



Reunification

OKLAHOMA Human Services

Oklahoma Human Services (OKDHS) maintains that the primary goal of foster care is to allow birth families the necessary time to correct the conditions that initially brought their children into the state's care and safely sustain their family after reunification.

A Foster Family's Role

Children need to be part of families as they grow and manifest their identity in the world. Sometimes, difficult or unsafe circumstances determine that they cannot live with their birth family for a period of time. Foster families are needed to give children a safe place to live while their families are given help. Those who become foster parents not only foster children, but families, too. They serve as mentors for birth families and help parents and children work toward becoming a family that is healthy and whole again. When it is safe to do so, returning to their birth homes is best for children. Reunification ensures children maintain long-term connections to their kin, culture and community. Foster families support the children's parents and extended family while the child is in their care, in the time leading up to reunification, and sometimes even after the child has returned home.

A Chance for Children to Heal

In Oklahoma, the majority of children come into care due to neglect, often related to parental substance abuse. Regardless of whether they experienced neglect or abuse, children in foster

**Nearly 1,900
children were
safely reunited
with their families
in SFY 2021.**



care often exhibit behaviors that result from their trauma. They have learned survival skills that helped keep them safe in difficult times, however, these can negatively impact how they relate to the world around them. Children come into care from every race, religion and socioeconomic group, but they experience similar challenges when dealing with removal from their home and everything familiar to them. Foster families can offer a safe home and a chance to replace unsafe habits with new ones. OKDHS offers training to help foster parents understand the trauma children have experienced and how to effectively care for them.

A Chance for Parents to Receive Help

While their children are in a safe home, birth families can take time to approach interventions like counseling or substance abuse treatment and recovery. Birth families can also experience trauma or difficult life experiences that have interfered with their ability to care for their children. OKDHS, supportive agencies and foster parents help birth families work through their trauma and find strength again.

If Reunification is Not Possible

Some birth families are unable to correct the conditions that brought their children into the state's care, and reunification is not possible. When this happens, the state is responsible for finding their children a permanent home, often through adoption. In state fiscal year 2021, nearly 1,353 adoptions were established.¹

True North goals are a set of priorities developed by OKDHS to guide the work of the agency in order to focus resources and improve collaboration and communication with stakeholders. Each of OKDHS's divisions has approximately three to five focused True North goals in addition to eight agency-wide True North goals.

True North Child Welfare Services Goal 1: Equip and empower families to provide a safe home for their children.

¹ Data from SFY 2020 Annual Report