

SOUTH CAROLINA OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

CHILDREN'S FOSTER CARE REVIEW BOARD CITIZENS ADVOCATING SAFETY AND PERMANENCE FOR CHILDREN

2005 - 2006 ANNUAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS



"IF WE DON'T STAND FOR CHILDREN, THEN WE DON'T STAND FOR MUCH."

MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

MISSION STATEMENT

The Division of Foster Care Review provides an external system of ACCOUNTABILITY and ADVOCACY for children and families involved with the foster care system; utilizes panels of COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS to PROMOTE SAFE, PERMANENT HOMES for children in foster care in a timely manner; and increases PUBLIC AWARENESS regarding the impact of child abuse and neglect.

INTRODUCTION AND HIGHLIGHTS

FROM THE DIRECTOR . . .

I am pleased to present the 2005-2006 Annual Report for the South Carolina Children's Foster Care Review Board. This report provides an in-depth look at the status and outcomes of children who experience public foster care in South Carolina (SC). This report also reflects the value of SC's 168 local Foster Care Review Board (FCRB) Members. I am proud to take this opportunity to highlight some of the noteworthy activities of 2005.



- Local review boards held 431 meetings, conducted 8,317 reviews and donated 10,574 hours of service to children in foster care.
- Representatives from local review boards participated in 85 partners meetings with representatives from county Department of Social Services (DSS), county Foster Parent Associations and county Guardian ad Litem Programs to discuss county specific issues, needs and barriers to permanence for children in foster care.
- Local review boards presented the FCRB Annual Report to eight county legislative delegations and submitted 34 reports to local legislative delegations outlining the issues and trends noted during review board meetings.
- Carolyn Payton-Pinson, from Review Board 10B, and Joan Youmans, from Review Board 14A, were named co-winners of the "2005 Review Board Member of the Year." Local Review Board 10B was named the "2005 Review Board of the Year". Members are Carolyn Payton-Pinson, Ann Thayer, Susan Buckner, Carl Edwards and Scott Stephens.
- Local review boards demonstrated their commitment to children, families and their communities through service projects and activities. These included donating book bags, books and school supplies; supporting the DSS's recruitment campaign for foster and adoptive families by providing financial support, soliciting donations and volunteering at recruitment functions; establishing bank accounts to purchase needed items for children in foster care; contributing financially to local Foster Parent Association projects; establishing clothes closets for county DSS offices; soliciting donations to purchase gift cards for children in foster care; providing gifts for children in foster care at Christmas; and hosting appreciation drop-ins for the DSS and other community partners.

INTRODUCTION AND HIGHLIGHTS (continued)

- As a result of follow-up requests from local review boards, the FCRB's General Counsel and Staff Attorney advocated for safety and permanency on behalf of 303 children and attended court on behalf of 101 of these children. The FCRB's Medicaid Review Specialist conducted in-depth assessments on behalf of 64 children in therapeutic placements funded by Medicaid at the request of local review boards. Review Board Coordinators conducted advocacy on behalf of 222 children upon the request of local Review Boards.
- FCRB volunteers and staff have supported the establishment and implementation of the "SC Heart Gallery", a photo gallery exhibit and website of SC children in need of adoptive families. The "SC Heart Gallery" is associated with the National Heart Gallery Project.
- Through a combined effort of the FCRB, the SC Victim's Assistance Children's Network and the Department of Social Services, Senate Bill 85 was signed into law on May 26, 2005. This bill strengthens the Central Registry of Child Abuse and Neglect by mandating that all people who physically or sexually abuse a child, or willfully or recklessly neglect a child, appear on the registry.

Working together we will continue to make an impact for children in foster care in South Carolina. Thank you for your support.

Denise Turbeville Barker
DIVISION DIRECTOR

ABOUT THE CHILDREN'S FOSTER CARE REVIEW BOARD

South Carolina was the first state to pass a law allowing citizens from each community to become involved in the child welfare system. Citizen volunteers review the cases of all children who spend longer than four consecutive months in foster care. After the first review, each child's case is reviewed every six months until the child is no longer in the custody of DSS.

