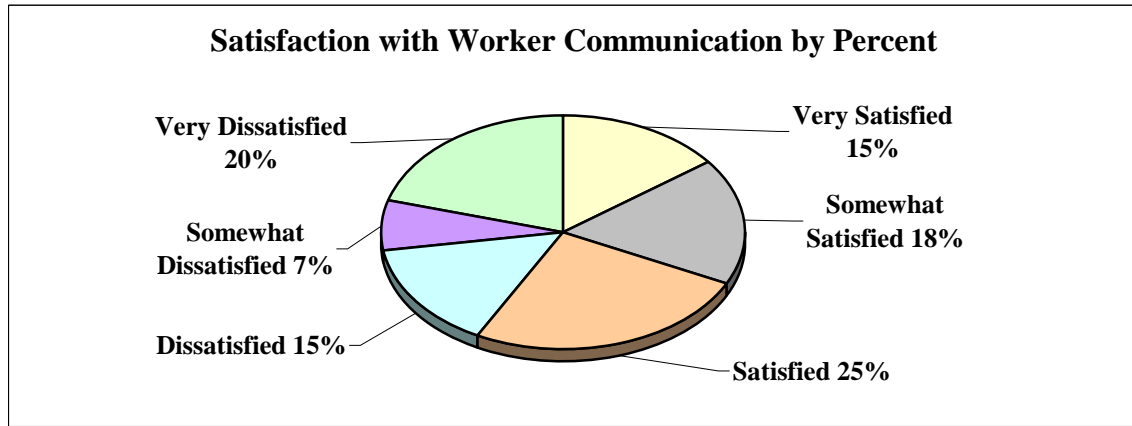
While parents work to complete their case plans, it is helpful when workers respond to their phone calls or e-mails in a timely manner. The communication not only strengthens the parent-worker relationship, but it also provides support and encouragement to the parents. Figure 4 presents respondents' perceptions of timeliness of return of calls and e-mails and Figure 5 presents respondents' overall satisfaction with the communication with their workers.

Figure 4



- Overall, how satisfied are you with communication with your worker?

Figure 5



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- How many workers have you had on your case?

Maintaining the same caseworker throughout the case contributes to a strong working relationship between the parent and caseworker as well as continuity of case management activities. When workers do change, parents should be notified before the change and have an opportunity to speak with the exiting worker prior to the change. Tables 27 and 28 present the responses to number of caseworkers parents have experienced and whether or not the parent was notified of the change. Figure 6 presents information on the parents' ability to speak with the worker before the change of workers occurred.

Table 27

Number of Workers Families Have Had By Region and Percent						
Region	One Worker	Percent	Two-Three Workers	Percent	Three or More Workers	Percent
Northern	8	36%	9	41%	5	23%
Southcentral	5	18%	21	75%	2	7%
Anchorage	5	12%	24	56%	14	32%
Southeast	1	11%	5	56%	3	33%
Total	19	19%	59	58%	24	23%

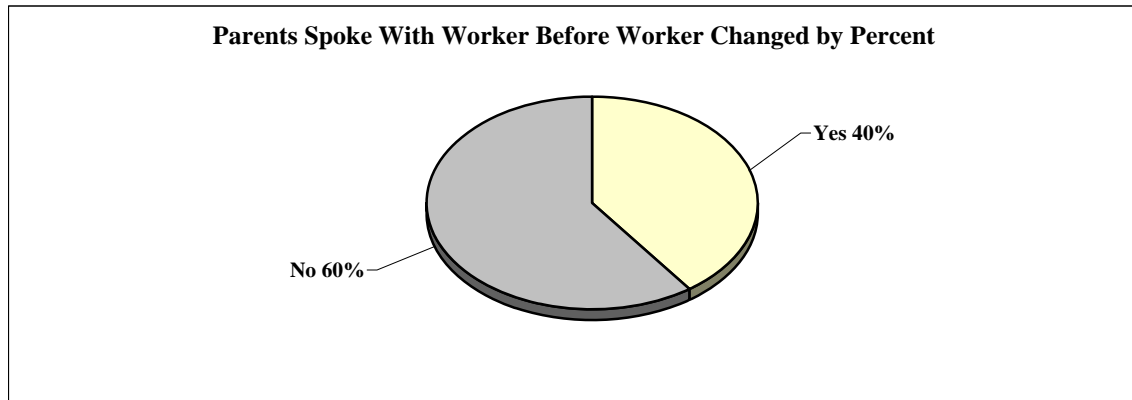
- **Were you notified that your worker was changing before the change occurred?**

