FOSTER KIDS COUNT 2003

Oconee County

A profile of South Carolina children in out-of-home placements

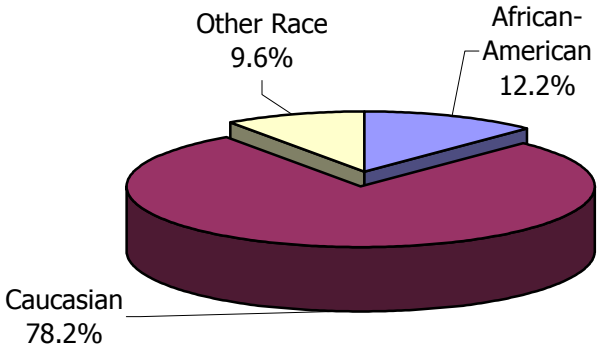
A Publication of the South Carolina Governor's Office – Division of Foster Care Review

DEMOGRAPHICS[1]

In 2002, there were 156 children in out-of-home placements in Oconee County who were reviewed at least once while in care by the Foster Care Review Board.[2] Of these children, 12.2% were African-American, 78.2% were Caucasian, and 9.6% were children of other races. There were 135 children in out-of-home placements reviewed by the Review Board in 2001, 127 children in 2000, and 124 children in 1999.

Children in out-of-home placements represent an increasing portion of the overall population of children under the age of 18 in the county. Those children in out-of-home placements reviewed by the Review Board constituted 1.0% of the population of all children in the county in 2002, compared to .88% in 2001, .84% in 2000, and .84% in 1999.

Figure 1: Race of Children in Care 2002



Note: "Other Race" includes children who are Bi-Racial, American Indian, Asian, and Hispanic or children of any other race not previously mentioned.

There were fewer boys in care in 2002 than girls, 44.2% compared to 55.8%. Children 16 years of age or older constituted 12.8% of the children in care, 22.4% were between 10 and 15 years of age, 20.5% were between 6 and 9 years of age, and 44.2% were 5 years of age or younger.

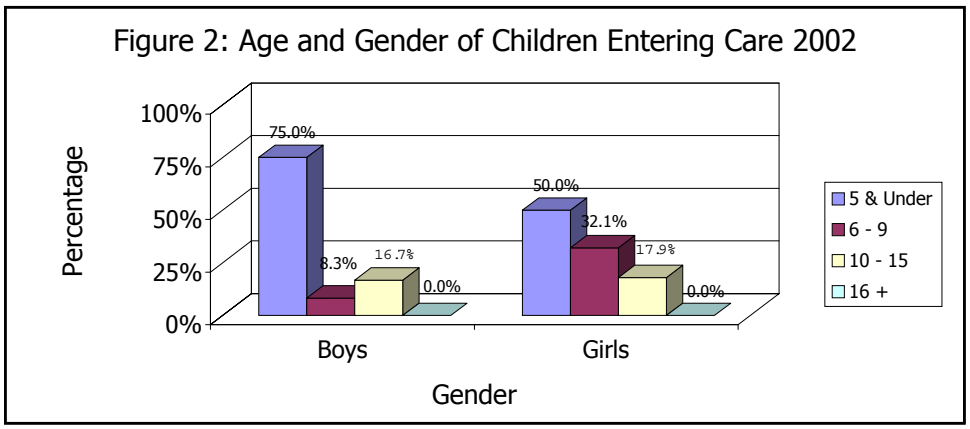
In 2002, 53 children entered the foster care system in Oconee County and were reviewed by the Review Board. Of these children, 15.1% were African-American, 75.5% were Caucasian, and 9.4% were children of other races. Fewer boys entered care than girls, 45.3% compared to 54.7%. There were 53 children who entered care in 2001, 23 children in 2000, and 36 children in 1999.

[1] Children who were in out-of-home placements in 2001 and not reviewed at least once by the Review Board are not included in this report.

[2] The number of children in out-of-home placements was higher in 2001 because of a change in when FCRB data was processed. This change allowed for a more accurate assessment of the children in foster care who are reviewed by the Review Board.

Children tend to enter care at a younger age. Of those children entering care in 2002, 61.5% were 5 years of age or younger, 21.2% were between 6 and 9 years of age, and 17.3% were between 10 and 15 years of age. There were no children 16 years of age or older reviewed by the Review Board who entered care in 2002. Of the boys entering care in 2002, 83.3% were under the age of 10, while 82.1% of the girls were under the age of 10.

