

2020 |



Washington Child Advocate

Advocacy Report September 2020

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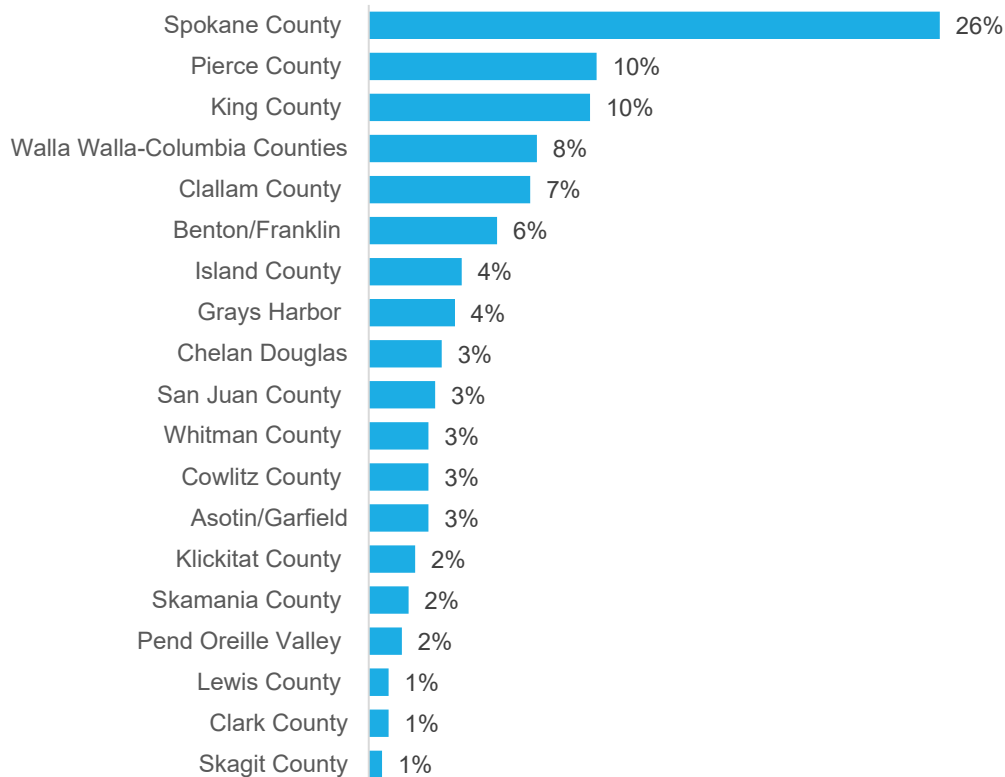


Washington Child Advocate Report (2020)

Introduction

Court Advocate volunteers were asked to enter data on their current cases into an online child advocate survey. The survey asked a series of questions about children they represent, including visitation, well-being, placement, and education related information. Child advocates completed the survey in September of 2020. A total of 330 entries, representing 330 unique children involved in the foster care system, were made by child advocates across the state of Washington. Twenty-four counties were represented in the survey, with the highest percentage (26%) from Spokane County. In addition to the counties identified on the figure below, Whatcom, Ferry, Jefferson, Thurston, and Okanogan each had one case and three volunteers identified multiple counties.

