

Kids cont'd from pg 1

been limited about the number of youths held at each facility overseen by the Office of Refugee Resettlement. The AP obtained data showing the number of children in individual detention centers, shelters and foster care programs for nearly every week over the past 20 months, revealing in detail the expanse of a program at the center of the Trump administration's immigration crackdown.

It's been taking at least twice as long as it did in January 2016, on average two months now, for youth to get out of ORR custody, in part because the administration added more restrictive screening measures for parents and relatives who would take them in. That changed Tuesday when officials ended a policy requiring every adult in households where migrant children will live to

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provide the government with fingerprints.

All still must submit to background checks, and parents themselves still need to be fingerprinted. Nonetheless, officials said they could now process some children more rapidly, and hoped to shorten shelter stays that had dragged on so long kids sometimes wondered if their parents had abandoned them for good.

“It's a pain we will never get through,” said Cecilio Ramirez Castaneda, a Salvadoran who was separated from his 12-year-old son, Omar, when they were apprehended in June under the administration's “zero tolerance” policy, which led to nearly 3,000 children being separated from their families. Omar feared his father

had given up on him during his five months in a Texas shelter.

Ramirez was reunited with Omar last month only to learn that his son had been hospitalized for depression and medicated for unclear reasons, and suffered a broken arm, while in government custody. “It's a system that causes irreparable damage,” Ramirez said.

Experts say the anxiety and distrust children suffer while institutionalized can cause long-lasting mental and physical health problems. It's worse for younger children, those who stay more than a few days and those who are in larger facilities with less personal care.

“This is a moral disaster,” said Dr. Jack Shonkoff, who heads Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child. “We are inflicting punishments on innocent children that will have lifelong consequences.”

Administration officials say increased need has driven them to expand the number of beds available for migrant children from 6,500 last fall to 16,000 today. Sheltering children in large facilities, while not preferable, is a better alternative than holding them for long periods at Border Patrol stations, said Mark Weber, a spokesman for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which oversees ORR.

“There are a large number of children and it's a difficult situation, and we are just working hard to make sure they are taken care of and placed responsibly,” Weber said.

Weber confirmed a number of the shelter populations from the data the AP obtained. To further verify, reporters contacted more than a dozen programs that contract with ORR.

Read the rest of this story at
TheSkanner.com

Retiring Saltzman Delivers Gift to The Skanner

Artwork was created by Monique Clayton, then a sixth-grader at Tubman Middle School.

Retiring City Commissioner Dan Saltzman visited The Skanner's office last week. He delivered a piece of artwork created by Monique Clayton, then a sixth-grader at Harriet Tubman Middle School. Saltzman inscribed the back of the frame with the following message: “Bernie & Bobbie, From my office wall for 20 years, in appreciation for all your support of me & my causes. - Dan Saltzman, 12/12/18.” He is pictured here with The Skanner's publisher, Bernie Foster.

Saltzman, who leaves office at the end of this month, first assumed office in 1999. As of 2017 he had served longer than any member of the Portland City Council since 1969. In January he will be succeeded by Jo Ann Hardesty.



PHOTO BY THE SKANNER

Foster cont'd from pg 1

who was just then starting Youth Unlimited – a nonprofit that provides therapeutic foster care services to children with high needs – by happenstance.

“I was actually in the wrong coffee shop,” Johnson, formerly a behavioral health policy analyst with the Oregon Health Authority, said, laughing. She hadn't even really started recruiting foster parents yet, but gave her card to Davis, and he later became one of her first foster parents after Youth Unlimited was licensed in January.

Davis' foster son is 12-years-old and biracial, with Black and White biological parents; he also has a developmental disability and could not spell his own name before he came to live with Davis.

“It makes me feel good as a person to give back to someone of my color,” said Davis, who is African American himself, college educated and works as a letter carrier for the U.S. Postal Service. A second foster child, who is 14 and Hispanic, will be placed in Davis' home later this week.

Youth Unlimited is part of a newly created coalition of organizations that serve foster youth, and while it's set up to serve everyone, Johnson is particularly eager to recruit foster parents of color and serve foster youth of color. So far, there are five families working with Johnson, all headed by people of color – four are Black and one is a biracial

couple.

“When there is a crisis, people of color suffer the most,” Johnson said. In Oregon, as in many other states, Black and Native American children are overrepresented in foster care: African American children make up 7 percent of foster care youth ver-

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sus 3.3 percent of children statewide, and Native youth make up 4.5 percent of children served in foster care versus 1.6 percent of children in the state's general population.

“I like to use data to inform my decisions,” Johnson said. “If I see that foster youth are disproportionately Native American and African American, that tells me I need to do something intentional and specific,” Johnson said.

After a career in the state and nonprofit sector, Johnson was driven to create her organization in part because of historic mistrust between communities of color and the child welfare system, and provide opportunities for culturally competent care of children of color.

“One of the reasons I've been

able to recruit Black foster parents is that I'm not afraid to speak up for Black people,” Johnson said.

Youth Unlimited is supported with state funds and is part of Foster Plus, a network of 13 social service agencies around the state that collaborate to provide resources and services for foster youth.

“The great thing about a program like Youth Unlimited is the support for families,” said Diane Brandsma, an interim program manager at Boys and Girls Aid, which is also part of the Foster Plus network. “What [Johnson] provides is, there is someone on the other end of that phone when she needs it.”

Currently the organization provides therapeutic foster care, a “semi-clinical” approach to treatment to help children develop social and academic skills they may not have been taught in previous homes or settings, or may be struggling with due to trauma. It will soon have the capacity to provide therapeutic shelter care and residential services for children and youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Johnson is now actively recruiting foster families of color, as well as families that may want to provide relief care or volunteer.

“I want Youth Unlimited to be visible. I don't want Black kids in foster care to be invisible anymore,” Johnson said.

Library cont'd from pg 1

The renewed commitment to Black families aligns with the library's steady expansion of its linguistic and culturally relevant services – including Black Storytime and the archival collection “Our Story: Portland Through an African American Lens” – as well as an effort to ramp up diversity among its staff members.

The bulk of the effort will go towards what the library calls “community action research.” It works by partnering researchers with community members to solve local problems – one of the most pending being the barriers and inequities tied to kindergarten transition.

“Research has shown that Black children often face disparities in school readiness, which signal disparate educational, economic and social outcomes later in life,” stated Multnomah County Library in a press release.

The library is currently requesting proposals for consulting services to lead the community action research. Selected consultants will guide efforts to learn from Black parents and caregivers about kindergarten transition and community needs, as well as make recommendations to the library on culturally responsive programs and practices.

Consultants will also train library staff with the goal of carrying the work forward with Black communities and other cultural groups in the future.

Official research and consulting is set to begin in spring of 2019.

“A public library should be a community's most open and inclusive institution,” said director of Libraries Vailey Oehlke. “Thanks to the generosity of Meyer Memorial Trust and the support of The Library Foundation, Multnomah County Library can live that value, better serve Black families and eliminate barriers for those who are oppressed or have been oppressed.”



Community members at Multnomah County Library