

Focus on Whatcom County

Focus on Whatcom County provides an overview of child welfare-related data. These quarterly, automated reports mirror the Child Well-Being Data Portal by providing information on two major parts of the child welfare system: Investigations & Assessments and Out-of-Home Care.

Overview

The Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) divides Washington state into six regions. Since some of the regions are only one or two counties, Regions 1 and 2, 3 and 4, and 5 and 6 are grouped together. Whatcom County is in the Region 3 and 4 group, along with Island, King, San Juan, Skagit and Snohomish counties.

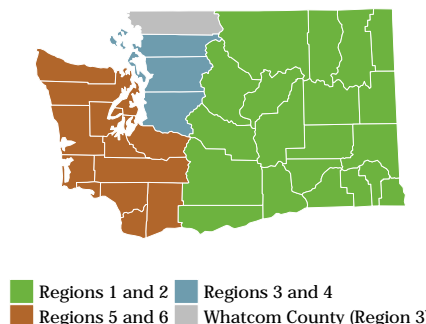
Investigations & Assessments (page 2) provides **household data** on the total number of investigations and assessments cases since 2017, as well as comparative rates for investigations and assessments cases for all Region 3 and 4 counties.

Out-of-Home Care (page 4) provides total counts and comparative rates for the same time periods, but counts **children**, not households. The Out-of-Home Care section also provides basic graphs depicting safety, permanency outcomes and well-being for children in out-of-home care.

- Safety is measured as the percentage of children who re-entered out-of-home care within one year after already exiting to a permanent placement (i.e., reunification, adoption, and guardianship), with region-level and state-level context.
- Permanency outcomes are measured as the percentage of children who entered out-of-home care and experienced one of the following outcomes after two years: reunification, adoption, guardianship, emancipation, other or still in out-of-home care.
- Well-being is measured as the average percent of time children spent in the care of relatives (kinship care) while in out-of-home care.

High-level overview for Whatcom County:

Office of Financial Management (2018)	
Total Population	220,350
Percent of Population Under 5 Years	5.3%
Percent of Population Under 18 Years	20.1%
Child Well-Being Data Portal	
Number of Open Investigations & Assessments, (July 01, 2020)	367
Number of Open Out-of-Home Care Cases, (October 01, 2020)	204
Percent of Out-of-Home Care Cases: Children Under 5 Years, (October 01, 2020)	45%