Child Advocate Volunteer County

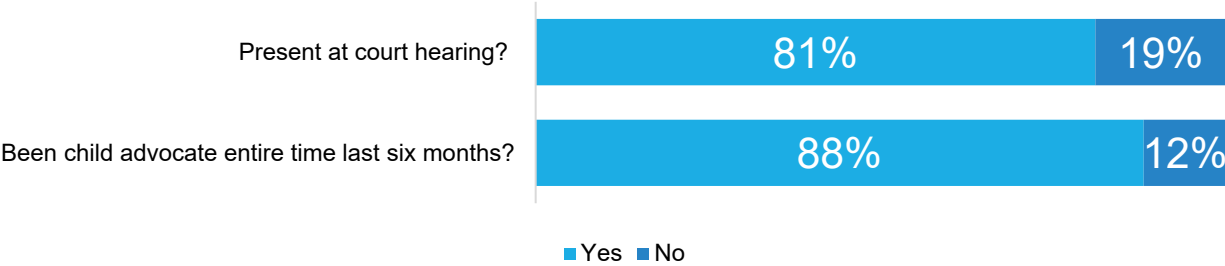


The survey asked child advocate volunteers to identify the child's most recent review hearing and reflect on the child's status of this date. The questions focused on child's placement, visitation, education and general well-being. A summary of responses is presented below.

Findings

One hundred thirty-six volunteers completed the survey. The child advocates self-reported appoint dates a median of 31 days after the case opened (range of 284 days prior to case opening, to almost 7 years after a case opened). 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 advocate for the entirety of the last 6 months. Eighty-two percent (82%) indicated that they were present at the most recent court hearing. Child advocates reported visiting with the child an average of 6.5 times in the last six months.

Child Advocate Assignment and Presence



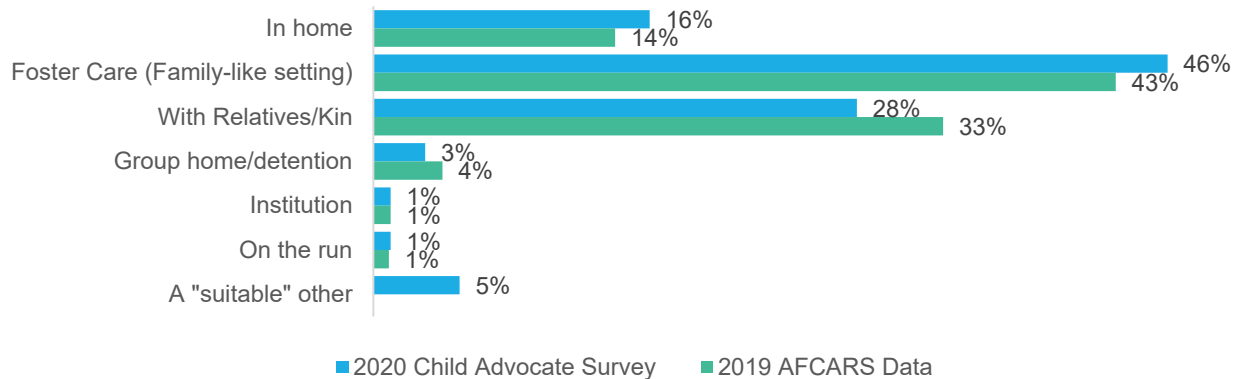
83% of child advocates reported that the child had not reunified with their parents in the last six months.

92% reported no additional findings of re-abuse or neglect in the past 6 months.

Placement & Visitation

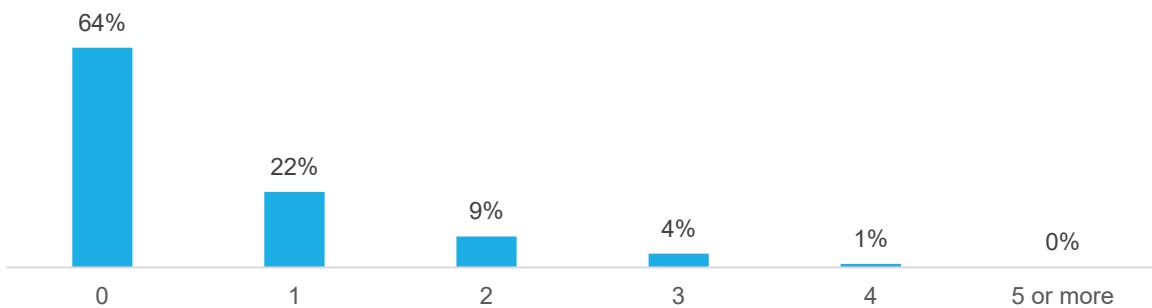
A series of questions asked about child’s placement and visitation with the mother, father, and siblings on the case. The data collected was compared to statewide data from the 2019 Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). The child advocate survey data is consistent with the national data trends for placement type. As illustrated in the graph below, the most common placement type is Foster Care with a non-relative. In addition, only 4 child advocates (1%) reported that the child had a hotel stay as a result of lack of placement options.

