

2019 |



Washington Child Advocate

Report March 2019

Report Authored by: Alicia Summers, PhD

Director, Data Savvy Consulting, LLC

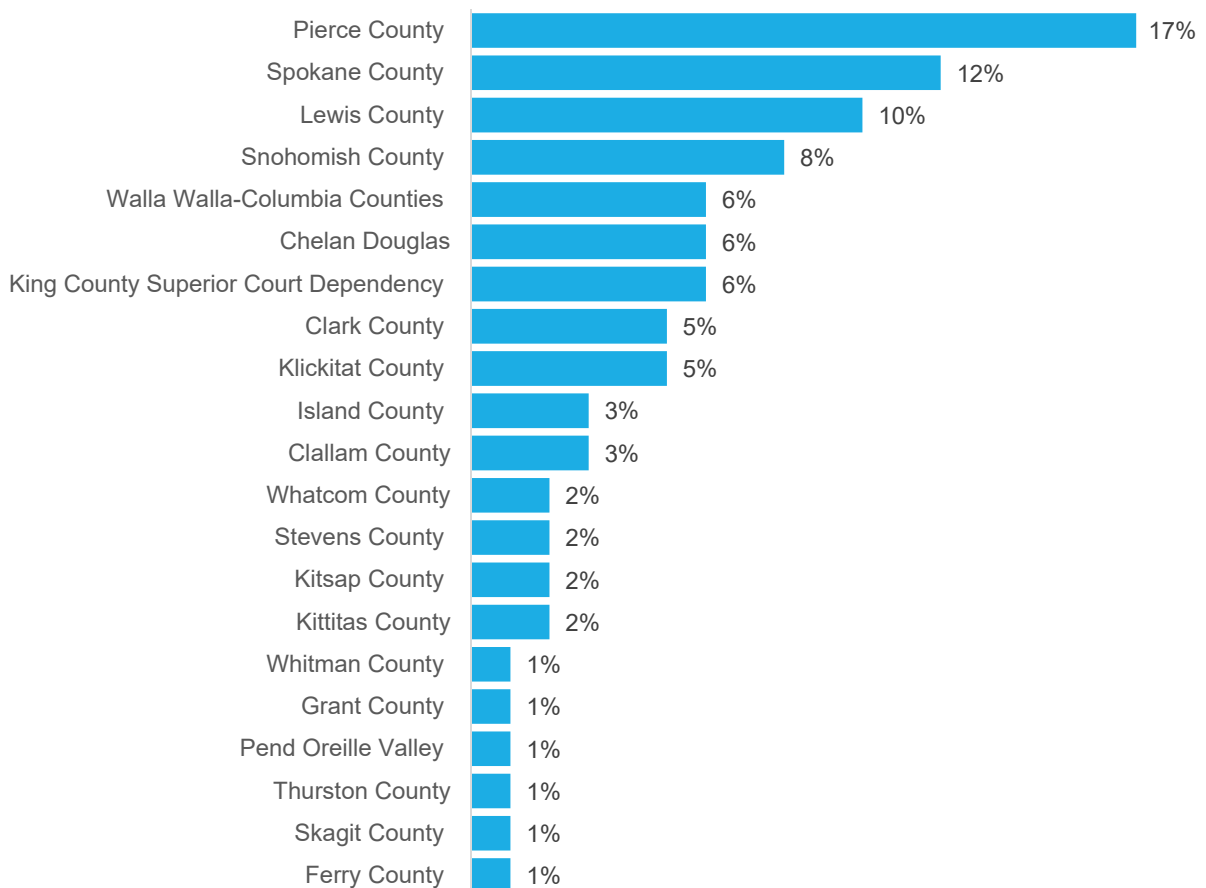


Washington Child Advocate Report (2019)

Introduction

Washington State child advocate volunteers were asked to enter data on their current cases into an online survey. The survey asked a series of questions about children the child advocates represent, including visitation, well-being, placement, and education related information. Child advocates completed the survey in March and April of 2019. A total of 506 entries, representing 506 unique children involved in the foster care system, were made by child advocates across the state of Washington. Twenty-nine counties were represented in the survey, with the highest percentage (17%) from Pierce County. Counties with only 1 participant are not shown in the graph below. This includes Grays Harbor, Mason, Cowlitz, and Quileute Tribal Program as well as participants who identified multiple programs (n=10).