Following each review, a written recommendation is sent to the Family Court, the Department of Social Services and other interested parties. The objectives of foster care review are to promote safety and permanence so that children do not grow up in foster care; to identify gaps in services to children and families; and to promote public awareness regarding child abuse and neglect.

Each of South Carolina's sixteen judicial circuits must have at least one local review board. Currently there are 38 local foster care review boards serving 4,854 children. Most local review boards meet monthly to review the cases of children in foster care. Each local review board has five members, who are appointed by the Governor, upon the recommendation of the local legislative delegation. All local review board members are trained and supported by professional staff within the Division of Foster Care Review.

CHILDREN ENTERING FOSTER CARE

There are 518,000 children and youth in foster care in the United States.

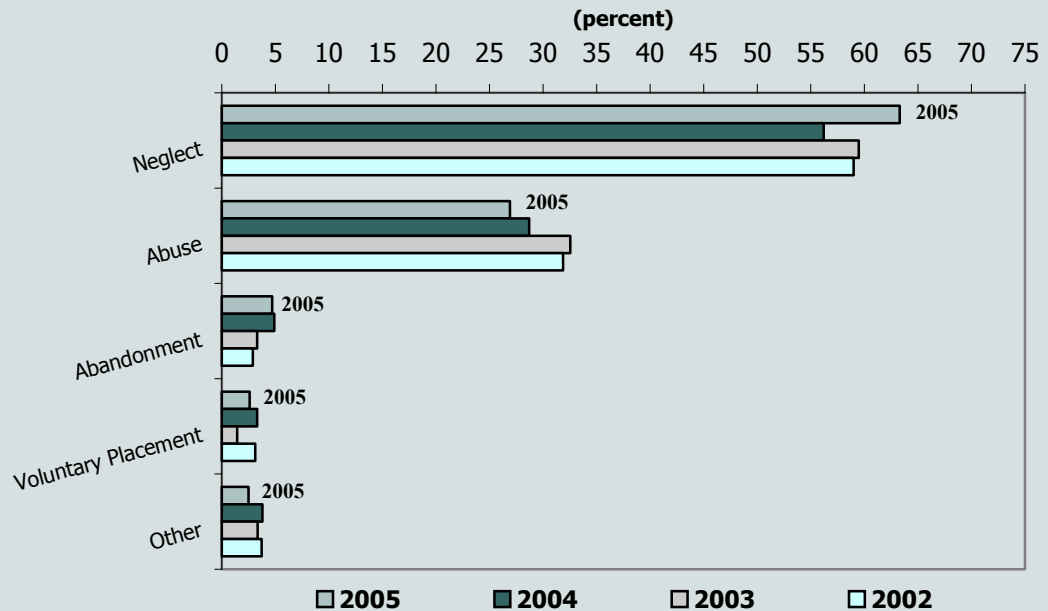
Neglect and Abuse remain the primary reasons children enter care in South Carolina, accounting for more than 80% of children entering foster care in 2005.

Children who enter care at older ages are more likely to leave care and not return to a family.

Historical data clearly indicates the vast majority of children who re-enter foster care return to care from the home of a parent or relative.

In 2005, 1,738 children entered foster care and were reviewed by the Foster Care Review Board, a slight increase from 2004. Children entering foster care in 2005 were nearly evenly divided by race and sex. Nearly 62% of children entering foster care in 2005 were age 9 and younger, and only 5% were age 16 and older.

Children Entering Foster Care by Placement Reason



Re-Entries by Previous Location	2005		2004		2003		2002	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Adoption	9	3%	17	4%	21	5%	10	4%
Parent	191	52%	236	59%	240	54%	153	60%
Relative	137	37%	117	29%	153	35%	79	31%
Other	26	5%	31	8%	26	6%	13	5%
TOTAL	366	21%	401	24%	440	27%	257	18%

Of the 1,738 children entering foster care in 2005, 21% had previously been in foster care. This is an encouraging decrease compared to the 24% that had previously been in foster care in 2004.



