



# FACTS ABOUT FOSTER KIDS

## Sumter 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 surged in Sumter County during 2002 after two straight years of having many more children enter care than leave it. Reviewed children now constitute .56% of all children living in the county, the first time such incidence has been above the statewide average. More than half of all children entering foster care in 2002 were aged five and younger.

	1999	2000	2001	2002	Average
Number of Children Reviewed	113	112	122	166	128
Change from Prior Year		-1	10	44	
Percent of all Children in County	0.38%	0.38%	0.42%	0.56%	0.44%
Number Entering	18	20	45	57	35
Number Leaving	22	22	19	37	25

	Children Reviewed		Children Entering		Children Leaving	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<b>ALL CHILDREN</b>	166		57		37	
<b>Race:</b>						
African-American	119	72%	34	60%	27	73%
Caucasian	39	24%	18	32%	7	19%
Other	8	5%	5	9%	3	8%
<b>Gender:</b>						
Male	76	46%	27	47%	24	65%
Female	90	54%	30	53%	13	35%
<b>Age:</b>						
5 and younger	64	39%	31	54%	14	38%
6 to 9	24	15%	9	16%	5	14%
10 to 15	53	32%	16	28%	7	19%
16 and older	25	15%	1	2%	11	30%

## AREAS OF CONCERN

In 2002, the Local Review Board covering Sumter County held 12 meetings with an average of 20 children from the county reviewed at each meeting. Of the 237 reviews held, close to half (49%) had at least one area of concern cited. A total of 173 deficiencies in systemic efforts to secure permanent homes for children in care were cited in 2002, an increase of 51 over the 2001 tally, thus rising three times as fast as the number of reviews held. Despite this increase, Sumter County's average of .73 citations per review remains well below the statewide average of 1.02.

In 2002, the most often cited legal violations were *No Timely Permanency Planning Hearing* and *No Timely Merits 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. Both of these critical processes have risen in each of the last two years. In 2002, the number of reviews with *No Thorough Adoption Assessment* also went up.

The most often cited program violation was *No Progress Reports* from treatment providers, followed by *Lack of Progress Towards a Permanent Plan*. 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. Both of these violations increased from 2001 to 2002 after having fallen the prior year.

<b>Table 3: Frequently Cited Areas of Concern, 2000 to 2002, Sumter County</b>					
	2000	2001	2002	Change:	
				00 to 01	01 to 02
<b>LEGAL</b>					
No Timely Permanency Planning Hearing	32	36	46	4	10
No Timely Merits Hearing	17	22	29	5	7
No Thorough Adoption Assessment	1	0	7	-1	7
No Face to Face Contact	2	7	3	5	-4
No Court Order at Review	8	2	2	-6	0
<b>PROGRAM</b>					
No Progress Reports	9	2	25	-7	23
Lack of Progress Towards Permanent Plan	25	15	24	-10	9
Interested Parties Not Invited	2	2	6	0	4
No Copy of Pleadings	1	2	6	1	4
No Advance Packets	1	3	2	2	-1
<b>ALL AREAS OF CONCERN</b>					
Total Number: Areas of Concern	135	122	173	-13	51
Total Number of Reviews	194	220	237	26	17
Areas of Concern per Review	0.70	0.55	0.73	-0.14	0.18
Percent of Reviews with an Area of Concern	52%	43%	49%		

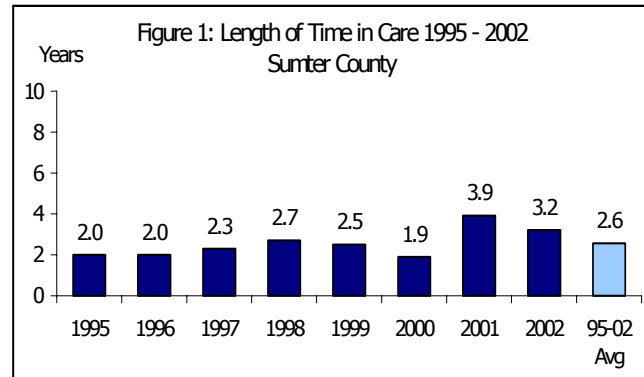
The 2004 edition of *Facts About Foster Kids*, when published during the second half of that year, will include complete information about children who were reviewed at least once in 2003. Because these reviews are now complete, a supplement is currently available on request that contains updated 2003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

