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## Results for Berks are mixed in state study of foster care

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- Some abused and neglected children in Berks County spend seven times longer in foster care before being placed with relatives than is typical statewide. Berks children typically spend six months in foster care before being reunited with parents vs. five months statewide, according to [a report released Wednesday](#).

On the other hand, Berks County Children and Youth Services is better than most counties at making sure children reunited with their parents after foster care are not returning to foster care, the report said.

The report was issued by Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, a Harrisburg nonprofit group that investigates government policies regarding children.

The goal of the analysis, Chief Executive Joan Benso said, was to encourage counties to get children into permanent homes as quickly as possible because children who languish in the foster care system are more likely to drop out of school, become teen parents or be incarcerated.

The report shows that Berks is using good strategies to prevent children from returning to foster care after they have been reunited with parents or other family, she said.

But the report also found that Berks children generally are in temporary foster care for 28 months before being placed with relatives. The state average is four months.

Barbara Jakubek, agency placement director, said she would have to look more closely at the factors that went into the statistic before she could pinpoint the reasons.

Some of the children could have been in the system longer because plans to reunite them with their parents fell through or time was needed to locate willing relatives who could provide a safe home, she said.

The agency may need to work with relatives before the child can live there, Jakubek said.

Some of the problem could be timing because the caseload ebbs and flows from month to month, and the report only covers October through March, she said.

"In February, we had one adoption," she said. "In August, we had 15."

Jakubek was not surprised that only 18.2 percent of the agency's children are coming back into foster care within a year after being reunited with their parents versus the statewide average of 26.6 percent.

The agency in 2004 recognized it had a problem in that area, and created a special unit to work exclusively with children leaving foster care, she said.

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