"It is no use saying, 'we are doing our best'. To succeed, you must do what is necessary."

Sir Winston Churchill

CHILDREN LEAVING FOSTER CARE

During 2005, 1,520 children, who were reviewed at least once, left foster care. The largest percentage of children (33%) returned to a birth parent, followed by 27% who were adopted. Since 2002, the number of children leaving foster care through emancipation has steadily increased and the number of children returning to a parent has decreased. Of the children who left foster care in 2005, 30% were age 16 or older, a slight decrease from 2004. Slightly more girls left care than boys, more African-American and other minorities left than Caucasians, and 69% of the children leaving care experienced less than three foster care placements. Sixty-six percent (66%) of the children that left in 2005 spent less than 3 years in foster care.

Children Leaving Foster	2005	2004	2003	2002
TOTAL NUMBER	1,520	1,559	1,448	1,639
% Adopted	27%	24%	21%	23%
% Returned Home	33%	36%	37%	41%
% Emancipated	23%	25%	26%	20%
% Living with Relative	17%	16%	16%	14%

For children leaving foster care in 2005, those in therapeutic Medicaid placements were 8 times less likely to be adopted and 4 times more likely to age out of the system through emancipation.

The number of children who leave foster care from a therapeutic placement has INCREASED 17% since 2002.

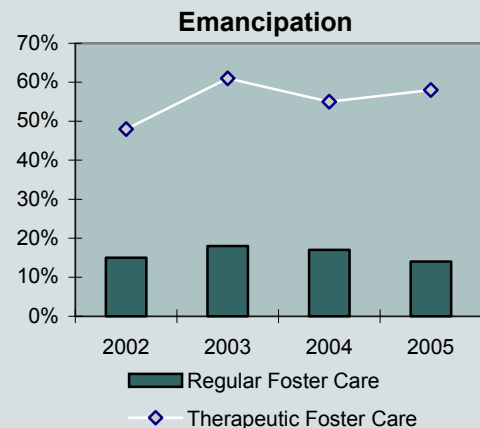
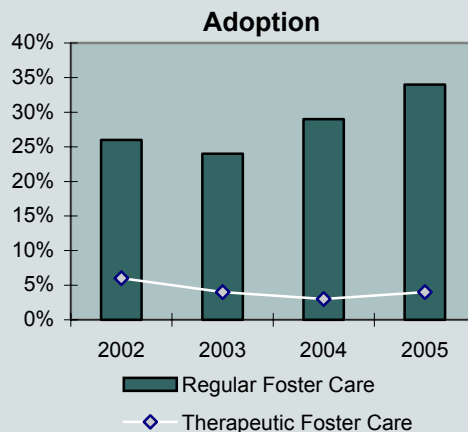
There has been a 11% INCREASE in the number of children being emancipated from foster care since 2004.

In 2005, twenty-three percent of the children who left foster care, left from a therapeutic foster home or a residential facility funded by Medicaid.



In 2005, of the children who left foster care from a therapeutic placement:

58% were emancipated
30% returned home
5% were adopted.



