



FOSTER KIDS COUNT 2003

Darlington
County

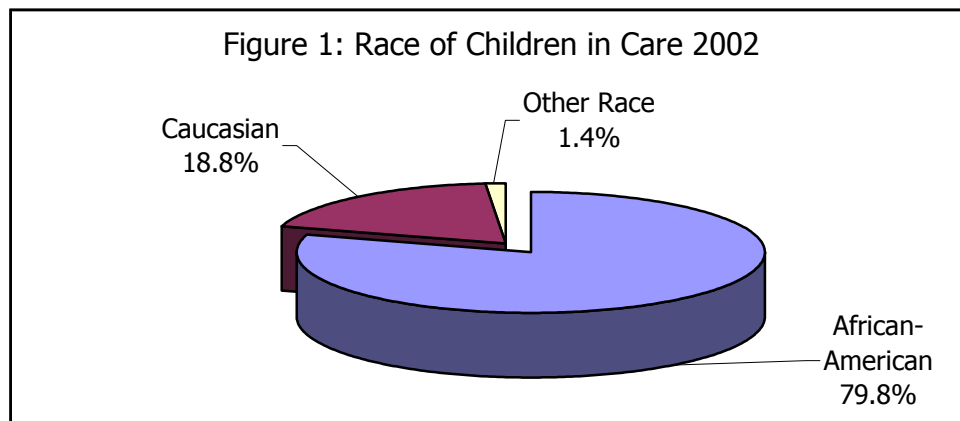
A profile of South Carolina children in out-of-home placements

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

DEMOGRAPHICS¹

In 2002, there were 69 children in out-of-home placements in Darlington County who were reviewed at least once while in care by the Foster Care Review Board.² Of these children, 79.8% were African-American, 18.8% were Caucasian, and 1.4% were children of other races. There were 63 children in out-of-home placements reviewed by the Review Board in 2001, 59 children in 2000, and 57 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 .39% of the population of all children in the county in 2002, compared to .35% in 2001, .33% in 2000, and .33% 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 more boys in care in 2002 than girls, 60.9% compared to 39.1%. Children 16 years of age or older constituted 14.5% of the children in care, 31.9% were between 10 and 15 years of age, 23.2% were between 6 and 9 years of age, and 30.4% were 5 years of age or younger.

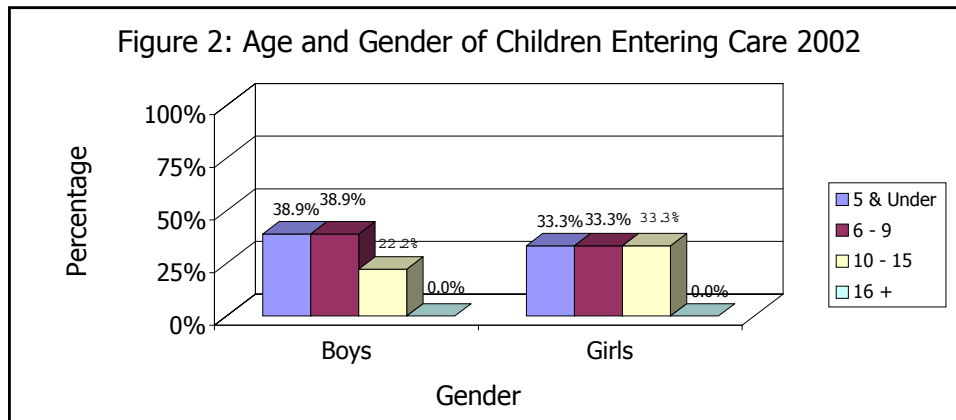
In 2002, 27 children entered the foster care system in Darlington County and were reviewed by the Review Board. Of these children, 66.7% were African-American, 29.6% were Caucasian, and 3.7% were children of other races. Substantially more boys entered care than girls, 66.7% compared to 33.3%. There were 26 children who entered care in 2001, 32 children in 2000, and 16 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, 37.0% were 5 years of age or younger, 37.0% were between 6 and 9 years of age, and 25.9% 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, 77.8% were under the age of 10, while 66.7% of the girls were under the age of 10.

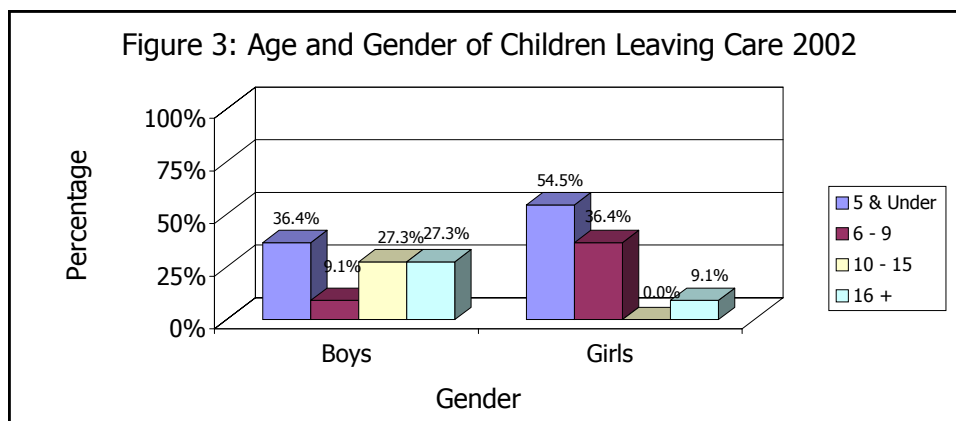
Of the children entering care, 88.8% of the African-Americans and half of the Caucasians were under the age of 10. There were no children of other races reviewed by the Review Board who entered care in 2002.