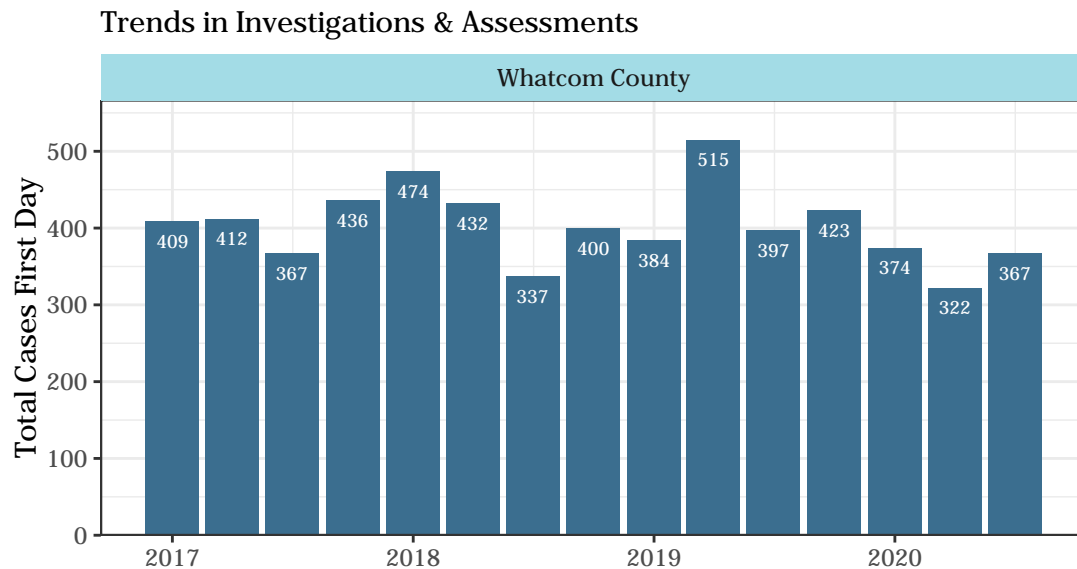


1 Investigations & Assessments

When professionals and community members report suspected instances of child abuse or neglect to the child welfare system, some of the reports are investigated, some are assessed only (e.g., Family Reconciliation Services) and some are screened out because the information reported (if true) does not meet the statutory definition of child abuse or neglect and there is not an immediate need for an assessment or investigation.

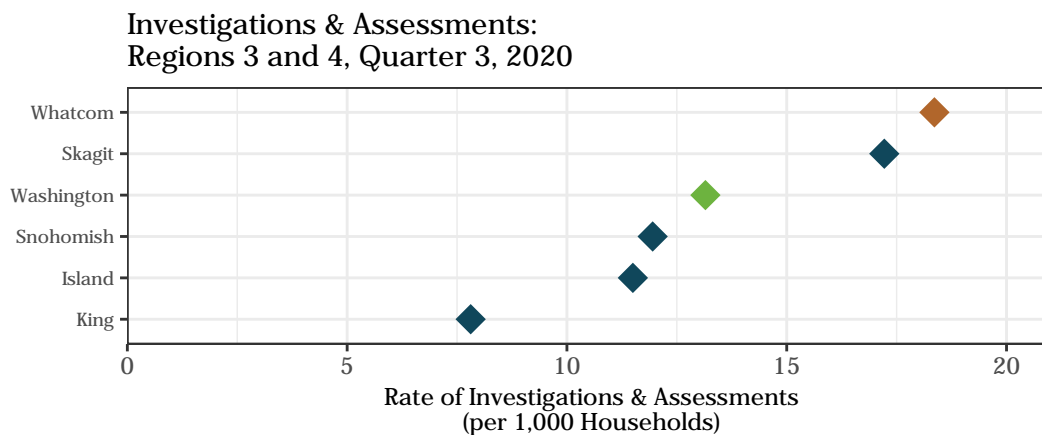
1.1 Investigations & Assessments: Whatcom County Focus

The graph displays point-in-time (i.e., first day of the quarter) trends in investigations & assessments cases for Whatcom County.



1.2 Investigations & Assessments: Regions 3 and 4

To give context to the Whatcom County offices' trend data, the following plot compares the rate of investigations & assessments on Quarter 3, 2020 for Regions 3 and 4 counties and for Washington state. Rates, rather than counts (or total numbers), are used because they account for the population differences.