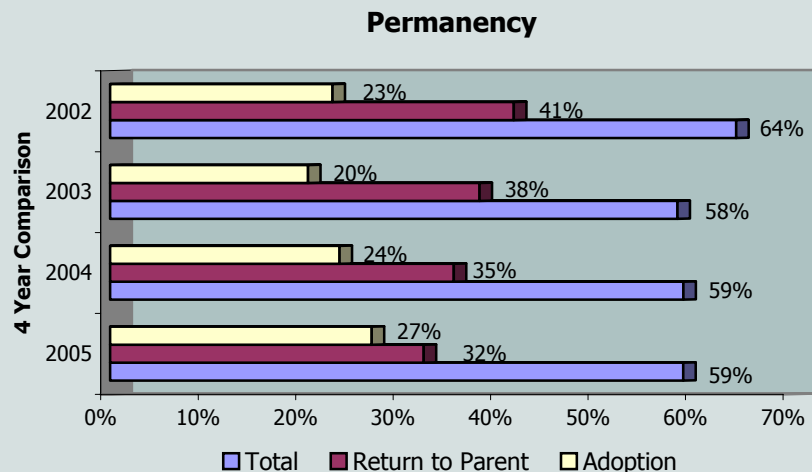
PERMANENCY AND ADOPTION

The Federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) conducted in 2003 measured Safety, Permanency and Well-Being outcomes for children and families. Permanency, specifically timely adoptions, was determined to be one of SC's areas which needed improvement, along with the stability of foster care placements and timely permanency planning hearings. SC has implemented a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) to address these areas needing improvement.

Permanent, legal homes for children are defined as custody with a parent or a consummated adoption. In 2005, as in 2004, 59% of the children that left foster care were placed in a permanent home, the difference being that 3% more children were adopted in 2005, and 3% less returned to a parent. Since 2002, the percent of children leaving foster care to a permanent home has decreased by 5%.



Only ten percent (10%) of the children adopted in 2005 were teenagers. This statistic has remained unchanged since 2002.



Every child in South Carolina deserves the opportunity to grow up knowing the many advantages of a safe, secure, healthy, permanent family.

In 2005, 27% of the children who were reviewed left foster care through adoption, compared to 24% in 2004. Fifteen percent (15%), 59 of the 408 children, were adopted within the federal standard of 24 months of entering foster care. Since 2002, there has been a 3% increase in the percent of children being adopted within 24 months.

	2005		2004		2003		2002	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Adoption								
TOTAL	408	27%	367	24%	297	21%	374	24%
Regular Foster Care	392	33%	358	29%	287	24%	358	26%
Medicaid Placement	16	4%	9	3%	10	4%	16	6%
By 24 Months	59	15%	68	19%	48	16%	45	12%

“People say kids my age are hard to place and that time is running out for me. Please don't give up trying . . .

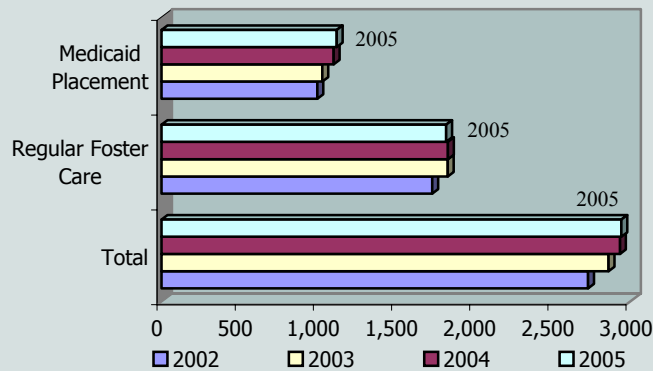
foster youth waiting for a family

CHILDREN REMAINING ACTIVE IN FOSTER CARE

A total of 2,935 children entered foster care prior to January 1, 2005, and remained active in the foster care system as of January 1, 2006. Since 2002, there has been a 7% increase in the total number of children remaining active in foster care.

In 2005, 38% of the children who remained active were in therapeutic foster care or a residential placement. In the past four years, there has been a 10% increase in the number of children remaining active in foster care in therapeutic placements. There has been a 5% increase in the number of children remaining active in regular foster care placements. Sixty percent (60%) of the children remaining active were age 10 or older. Fifty-nine percent (59%) were African-American and other minorities, and slightly more boys remained active than girls.

