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FOSTER KIDS COUNT 2003 Charleston County

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FOSTER KIDS COUNT 2003

Charleston
County

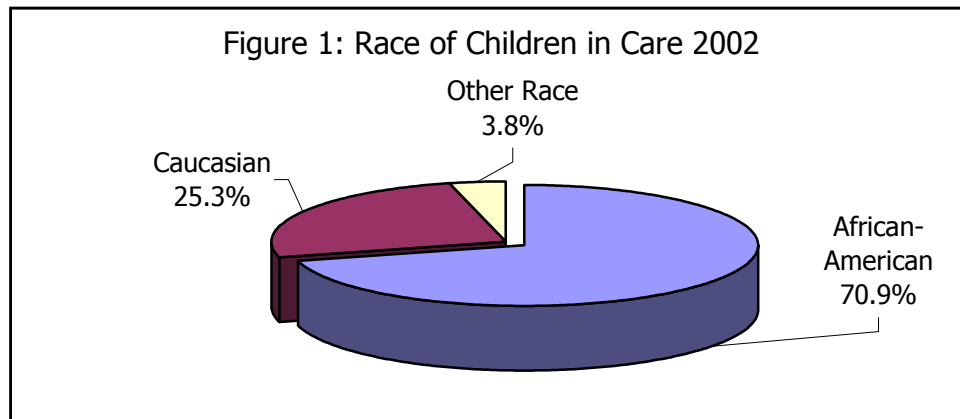
A profile of South Carolina children in out-of-home placements

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

DEMOGRAPHICS¹

In 2002, there were 501 children in out-of-home placements in Charleston County who were reviewed at least once while in care by the Foster Care Review Board.² Of these children, 70.9% were African-American, 25.3% were Caucasian, and 3.8% were children of other races. There were 523 children in out-of-home placements reviewed by the Review Board in 2001, 454 children in 2000, and 435 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 .67% of the population of all children in the county in 2002, compared to .71% in 2001, .62% in 2000, and .57% in 1999.



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, 47.5% compared to 52.5%. Children 16 years of age or older constituted 21.6% of the children in care, 39.3% were between 10 and 15 years of age, 14.6% were between 6 and 9 years of age, and 24.6% were 5 years of age or younger.

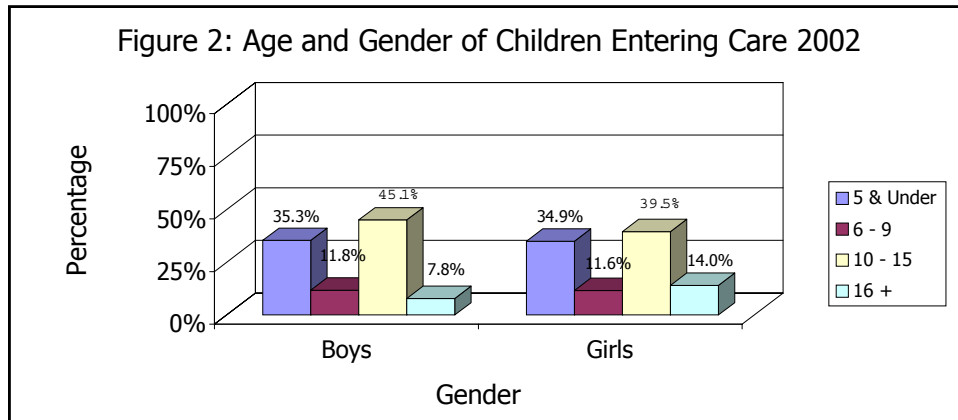
In 2002, 94 children entered the foster care system in Charleston County and were reviewed by the Review Board. Of these children, 64.9% were African-American, 33.0% were Caucasian, and 2.1% were children of other races. More boys entered care than girls, 54.3% compared to 45.7%. There were 145 children who entered care in 2001, 96 children in 2000, and 108 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 an older age. Of those children entering care in 2002, 35.1% were 5 years of age or younger, 11.7% were between 6 and 9 years of age, 42.6% were between 10 and 15 years of age, and 10.6% were 16 years of age or older. Of the boys entering care in 2002, 52.9% were 10 years of age or older, while 53.5% of the girls were 10 years of age or older.