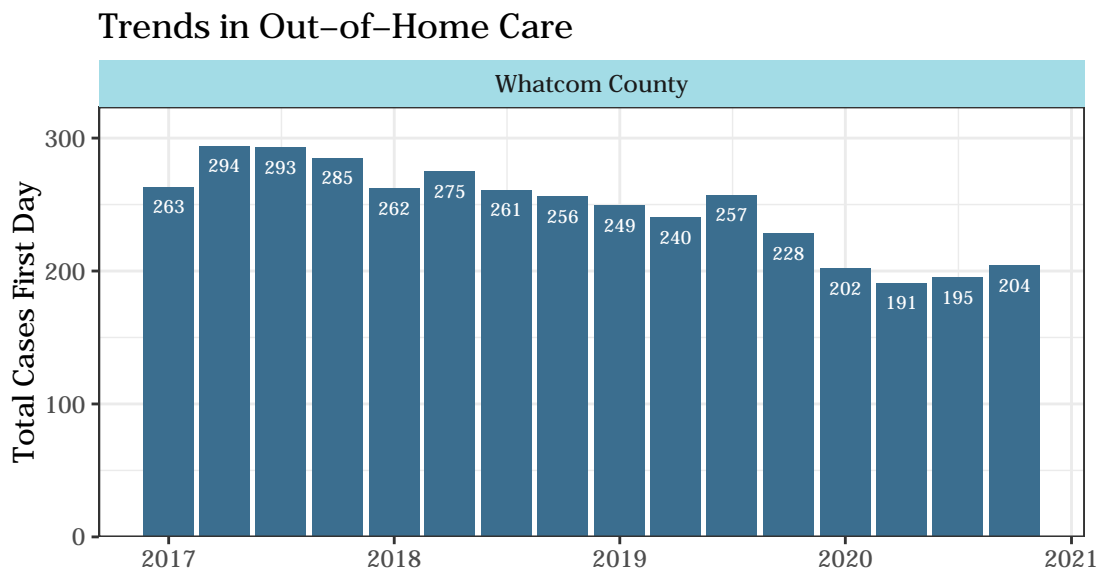


2 Out-of-Home Care

When children cannot remain safely in their home, they are placed in out-of-home care. Once a child is removed, the child welfare system works to find a safe and permanent home for the child. Most children ultimately reunify with their parents after all safety concerns have been addressed; however, some children exit to other permanency outcomes (e.g., adoption, guardianship).

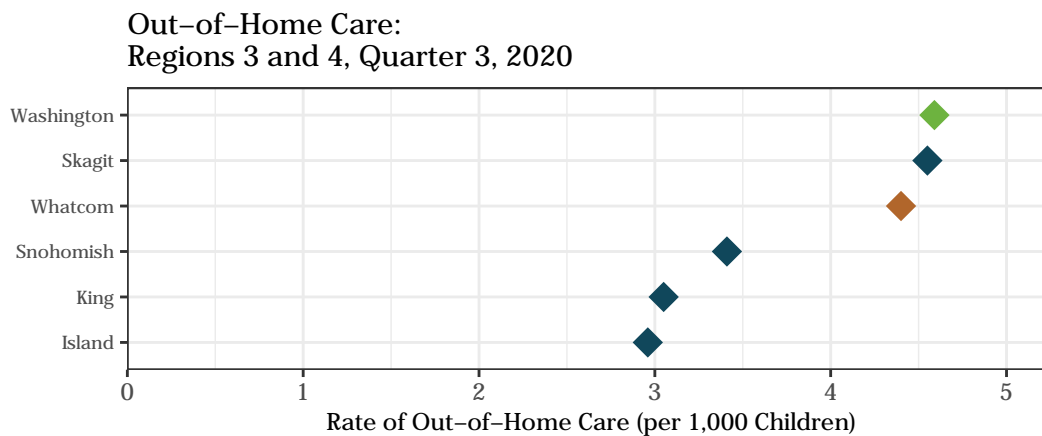
2.1 Out-of-Home Care: Whatcom County Focus

The following graphs display point-in-time (i.e., first day of the quarter) trends in out-of-home care cases for Whatcom County.



2.2 Out-of-Home Care: Regions 3 and 4

To give context to the Whatcom County trend data, the following plot shows the rate of out-of-home care in quarter 3 of 2020 for Regions 3 and 4 counties and for Washington state. Rates, rather than counts (or total numbers), are used because they account for the population differences across Washington State counties.



2.3 Out-of-Home Care: Safety

Sometimes, when children experience a permanency outcome after out-of-home placement (e.g., reunification, guardianship, adoption), safety concerns can resurface. In some circumstances, these safety concerns can be severe enough that the child needs to re-enter out-of-home care.

Table 1 identifies the percentage of children re-entering out-of-home care within one year of exiting to a permanent outcome in 2017, by permanency type, for Regions 3 and 4 counties, as well as for Washington state overall. The higher percentages of re-entry point to the challenges of providing a safe, permanent outcome for the child.