Child Advocate Volunteer County

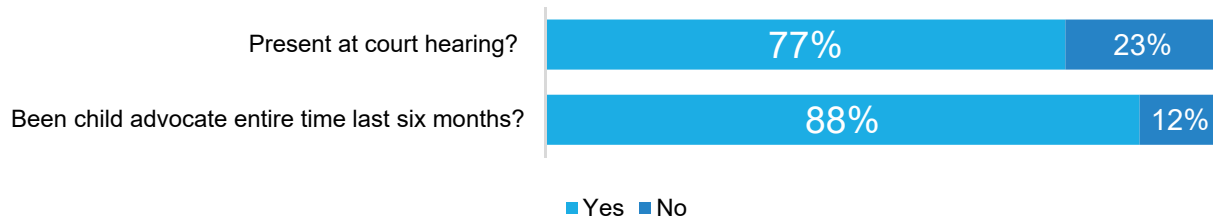


The survey asked child advocate volunteers to identify the child's most recent review hearing and reflect on the child's status of this date. The review hearings identified ranged from 18 months ago to occurring the week of data collection. The questions focused on child's placement, visitation, education and general well-being. A summary of responses is presented below.

Findings

Three hundred and nine child advocate workers completed the survey. The child advocates were appointed a median of 24 days after the case opened (range of 316 days prior to case opening, to more than 3 years after a case opened). The average age of children was 6, with a range of 0 to 18. Child advocates were asked if they were present at the most recent court hearing and if they have been the child advocate the entire time for the last 6 months. The majority 88% indicated that they had been the child advocate for the entirety of the last 6 months. Seventy-seven percent (77%) indicated that they were present at the most recent court hearing. Child advocates report visiting the child an average of 6 times in the last six months, with a range of 0 (3%) to more than 20 times (1%).

Child Advocate Assignment and Presence



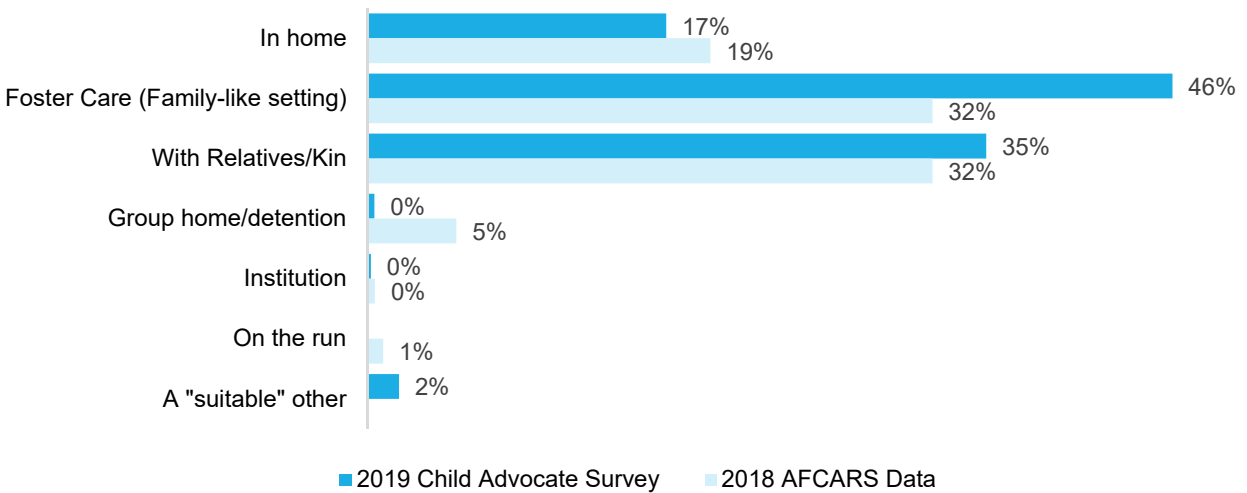
82% of child advocates reported that the child had not reunified with their parents in the last six months.

95% reported no additional findings of re-abuse or neglect in the past 6 months.

