

## Washington State Foster Care: The Parents

These are highlights from the most comprehensive survey to date of parents with children in Washington State's child welfare system.

By and large these parents are very **poor** single women, disproportionately **of color**. Two thirds are **unemployed** and almost 30% are in **unstable living situations**.

### Parent profile

- 92% are female, average age is 32; 68% single parents
- Only 62% are white, compared to the state's general population, which is 84% white.
- 47% have annual income of less than \$10,000
- 67% are unemployed
- 30% didn't finish high school; 28% only have a high school degree

### The struggle to meet basic needs

Parents told us that in the last year:

- Food: 58% were unable to buy enough food to feed their family or had used a food pantry or community meal program

- Shelter: 45% had been evicted, had to move in with family or friends or had been homeless
- Clothing and other essentials: 73% were unable to pay the rent or mortgage, buy needed clothing or pay an important bill

### Parent risk factors

- 55% suffered sexual abuse as a minor
- 45% have had major depression in their lifetime
- 35% experienced domestic violence in past 12 months
- 29% reported alcohol/drug use or dependence in past 12 months

These data were collected as part of an independent evaluation DSHS asked Partners for Our Children to undertake to determine if the state's new child welfare casework practice model — Solution Based Casework — improves outcomes for children and their families. The survey — conducted between July and December, 2008 — had an 82% response rate of 809 parents with a newly opened case in the past 60 to 180 days.

*Partners for Our Children is committed to improving the lives of Washington state foster children through rigorous research, analysis and evidence-based innovation. The organization, founded in 2007, is a collaborative effort of the University of Washington School of Social Work, Washington State Department of Social and Health Services and private funders.*

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