

Wyoming Children's Justice Project

2023 Case Closure Audit

As part of receiving the Federal Court Improvement Program grant, the Wyoming Children's Justice Project (CJP) is required to analyze data regarding Wyoming child welfare cases. Furthermore, the grant requires that CJP continuously evaluate and modify data collection methods to ensure that valid data is being collected and analyzed. Data collected by CJP is used to determine future CJP goals and efforts, with an emphasis on data-driven decision making.

In 2021, after review of previous data collection methods, CJP implemented a new "case closure audit" process to improve the reliability of data retrieved from Wyoming cases. The case closure audit has been conducted on cases from four years, 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023. The data for 2021 and on was collected using the new method. Increased technological support was utilized during the 2022 audit and the 2023 audit was conducted with full support from the Judicial Branch's data team. The following report contains the results of the 2023 audit.

Methodology

The case closure audit consists of a review on every abuse and neglect case in Wyoming closed during the previous calendar year. In 2021, all cases that closed in 2020 were reviewed. In 2022, all cases that closed in 2021 were reviewed. In 2023 all cases that closed in 2022 were reviewed. Finally, in 2024 all cases that closed in 2023 were reviewed.

The first step in the process is obtaining a list of every case closed during the previous calendar year, utilizing the Full Court Enterprise case management system maintained by the Wyoming Judicial Branch. Any case assigned a status of "closed," "dismissed," or "disposed" is included on the list for review. Each of these cases is examined to verify the presence of a dismissal order signed by the judge to confirm eligibility for the review. Cases which were not closed in the calendar year under review are removed from the list. Additional cases removed from the list include cases that are transferred from one county to another due to the difficult procedural posture, and cases with consent decrees as they are not required to follow some statutory deadlines.

Once the final list is prepared, documents associated with cases closed during the audit period are processed using optical character recognition (OCR) software and CJP audit keywords are identified and highlighted. The documents are loaded into the CJP module of the Wyoming Judicial Branch's user interface to allow for search optimization. Staff from the Administrative Office of the Courts, including CJP staff and members of the data team review the documents for each case and submit an electronic form with the required audit data. The audit data statistics are then processed and analyzed:

Data Point	What is Collected	Reason for Collection
Case Identifiers	The Judge, county, children's initials, and case #	Identification and tracking purposes
Removal Date	The date that the child was taken into temporary protective custody This date is retrieved from the Petition	Statutory timelines for certain hearings run from the date of removal
Shelter Care Hearing Date	The date the court held the shelter care hearing This date is retrieved from the Order on Shelter Care Hearing or Police Affidavits filed with the court	By statute, the shelter care hearing is to be held within 48 business hours of removal
Petition Date	The date the prosecutor filed the petition with the Clerk of District Court This date is retrieved from the Petition	Statutory timelines for certain hearings run from the date of the Petition
Initial Appearance Date	The date of the initial appearance This date is retrieved from the Order on Initial Appearance	Statutory timelines for certain hearings run from the date of the initial appearance
Adjudication Date	The date the case was adjudicated at trial or through plea This date is retrieved from the Adjudication Order	Adjudication is required to be held within 60 days of the initial appearance or for good cause within 90 days of the filing of the Petition
Disposition Date	The date the final disposition hearing was held This date is retrieved from the order designated as the final disposition order. Temporary disposition orders are not used to collect this data point.	Disposition is required to occur within 60 days of adjudication but for good cause may be continued for an additional 60 days
1 st Review Hearing Date	The date of the first review hearing This date is retrieved from the first order designated as an Order on Review Hearing	The first review hearing is to be held within six months of the date of removal
1 st Permanency Hearing Date	The date of the 1 st permanency hearing This date is retrieved from the first order designated as an Order on Permanency Hearing UNLESS the permanency was changed from reunification to another permanency type in the Disposition Order	The first permanency hearing is to be held within one year of the date of removal

Date of Closure	The date the judge signed the order closing the case	Date of closure is used to determine case length
Return Date	<p>The date the child was removed from the legal custody of DFS</p> <p>DFS custody runs from the time the child enters the LEGAL custody of DFS to the time the child leaves the LEGAL custody of DFS.</p>	Date of return is used to determine time in custody for reunification cases
Date Permanency Plan Changed	<p>The first date the court ordered the permanency plan as something other than reunification</p> <p>This date is retrieved by reviewing permanency hearing orders until an ordered change in permanency is located</p>	The date the permanency plan is changed is used to calculate time to achieve permanency
Permanency Type	<p>The final permanency achieved in the case</p> <p>Cases are designated as achieving the following permanency types: Reunification, Guardianship, Preservation, Adoption, APLA, and Other.</p> <p>Reunification is when a child enters custody and then returns to a parent or guardian.</p> <p>Guardianship is when a child enters custody and then achieves permanency through legal guardianship with someone other than parent/guardian (i.e., relative, foster parent).</p> <p>Preservation is when a child does not enter custody and remains with parent/guardian.</p> <p>Adoption is when a child enters custody and then achieves permanency through legal adoption from someone other than parent/guardian (i.e., relative, foster parent).</p>	The type of permanency achieved is used to sort which cases should be analyzed for certain data points

	<p>APLA is “another planned living arrangement” is when a child enters custody and then achieves permanency via transitioning to independent living arrangements.</p> <p>“Other” was added as a data point in 2021 to account for cases that were closed before permanency was achieved, such as a case where a child passed away or if custody was transferred to another case (i.e., a delinquency case).</p>	
Date Permanency was Achieved	<p>The date final permanency was achieved</p> <p>This date is calculated in one of two ways. If the date that final permanency was achieved can be located in any of the documents filed with the court, that date will be used (ex: if the Motion to Dismiss includes the date of adoption or the date in which a child is returned home). If the date of final permanency cannot be located in the file, the date of closure is used as the date permanency was achieved.</p>	The date permanency was achieved is used to calculate time to achieve permanency

These data points are entered into the case closure database. Because children within the same case may be returned home at different times or leave the case under different permanency options, a “case” within the case closure audit refers to a child, not a court case. For example, a court case with five children will be entered into the database as five different cases, once for each of the children with the information pertaining to that child.