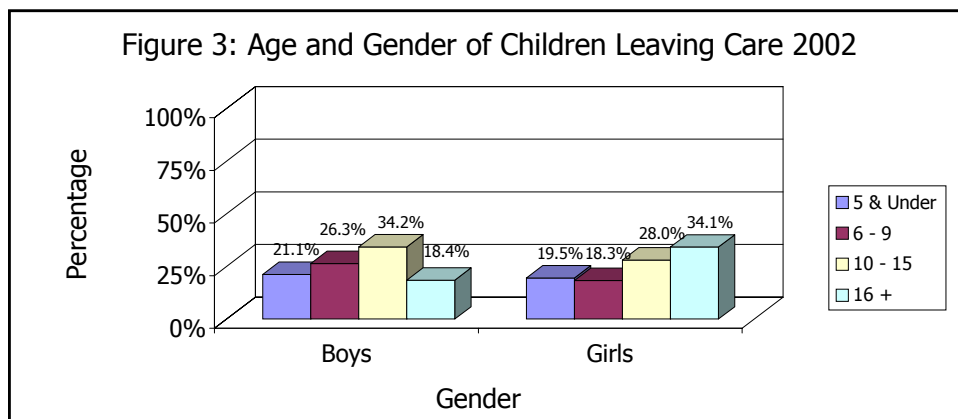
Of the children entering care, 52.4% of the African-Americans, 54.8% of the Caucasians, and half of the children of other races were 10 years of age or older.



In 2002, 120 children left custody of the county. Of these children, 67.5% were African-American, 29.2% were Caucasian, and 3.3% were children of other races. There were 117 children who left care in 2001, 107 children who left care in 2000, and 104 children in 1999. Fewer boys left care in 2002 than girls, 31.7% compared to 68.3%.

Children tend to leave care at an older age. Of those children leaving care in 2002, 20.0% were 5 years of age or younger, 20.8% were between 6 and 9 years of age, 30.0% were between 10 and 15 years of age, and 29.2% were 16 years of age or older. Of the boys leaving care in 2002, 52.6% were 10 years of age or older, while 62.1% of the girls were 10 years of age or older.

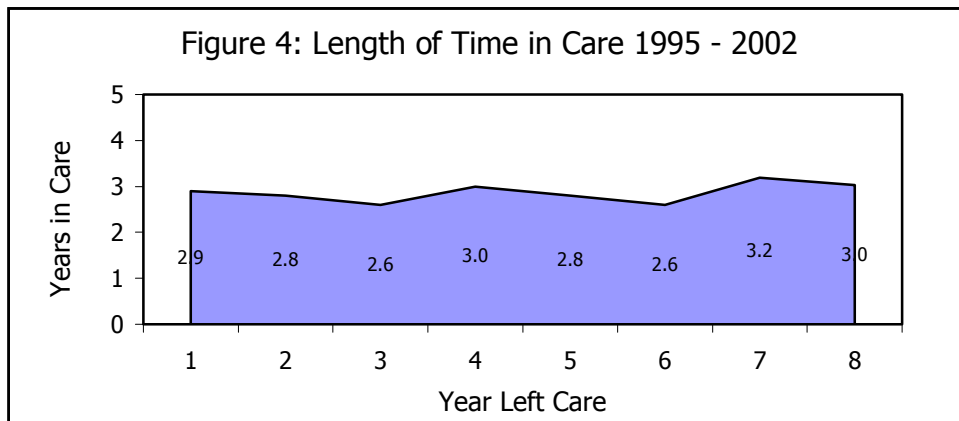
Of the children leaving care, 64.2% of the African-Americans, 51.4% of the Caucasians, and 25.0% of the children of other races were 10 years of age or older.