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## `summarise()` ungrouping output (override with `.groups` argument)
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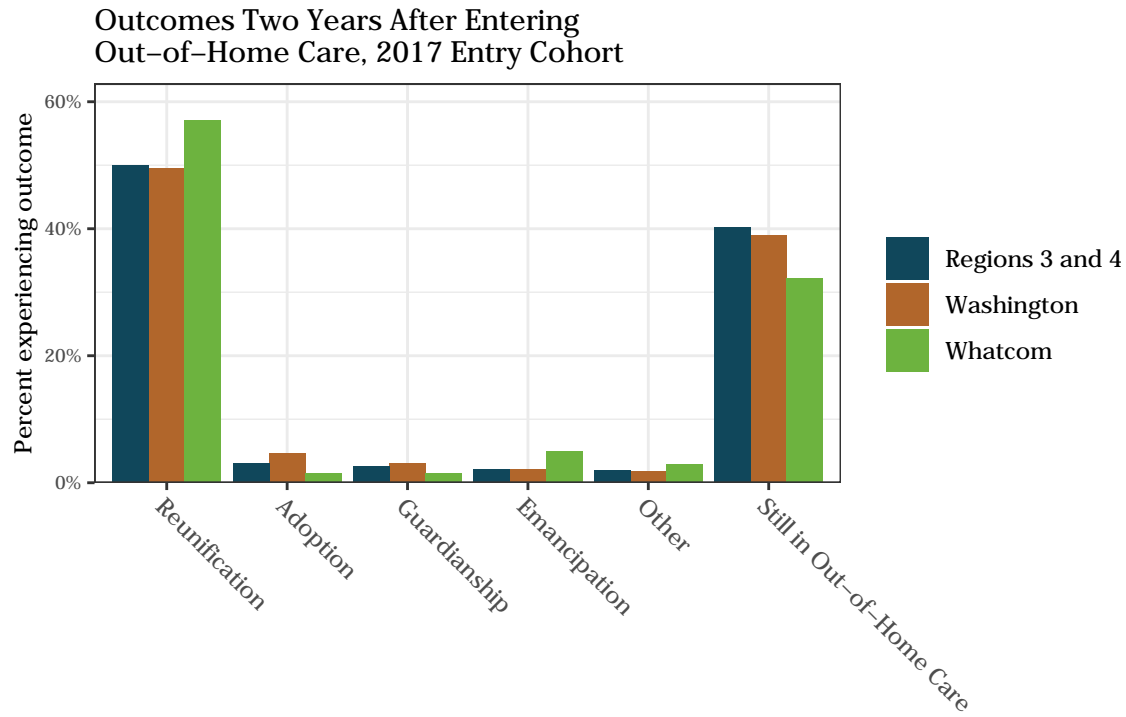
Table 1: Percentage of Children Re-Entering Out-of-Home Care within One Year of Exiting Out-of-Home Care, 2017 Exit Cohort

	Re-Entry
Whatcom	3%
Skagit	12%
Washington	12%
Island	12%
Snohomish	13%
King	14%

2.4 Out-of-Home Care: Outcomes

Under the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA), the goal of the child welfare system is to ensure that children are placed in safe and permanent homes as quickly as possible. When it is safe to do so, the child welfare system first seeks to reunify children with their families. If children are unable to be safely reunified, permanency can be achieved through adoption or guardianship. Some children will also exit the system for other reasons, such as emancipation or transfer of custody to different jurisdictions (e.g., Tribal authorities).

