



DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC SECURITY

*Your Partner For A Stronger Arizona*

Janice K. Brewer  
Governor

Neal Young  
Director

SEP 1 2009

Ms. Debbie Davenport  
Auditor General  
Office of the Auditor General  
2910 North 44 Street, Suite 410  
Phoenix, Arizona 85018

Dear Ms. Davenport:

The Arizona Department of Economic Security wishes to thank the Office of the Auditor General for the opportunity to respond to the recently completed performance audit of the Division of Children, Youth and Families, Child Protective Services, Relative Placement Program.

We appreciate the Auditor General's acknowledgment of the Department's success, for many years, in significantly surpassing the national median rate for the placement of children who require out-of-home care with relatives. In some recent years, the Department's rate of relative placements was twice the national median rate, as indicated in your charts. The Department also appreciates the Auditor General's acknowledgment of our policy and efforts in conducting frequent searches for relatives of children in out-of-home care. We recognize, and your report corroborates, that children placed with relatives are better able to maintain their sense of cultural identity and family connections, experience fewer placement changes and are less likely to re-enter out-of-home care. In addition, the Department recognizes that placement with a relative can cost much less than other placements.

The Department will continue to build upon our successful efforts in this area and implement the recommendations in the report. If you have any questions, please contact Jakki Hillis, Acting Assistant Director, Division of Children, Youth and Families, at (602) 542-3598 or me at (602) 542-5757.

Sincerely,

Neal Young  
Director

***ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC SECURITY'S RESPONSE  
TO THE OFFICE OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORT  
ON RELATIVE PLACEMENTS***

Relative placements benefit children in many ways. Studies support that children who are placed with relatives experience fewer placement changes and are less likely to re-enter out-of-home placement. For many years, the Arizona Department of Economic Security has surpassed the national median rate for placing children who require out-of-home care with relative caregivers.

The Department places great emphasis on the importance of children in out-of-home placement maintaining their sense of cultural identity and family connections. Department policy supports children maintaining their family and cultural ties by requiring staff to conduct frequent searches for relatives of children in out-of-home placement. The Department appreciates the Auditor General's acknowledgment of our positive outcomes in this area.

The Department agrees with the recommendations in the report. We will continue to build upon our successful efforts in this area.

**RECOMMENDATION 1.1:**

The Division should revise its policy to include additional guidance for staff to consider when determining whether the adults in a prospective relative caregiver's household clear their criminal background check. Specifically, the policy should include a listing of offenses that would automatically preclude someone from clearing the criminal background check and additional factors that staff should consider if an individual requested that CPS staff reconsider its decision to deny clearance.

**DES Response:**

The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented.

The Division will provide additional guidance for staff by providing a listing of criminal offenses that would preclude a relative from clearing the criminal records check.

**RECOMMENDATION 1.2:**

The Division should revise its assessment guidance to include common types of safety hazards that should be looked for when performing home safety assessments.

**DES Response:**

The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented.

The Division will provide staff with additional guidance on the common types of safety hazards that should be looked for when performing home safety assessments.

**RECOMMENDATION 1.3:**

The Division should enforce the statutory and policy requirements that staff notify, in writing, individuals who are declined as relative placements. The notification should include the decision, reason(s) for it, and appeals process information. Alternately, if the Division believes that verbal notification is more effective, it should seek a statutory change to allow the required information to be communicated verbally, revise its policy to reflect the statutory change, and develop a mechanism that will allow supervisors to verify that staff are providing the required information.

**DES Response:**

The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented.

The Division will instruct direct service staff and their supervisors to provide written notification to individuals who are declined as relative caregivers. The notification will include the decision, reason(s) for the decision, and the process for having this decision reviewed, if requested by the relative.

**RECOMMENDATION 2.1:**

The Division should centralize on-going information on staff's efforts to identify and place children with relatives, including:

- a. Identifying or developing a centralized location, preferable electronic;
- b. Modifying its policies to indicate what information staff are required to record in the centralized location; and
- c. Ensuring staff record the required information in the centralized location.

**DES Response:**

The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented.

The Division will document the efforts made to identify and place children with relatives in our Automated Case Management System (CHILDS). The Division will also provide additional guidance to staff as to the centralized documentation requirements for relative searches. To better ensure that staff record the required information in the centralized location, the Division will include this requirement in the Supervisory Review process.