Table 28

Parents Received Notification of Worker Reassignment by Region, Number, and Percent				
Region	Yes-Notified	Percent	No-Not Notified	Percent
Northern	3	21%	11	79%
Southcentral	12	52%	11	48%
Anchorage	19	50%	19	50%
Southeast	4	50%	4	50%
Total	38	46%	45	54%

- **Were you able to talk with your worker before they were transferred from your case?**

Figure 6

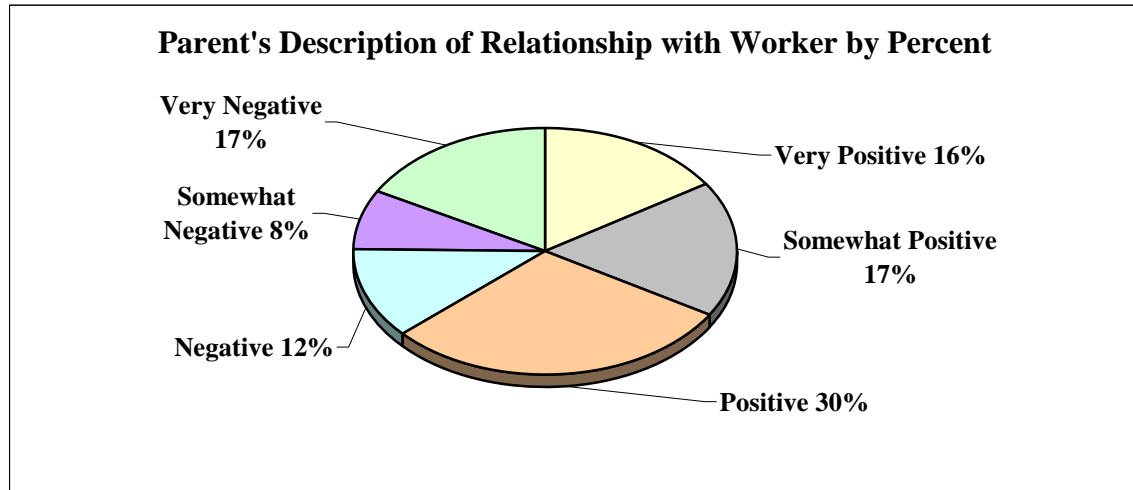


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- **How would you describe your overall working relationship with your worker?**

A working relationship between the parents and caseworker, which is supportive of the family while assisting with the changes that need to occur, can facilitate family reunification. Respondents were asked to describe their relationship with their worker. Figure 7 presents the responses.

Figure 7



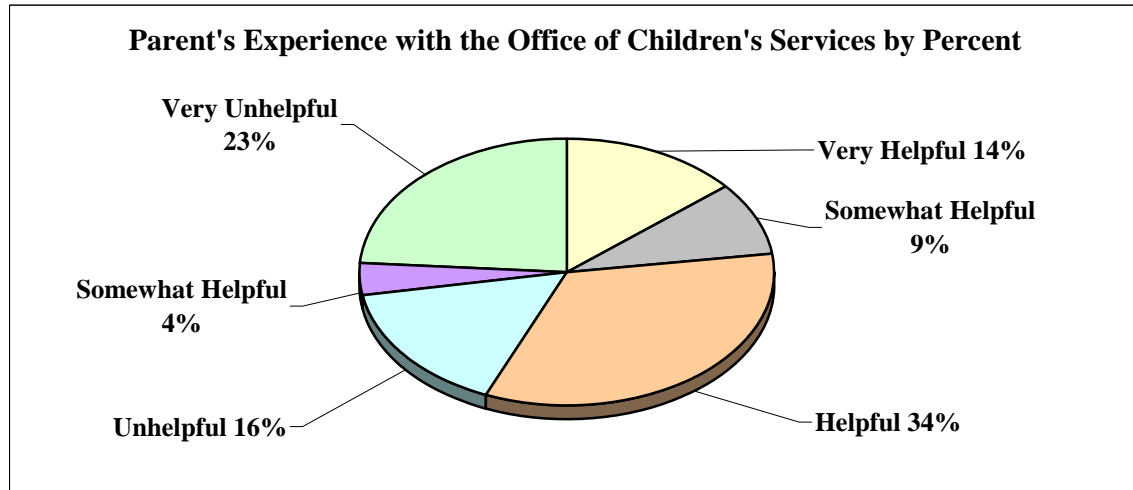
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- **How would you describe your overall experience with the Office of Children's Services?**

There were a substantial number of respondents who made positive comments about their overall experiences with the agency. Many of the respondents stated workers were instrumental in helping them obtain appropriate services which contributed to them making necessary life changes. These respondents were especially thankful to the workers for their professionalism and their helpfulness in returning their children to their homes.