LENGTH OF TIME IN CARE

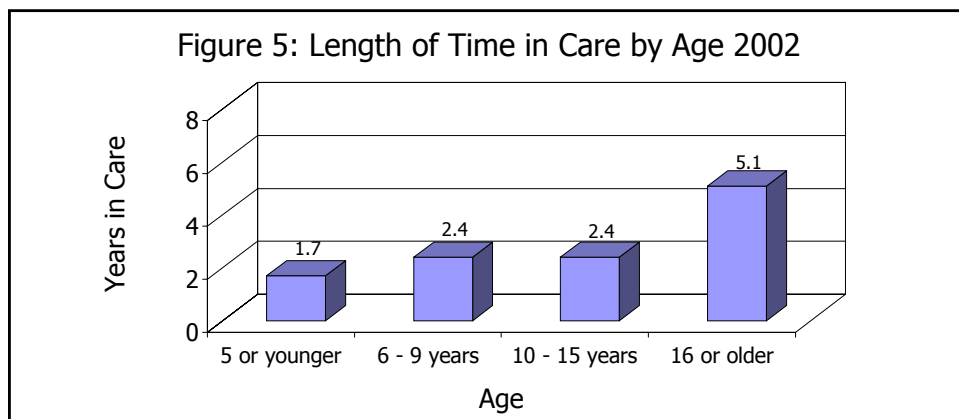
The longer a child is away from their home or a nurturing family environment, the more damaging it can be to the normal development of the child. For this reason, a major goal of the Review Board is to ensure that children achieve permanency as quickly as possible.

Children today are spending slightly more 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 up by an average of 2 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 3 years, compared to 3.2 years in 2001, 2.6 years in 2000, and 2.8 years in 1999.



Caucasian children spent longer in care than African-American children and children of other races. In 2002, Caucasian children spent on average 3.2 years in care, compared to 3 years for African-American children, and 2 years for children of other races.

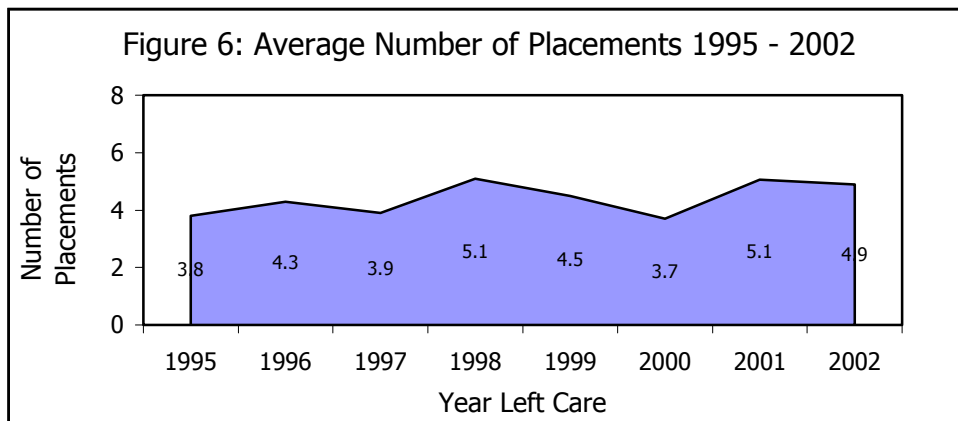
In 2002, boys spent on average 3.4 years in care, compared to girls who spent on average 2.8 years in care. Children 16 years of age or older spent the longest amount of time in care, averaging 5.1 years in care, compared to 2.4 years for children between 10 and 15 years of age, 2.4 years for children between 6 and 9 years of age, and 1.7 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.

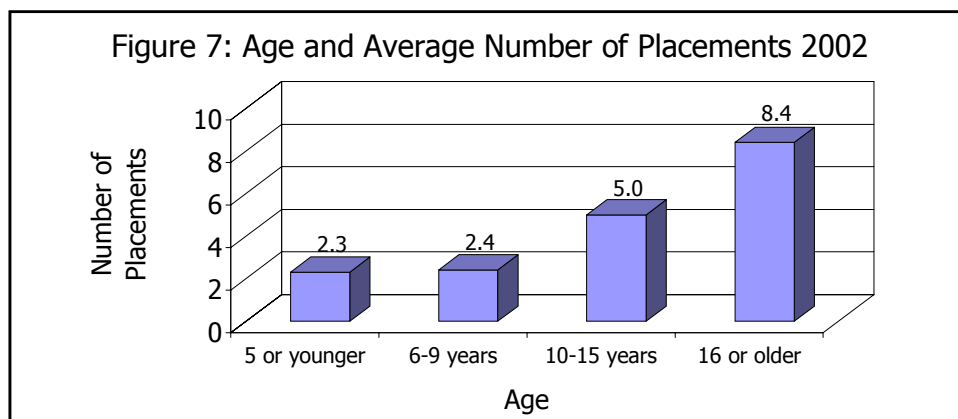
Children today are experiencing more changes in placement than children in previous years. Of those children who left care in 2002, the average number of changes in placement was up by an average of a half of a placement from the average number of changes in placement children experienced between 1995 and 2001. In 2002, the average child who left care had lived in 4.9 different placements while in the custody of the county, compared to 5.1 in 2001, 3.7 in 2000, and 4.5 in 1999.



