

# NEWS RELEASE



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**Headline:** ***Nearly 900 Oregon children and families stayed together thanks to innovative addiction recovery services***

When parents struggle with drug or alcohol addiction, families can stay intact and the state saves resources through comprehensive services, according to a recent report by Oregon's Department of Human Services.

The report analyzes two years of data from the Intensive Treatment and Recovery Services (ITRS) initiative, which provides families with addiction treatment and recovery support services. The program offers funding for housing, transportation and other services such as parent training and child care. These supports make it possible for families to stay together and lessen the time children spend in foster care. The program was created jointly by the DHS divisions of Addictions and Mental Health (AMH) and Children, Adults and Families (CAF).

"The services are recovery focused. We know when parents receive addiction treatment combined with other supports, they can keep their families together," says Karen Wheeler, AMH addictions policy and program development administrator. "Treating the parents' addiction does more than just save families. It prevents the cycle of addiction, creating healthier families and communities."

The report summarizes the first two years of ITRS and compares the outcomes with families receiving addiction services before ITRS was launched. The comparison shows that, with supportive and intensive treatment, the time children stay in foster care can be reduced or foster care can be avoided altogether. DHS found a median length of stay in foster care of 6.8 months for reunified children under ITRS compared to 8.9 months for children whose parents received services in 2005-2007.

Additionally, because foster care is a disruptive and expensive form of support for a child, the human and cost savings were dramatic. Since the program was launched nearly three years ago, 868 children or 40 percent were reunited with their parents, saving \$1.7 million a month in foster care costs. This total includes food, clothing, shelter and caseworker time.

"Addictions issues are the single biggest factor for parents with children who end up in foster care," says Jay M. Wurscher, Children, Adults and Families child welfare alcohol and drug services coordinator. "ITRS allows child welfare caseworkers to focus on protecting the children while the alcohol and drug workers focus on the parents. The greatest motivational factor any substance abusing parents have toward achieving recovery is to retain the right to parent their own children."

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The need for an intensive treatment program began to surface in 2005. At the time teams in AMH and CAF were seeing the numbers of families in the child welfare system dramatically increase due to drug use. It's estimated 60 percent of all children in foster care enter the system because of their parents' harmful level of substance abuse.

State legislators approved \$10.4 million for the ITRS initiative in the 2007-2009 biennium and last year approved funding for another two years. Studies show investing in treatment is cost-effective. For every dollar invested, there is a \$4 to \$7 return due to reductions in crime, child abuse and neglect, and medical costs. These social costs of untreated addictions amount to approximately \$1,600 every year for each Oregonian, or a total of nearly \$6 billion.

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