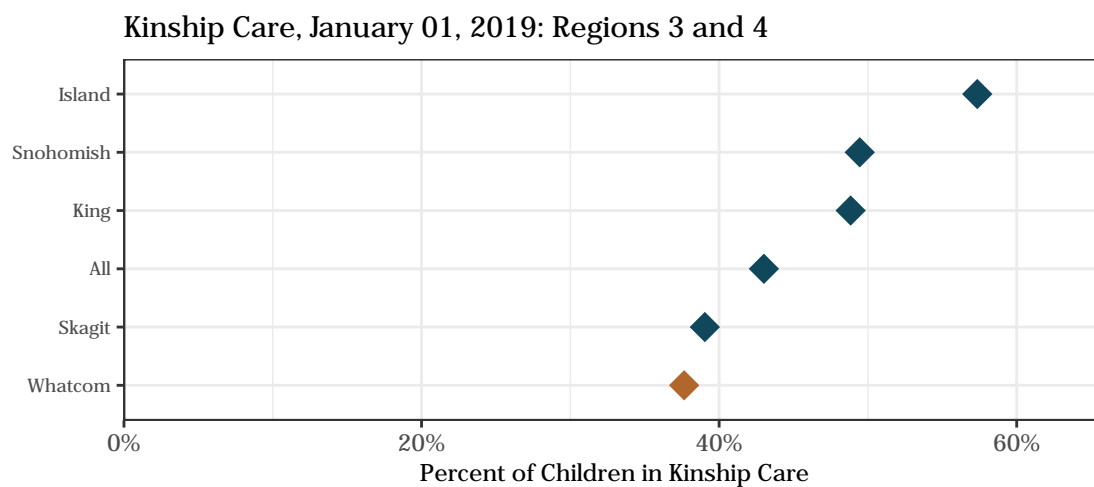
The following bar graph shows the percentage of children in the 2017 entry cohort (those who entered at the same time in 2017) achieving each outcome for Whatcom County, Regions 3 and 4 and Washington state.



2.5 Out-of-Home Care: Well-Being

When placement in out-of-home care is necessary, the physical and psychological needs, as well as the general well-being of the child must be considered. While individual needs vary and well-being is difficult to measure directly, research has shown that placement in kinship care (i.e., a relative's home) can enhance a child's physical and emotional health. Yet, in some cases, the child's best interests necessitate placement in a non-family setting. For example, a child may need specialized services to accomplish a specific therapeutic goal. In such cases, a child may be placed in a non-family setting until those therapeutic goals are met.

Assuming that to some extent kinship care measures child's well-being in an out-of-home setting, the graph below shows the percent of children placed in kinship care (as opposed to foster care or a non-family setting) for the counties in Regions 3 and 4. While in out-of-home care, children often stay in different settings. For example, a child can start in a foster home, but then move to kinship care as soon as a willing and able relative is identified. The online Data Portal provides a more detailed look at kinship care, as well as several other measures related to child well-being.



3 Appendix

The table below provides relevant U.S. Census Bureau data for Whatcom County and for Washington state.

Table 2: Whatcom County Summary

	Whatcom County	Washington
Total population (2018)	220,350	7,427,570
Percent change in population (2010 to 2018)	8.7%	9.5%
Population under 5 years	5.3%	6.1%
Population under 18 years	20.1%	22.4%
Population: White alone	86.8%	79.5%
Population: Black alone	1.2%	4.1%
Population: American Indian/Alaska Native alone	3.2%	1.8%
Population: Asian alone	4.3%	8.7%
Population: Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander alone	0.3%	0.8%
Population: Multiracial	4.2%	5.1%
Population: Hispanic or Latino Origin	9.4%	13.0%
Population: Not Hispanic, White alone	79.2%	68.5%

Office of Financial Management population data retrieved from:
(<https://ofm.wa.gov/washington-data-research/population-demographics>).

Note: In this report, data are presented using “unduplicated counts,” meaning each household with at least one open investigation or one open in-home service case on the first day of the quarter was counted. Unduplicated counts for out-of-home care cases means each child in out-of-home care on the first day of the quarter was counted (see Technical Bulletin: Interpreting the Type of Count Filter for more information).