Once these data points are entered into the database, the following calculations are made for each case:

Calculation	What is Calculated
Days to Shelter Care	The days from the time of removal to the time of the Shelter Care Hearing
Days to Adjudication	The days from the filing of the Petition to Adjudication
Days to Disposition	The days from Adjudication to Disposition
Days to Review Hearing	The days from removal to the 1 st review hearing
Days to Permanency Hearing	The days from removal to the 1 st permanency hearing

Days to Permanency from Removal	The days from removal to achieving final permanency ** Because removal can occur 48 hours before a Petition is filed, and because certain cases may use the date of closure as the date permanency was achieved, it is possible to have a case where the days to achieve permanency is longer than the days a case was open
Days to Permanency from Change in Permanency	For cases with a permanency type other than reunification, the days from when the permanency plan was changed to when final permanency was achieved
Days to Return	For reunification cases, the days from removal to the date of return
Days Open	The days from the filing of the Petition to the date the case was closed

Once these numbers are obtained, the database is then checked for errors. Any case that produces one of the following results is automatically reviewed again for accuracy.

Data Point

Days to Adjudication
Days to Disposition
Days to Review Hearing
Days to Permanency Hearing

Trigger Point for Second Review

Anything over 100 days
Anything over 120 days
Anything over 200 days
Anything over 370 days

Any other data point that indicates possible error (such as a negative number, a failure to calculate, or a final number that is glaringly wrong) also triggers a second review of the case data. Second reviews are designed to eliminate errors in data collection as well as typographical errors.

Once error checking is complete, district averages are obtained, and data is prepared for dissemination to the CJP Council. Upon review of the final report, the CJP Council will approve publication of the case closure audit data.

Federal Timelines

Permanency Type	Federal Timeline Requirement
Reunification	12 months
Guardianship	18 months
Adoption	24 months

2023 Case Closure Audit Results

Audit Category	First Judicial District	Second Judicial District	Third Judicial District	Fourth Judicial District	Fifth Judicial District	Sixth Judicial District	Seventh Judicial District	Eighth Judicial District	Ninth Judicial District	Statewide
# of Cases Closed	89	61	70	23	41	123	171	55	33	666
# of Consent Decrees	21	15	15	3	11	32	37	13	15	162
# of Cases Analyzed	68	46	55	20	30	91	134	42	18	504
# Reunification	46	21	44	15	25	26	98	27	8	310
# Preservation	10	4	2	0	2	56	2	10	1	87
# Adoption	11	4	8	4	3	3	15	1	4	53
# Guardianship	1	17	0	0	0	3	15	3	5	44
# APPLA	0	0	1	1	0	2	4	0	0	8
# Other	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	2
% Returned	67.6%	45.7%	80.0%	75.0%	83.3%	28.6%	73.1%	64.3%	44.4%	61.5%
Average Days To Shelter Care Hearing	3	2	2	3	3	3	2	2	3	2
Average Days To Adjudication	57	52	51	65	75	57	64	56	72	57
Average Days To Disposition	43	51	19	43	65	56	26	16	99	44
Average Days To Review Hearing	189	184	177	170	217	208	177	193	281	192
Average Days To Permanency Hearing	353	332	404	382	355	371	365	363	359	364
Average Days In Legal Custody	303	334	347	292	502	225	230	334	134	301
Average Days To Permanency from Removal	967	862	1114	1339	1258	1245	694	1037	1057	924
Average Days To Permanency from Change in Permanency	551	397	542	902	969	748	327	498	311	471
Average Case Length	334	673	464	673	666	326	399	373	481	437

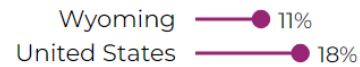
Wyoming Statistics Compared to National Statistics

Outcomes of children exiting foster care

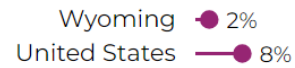
Reunification



With relative or guardianship



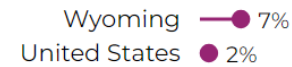
Emancipation



Adoption



Other



Source: ChildTrends.org report of AFCARS 2021 Data

Wyoming Statistics Compared to National Statistics, cont.

Number of children exiting foster care to each form of permanency in 2021

	Wyoming	United States
Reunification	504	99,822
Adoption	105	53,337
Guardianship	85	37,383

Source: ChildTrends.org report of AFCARS 2021 Data

Length of stay in foster care

	Wyoming	United States
Average length of stay in foster care before exit to reunification ⁴	8.5 months	13.4 months
Average length of stay before exit to adoption	33.3 months	34.2 months
Average length of stay before exit to guardianship	17.1 months	22.9 months