



FACTS ABOUT FOSTER KIDS

Laurens County 2003

A Publication of the South Carolina Governor's Office – Division of Foster Care Review

OVERVIEW

Facts About Foster Kids is intended to provide annual data about children in foster care for every county in South Carolina. It covers: **Demographics** -- how many children there are in foster care, their characteristics and whether their prevalence is increasing or decreasing; **Areas of Concern** -- legal and program shortcomings identified at monthly citizen reviews; and **Progress Measures** -- length of time in care, number of placements, achieving permanency, and recidivism rates. The report concludes with an **Overall Assessment** of this county. Information is collected from local volunteer citizen review boards that review the cases of all children who have been in foster care at least four months; each case is then reviewed every six months thereafter until the child leaves care. The 2003 edition includes complete information about children who were reviewed at least once in 2002. It also includes demographics on those children who entered foster care late in the year and were not reviewed until 2003, but does not yet incorporate them into progress measures or areas of concern.

Facts About Foster Kids replaces the previously produced *Foster Kids Count*. This streamlined version is easier to read, faster to find information, and more suitable for cross-comparing areas and discerning trends over time. Consequently, we hope it will have a greater impact on getting out the message that children need permanent homes.

DEMOGRAPHICS

In Laurens County there were 55 children in foster care who were reviewed during 2002, a slight increase after large swings the prior two years. This represents .31 percent of all children in the county, considerably below the state average of .52 percent. However, 22 children, a larger-than-typical number, entered care in 2002. That will keep the number of reviews from falling further.

	1999	2000	2001	2002	Average
Number of Children Reviewed	46	64	47	55	53
Change from Prior Year		18	-17	8	
Percent of all Children in County	0.30%	0.36%	0.27%	0.31%	0.31%
Number Entering	13	14	11	22	15
Number Leaving	5	22	5	14	12

	Children Reviewed		Children Entering		Children Leaving	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
ALL CHILDREN	147		117		104	
Race:						
African-American	43	29%	39	33%	33	32%
Caucasian	102	69%	76	65%	69	66%
Other	2	1%	2	2%	2	2%
Gender:						
Male	80	54%	62	53%	57	55%
Female	67	46%	55	47%	47	45%
Age:						
5 and younger	46	31%	47	40%	29	28%
6 to 9	29	20%	26	22%	29	28%
10 to 15	41	28%	38	33%	24	23%
16 and older	31	21%	6	5%	24	23%

AREAS OF CONCERN

In 2002, the local review board held 10 meetings that included Laurens County cases, with an average of 8 children reviewed at each meeting. Of the 76 reviews held, about half (49%) had at least one area of concern cited. A total of 62 deficiencies in systemic efforts to secure permanent homes for children in care were cited in 2002. This is nine fewer than in 2001 and considerably less than the all-time high of 171 citations found in 2000. During that two-year span the average number of deficiencies per review fell from 1.74 to 0.82, placing it under the state average of 1.02.

Most of the improvement has come in the less-critical program violations. In 2002, the most often cited legal violations were *No Timely Permanency Planning Hearing* and *No Timely Merits Hearing*, neither of which has improved during the last two years. Both unnecessarily lengthens the time children remain in foster care. The most often cited program violations were *No Case Plan within 60 Days*, *Lack of Progress towards a Permanent Plan* and *No Current Case Plan*. The number of citations for the second of these was reduced in 2002, but these gains are offset by increases in the others.

Table 3: Frequently Cited Areas of Concern, 2000 to 2002, Laurens County					
	2000	2001	2002	Change:	
				00 to 01	01 to 02
LEGAL					
No Timely Permanency Planning Hearing	20	24	19	4	-5
No Timely Merits Hearing	13	6	13	-7	7
No Court Order at Review	16	4	2	-12	-2
No Thorough Adoption Assessment	6	3	4	-3	1
No Face to Face Contact	9	1	9	-8	8
PROGRAM					
No Progress Reports	10	4	2	-6	-2
Lack of Progress Towards Permanent Plan	15	12	4	-3	-8
Interested Parties Not Invited	4	1	1	-3	0
No Advance Packets	13	0	0	-13	0
Incomplete/Inappropriate Case Plan	28	3	2	-25	-1
ALL AREAS OF CONCERN					
Total Number: Areas of Concern	171	71	62	-100	-9
Total Number of Reviews	98	89	76	-9	-13
Areas of Concern per Review	1.74	0.80	0.82	-0.95	0.02
Percent of Reviews with an Area of Concern	78%	60%	49%		

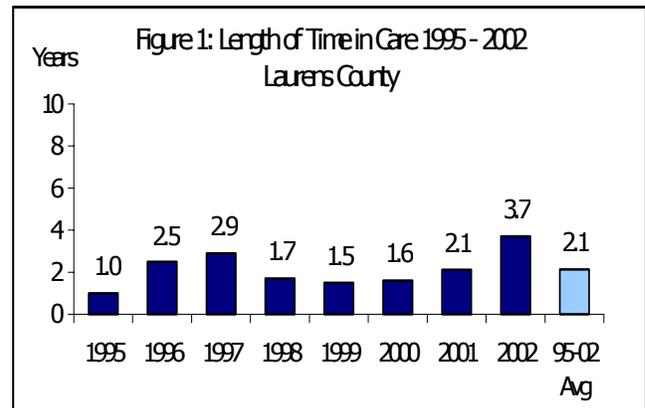
The 2004 edition of *Facts About Foster Kids*, when published during the second half of that year, will include complete information about children who were reviewed at least once in 2003. Because these reviews are now complete, a supplement is currently available on request that contains updated 2003 data on Areas of Concern -- legal and program shortcomings identified at monthly citizen reviews. Please see the contact information at the end of this report if you wish to obtain this supplement (which has been compiled for Laurens County). Demographics and Progress Measures will not be ready until all children entering foster care for the first time in 2003 have been reviewed during the first half of 2004.