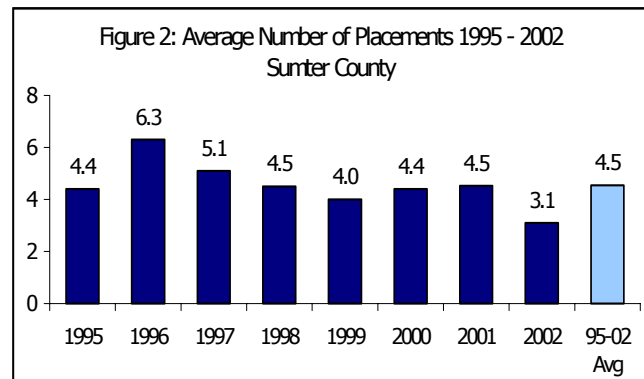
### LENGTH OF TIME IN CARE:

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. Sumter County's average length of time in care fell, but remained at a high 3.2 years in 2002. That kept it above the statewide average of 2.8 years and above the county's long-term average as well.



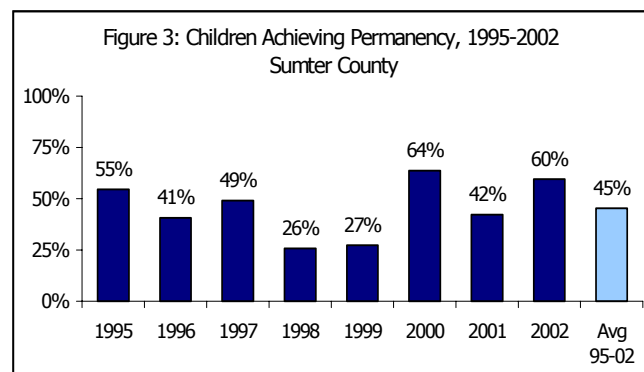
### NUMBER OF PLACEMENTS:

Research shows that additional changes in placements for children once in the foster care system can be detrimental to their development, affecting their ability to learn, establish relationships and develop as stable, secure individuals. In 2002, the average number of placements for children leaving foster care in Sumter County achieved its lowest level yet at 3.1, placing it below the state average of 3.7 for the first time. Only 19% of the children who left care experienced 5 or more placements.



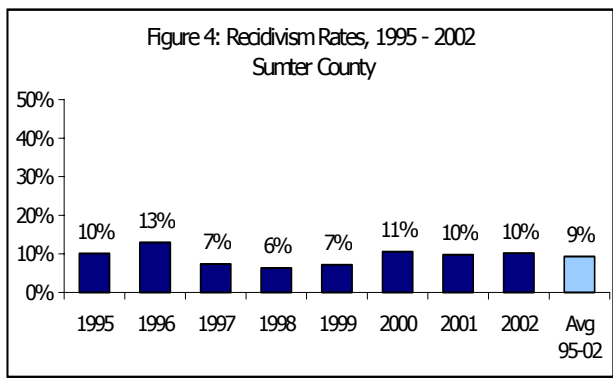
### PERCENT ACHIEVING PERMANENCY:

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. Sumter County improved its permanency rate to 60% for children leaving care in 2002, though that remains below 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, Sumter County continued to have a relatively low ten percent rate of re-entry. That was half the statewide average, which had risen to 20%.



For children re-entering foster care, the previous location matters. During the last three years, 80% of them came from either their parents or another relative. Only one child came back into foster care after having been placed with an adoptive parent.

Previous Location	2000		2001		2002		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Parents	7	58%	8	67%	8	47%	23	56%
Relatives	2	17%	2	17%	6	35%	10	24%
Adoptive Parents	1	8%	0	0%	0	0%	1	2%
Other	2	17%	2	17%	3	18%	7	17%
Total	12	100%	12	100%	17	100%	41	100%

**OVERALL ASSESSMENT**

Sumter County’s performance measures in 2002 all improved. While length of time in care remained high, the average number of placements for children leaving care was at a low, the percent achieving permanency was the second best in history and return rates were half the state level.

The more troubling fact is that Sumter County faced a surge of new entrants into foster care during both 2001 and 2002, especially younger children. This may be starting to put strains on its social service system, evidenced by the number of Areas of Concern rising three times as fast as caseloads. Sumter’s population has been growing slowly since 2000, so the cause is probably not a surge in new residents, as it has been in other places. Instead, the culprit might be the impact that worsening job market and economic conditions has on families, which unfortunately have not improved much since.

Given the county’s historically poor performance in achieving permanency and in number of placements, the gains made in 2002 will be harder to maintain going forward without continued vigilance on permanency planning, on getting progress reports from treatment providers and on scheduling timely hearings, all of which have started to slip. Other performance measures that have held up well over the years – recidivism rates and length of time in care -- might also be in jeopardy.

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>