Of the children reviewed by the Review Board, 40.0% were placed in foster homes, 20.8% were in Medicaid therapeutic placements, 7.5% were in group homes or institutions, 2.5% were in adoptive placements, 15.8% were with relatives, 7.5% were with one or both natural parents, 5.0% were runaways, and 0.9% were in other types of placements.

African-American children experienced more changes in placement on average than Caucasian children and children of other races. In 2002, African-American children experienced on average 5.3 changes in placement, compared to 4.3 for Caucasian children, and 1.3 for children of other races. In 2002, boys experienced on average 3.5 changes in placement, compared to 5.6 for girls.

Children 16 years of age or older experienced the most changes in placement on average, 8.4 placements compared to 5 placements for children between 10 and 15 years of age, 2.4 placements for children between 6 and 9 years of age and 2.3 placements for children 5 years of age or younger.



Most children who left care experienced between 1 and 3 changes in placement while in the custody of the county. In 2002, 54.2% of the children experienced between 1 and 3 changes in placement, compared to 62.4% in 2001, 57.9% in 2000, and 63.5% in 1999.

More children today are experiencing multiple changes in placement than children in previous years. In 2002, 32.5% of the children who left care experienced 5 or more placements, compared to 28.4% in 2001, 25.2% in 2000, and 25.9% in 1999.

Table 1: Number of Placements for Children Leaving Care									
Number of Placements	2002		2001		2000		1999		Percent
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
1	13	10.8	26	22.2	30	28.0	27	26.0	
2	39	32.5	30	25.6	21	19.6	29	27.9	
3	13	10.8	17	14.5	11	10.3	10	9.6	
4	16	13.3	11	9.4	18	16.8	11	10.6	
5	10	8.3	4	3.4	6	5.6	5	4.8	
6	5	4.2	9	7.7	6	5.6	4	3.8	
7	3	2.5	2	1.7	5	4.7	0	0.0	
8	2	1.7	4	3.4	2	1.9	3	2.9	
9	1	0.8	6	5.1	1	0.9	0	0.0	
10+	18	15.0	8	6.8	7	6.5	15	14.4	
Total	120	100.0	117	100.0	107	100.0	104	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 weak positive relationship between the number of placements children experience in the county and how long they spend in care ($r = .299$). The number of changes in placement that a child experiences accounts for 8.9% of the variability in the number of months a child spends in out-of-home placement.

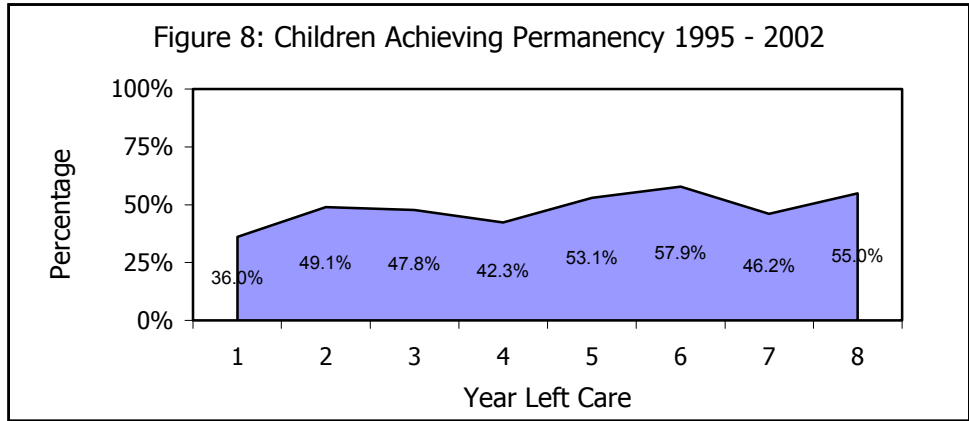
ACHIEVING PERMANENCY

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.