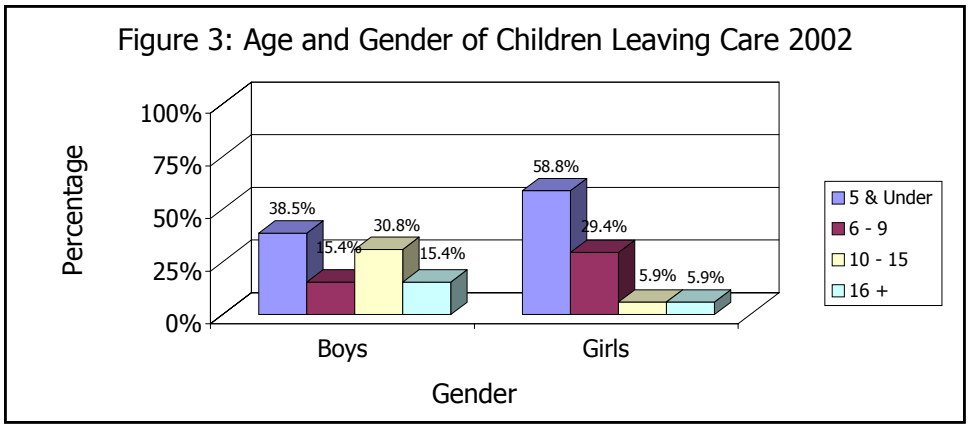
Of the children entering care, all of the African-Americans, 80.0% of the Caucasians, and 75.0% of the children of other races were under the age of 10.



In 2002, 30 children left custody of the county. Of these children, 20.0% were African-American and 80.0% were Caucasian. There were no children of other races reviewed by the Review Board who left care in 2002. There were 24 children who left care in 2001, 25 children who left care in 2000, and 22 children in 1999. Fewer boys left care in 2002 than girls, 43.3% compared to 56.7%.

Children tend to leave care at a younger age. Of those children leaving care in 2002, half were 5 years of age or younger, 23.3% were between 6 and 9 years of age, 16.7% were between 10 and 15 years of age, and 10.0% were 16 years of age or older. Of the boys leaving care in 2002, 88.2% were under the age of 10, while 53.9% of the girls were under the age of 10.

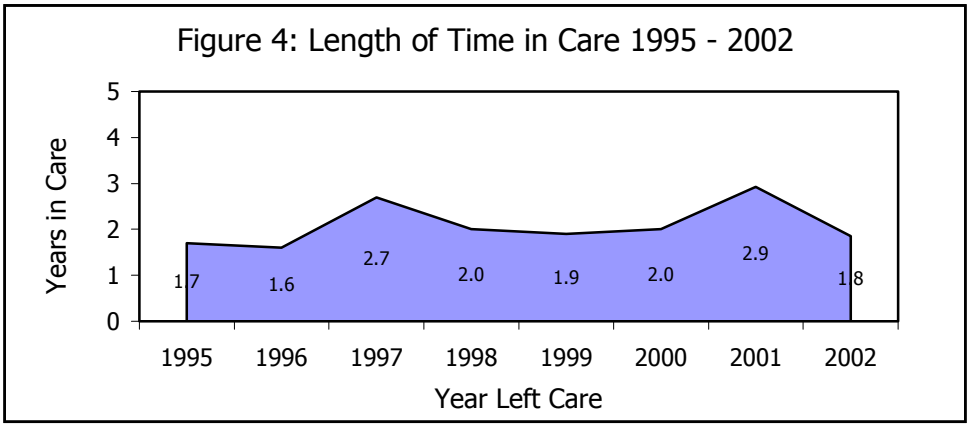
Of the children leaving care, 83.3% of the African-Americans and 70.8% of the Caucasians were under the age of 10. There were no children of other races reviewed by the Review Board who left care in 2002.