PROGRESS MEASURES

Four main indicators are used to measure progress towards better outcomes for children in foster care. For each, trends since 1995 and the average for this eight-year time period are provided.

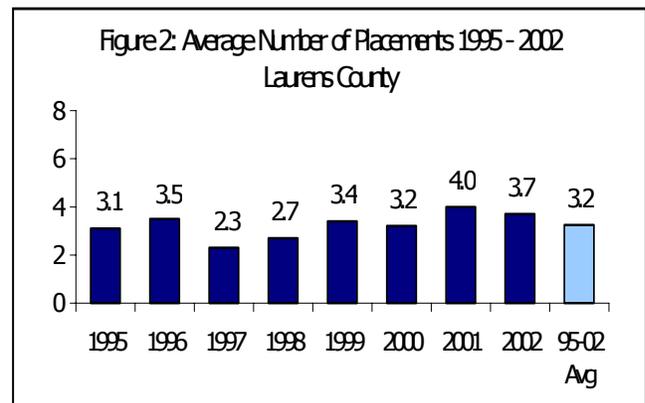
LENGTH OF TIME IN CARE:

The longer a child is away from their home or a nurturing family environment, the more damaging it can be to the normal development of the child. For this reason, a major goal of the Review Board is to ensure that children achieve permanency as quickly as possible. In 2002, the average length of time in care for children in Laurens County rose considerably to 3.7 years. This was its highest ever and the first time since 1997 that length of time in care exceeded the state average.



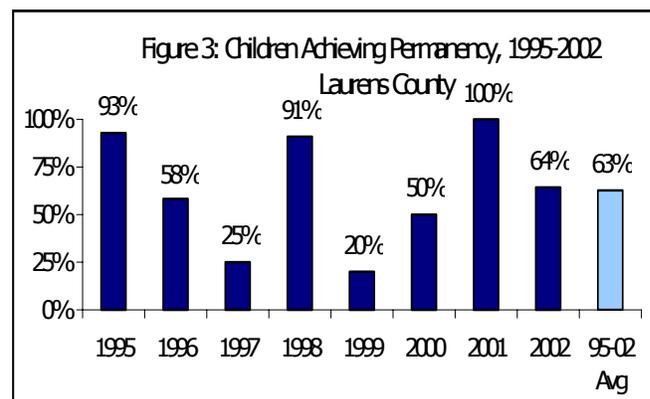
NUMBER OF PLACEMENTS:

Research shows the initial placement in foster care is extremely traumatic for a child. Additional changes in placement once in the foster care system can be detrimental to children's development, affecting their ability to learn, establish relationships and develop as stable, secure individuals. In 2002, Laurens County's average number of placements fell slightly to 3.7, matching the state average. Twenty-three percent of the children who left care experienced five or more placements.



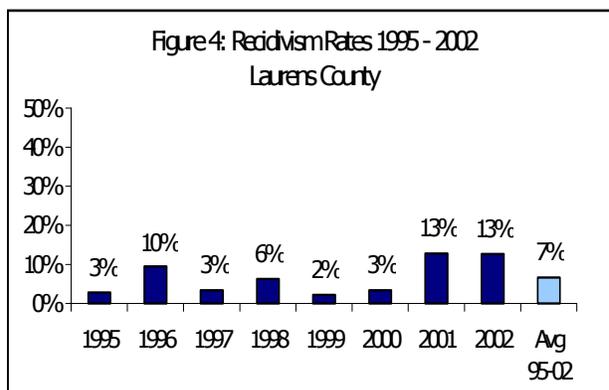
PERCENT ACHIEVING PERMANENCY:

Permanency for a child means placement with a "forever family." Families are the single most important influence in a child's life. Children depend on their families for their material needs and wants, nurturing and leadership. A child can achieve legal permanency upon leaving the foster care system either by returning home to their natural parent or by being adopted. Over time, Laurens County's permanency rate has been 63 percent, identical to the state average, but with great yearly variation.



RECIDIVISM RATES:

Children who re-enter care are some of the most vulnerable children in foster care because they have been taken into custody more than once. Subsequent removals increase the risk for further developmental delays and have an even greater impact on a child's ability to succeed later in life. In 2002, Laurens County failed to lower its historical high recidivism rate of 13 percent. It remains below the state average of 20 percent, however, which has also been rising.



For children re-entering foster care, the previous location matters. Since 1995, all of the children who came back into foster care were from a birth parent or from a relative; none who were adopted returned to foster care.

(Due to the small number of children returning to care in Laurens County, Table 4 is not compiled as it is for larger counties.)

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

Laurens County has displayed a mixed record recently towards improving the situation of children in foster care. In many respects, Laurens equals or outperforms the typical county in South Carolina. A smaller proportion of all Laurens' children are in foster care, and that proportion has not been rising as it has statewide. Recidivism rates, though higher the last two years, remain below the overall South Carolina rate, and the Areas of Concern per review has fallen below the state average. The average number of placements, the length of time in care and the percent of foster children achieving permanency are the same as a typical South Carolina county.

The problem is that until two years ago, Laurens had been outperforming the state in all these respects and has since slipped back to statewide levels in some of them. Moreover, decline in the overall number of deficiencies, while welcome, overstates improvement because the critical legal Areas of Concern such as *No Timely Permanency Planning* and *Merits Hearings* have not similarly been reduced. Meanwhile, the larger-than-usual influx of new children entering foster care in 2002 probably means that the overall prevalence of the county's children who are in foster care will rise in the near-term future, perhaps adversely impacting the progress measures further.