



# FACTS ABOUT FOSTER KIDS

## Lee 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

In Lee County there were 33 children in foster care who were reviewed during 2002, about the same number as during the prior two years. This represents .63 percent of all children in the county, slightly higher than the state average of .52 percent. Over time, a third of all children leaving care have been aged 16 or older, a sign that many children are lingering in foster care until emancipated.

	1999	2000	2001	2002	Average
Number of Children Reviewed	27	32	35	33	32
Change from Prior Year		5	3	-2	
Percent of all Children in County	0.51%	0.62%	0.68%	0.63%	0.61%
Number Entering	8	12	15	8	11
Number Leaving	5	8	12	9	9

	Children Reviewed		Children Entering		Children Leaving	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<b>ALL CHILDREN</b>	91		68		67	
<b>Race:</b>						
African-American	72	79%	52	77%	53	79%
Caucasian	19	21%	16	24%	14	21%
Other	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
<b>Gender:</b>						
Male	38	42%	31	46%	22	33%
Female	52	57%	37	54%	45	67%
<b>Age:</b>						
5 and younger	22	24%	20	29%	17	25%
6 to 9	12	13%	15	22%	8	12%
10 to 15	31	34%	30	44%	20	30%
16 and older	26	29%	3	4%	22	33%

## AREAS OF CONCERN

In 2002, the local review board held 12 meetings that included Lee County cases, with an average of 5 children reviewed at each meeting. Of the 57 reviews held, 39% had at least one area of concern cited, lower than the state average, but higher than it had been in each of the prior two years. A total of 34 deficiencies in systemic efforts to secure permanent homes for children in care were cited in 2002, up from 8 in 2001 and 19 in 2000. That raised the average number of deficiencies per child to .60, still low compared to the state average of 1.02.

There are only a small number of legal violations, the most often cited in 2002 being three with *No Timely Permanency Planning Hearing*. This unnecessarily lengthens the time children remain in foster care. There were no cases with *No Timely Merits Hearing* this past year. The most often cited program violation was *No Copy of Pleadings*, a typically unusual citation which suddenly ballooned to 10 in Lee County during 2002. Several other program violations increased in number during 2002 after dropping the prior year.

<b>Table 3: Frequently Cited Areas of Concern, 2000 to 2002, Lee County</b>					
	2000	2001	2002	Change:	
				00 to 01	01 to 02
<b>LEGAL</b>					
No Timely Permanency Planning Hearing	0	0	3	0	3
No Thorough Adoption Assessment	2	0	2	-2	2
No Timely Foster Care Review Board	0	0	1	0	1
No Timely Merits Hearing	5	3	0	-2	-3
Non-Compliance with Court Order	0	2	0	2	-2
<b>PROGRAM</b>					
No Copy of Pleadings	0	0	10	0	10
No Advance Packets	4	0	4	-4	4
No Progress Reports	2	2	3	0	1
Incomplete/Inappropriate Case Plan	1	0	3	-1	3
Interested Parties Not Invited	0	0	3	0	3
<b>ALL AREAS OF CONCERN</b>					
Total Number: Areas of Concern	19	8	34	-11	26
Total Number of Reviews	51	53	57	2	4
Areas of Concern per Review	0.37	0.15	0.60	-0.22	0.45
Percent of Reviews with an Area of Concern	29%	15%	39%		

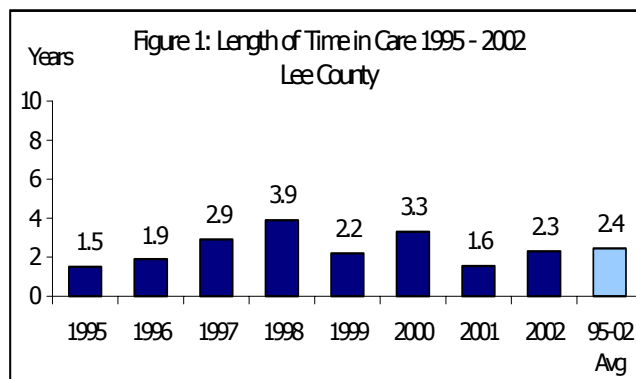
The 2004 edition of *Facts About Foster Kids*, when published during the second half of that year, will include complete information about children who were reviewed at least once in 2003. Because these reviews are now complete, a supplement is currently available on request that contains updated 2003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