More children today are achieving permanency than children in previous years. The number of children who achieved permanency in 2002 is up by an average of 7.5% from the average number of children who left care between 1995 and 2001. In 2002, 55.0% of the children who left care achieved permanency, compared to 46.2% in 2001, 57.9% in 2000, and 53.1% in 1999.

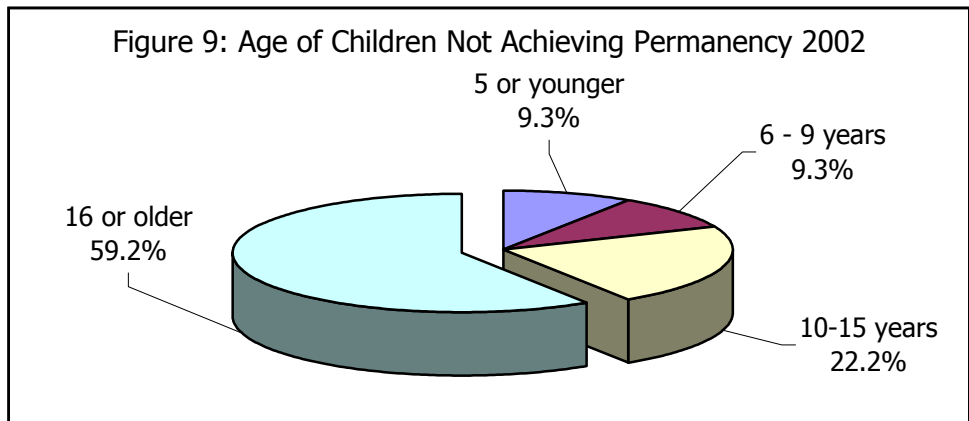
Of the children who left care in 2002 without achieving permanency, 51.9% aged out of the system, 44.4% were placed in the care of someone other than their parent, and 3.7% died.³

³ In 2002, 2 of the children in out-of-home placements in the state died. Pursuant to SC Code Ann. 20-7-5915, children who die while in out-of-home placements come under the purview of the State Law Enforcement Division’s Department of Child Fatalities.



In 2002, African-American children constituted 77.8% of the children who left care and did not achieve permanency, compared to 22.2% Caucasians. All of the children of other races achieved permanency upon leaving care. Boys constituted 31.5% of those children who did not achieve permanency, compared to 68.5% girls. Girls were more likely than boys to age out of care, comprising 82.1% of all children aging out.

Children leaving care without achieving permanency were more likely to be older children. Children 16 years of age or older constituted 59.2% of those children who did not achieve permanency in 2002, while 22.2% were between 10 and 15 years of age, 9.3% were between 6 and 9 years of age, and 9.3% were 5 years of age or younger. Of the children 16 years of age or older, 80.0% aged out, 8.6% returned home to at least one of their natural parents, and 8.6% were placed in the custody of a non-parent.

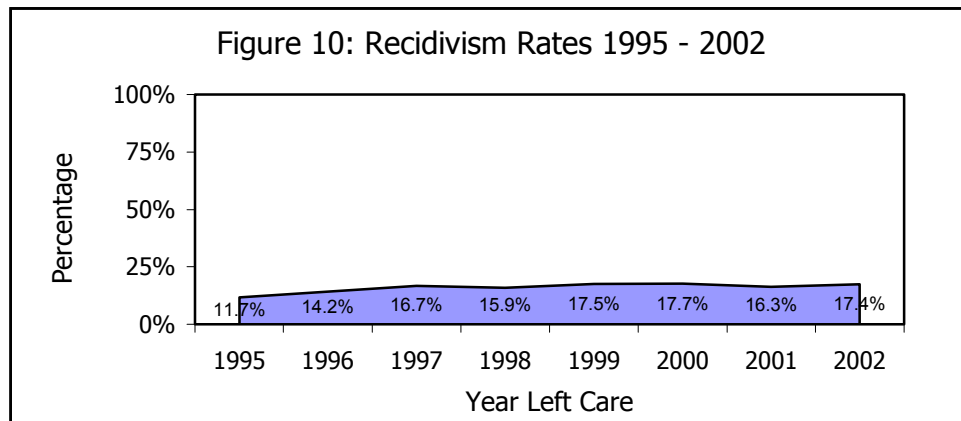


Children who did not achieve permanency when leaving care in 2002 spent longer in care and experienced more changes in placement while in care than children who achieved permanency. The average length of time these children spent in care was 4.2 years, compared to 2.1 years for children who achieved permanency. The average number of changes in placement experienced by these children was 6.8 placements, compared to 3.4 placements for children who achieved permanency.