Children Remaining in Foster Care	2005	2004	2003	2002
TOTAL NUMBER	2,935	2,933	2,860	2,729
Percent in Regular Foster Care	62%	62%	64%	64%
Percent in Medicaid Placement	38%	38%	36%	37%



The stability of foster care placements and the length of time in care are systemic factors addressed in South Carolina's PIP. Both are areas in which SC has made progress.

Four Year Comparison	2005	2004	2003	2002
Number Years in Care	3.6	3.8	4.1	4.5
Regular Foster Care	3.2	3.4	3.7	4.2
Medicaid Placement	4.4	4.5	4.8	5
Number of Placements	4	4.3	4.9	5.4
Regular Foster Care	2.8	2.9	3.4	3.9
Medicaid Placement	6	6.5	7.4	7.9

Children in THERAPEUTIC MEDICAID PLACEMENTS will have at least 50% MORE placements than children in regular foster care, and spend at least ONE ADDITIONAL YEAR in care.

Nearly half of the U. S. foster care population is over the age of 10.

The length of time children spend in foster care has DECREASED 25% since 2002.

Between 2002 and 2005, the number of placements experienced by children remaining active in foster care has DECREASED 38%.

SUMMARY OF REVIEWS AND AREAS OF CONCERN

A total of 4,854 children were reviewed by local review boards in 2005. The average of 19 children reviewed at each of the 431 local review board meetings remains high. In order to review the optimum number of 12 children per review board meeting, additional review boards would be needed.

Review Data	2005	2004	2003	2002
Number Children Reviewed	4,853	4,802	4,812	4,858
Number Reviews Held	8,317	8,410	8,284	8,192
Number Review Board Meetings	431	441	426	425

Areas of Concern	2005	2004	2003	2002
AOC Cited	9,793	10,706	9,325	8,318
No Timely Probably Cause Hearing	114	154	160	88
No Timely Merits Hearing	936	844	925	948
No Timely Permanency Planning Hearing	1,180	1,306	1,242	1,132

Through the course of conducting case reviews, local review boards identify systemic deficiencies that are barriers to permanence for the children being reviewed. These deficiencies, or Areas of Concern, are defined as violations of law or policy. Of the 8,317 reviews conducted in 2005, 62% had at least one Area of Concern. 9,793 Areas of Concern were identified in 2005, nearly 10% fewer than in 2004. In 2005, the lack of a timely Permanency Planning hearing was identified as an Area of Concern at 1,180 reviews, 11% less than in 2004.

2005 REVIEW BOARD RECOMMENDATIONS

The Foster Care Review Board celebrates the positive impact that local review boards have made on South Carolina's foster care system and its children in 2005. All partners can be proud of the progress that has been made in certain areas of the child welfare system; however, challenges still remain. In an effort to address the challenges addressed in this report, the State Board of Directors for the South Carolina Foster Care Review Board makes the following recommendations:

- Local Review Boards will continue to address systemic deficiencies, issues and needs of the foster system by continuing to meet quarterly with county partners and by adopting annual service projects.
- Local Review Boards will educate local legislative delegations regarding the status and needs of the foster care system through quarterly reports and presentations of the FCRB Annual Report.
- The State Board of Directors for the SC FCRB will establish a connection with all local review boards by telephone and by attending review board meetings, to promote and support the activities of local review boards.

STATE BOARD OF DIRECTORS **(by Congressional District)**

Vernon McCurry, Member At-Large, CHAIRPERSON

Dorothy Bailey, 4th District

Burnet Mendelsohn, 1st District

Vacant, 6th District

Martha Brock, 5th District

Louise McFarland, 2nd District

Anne Thayer, 3rd District

Data contained in this Annual Report represents children reported by the SC Department of Social Services and who remained in foster care at least 4 consecutive months and reviewed by Foster Care Review.

This report was prepared by the State of South Carolina's Governor's Office, Division of Foster Care Review. For additional information, please contact Lisa S. Vosburgh at 1205 Pendleton Street, Columbia, SC 29201.

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