DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
ISSUE BRIEF

ISSUE: In-Home Services

Whenever possible consistent with child safety, children belong at home. So it is encouraging that the number of children in care as the result of abuse or neglect has declined by approximately 16% in four years and nearly 25% in the last eight years. This reflects a number of positive developments including a reduction in the number of children entering care and an accompanying increase in the number of families served with their children at home.

Here are some of the factors contributing to this positive trend:

- Fewer children entering care: Whereas 2,930 children entered care in 2002, the three-year average for 2005 through 2007 was approximately 2,516, and the total for 2007 was 2,137.
- More families receiving services with children at home: In-home cases increased 41 % from July 2002 when there were 2,849 in-home cases to September 2008 when there were 4,010 in-home cases.
- Exiting Care To Timely Permanency: The percentage of children exiting care to a form of permanency within two years or less from the time a child enters care has improved. Over the past eight quarters, the three measures of timely permanency, which include adoption, subsidized guardianship, and reunification, met the *Juan F.* Exit Plan goals in 20 of 24 possible occasions. Timely adoptions, which represented only approximately 11% of all adoptions in the first quarter of the Exit Plan, reached or exceeded 33% in each of the last eight quarters. Finally, the number of adoptions and guardianships has risen as well. During state fiscal years 1997 to 2005, an average of 615 permanent homes (both adoptions and subsidized guardianships) were found annually for children in foster care -- more than four times the number in 1996. In FY2008, 634 adoptions were finalized and 234 subsidized guardianships granted for a total of 868 new permanent homes. The percentage of children reunified with parents within one year of entering care has increased to 30% in 2007 compared to 24% in 2000.

Importantly, this significant decrease in the number of children in care has not come at the expense of child safety. In fact, the percentage of children who are victims of repeat maltreatment is at a record low. This measure serves as a valuable gauge for how well our interventions work and to make sure that in striving to meet our goals -- the timely reunification of families, for example -- we are not subjecting children to higher rates of repeat victimization. For each of the last five quarters, the Exit Plan goal for repeat maltreatment has been achieved, and for the last three quarters the measure has come in under 6% -- the lowest since the Exit Plan began in 2004 with a baseline measure of

9.4%. In addition, Connecticut's rate of repeat maltreatment is below the national median of 6.6%.

Consistent with the trend of fewer children in care overall is a movement away from the use of large institutional settings. The Exit Plan outcome measuring the use of residential care reached its best levels in the final two quarters of FY2008 and has met the goal for over two years. As of October 27, 2008, the number of children in residential care declined by 365 children or 41% since April 2004. The number of children in residential care, 524 as of October 27, is at its lowest level on record under the Exit Plan.

The reduction in children in residential care is attributable to a number of factors. One is that Connecticut now has the capacity to serve nearly 2,300 children a year in intensive home-based programs, which largely did not exist only a few years ago. Some of the initiatives that help children and families with mental health and substance abuse treatment needs in their homes include:

- Family Support Teams (serving 340 families annually) and therapeutic foster care;
- In-home family therapy services (serving more than 1,900 families annually);
- Wrap-around services that help both children and parents in whatever way is required, including non-traditional help such as mentoring and respite (serving 1,150 families annually); and
- Intensive in-home psychiatric services (serving 500 children annually).

Another key initiative, which has enabled children to reside in home-like community based settings, is the development of therapeutic group homes. These group homes provide intensive clinical services and allow children who would otherwise need a more institutional treatment setting to live in a home-like environment and attend school in the community. DCF has contracted for 54 therapeutic group homes with a capacity to serve 273 children and adolescents.