



FACTS ABOUT FOSTER KIDS

Aiken 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

For Aiken County the number of foster care children reviewed decreased between 2001 and 2002 to 122, which is .32% of all children living in the county, a recent low. This is below the statewide average of .52% and an improvement from the .45% rate in 1999 when 156 children were reviewed. The number of children entering care exceeded the number leaving for all age groups under sixteen.

	1999	2000	2001	2002	Average
Number of Children Reviewed	156	129	133	122	135
Change from Prior Year		-27	4	-11	
Percent of all Children in County	0.45%	0.35%	0.35%	0.32%	0.37%
Number Entering	35	17	49	33	34
Number Leaving	29	42	35	31	34

	Children Reviewed		Children Entering		Children Leaving	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
ALL CHILDREN	122		33		31	
<u>Race:</u>						
African-American	64	53%	16	48%	15	48%
Caucasian	55	45%	17	52%	16	52%
Other	3	3%	0	0%	0	0%
<u>Gender:</u>						
Male	73	60%	18	55%	18	58%
Female	49	40%	15	46%	13	42%
<u>Age:</u>						
5 and younger	26	21%	14	42%	6	19%
6 to 9	16	13%	6	18%	2	7%
10 to 15	46	38%	11	33%	10	32%
16 and older	34	28%	2	6%	13	42%

AREAS OF CONCERN

In 2002, Review Board members held 22 meetings with an average of 10 children reviewed at each meeting. Of the 210 reviews held, 45% had at least one area of concern cited by the local Review Board. A total of 148 deficiencies in systemic efforts to secure permanent homes for children in care were cited in 2002 for an average of 0.70 per review, well below the state average of 1.02. Aiken County's number of deficiencies has fallen significantly during the last several years to an all-time low.

In 2002, the most often cited legal violation was *No Timely Permanency Planning Hearing*. The failure to hold permanency planning 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 violation was *No Progress Reports* from treatment providers. Progress reports should be provided by treatment providers and should detail the progress children or parents are making in therapy. This information is necessary to make the best decision as to the safety and the appropriate permanent plan for the child.

Table 3: Frequently Cited Areas of Concern, 2000 to 2002, Aiken County					
	2000	2001	2002	Change:	
				00 to 01	01 to 02
LEGAL					
Non-Compliance with Court Order	10	5	3	-5	-2
No Timely Merits Hearing	4	22	8	18	-14
No Thorough Adoption Assessment	7	4	4	-3	0
No Timely Permanency Planning Hearing	31	10	14	-21	4
No Timely Foster Care Review Board	12	1	6	-11	5
PROGRAM					
No Progress Reports	55	45	36	-10	-9
Lack of Progress Towards Permanent Plan	43	9	22	-34	13
Incomplete/Inappropriate Case Plan	62	44	16	-18	-28
No Three-Week Notice to Parties	0	10	0	10	-10
Conflict with Permanent Plan	19	4	7	-15	3
ALL AREAS OF CONCERN					
Total Number: Areas of Concern	334	255	148	-79	-107
Total Number of Reviews	221	206	210	-15	4
Areas of Concern per Review	1.51	1.24	0.70	-0.27	-0.53
Percent of Reviews with an Area of Concern	74%	67%	45%		

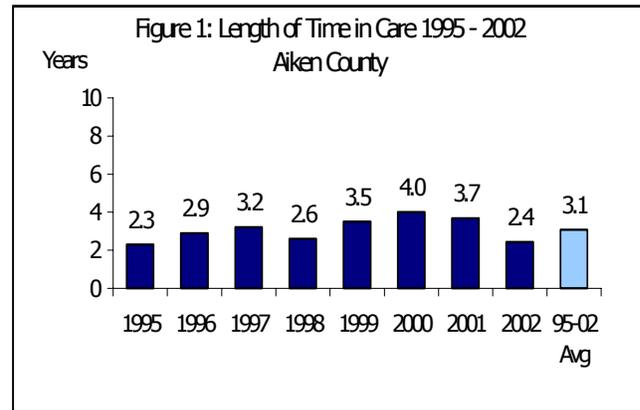
The 2004 edition of *Facts About Foster Kids*, when published during the second half of the year, will include complete information about children who were reviewed at least once in 2003. Because these reviews are now complete, a supplement is currently available on request that contains updated 2003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