LENGTH OF TIME IN CARE

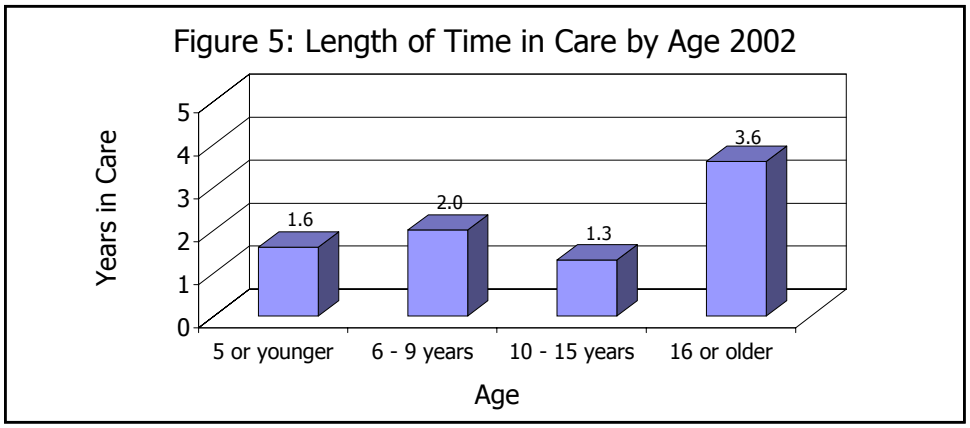
The longer a child is away from their home or a nurturing family environment, the more damaging it can be to the normal development of the child. For this reason, a major goal of the Review Board is to ensure that children achieve permanency as quickly as possible.

Children today are spending less time in the custody of the county than children in previous years. Of those children who left care in 2002, the average length of time spent in care is down by an average of 3 months from the average length of time children spent in care between 1995 and 2001. In 2002, the average length of time spent in care was 1.8 years, compared to 2.9 years in 2001, 2 years in 2000, and 1.9 years in 1999.



African-American children spent longer in care than Caucasian children. In 2002, African-American children spent on average 2.1 years in care, compared to 1.8 years for Caucasian children.

In 2002, boys spent on average 1.9 years in care, compared to girls who spent on average 1.8 years in care. Children 16 years of age or older spent the longest amount of time in care, averaging 3.6 years in care, compared to 1.3 years for children between 10 and 15 years of age, 2 years for children between 6 and 9 years of age, and 1.6 years for children 5 years of age or younger.

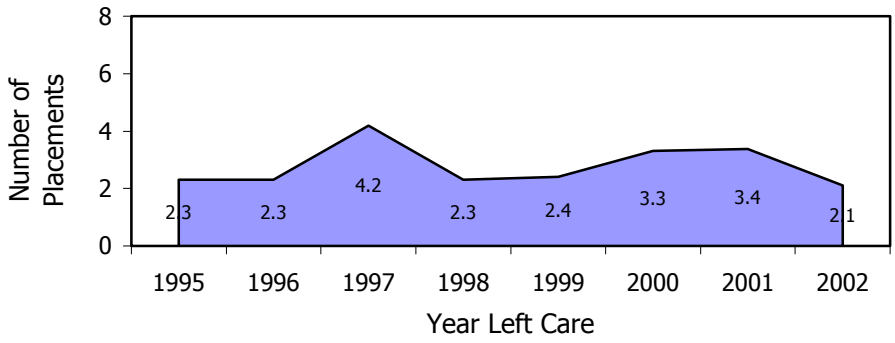


NUMBER OF PLACEMENTS

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.

Children today are experiencing fewer changes in placement than children in previous years. Of those children who left care in 2002, the average number of changes in placement was down by an average of 1 placement from the average number of changes in placement children experienced between 1995 and 2001. In 2002, the average child who left care had lived in 2.1 different placements while in the custody of the county, compared to 3.4 in 2001, 3.3 in 2000, and 2.4 in 1999.

