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## State report on foster care gives Berks system mixed grades

Returns fewer, adoptions faster, but stays longer state than average

By **Mary E. Young**  
Reading Eagle

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Berks County children removed from their homes because of abuse or neglect spend nearly six months longer in foster care than the statewide average, according to a report issued Tuesday.

But the report doesn't tell the whole story, said the woman overseeing the county foster care system.

Barbara Jakubek, Children and Youth Services placement director, said Berks provides intensive in-home services for parents in a bid to prevent children from being placed in foster care.

If parents can't or won't care for their children, the agency then tries to place the children with other family members, she said.

The children who then are placed in foster care have more complex problems that take longer to resolve, Jakubek said.

The Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children report said a Berks child averages 16.4 months in foster care, compared with 12.1 months for similar counties with an urban core and rural areas, and 10.7 months statewide.

Chief Executive Joan Benso said the goal is to ensure every child has a safe, stable home and supportive family.

The numbers show Berks is on the right track, she said.

Berks had 689 children in care March 31, compared with 812 on the same date in 2008, Benso said. And fewer Berks children return to foster care after being reunited with parents or placed with families than the statewide average.

"The stay in foster care is a little longer," Benso said. "But when they go home, more of them stay home."

Jakubek said the agency had 539 children in foster care as of Tuesday, with 245 up for adoption because they cannot be reunited with parents or placed with relatives.

Sending the remaining children home too soon might result in their being harmed, she said.

Contact Mary Young: 610-478-6292 or myoung@readingeagle.com.

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