Placement & Visitation

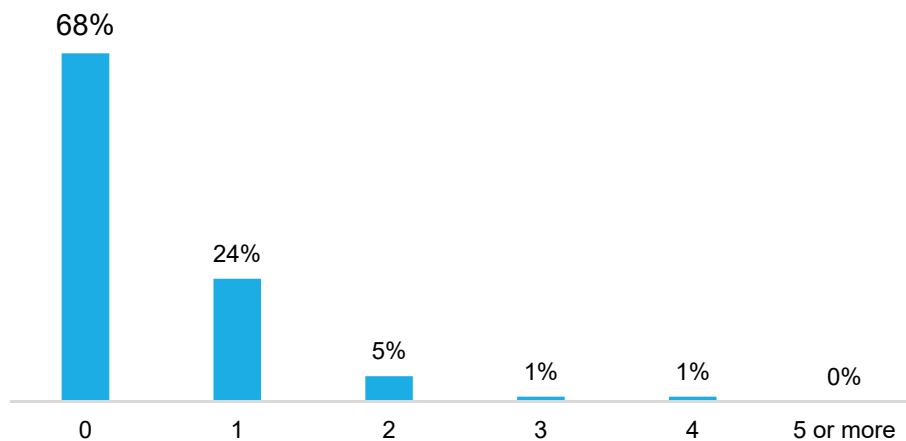
A series of questions asked about child's placement and visitation with the mother, father, and siblings on the case. The data collected was compared to statewide data from the 2018 Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). The child advocate Survey data is consistent with the national data trends for placement type. As illustrated in the graph below, the most common placement type is Foster Care with a non-relative.

Child's Placement



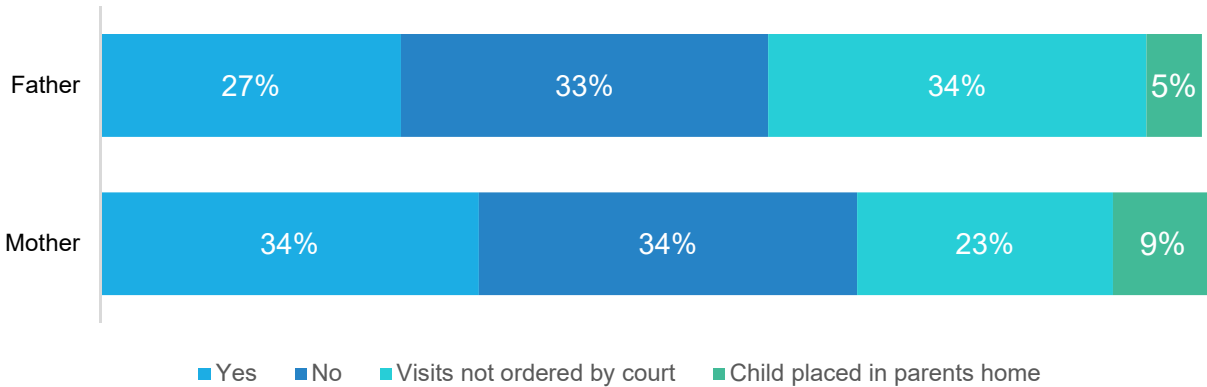
The survey also asked about the number of placement moves in the last 6 months. The majority of children (68%) had not moved placement.

Placement Moves in the Last Six Months

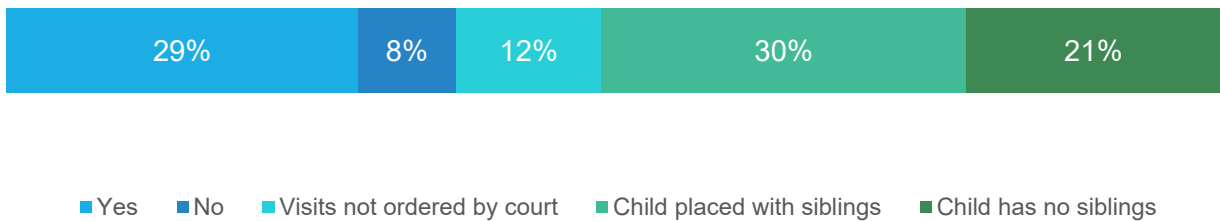


The survey also asked if the child has maintained consistent visits with parents and siblings in the last six months. The graphs below illustrate responses to all possible visitation options. It is important to note that, when visitation *was applicable*, only approximately one half (45%) of children are maintaining consistent visits with their father. For mothers, this number is a little higher. Of those ordered visitation and not placed at home, mothers visit consistently about 49% of the time. Sibling visits were most common, with youth visiting siblings when ordered 79% of the time. The data also indicate that father visits are more likely **not** to be ordered (36%) than sibling (25%) or mother visits (25%).

Maintained Consistent Visits with Parent in Last 6 Months



Maintained Consistent Visits with Siblings in Last 6 Months



Health & Well-being

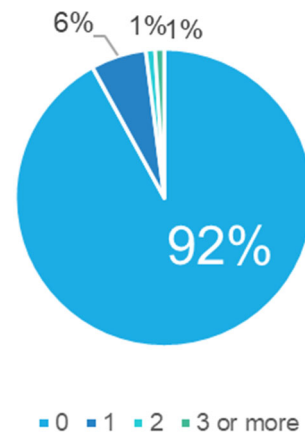
The child advocate survey asked about child’s health and wellbeing. In particular the survey asked about participation in services with the last 6 months. The majority of children has been to the dentist (76%) and to the doctor (95%) in the last 6 months.