In 2002, 22 children left custody of the county. Of these children, 95.5% were African-American and 4.5% were Caucasian. There were no children of other races reviewed by the Review Board who left care in 2002. There were 18 children who left care in 2001, 21 children who left care in 2000, and 17 children in 1999. Boys and girls left care at the same rate.

Children tend to leave care at a younger age. Of those children leaving care in 2002, 45.5% were 5 years of age or younger, 22.7% were between 6 and 9 years of age, 13.6% were between 10 and 15 years of age, and 18.2% were 16 years of age or older. Of the boys leaving care in 2002, 45.5% were under the age of 10, while 90.9% of the girls were under the age of 10.

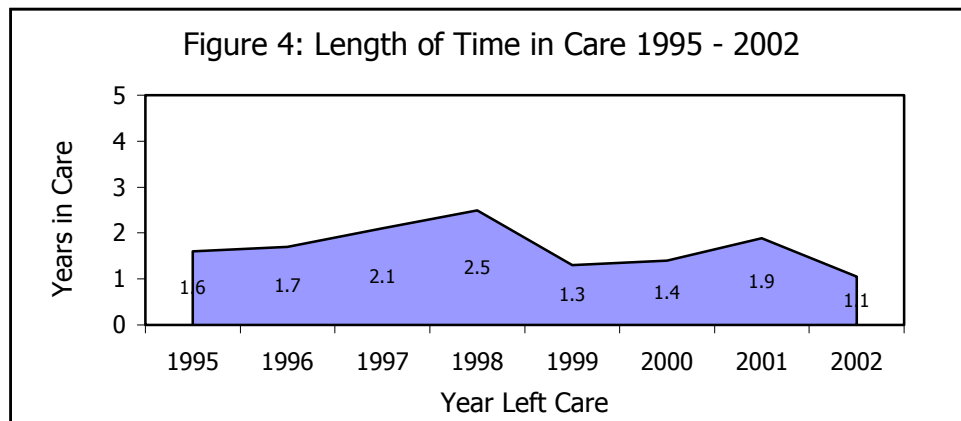
Of the children leaving care, 66.7% of the African-Americans and all of the Caucasians were under the age of 10. There were no children of other races reviewed by the Review Board who left care in 2002.



LENGTH OF TIME IN CARE

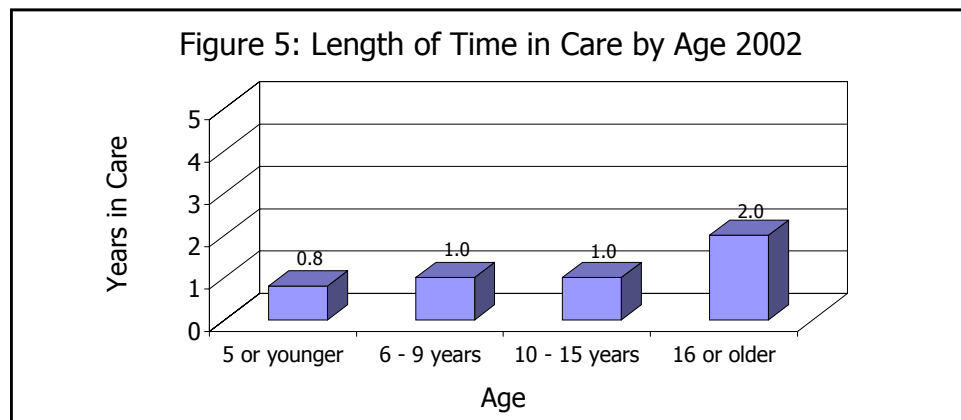
The longer a child is away from their home or a nurturing family environment, the more damaging it can be to the normal development of the child. For this reason, a major goal of the Review Board is to ensure that children achieve permanency as quickly as possible.

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 9 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 1.1 years, compared to 1.9 years in 2001, 1.4 years in 2000, and 1.3 years in 1999.



African-American children spent longer in care than Caucasian children. In 2002, African-American children spent on average 1 year in care, compared to 10 months for Caucasian children.