Figure 6: Average Number of Placements 1995 - 2002

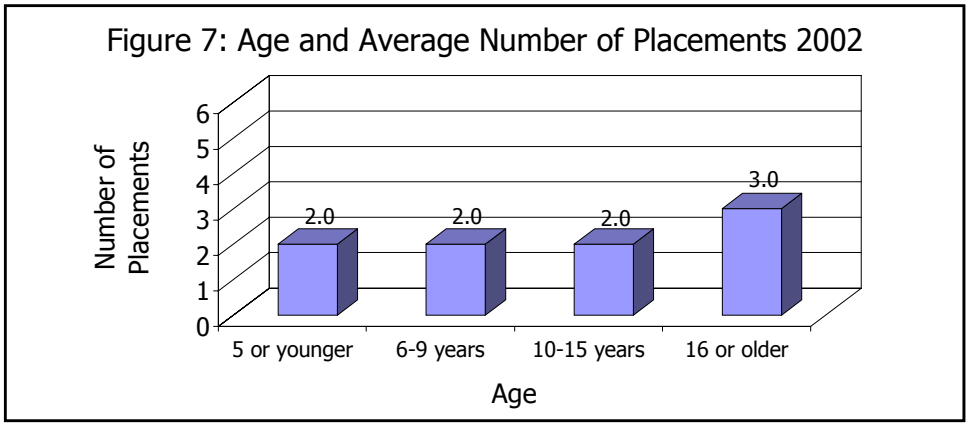


Of the children reviewed by the Review Board, 23.3% were placed in foster homes, 6.7% were in Medicaid therapeutic placements, 3.3% were in group homes or institutions, 40.0% were with relatives, 16.7% were with one or both natural parents, and 10.0% were in other types of placements. There were no children reviewed by the Review Board in 2002 who were placed in adoptive placements or on runaway status.

African-American children experienced more changes in placement on average than Caucasian children. In 2002, African-American children experienced on average 2.5 changes in placement, compared to 2 for Caucasian children. There were no children of other races reviewed by the Review Board who left care in 2002. In 2002, boys and girls experienced the same number of changes in placement, on average 2.1.

Children 16 years of age or older had experienced the most changes in placement on average, 3 placements compared to 2 placements for children under 16 years of age.

Figure 7: Age and Average Number of Placements 2002



Most children who left care experienced 1 or 2 changes in placement while in the custody of the county. In 2002, 80.0% of the children experienced 1 or 2 changes in placement, compared to 66.7% in 2001, 64.0% in 2000, and 77.3% in 1999.

Significantly fewer children today are experiencing multiple changes in placement than children in previous years. In 2002, none of the children who left care experienced 5 or more placements, compared to 12.6% in 2001, 20.0% in 2000, and 13.5% in 1999.

Table 1: Number of Placements for Children Leaving Care

Number of Placements	2002		2001		2000		1999	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1	6	20.0	7	29.2	6	24.0	8	36.4
2	18	60.0	9	37.5	10	40.0	9	40.9
3	3	10.0	1	4.2	2	8.0	2	9.1
4	3	10.0	4	16.7	2	8.0	0	0.0
5	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	4.0	1	4.5
6	0	0.0	1	4.2	1	4.0	1	4.5
7	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
8	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	4.0	1	4.5
9	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	8.0	0	0.0
10+	0	0.0	2	8.3	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	30	100.0	24	100.0	25	100.0	22	100.0

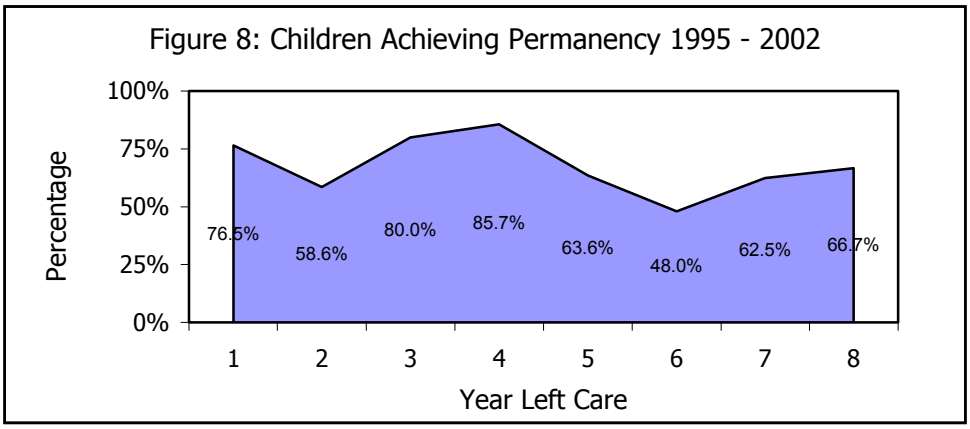
It seems that those children who are hardest to place are more likely to change placements and spend longer in care than children who are not as difficult to place. There is a moderate, positive relationship between the number of placements children experience in the county and how long they spend in care ($r = .452$). The number of changes in placement that a child experiences accounts for 20.5% of the variability in the number of months a child spends in out-of-home placement.

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.

