



Child Protection

Keeping Idaho's Children Safe, Healthy, and Home

Report to Governor
C.L. "Butch" Otter
and the 1st Regular
Session of the 63rd
Idaho Legislature

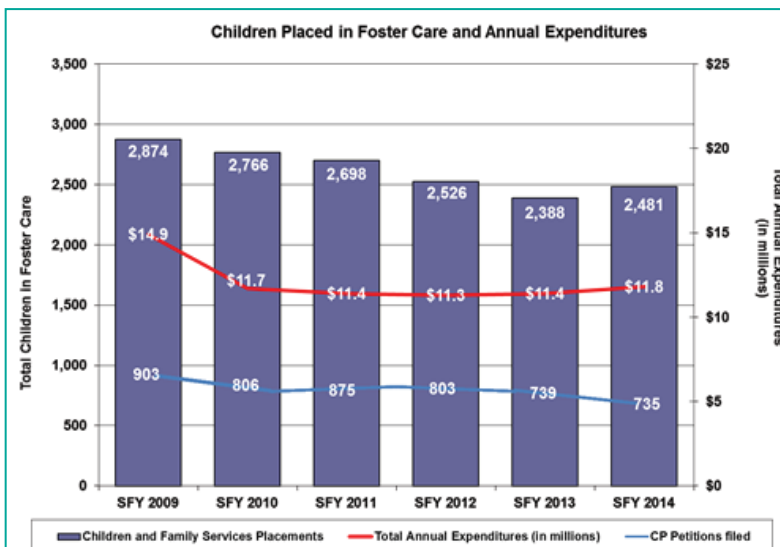
*There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul
than the way in which it treats its children.* ~Nelson Mandela

For the past fifteen years, Idaho courts have worked diligently to strengthen and enhance the role of the courts in Idaho's child protection process and thereby improve outcomes for some of Idaho's most vulnerable children and families.

OUTCOMES FOR IDAHO'S CHILDREN & FAMILIES REMAIN STABLE

In FY2014, the courts and the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare (IDHW) continued their long and strong history of working collaboratively for the benefit of Idaho children and families. One of the results of this collaboration is that outcomes for Idaho children and families remained stable in FY2014.

- 1. Number of Child Protection Cases.** The number of child protection petitions filed in FY2014 remained stable, with a very slight decrease in the number of cases filed when compared with FY2013 (739 petitions filed in FY2013 and 735 filed in FY2014), but a notable decline of 9% when compared to the five-year high in FY2010.
- 2. Number of Children in Foster Care.** In FY2014, the number of Idaho children in out-of-home care increased slightly, by 3.7%, when compared to FY2013. Despite the slight increase in the number of children in care, FY2014 continues a downward trend in the number of children in care, with a decline of 11% when compared to the five-year high in FY2010.
- 3. Cost of Out-of-Home Care.** Mirroring the slight increase in the number of Idaho children in out-of-home care, the cost of foster care in FY2014 increased by 3% when compared to FY2013, but declined by 7% when compared to the five-year high in FY2010.



The courts and the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare remain committed to keeping Idaho children safely at home and to place them in out-of-home care only when there is no way for a child to be safe at home. When placement in out-of-home care is unavoidable, efforts are made to safely reunify the family within twelve months whenever possible.

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ENHANCED SERVICES AND SUPPORT AVAILABLE TO IDAHO FAMILIES CHALLENGED BY SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND TRAUMA AND/OR MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Idaho families faced with both a child protection case and a substance use disorder are among Idaho's highest risk and highest need families. Child protection cases involving a substance use disorder are complex and challenging. Idaho's four child protection drug courts (CPDCs), one each in Nez Perce, Twin Falls, Bannock, and Bonneville counties, provide enhanced treatment, services, and support to families that have an open child protection case. To qualify, families must meet the drug court eligibility requirements (high risk/high need) and voluntarily agree to participate. Enhanced services and support may include assistance with transportation, housing, child care, employment, and medical/dental care not covered by other funding sources.

In FY2014, Idaho's four CPDCs:

- served a total of 77 parents and 100 children;
- graduated 13 participants;
- reunified 41 children with their families; and
- welcomed 2 substance free babies.

For those Idaho families with an open child protection case, a substance use disorder, a history of trauma and/or a co-occurring mental health diagnosis, enhanced trauma informed treatment and services are available in the Twin Falls and Bannock County child protection drug courts. The enhanced treatment and services are funded by a three-year, \$550,000 federal grant awarded to the Idaho Supreme Court in FY2014.

The courts and IDHW are exploring opportunities to provide enhanced treatment and services to families who have an open child protection case and a substance use disorder but who do not meet the eligibility requirements for, or decline participation in a CPDC. IDHW, in collaboration with the courts and other key stakeholders, applied for and was awarded one of five "Access to Recovery" grants (ATR-IV) in late FY2014. IDHW will manage the ATR-IV grant. Although the details of available funding, treatment and services offered under the ATR-IV grant are not yet finalized, it is certain that families with an open child protection case and a substance use disorder are one of three at-risk populations that will be served by the ATR-IV grant.

IDAHO'S GUARDIAN AD LITEM PROGRAMS: PROTECTING PRECIOUS RESOURCES

Idaho's seven guardian ad litem programs (GAL or CASA programs) exemplify a successful public/private partnership that greatly benefits Idaho children and families. The Idaho GAL programs are funded by an appropriation from the Idaho Legislature (approximately two-thirds of total funding) and from community donors (approximately one-third of total funding). GAL volunteers worked incredibly hard in FY2014, contributing 91,375 hours, roughly the equivalent of 46 full-time positions, to advocate for Idaho's abused, abandoned, and neglected children.

Idaho Code § 16-1614 provides that in Child Protection Act cases, the court shall appoint a guardian ad litem (GAL) for any child under 12 years old and may appoint a GAL for children 12 years or older. In FY2014, Idaho judges appointed a GAL to advocate on behalf of 292 children¹, of which 222 (76%) benefitted from the steady, positive influence, and compassionate advocacy of a GAL volunteer. The remaining 70 children (24%) were monitored by CASA staff, but did not have the long-term support and child-focused advocacy of a volunteer GAL. Despite the ongoing support of the Legislature and the citizens of Idaho, additional funding is needed to ensure that Idaho's GAL programs can meet their statutory mandate.

Much has been accomplished to improve outcomes for Idaho's most fragile families and children in the past year. Much remains to be done.

Nothing you do for children is ever wasted. ~~ Garrison Keillor

12-16-14

¹ This number represents children for whom a GAL was appointed during FY2014. It does not include children for whom a GAL was appointed in previous years that continued to be unserved by a volunteer during FY2014. Idaho's CASA programs report that a total of 427 children for whom a GAL was appointed were unserved by a GAL volunteer at some point during FY2014.

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