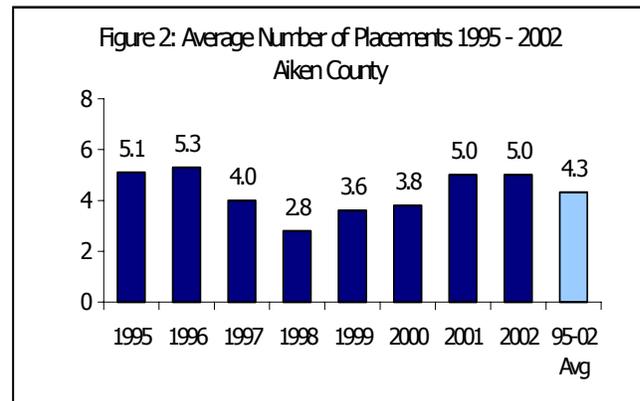
LENGTH OF TIME IN CARE:

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, Aiken County reduced the average length of time in care to 2.4 years, down from a high of 4.0 years in 2000. This was its best showing in this measure since 1995 and the first time Aiken has been lower than the state average.



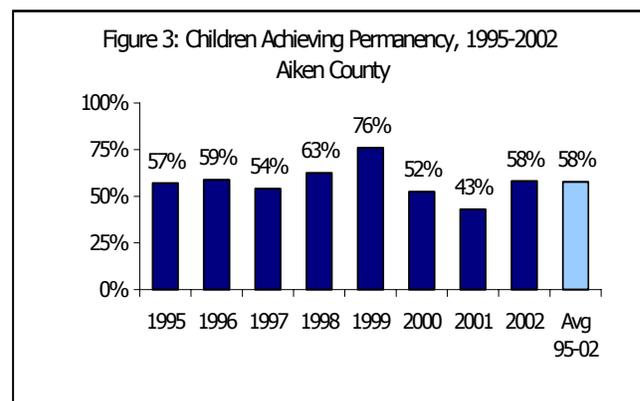
NUMBER OF PLACEMENTS:

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, Aiken County's average number of placements remained at 5.0, substantially above the low of 2.8 reached in 1998. In 2002, 39% of children who left care experienced 5 or more placements.



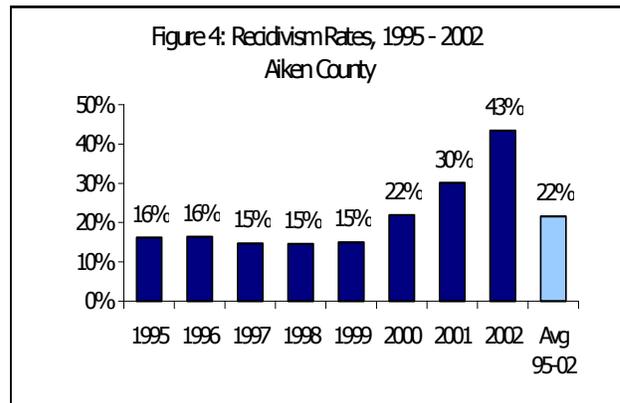
PERCENT ACHIEVING PERMANENCY:

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. After faltering to a low of 43% in 2001, the share of children achieving permanency in Aiken County rebounded to 58% in 2002.



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, Aiken County witnessed another new high in rates of re-entry. Of all children in foster care, 43% have been in such care previously. This is up substantially from a low of 15% in 1998 and now well above the statewide average of 20%.



For children re-entering foster care, the previous location matters. On average during the last three years, 90% of these children came from either their parents or another relative. Only 7% came from an adoptive parent.

Table 4: Previous Location of Children Re-Entering Care, 2000-2002, Aiken County

Previous Location	2000		2001		2002		Average	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Parents	16	57%	25	63%	26	49%	22	55%
Relatives	11	39%	11	28%	20	38%	14	35%
Adoptive Parents	1	4%	3	8%	4	8%	3	7%
Other	0	0%	1	3%	3	6%	1	3%
Total Reentering	28	100%	40	100%	53	100%	40	100%

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

During the last several years, Aiken County has demonstrated tremendous improvement in several indicators of permanency for children. The number of Areas of Concern cited continues to fall and that has coincided with a steady reduction in the incidence of all children that are in foster care, a low .32% compared to the South Carolina statewide average of .52%. Improvements in the length of time in care and in the percent of children achieving permanency have recently occurred as well, though both remain worse than the state average.

The major current problem in Aiken County is a rapidly rising rate of re-entry, now up to 43% of all children. The number of placements also has shown no recent improvement, remaining at a high 5.0 (the statewide average is 3.7). A third troublesome fact is that there are now a far higher number of children under age 16 entering foster care than there are leaving. Future reductions in the prevalence of children in foster care may be difficult to achieve in Aiken County.