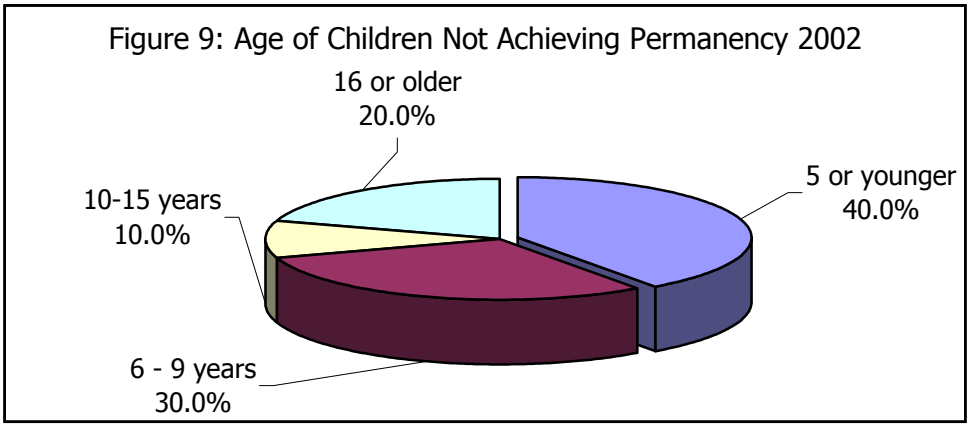
The same number of children today are achieving permanency as children in previous years. The number of children who achieved permanency in 2002 is down by an average of 1.1% from the average number of children who left care between 1995 and 2001. In 2002, 66.7% of the children who left care achieved permanency, compared to 62.5% in 2001, 48.0% in 2000, and 63.6% in 1999.

Of the children who left care in 2002 without achieving permanency, 20.0% aged out of the system and 80.0% were placed in the care of someone other than their parent.



In 2002, African-American children constituted 20.0% of the children who left care and did not achieve permanency, compared to 80.0% Caucasians. There were no children of other races reviewed by the Review Board who left care in 2002. Boys constituted 30.0% of those children who did not achieve permanency, compared to 70.0% girls. Boys and girls aged out of care at the same rate.

Children leaving care without achieving permanency were more likely to be younger children. Children under 5 years of age or older constituted 40.0% of those children who did not achieve permanency in 2002, while 30.0% were between 6 and 9 years of age, 10.0% were between 10 and 15 years of age, and 20.0% were 16 years of age or older. Of the children 16 years of age or older, 66.7% aged out and 33.3% returned home to at least one of their natural parents..



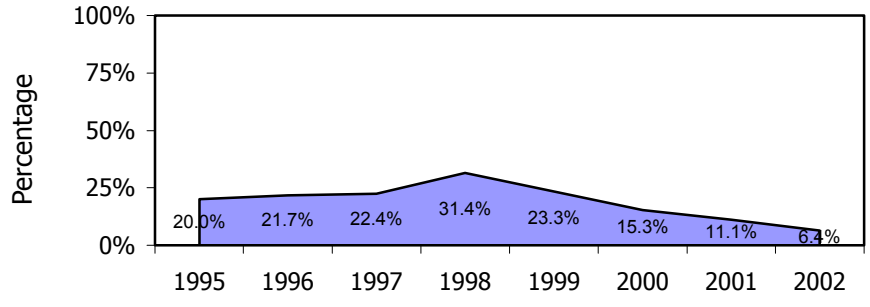
Children who did not achieve permanency when leaving care in 2002 spent longer in care and experienced the same number of changes in placement while in care as children who achieved permanency. The average length of time these children spent in care was 2.1 years, compared to 1.7 years for children who achieved permanency. The average number of changes in placement experienced by these children was 2.1 placements, compared to 2.1 placements for children who achieved permanency.

RECIDIVISM RATES

Children who come back into 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.

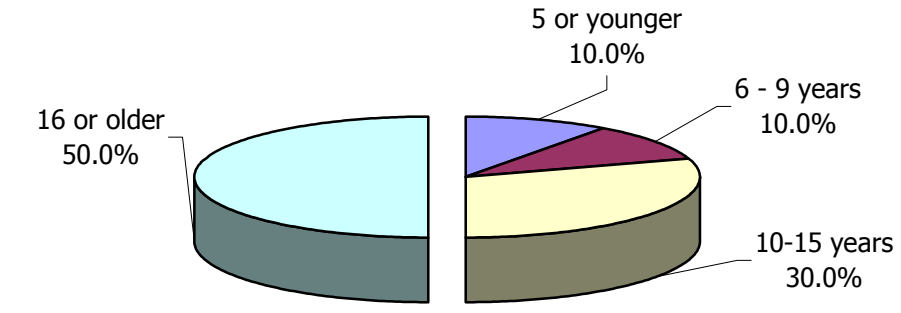
Fewer children today are returning to foster care than children in previous years. In 2002, the number of children who had been in care before is down by an average of 14.3% from the number of children reviewed between 1995 and 2001 who had been in care before. In 2002, 6.4% of the children reviewed by the Review Board had been in care before, compared to 11.1% in 2001, 15.3% in 2000, and 23.3% in 1999.