There were numerous respondents who commented they did not have an overall good experience with the agency. These respondents expressed a deep disappointment with workers who did not communicate with them or help them access the services they needed. Other respondents stated they needed help with understanding what they needed to do and they needed someone to explain to them what was going to happen with their children. Some respondents were not pleased with the placements of their children and noted that their children remained in custody too long. Respondents indicated that workers need to improve their communication with parents and spend more time encouraging and updating parents on the status of their cases. Figure 8 shows parents' responses to their experiences with the Office of Children's Services.

Figure 8



n=102

- **What are some things that we can do to improve our working relationship with families and to improve our services to families?**

Respondents provided helpful comments on how the agency can improve their working relationships with families and how services can be improved. The respondents outlined several areas of concerns and provided suggestions on how the agency can make improvements. The suggestions have been organized for presentation into six areas including: consistent communication regarding case status; modification to the timeframes to allow parents to access services and complete their case plans; attentiveness to parents and their issues; initiate and engage parents earlier in their case plans so children are able to return home sooner; address the worker turnover problem; and assure worker visits occur with children and parents.

Several respondents stressed the importance of improving communication between workers and families. These respondents said they expect workers to sit down with them and explain, in simple terms, what is expected of them. Five of the respondents stated they want workers to spend quality time explaining the case plan process to ensure parents understand the tasks and activities they are being asked to engage in and carry out. The respondents also said they want to be kept informed of changes to their case as they occur. One respondent noted the worker assigned to their case was the best worker they had ever had. This respondent said the worker told them what they needed to do in order to be reunited with their child. A respondent indicated workers have the ability and responsibility to make a difference in the lives of children and parents.

A number of respondents remarked that the agency needs to be more attentive to and supportive of families. They specifically request that workers listen to what they have to say. Many of these respondents said their voices are often overshadowed by workers' voices. The respondents indicated they look forward to having a dialogue with workers in which their perspectives are considered. Some of the respondents stated the Office of Children's Services needs to spend more time working to provide services to prevent removal of children from their homes. Respondents noted the agency needs to make sure they are helping parents to identify services early and help them access appropriate service providers who accept Medicaid. A couple of respondents said workers need to help them obtain financial resources. Several respondents said they do not want to be judged, rather they want to be given a chance to engage in services that will help improve their lives and the lives of their children.

Many respondents indicated case plans are not being initiated in a timely manner. These respondents said the case plans need to be initiated earlier to ensure parents are able to access services and complete services within the agency's timeframes. Two respondents remarked the agency needs a better method of working with parents who are waiting for services. These respondents noted it took them five months to receive substance abuse treatment which delayed accomplishment of the reunification goal. Other respondents commented that modifying the timeframes would afford parents adequate time to complete their services. Many of the respondents expressed that their children were their motivation for complying with the agency and for completing their case plans.

Some of the respondents indicated parents are not meeting their case objectives due to worker turnover, the lack of worker home visits, and workers not returning phone calls. One respondent stated their worker never returned their phone calls. Another respondent said their worker visited them only once in six months. Respondents noted that they want workers to do a better job at managing cases and to be consistent with monthly visits. Two respondents stated they are still waiting to receive services. There was one respondent who stated when workers or their supervisors are not available, the agency needs to ensure someone can inform parents about court hearings and other scheduled activities.

Additional Comments

One respondent commented that the worker was awesome. Others commented that the workers' attitudes contributed to making their experiences pleasant and positive. Others stated that there was a need for respect and increased communication from the agency. Respondents indicated that they want their feedback taken seriously. Many of them stated communication between workers and families is the most important thing that the agency needs to implement.

Some respondents noted that their trust level with the agency decreased when workers promised to return their children to their care after they completed their case plans and then did not follow through with reunification. These respondents stated the workers were not forthcoming with them about not returning the children to their care.

Two respondents said the agency has not informed them of the status of their children's permanency goals. Other respondents want the agency to listen to their concerns and provide services they need. There was an overall urging that the agency engage with the parents and provide support.

Appreciation to Respondents

The Department of Health and Social Services, Office of Children's Services, is very appreciative to all parents who participated in the telephone survey. Staff and management will incorporate the information gained through this survey in our efforts to assist families and children.