Child's Placement



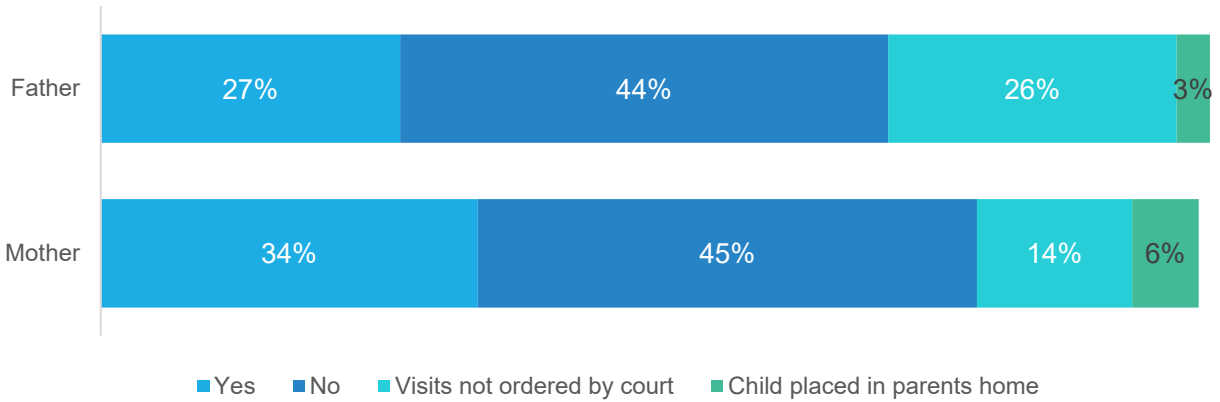
The survey also asked about the number of placement moves in the last 6 months. The majority of children (64%) had not moved placement.

Placement Moves in the Last Six Months

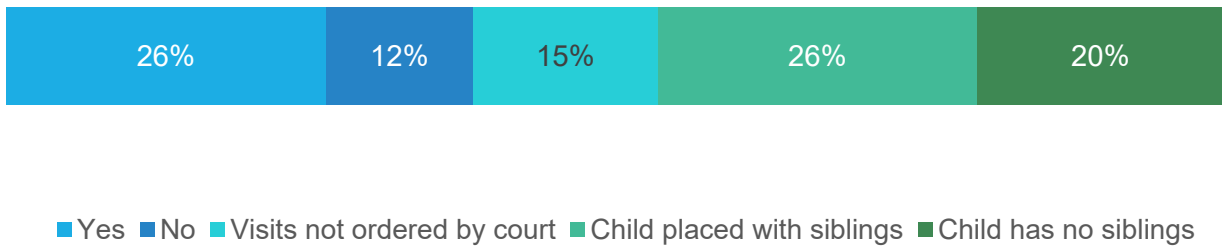


The survey also asked if the child has maintained consistent visits with parents and siblings in the last six months. As noted in the graphs for visits with mothers and fathers, the most common response was No (44% & 35% respectively for fathers and mothers). These data indicate that *when visitation is applicable, only approximately one third (38%) 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 43% of the time. Sibling visits were most common, with youth visiting sibling when ordered 67% of the time. The data also indicate that father visits are more likely **not** to be ordered (26%) than sibling (15%) or mother visits (14%).

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 (78%) and to the doctor (93%) in the last 6 months. In addition to general wellbeing the survey asked about mental health. The majority of youth (64%) were not ordered to go to mental health counseling by the court. Of those who were ordered, the vast majority were being provided services.

