



FACTS ABOUT FOSTER KIDS Anderson 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 has been on the rise in Anderson County in each of the last three years, jumping by 32 between 2001 and 2002. Reviewed children constitute .70% of all children living in the county, well above the statewide average of .52%. The number of children entering care has exceeded the number leaving in each of the last three years.

	1999	2000	2001	2002	Average
Number of Children Reviewed	231	254	262	294	260
Change from Prior Year		23	8	32	
Percent of all Children in County	0.60%	0.62%	0.63%	0.70%	0.64%
Number Entering	50	46	89	78	66
Number Leaving	72	43	55	76	62

	Children Reviewed		Children Entering		Children Leaving	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
ALL CHILDREN	294		78		76	
Race:						
African-American	94	32%	24	31%	26	34%
Caucasian	188	64%	53	68%	48	63%
Other	11	4%	1	1%	2	3%
Gender:						
Male	149	51%	40	51%	36	47%
Female	145	49%	38	49%	40	53%
Age:						
5 and younger	100	34%	33	43%	20	26%
6 to 9	39	13%	7	9%	12	16%
10 to 15	94	32%	31	40%	23	30%
16 and older	61	21%	6	8%	21	28%

AREAS OF CONCERN

In 2002, Review Board members held 26 meetings with an average of 19 children reviewed at each meeting. Of the 491 reviews held, 73% had at least one area of concern cited by the local Review Board, slightly above the state average of 58%. A total of 630 deficiencies in systemic efforts to secure permanent homes for children in care were cited in 2002. This was 61 more than the prior year and 143 more than in 2000; statewide these numbers have been decreasing. Anderson County now has an average of 1.28 citations per reviews, above the state average of 1.02.

In 2002, the most often cited legal violations were *No Timely Merits Hearing* and *No Timely Permanency Planning Hearing*. The failure to hold both types of 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 *Lack of Progress Towards a Permanent Plan*, which has almost tripled in number the last two years. 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. The number of cases with *No Progress Reports* from treatment providers has also been rising fast.

Table 3: Frequently Cited Areas of Concern, 2000 to 2002, Anderson County					
	2000	2001	2002	Change:	
				00 to 01	01 to 02
LEGAL					
No Timely Permanency Planning Hearing	109	116	107	7	-9
No Timely Merits Hearing	102	85	111	-17	26
No Court Order at Review	19	30	53	11	23
No Face to Face Contact	54	69	61	15	-8
No Timely Foster Care Review Board	1	4	0	3	-4
PROGRAM					
No Advance Packets	32	29	15	-3	-14
No Progress Reports	31	40	68	9	28
Lack of Progress Towards Permanent Plan	31	65	92	34	27
Incomplete/Inappropriate Case Plan	25	30	20	5	-10
Interested Parties Not Invited	8	5	21	-3	16
ALL AREAS OF CONCERN					
Total Number: Areas of Concern	487	569	630	82	61
Total Number of Reviews	436	456	491	20	35
Areas of Concern per Review	1.12	1.25	1.28	0.13	0.04
Percent of Reviews with an Area of Concern	71%	72%	73%		

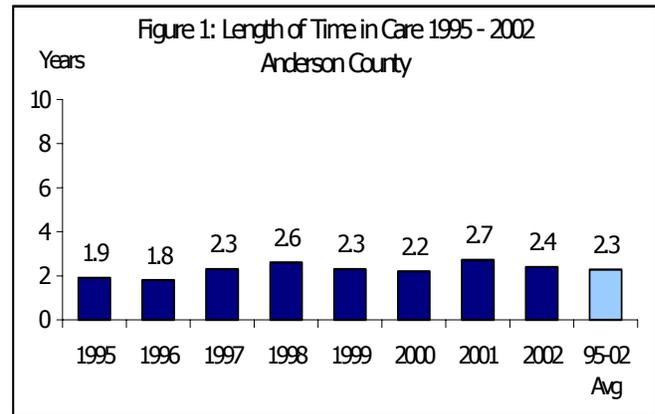
The 2004 edition of *Facts About Foster Kids*, when published during the second half of that year, will include complete information about children who were reviewed at least once in 2003. Because these reviews are now complete, a supplement is currently available on request that contains updated 2003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

