



FACTS ABOUT FOSTER KIDS

Horry 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

The number of foster care children reviewed rose very fast in Horry County between 1999 and 2001 before tailing off slightly in 2002. Reviewed children constitute .63% of all children living in the county, above the statewide average of .52%. The number of children entering foster care has exceeded those leaving for three straight years, with almost half of entrants aged 10 to 15.

	1999	2000	2001	2002	Average
Number of Children Reviewed	172	221	286	275	239
Change from Prior Year		49	65	-11	
Percent of all Children in County	0.43%	0.53%	0.66%	0.63%	0.56%
Number Entering	43	63	99	86	73
Number Leaving	51	62	87	81	70

	Children Reviewed		Children Entering		Children Leaving	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
ALL CHILDREN	275		86		81	
Race:						
African-American	91	33%	17	20%	29	36%
Caucasian	161	59%	59	69%	46	57%
Other	23	8%	10	12%	6	7%
Gender:						
Male	134	49%	37	43%	40	49%
Female	141	51%	49	57%	41	51%
Age:						
5 and younger	73	27%	26	30%	26	32%
6 to 9	41	15%	13	15%	16	20%
10 to 15	101	37%	40	47%	18	22%
16 and older	60	22%	7	8%	21	26%

AREAS OF CONCERN

In 2002, Review Board members held 29 meetings with an average of 15 children reviewed at each meeting. Of the 429 reviews held, slightly more than half (54%) had at least one area of concern cited by the local Review Board. A total of 386 deficiencies in systemic efforts to secure permanent homes for children in care were cited in 2002. This was a hefty increase of 138 from 2001 after progress reducing the number by 77 that year. Horry County has an average of 0.90 citations per child, close to the state average of 1.02.

In 2002, the most often cited legal violations remained *No Timely Merits Hearing*, whose incidence more than doubled over levels prevailing the prior two years. The failure to hold these hearings according to time frames outlined by state and federal law unnecessarily lengthens the time children remain in foster care.

The most often cited program violations were *No Progress Reports*, *Lack of Progress Towards a Permanent Plan* and *Incomplete/Inappropriate Case Plan*, which together accounted for a large portion of the increase in the number of violations. Reports should be provided by treatment providers and should detail the progress children are making in their therapy settings. This information is necessary to make the best decision as to the safety and the appropriate permanent plan for the child. The case plan document is critical to permanency planning as it serves as the road map for successfully moving children through the foster care system. Through sound case planning, children can be moved through the foster care system safely and swiftly, with the end result being permanent and stable homes.

Table 3: Frequently Cited Areas of Concern, 2000 to 2002, Horry County					
	2000	2001	2002	Change:	
				00 to 01	01 to 02
LEGAL					
No Timely Merits Hearing	19	19	51	0	32
No Timely Permanency Planning Hearing	27	29	30	2	1
No Court Order at Review	6	7	14	1	7
Non-Compliance with Court Order	5	4	4	-1	0
No Thorough Adoption Assessment	6	3	4	-3	1
PROGRAM					
No Progress Reports	34	23	41	-11	18
Lack of Progress Towards Permanent Plan	36	14	32	-22	18
Incomplete/Inappropriate Case Plan	46	12	31	-34	19
No Advance Packets	24	33	25	9	-8
Interested Parties Not Invited	14	7	3	-7	-4
ALL AREAS OF CONCERN					
Total Number: Areas of Concern	325	248	386	-77	138
Total Number of Reviews	359	385	429	26	44
Areas of Concern per Review	0.91	0.64	0.90	-0.26	0.26
Percent of Reviews with an Area of Concern	52%	40%	54%		

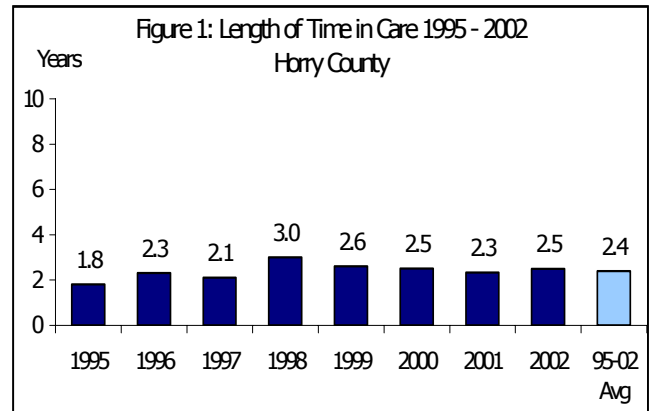
The 2004 edition of *Facts About Foster Kids*, when published during the second half of that year, will include complete information about children who were reviewed at least once in 2003. Because these reviews are now complete, a supplement is currently available on request that contains updated 2003 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 request this supplement. 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.