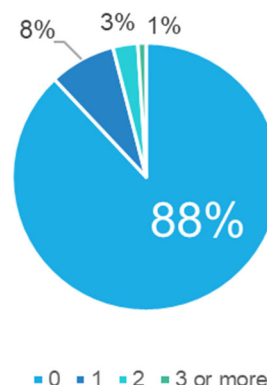
If Court Ordered Counseling/Mental Health Services, Is it Being Provided?



The survey also asked about psychotropic medication use. Ninety-one percent of youth were not reported to be on any psychotropic meds. Seven percent were on one psychotropic med and 3% 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 .5% had been adjudicated on any juvenile offenses in the past 6 months.

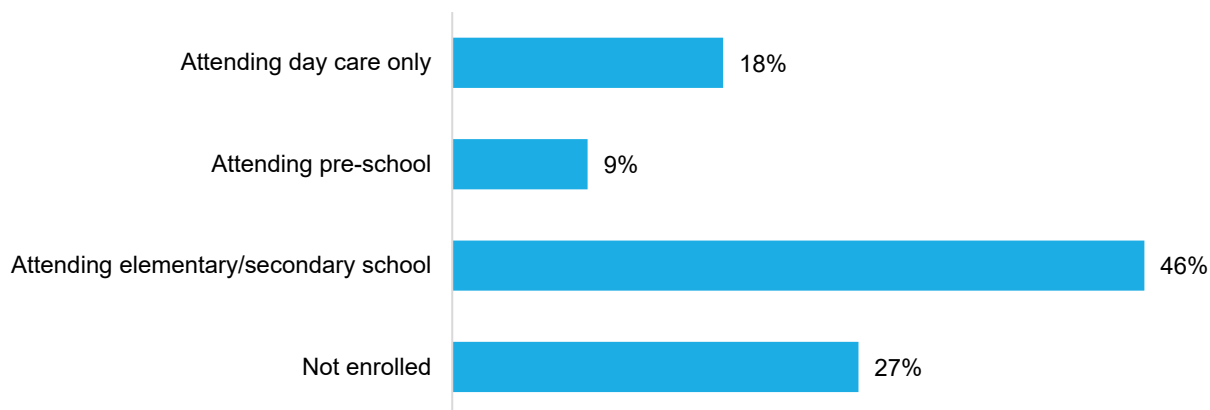
Number of Psychotropic Medications Ordered for Children



Education

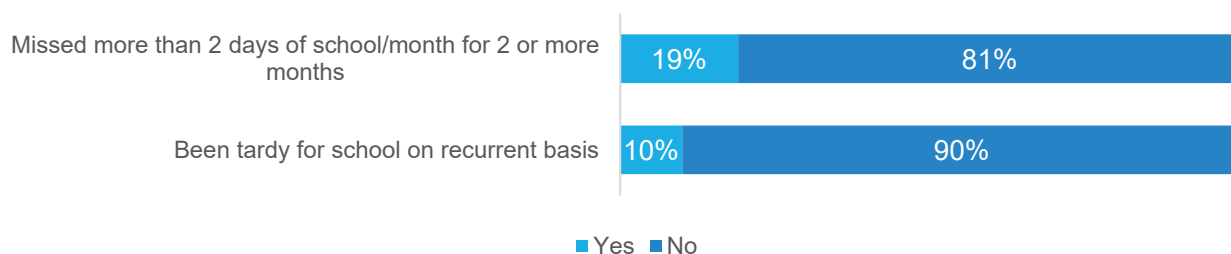
A final set of questions asked about the child's current education. Forty-six percent (46%) of youth were reported to be attending elementary/secondary school at the time of the survey.

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.

Education: Has the Child...



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

Of the school-aged children, child advocate 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 advocate reported that 48% of youth were not applicable for this. Of those applicable, only 38% have a current IEP/504 plan.

Finally, the survey asked about youth's participation in extracurricular activities. Child advocates reported that 30% participate in extracurricular activities.

Conclusions

The data collected for this report illustrate a point in time snapshot of the youth that child advocate 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.