Figure 10: Recidivism Rates 1995 - 2002



In 2002, most of the children who had been in care before were Caucasians, comprising 80.0% of these children, compared to 20.0% African-Americans. There were no children of other races reviewed by the Review Board who returned to care in 2002. Boys returned to the custody of the county at a slower rate than girls, 40.0% compared to 60.0%. Of these children, half were 16 years of age or older, 30.0% were between 10 and 15 years of age, 10.0% were between 6 and 9 years of age, and 10.0% were 5 years of age or younger. Children who had been in care before have spent an average of 4.3 years in care and have experienced an average of 4.6 changes in placement.

Figure 11: Age of Children Returning to Care 2002



Re-entry into foster care can occur for a number of reasons. The Review Board tracks the immediate location of children prior to a child's returning to foster care. Tracking this information brings insight into the lack of permanency achieved for children previously in foster care.

A child who leaves care to return home or go live with a relative has a greater risk of coming back into care than children who leave care and are adopted. Children who came back into care from home or from a relative constituted all of the children in 2002 who had been in care before, compared to 86.7% in 2001, 82.4% in 2000, and 91.7% in 1999.

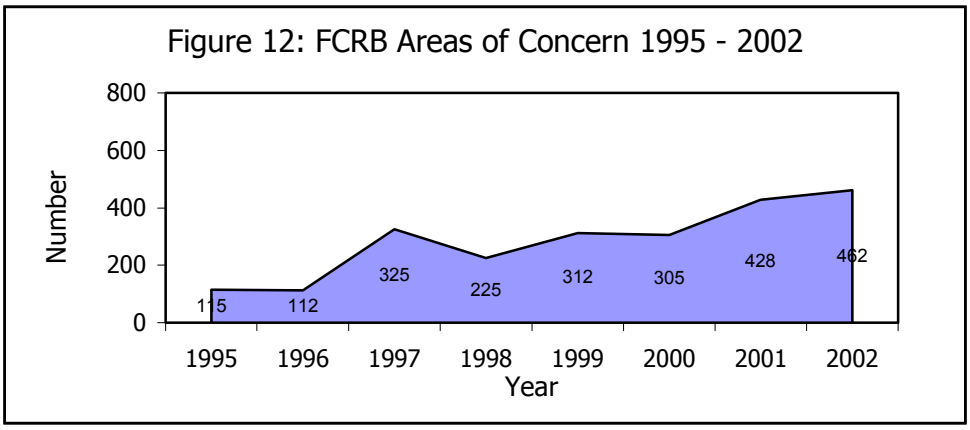
Table 2: Previous Location of Children Re-Entering Care						
	2002		2001		2000	
Previous Location	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Parents	7	70.0	10	66.7	10	66.7
Relatives	3	30.0	3	20.0	3	20.0
Adoptive Parents	0	0.0	2	13.3	2	13.3
Other	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	10	100.0	15	100.0	15	100.0

AREAS OF CONCERN

State and Federal law regulates the Department of Social Service's efforts to secure permanent homes for children in out-of-home placements. These laws, combined with agency policies and procedures, are designed to move children expeditiously out of care to a permanent placement. When these laws and policies are not followed, a child's ability to leave care and to achieve permanency upon leaving care can be significantly impacted.

In 2002, Review Board members held 13 meetings with an average of 18 children reviewed at each meeting. Of the 143 children reviewed, 95.1% had at least one area of concern cited by the local Review Board. A total of 462 deficiencies in systemic efforts to secure permanent homes for children in care were cited in 2002. Of these deficiencies, 60.8% were direct violations of the law, and 39.2% were violations of program policies or procedures. The number of deficiencies cited by the Review Board increased by 7.9% from the number of deficiencies cited in 2001.

Figure 12: FCRB Areas of Concern 1995 - 2002



In 2002, the most often cited legal violation was "No Timely Permanency Planning Hearing," which constituted 28.1% of all legal Areas of Concern, down from 29.4% in 2001. 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.