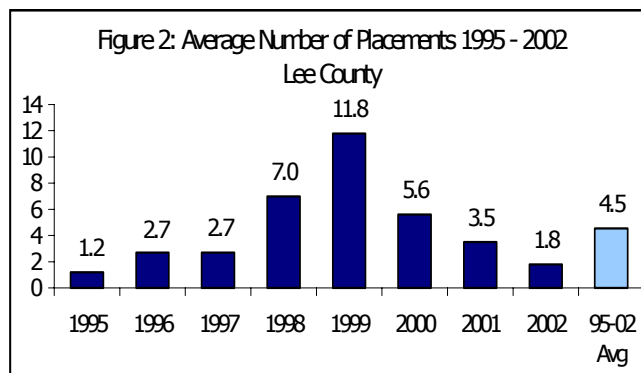
### LENGTH OF TIME IN CARE:

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, the average length of time in care for children in Lee County edged up to 2.3 years, close to its long-term record. This measure remains below the statewide average of 2.8 years.



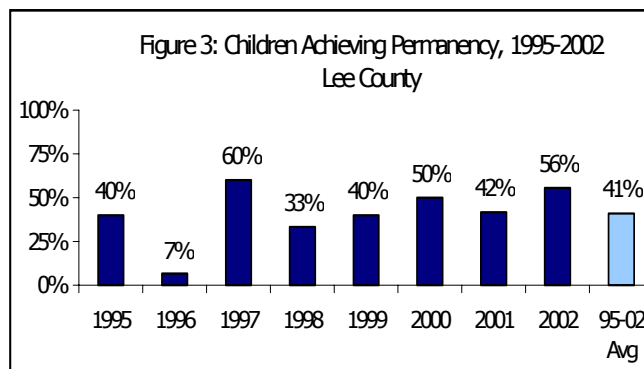
### NUMBER OF PLACEMENTS:

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, Lee County's average number of placements fell again to 1.8, well under the statewide average of 3.7. With few children leaving care in this county, any one year's figure should be treated cautiously; still, the trend is encouraging.



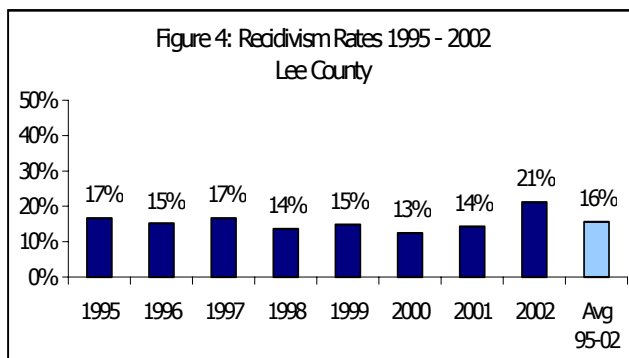
### PERCENT ACHIEVING PERMANENCY:

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. Over time, Lee County's permanency rate has averaged a low 41 percent, but with higher figures each of the last three years.



## 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, Lee County's recidivism rate rose to an all-time high of 21 percent, the first time since 1997 it has been above the South Carolina average, now at 20 percent.



For children re-entering foster care, the previous location matters. Since 1995, 89 percent of the children who came back into foster care in Lee County were from a birth parent or from a relative.

(Due to the small number of children returning to care in Lee County, Table 4 is not compiled as it is for larger counties.)

## OVERALL ASSESSMENT

Lee County has had fewer than 100 children in foster care during the last eight years, so measures for any one year should be viewed cautiously. Nevertheless, some patterns emerge after a string of years. Starting in 1999, Lee County has seen more children entering foster care than leaving it. More critically, a third of those leaving care are aged 16 and older, while a high 44% of those entering are aged 10 to 15. This shows that Lee County has a greater tendency than most other areas for older children to enter foster care and to linger there until emancipated. This county has had an average level for number of years in care (2.4) alongside a meager percent of children achieving permanency, 41% over the years. That is probably a sign of high reliance on relative placement. It also churns its foster children through more temporary homes. For all children leaving care during the last eight years, the average number of placements per year was 1.9 compared to a statewide figure of 1.5.

Lee County does a better job than most others in South Carolina in keeping Areas of Concern to a minimum. It has a very low level of legal violations. And even after an up tick in the number of several program violations in 2002, the total number of Areas of Concern per review is still about half the statewide average. Only 39% of all cases reviewed had at least one citation. Following procedures this well ought to result in better outcomes for children than most other areas. The fact that it doesn't suggests that better permanency planning is the missing ingredient, especially when it comes to helping older children.

---

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>