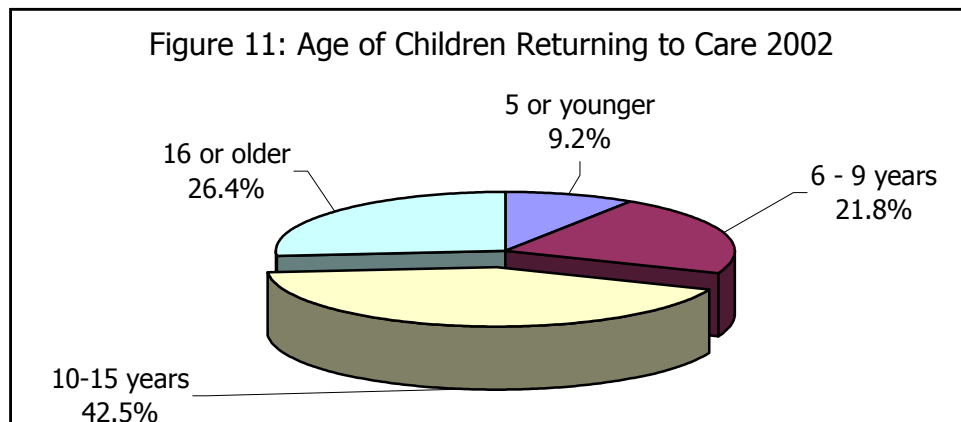
RECIDIVISM RATES

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.

More 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 up by an average of 1.7% from the number of children reviewed between 1995 and 2001 who had been in care before. In 2002, 17.4% of the children reviewed by the Review Board had been in care before, compared to 16.3% in 2001, 17.7% in 2000, and 17.5% in 1999.



In 2002, most of the children who had been in care before were African-Americans, comprising 72.4% of these children, compared to 23.0% Caucasians, and 4.6% children of other races. Boys returned to the custody of the county at a slower rate than girls, 44.8% compared to 55.2%. Of these children, 26.4% were 16 years of age or older, 42.5% were between 10 and 15 years of age, 21.8% were between 6 and 9 years of age, and 9.2% were 5 years of age or younger. Children who had been in care before have spent an average of 3 years in care and have experienced an average of 5.1 changes in placement.



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.

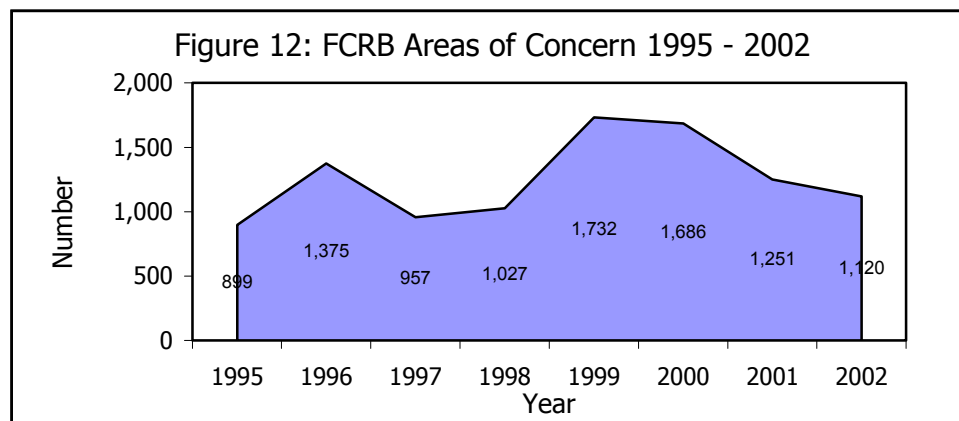
A child who leaves care to return home or go live with a relative has a greater risk of coming back into care than children who leave care and are adopted. Children who came back into care from home or from a relative constituted 94.3% of the children in 2002 who had been in care before, compared to 91.8% in 2001, 96.2% in 2000, and 90.1% in 1999.