Table 3: Legal Areas of Concern 2001 - 2002				
	2002		2001	
Previous Location	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
No Timely Permanency Plan Hearing	79	28.1	83	29.4
No Face-to-Face Contact	63	22.4	47	16.7
No Timely Merit Hearing	61	21.7	56	19.9
No Court Order at Review	56	19.9	62	22.0
Other Statutory Violation	9	3.2	12	4.3
No Child Specific Recruitment	6	2.1	5	1.8
No Thorough Adoption Assessment	3	1.1	5	1.8
Non-Compliance with Court Order	2	0.7	5	1.8
No Timely Probable Cause Hearing	1	0.4	2	0.7
No Timely FCRB	1	0.4	5	1.8
Adoption Complaint Not Filed Timely	0	0.0	0	0.0
Adoption Not Consummated Timely	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	281	100.0	282	100.0

The most often cited program violation was the lack of progress on the permanent plan, which constituted 42.5% of all program Areas of Concern, up from 27.4% in 2001. 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 4: Program Areas of Concern 2001 - 2002				
	2002		2001	
Area of Concern	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Lack of Progress Permanent Plan	77	42.5	40	27.4
P: No Progress Reports	54	29.8	49	33.6
P: No Psychological Reports at Review	19	10.5	4	2.7
P: No Copy of Pleadings	12	6.6	0	0.0
Incomplete/Inappropriate Case Plan	7	3.9	5	3.4
No Current Case Plan	5	2.8	29	19.9
Other	3	1.7	4	2.7
P: Case Plan Expired	1	0.6	0	0.0
P: Conflict with Permanent Plan	1	0.6	0	0.0
P: No Diligent Search	1	0.6	3	2.1
P: Other Policy/Procedure	1	0.6	2	1.4
No Case Plan Within 60 Days	0	0.0	0	0.0
P: Lapse in Case Planning	0	0.0	0	0.0
P: No Advance Packets	0	0.0	4	2.7
P: No Timely Referral to Adoption	0	0.0	0	0.0
P: TPR Summary Not Submitted Timely	0	0.0	0	0.0
Interested Parties Not Invited	0	0.0	6	4.1
No 3 Week Notice to Parties	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	181	100.0	146	100.0

Note: "P:" Indicates Agency Policy/Procedure Violation

SUMMARY

Facing the Scope of Problems:
The data on foster children, the length of time spent in care, the number of changes in placements experienced, whether permanency is achieved, and recidivism rates provide a picture of children in out-of-home placements in Oconee County. Children in out-of-home placements in this county are spending more than 1/10th of their childhood in foster care. The average child entering care today can expect to change placements 2 times before leaving care. About 1 in 3 children will leave the system without being placed with a "forever family."

The number of children returning to care today is decreasing. Of the children reviewed at least once by the Review Board while in out-of-home placement in 2002, more than 1 in 10 children had been in care before. Of the children who had been in foster care before, 7 in 10 children came back into care from one or both of their natural parents. This and other data in this report suggests that children in out-of-home placements in this county are at risk of not becoming self-supporting, contributing members of our communities and state.

Emphasizing the Positive:
South Carolina Foster Kids Count reports have been developed to describe the problems of foster children in each of the counties and across the state. Fortunately, the majority of children are doing well. One simple description is the percentage of children who do not fall into the problem categories reported. In Oconee County, about 2 in 3 children who leave foster care are placed with a "forever family," and the number of children who achieve permanency is the highest it has been since 1999. Of the children less than 16 years of age, 7 in 10 are achieving permanency.

Children today are spending less time and experiencing fewer changes in placement while in care than children in previous years. The majority of foster children experience just 1 or 2 placements while in care and children under 16 years of age experience on average 2 placements while in care. Almost 9 in 10 children in the custody of the county were there for the first time. Children who leave care to be adopted are at virtually no risk of returning to care.

All children in out-of-home placements in this county deserve a stable home with a "forever family." These children also deserve our best efforts for ensuring that their stay in foster care is as short as possible and without frequent changes in placements. The Review Board acknowledges the good work and dedication of those in child welfare across the county and encourages continued positive change for all children in foster care.

This version of the Foster Kids Count report will be revised on an annual basis or as more recent and additional data becomes available. Unless otherwise noted, statistical data presented in this profile was obtained from the Foster Care Review Board database. Please utilize local data sources whenever possible to supplement the profile provided throughout our report.

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, 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