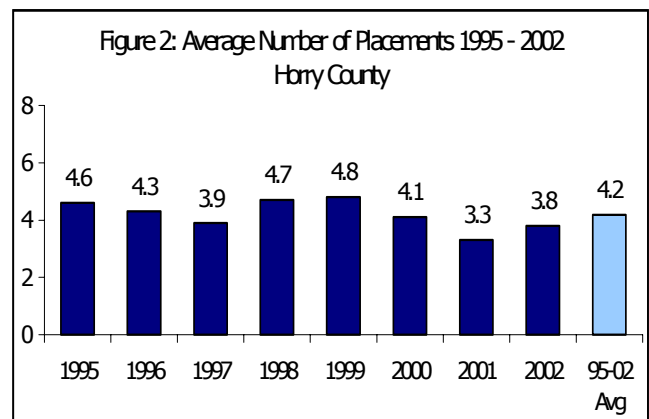
LENGTH OF TIME IN CARE:

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. The average length of time in care for children in Horry County rose to 2.5 years in 2002 after falling for three years in a row. But it remains below the statewide average of 2.8 years.



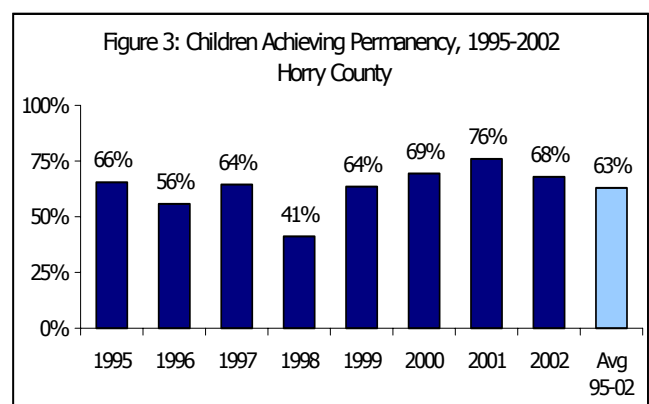
NUMBER OF PLACEMENTS:

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. The average number of placements in Horry County rose to 3.8 after achieving a low of 3.3 the prior year. But only 21% of the children who left care in 2002 experienced 5 or more placements versus 43% in 1999.



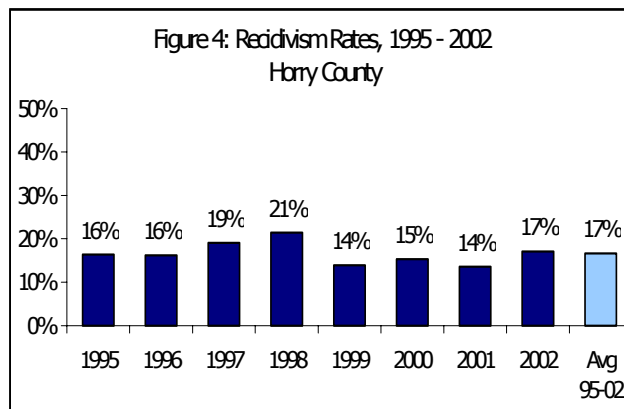
PERCENT ACHIEVING PERMANENCY:

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. After reaching a high 76% in 2001, the share of children achieving permanency in Horry County fell back to 68% in 2002, but still better than the statewide average of 64%.



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, Horry County’s rate of re-entry rose to 17% after an all-time low of 14% the prior year, bringing this measure closer to the statewide rate of 20%.



For children re-entering foster care, the previous location matters. During the last three years, 97% of them came from either their parents or another relative. Only 3% came from an adoptive parent, an average of one child per year.

Previous Location	2000		2001		2002		Average	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Parents	25	69%	25	64%	33	70%	28	68%
Relatives	10	28%	13	33%	12	26%	12	29%
Adoptive Parents	1	3%	1	3%	2	4%	1	3%
Other	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Total	36	100%	39	100%	47	100%	41	100%

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

Progress measures for Horry County all retracted slightly in 2002 and they now generally show an area very close to the statewide average in the conditions faced by children in foster care. The length of time in care, percent achieving permanency and recidivism rates are still slightly better than the typical county in South Carolina, while the number of placements has become slightly worse.

Where Horry County stands out from most other areas of the state is its rapid growth in numbers of children entering care during each of the last three years. The proportion of all children residing in the county who are in foster care was below the state average in 1999, but rose above it by 2002. It is particularly worrisome that 55 percent of entrants are aged 10 or older; the state average is 43 percent. Some of this influx is due to the county’s faster population growth, but some might be due as well to worsening job market conditions during the 2000 to 2002 period; as families face poorer economic prospects the likelihood of abuse and neglect of children rises. Rapid growth in people along with a poorer economy also put strains on the legal system and on social service support networks. A large number of distinct program and legal Areas of Concern rose in 2002, ranging from no timely hearings to no contacts/assessments to missing progress reports to poor case plans.

Inquiries about this report and requests for copies of this and other counties’ reports should be made to:
 Don Hilber, Data and Research Manager or to Denise Barker, Division Director
 Division of Foster Care Review, 1205 Pendleton St., Columbia, SC 29201 Phone: (803) 734-0480 Fax: (803) 734-1223.
 Comparable reports for other counties and for the state can also be found on the World Wide Web at:
<http://www.govoepp.state.sc.us/children/foster.htm>