Table 2: Previous Location of Children Re-Entering Care						
Previous Location	2002		2001		2000	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Parents	50	57.5	53	62.4	47	60.3
Relatives	32	36.8	25	29.4	28	35.9
Adoptive Parents	2	2.3	4	4.7	2	2.6
Other	3	3.4	3	3.5	1	1.3
Total	87	100.0	85	100.0	78	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 36 meetings with an average of 24 children reviewed at each meeting. Of the 492 children reviewed, 81.7% had at least one area of concern cited by the local Review Board. A total of 1,120 deficiencies in systemic efforts to secure permanent homes for children in care were cited in 2002. Of these deficiencies, 58.0% were direct violations of the law, and 42.0% were violations of program policies or procedures. The number of deficiencies cited by the Review Board decreased by 10.5% from the number of deficiencies cited in 2001.



In 2002, the most often cited legal violation was "No Timely Permanency Planning Hearing," which constituted 30.5% of all legal Areas of Concern, down from 32.1% 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				
Previous Location	2002		2001	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
No Timely Permanency Plan Hearing	198	30.5	234	32.1
Other Statutory Violation	120	18.5	92	12.6
No Face-to-Face Contact	115	17.7	139	19.1
No Timely Merit Hearing	109	16.8	135	18.5
No Timely Probable Cause Hearing	39	6.0	23	3.2
No Thorough Adoption Assessment	27	4.2	28	3.8
No Timely FCRB	19	2.9	17	2.3
No Court Order at Review	16	2.5	52	7.1
Non-Compliance with Court Order	5	0.8	8	1.1
Adoption Complaint Not Filed Timely	2	0.3	1	0.1
Adoption Not Consummated Timely	0	0.0	0	0.0
No Child Specific Recruitment	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	650	100.0	729	100.0

The most often cited program violation was the lack of progress on the permanent plan, which constituted 23.0% of all program Areas of Concern, up from 18.6% 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				
Area of Concern	2002		2001	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Lack of Progress Permanent Plan	108	23.0	97	18.6
Incomplete/Inappropriate Case Plan	66	14.0	63	12.1
P: No Progress Reports	62	13.2	80	15.3
P: No Advance Packets	59	12.6	85	16.3
No Current Case Plan	41	8.7	27	5.2
No Case Plan Within 60 Days	39	8.3	20	3.8
Interested Parties Not Invited	31	6.6	26	5.0
P: TPR Summary Not Submitted Timely	21	4.5	42	8.0
P: No Psychological Reports at Review	9	1.9	2	0.4
P: No Diligent Search	9	1.9	12	2.3
P: Conflict with Permanent Plan	8	1.7	7	1.3
P: Other Policy/Procedure	6	1.3	17	3.3
P: No Timely Referral to Adoption	5	1.1	20	3.8
Other	5	1.1	16	3.1
P: Lapse in Case Planning	1	0.2	4	0.8
P: Case Plan Expired	0	0.0	4	0.8
P: No Copy of Pleadings	0	0.0	0	0.0
No 3 Week Notice to Parties	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	470	100.0	522	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 Charleston County. Children in out-of-home placements in this county are spending 1/5th of their childhood in foster care. The average child entering care today can expect to change placements 5 times before leaving care. Almost half of the children will leave the system without being placed with a "forever family."

The number of children returning to care today is increasing. Of the children reviewed at least once by the Review Board while in out-of-home placement in 2002, 1 in 5 children had been in care before. Of the children who had been in foster care before, 3 in 5 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 Charleston County, more than half of the children who leave foster care are placed with a "forever family," and the number of children who achieve permanency is substantially higher than 5 years ago. Of the children less than 16 years of age, 3 in 4 are achieving permanency.

The majority of foster children experience between 1 and 3 placements while in care and children under 16 years of age experience on average 2 placements while in care. More than 4 in 5 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.gvoepp.state.sc.us/children/foster.htm>