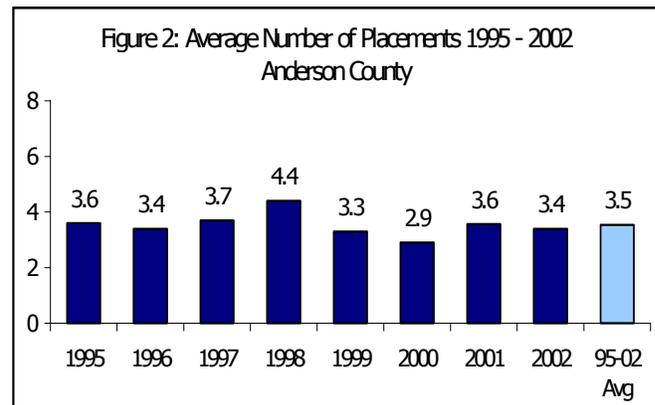
LENGTH OF TIME IN CARE:

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, Anderson County reduced the average length of time in care to 2.4 years, down from a high of 2.7 years in 2001, but still above its long-term average. Length of time in care is slightly below the statewide average of 2.8 years.



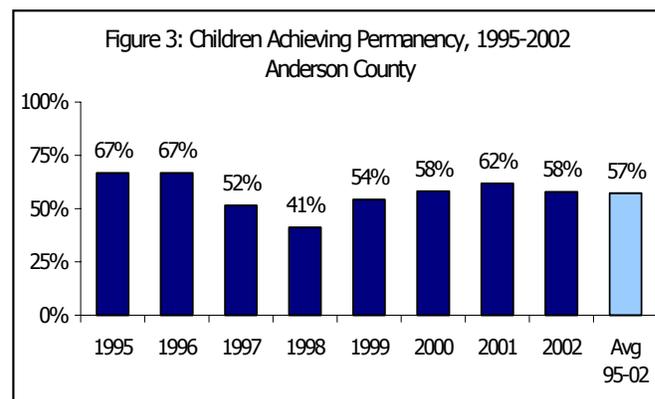
NUMBER OF PLACEMENTS:

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. In 2002, the average number of placements in Anderson County was lowered to 3.4, but 21% of children who left care experienced 5 or more placements, up from just 12% two years prior.



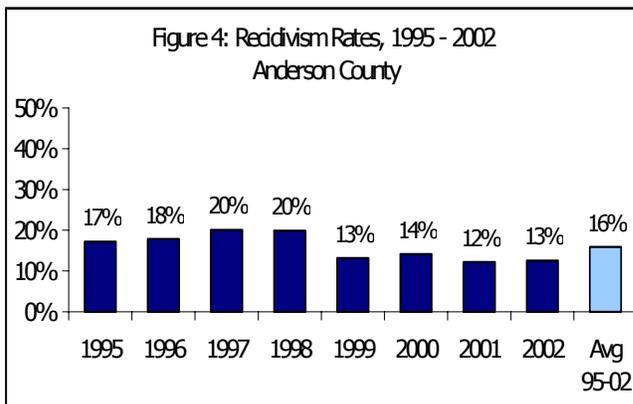
PERCENT ACHIEVING PERMANENCY:

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 rising back to 62% in 2001, the share of children achieving permanency in Anderson County fell to 58% in 2002, keeping it under 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, Anderson County held its rate of re-entry to 13%. While a slight up-tick from the prior year, that’s below its long-term average and beneath a rising statewide figure of 20%.



For children re-entering foster care, the previous location matters. During the last three years, 90% of them came from either their parents or another relative. Only 8% came from an adoptive parent.

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

Previous Location	2000		2001		2002		Average	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Parents	26	79%	27	84%	30	81%	28	81%
Relatives	3	9%	2	6%	4	11%	3	9%
Adoptive Parents	3	9%	2	6%	3	8%	3	8%
Other	1	3%	1	3%	0	0%	1	2%
Total Reentering	33	100%	32	100%	37	100%	34	100%

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

Anderson County sports a worsening record in improving the conditions which lead to permanency for children. The most troubling trends for this area are the rapidly rising number of Areas of Concern and the concurrent increase in the incidence of all children that are in foster care. During the last six years, the number of cited deficiencies has increased more than five-fold. The Areas of Concern per review stands at 1.28, placing it above the statewide average of 1.02. Three-quarters of all reviews have at least one citation. In this regard, Anderson County used to outperform the state; now it falls short. The number of cases with *No Timely Merits* or *Permanency Planning Hearings* remains high. For the third straight year, the number of children entering care is rising faster than the number leaving. Anderson County now has .70% of all children under foster care review, compared to the South Carolina statewide average of .52%. With a lag between process improvements and results, this incidence might continue to go up unless system deficiencies are quickly corrected.

Other progress measures are mixed. The recidivism rate is staying low, for now, and the length of time in care and the number of placements might be improving again. But even as the number of children leaving foster care rose in 2002, the share of them achieving permanency faltered.

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.govoep.state.sc.us/children/foster.htm>