In addition to general wellbeing the survey asked about mental health. The majority of children (58%) had not been ordered mental health services. However, for the 42% who had, 88% of child advocates reported that the service is being provided.

The survey also asked about psychotropic medication use. Ninety-two percent of youth were not reported to be on any psychotropic meds. Six percent were on one psychotropic med and 2% were on two or more.

In addition, child advocates reported that only 1% of youth had runaway from placement in the last 6 months and only .6% had been adjudicated on any juvenile offenses in the past 6 months.

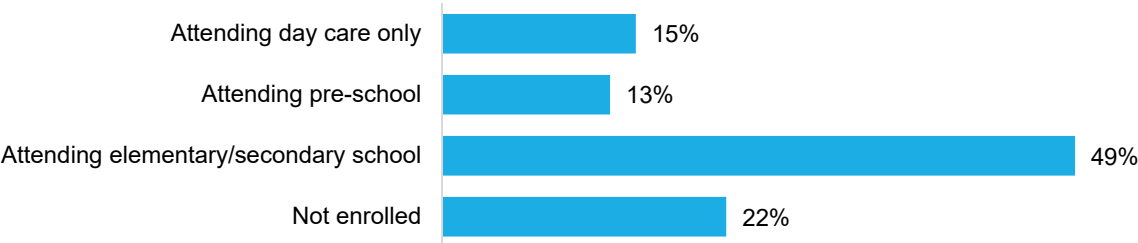
Number of Psychotropic Medications Ordered for Children



Education

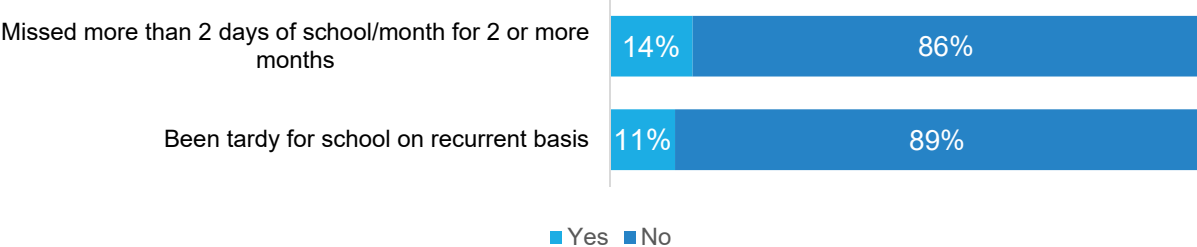
A final set of questions asked about the child's current education. Forty-nine percent (49%) of youth were reported to be attending elementary/secondary school at the time of the survey.

Child's Current Education Setting



The survey also asked about absences and being tardy from school. As noted in the graph below, only a small portion of youth had been tardy for school on a recurrent basis or missed more than 2 days of school/month for more than two months. These questions were not applicable for just over a third of children. For the ones that it was applicable, 11% had been tardy and 14% had missed more than two days of school.

Education: Has the Child...



The survey also asked about school specific information. Of those in school, 99% of the child advocates indicated that the child(ren) they work with had a reliable way to get to school.

Of the school-aged children, child advocates reported that 93% of the youth they served were on track to be promoted to the next grade level or to graduate.

When asked about current IEP/504 plans, child advocates reported that 37% of youth were not applicable for this. Of those applicable, only 37% have a current IEP/504 plan.

Finally, the survey asked about youth's participation in extracurricular activities. Child advocates reported that 49% participate in extracurricular activities.

Conclusions

The data collected for this report illustrate a point in time snapshot of the youth that serve in Washington State. The data can and should be used as a discussion point to explore outcomes for children served by child advocate. It is important to note that the data collected and the findings in this report cannot show any causal relationship to having a child advocate. That is, you cannot say that child advocate caused outcomes in the youth. Rather, this data provides some descriptive measures of what the youth who are served by child advocate look like, in terms of their placement, general well-being, and education. The survey is a good starting point to begin collecting data on children in care and allow child advocates an opportunity to reflect both on their practice and the youth that they serve. As discussions of the findings evolve, it is important to consider what other useful information could be gained from a reflective survey such as this and how the data may be used to look for trends in current practice.