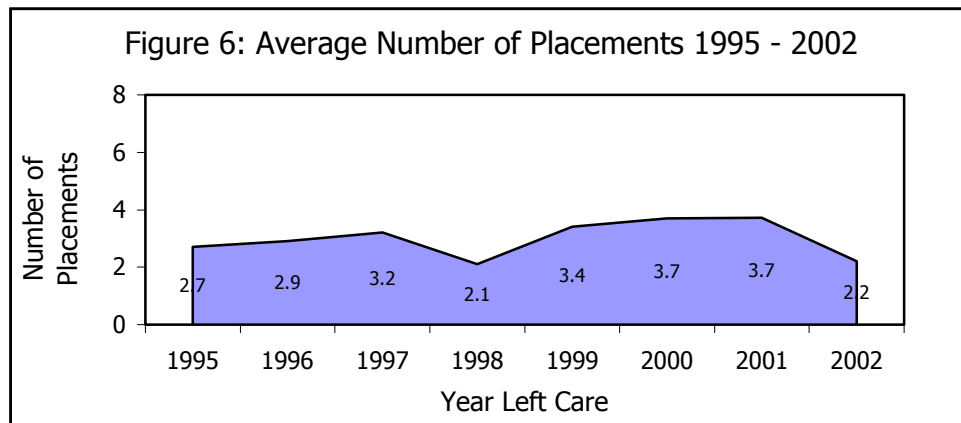
In 2002, boys spent on average 1.1 years in care, compared to girls who spent on average 11 months in care. Children 16 years of age or older spent the longest amount of time in care, averaging 2 years in care, compared to 1 year for children between 10 and 15 years of age, 1 year for children between 6 and 9 years of age, and 9 months 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.

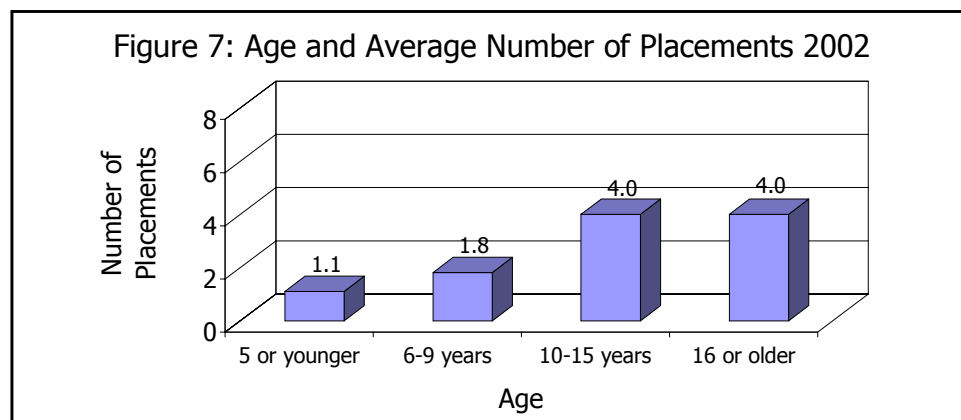
Children today are experiencing fewer changes in placement than children in previous years. Of those children who left care in 2002, the average number of changes in placement was down by an average of 1 placement from the average number of changes in placement children experienced between 1995 and 2001. In 2002, the average child who left care had lived in 2.2 different placements while in the custody of the county, compared to 3.7 in 2001, 3.7 in 2000, and 3.4 in 1999.



Of the children reviewed by the Review Board, 72.7% were placed in foster homes, 18.2% were in Medicaid therapeutic placements, 4.5% were with relatives, and 4.5% were with one or both natural parents. There were no children reviewed by the Review Board in 2002 who were placed in group homes or institutions, in adoptive placements, were on runaway status, or in other types of placements.

African-American children experienced more changes in placement on average than Caucasian children. In 2002, African-American children experienced on average 2.2 changes in placement, compared to 1 for Caucasian children. There were no children of other races reviewed by the Review Board who left care in 2002. In 2002, boys experienced on average 2.9 changes in placement, compared to 1.5 for girls.

Children 10 years of age or older had experienced the most changes in placement on average, 4 placements compared to 1.8 placements for children between 6 and 9 years of age, and 1.1 placements for children 5 years of age or younger.



Most children who left care experienced just one change in placement while in the custody of the county. In 2002, 51.9% of the children experienced just one change in placement, compared to 66.7% in 2001, 71.4% in 2000, and 76.5% in 1999.

Significantly fewer children today are experiencing multiple changes in placement than children in previous years. In 2002, 9.1% of the children who left care experienced 5 or more placements, compared to 33.4% in 2001, 23.8% in 2000, and 23.6% 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	13	59.1	4	22.2	8	38.1	6	35.3	
2	3	13.6	3	16.7	3	14.3	6	35.3	
3	3	13.6	5	27.8	4	19.0	1	5.9	
4	1	4.5	0	0.0	1	4.8	0	0.0	
5	0	0.0	2	11.1	3	14.3	2	11.8	
6	0	0.0	2	11.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	
7	0	0.0	1	5.6	0	0.0	0	0.0	
8	2	9.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	
9	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	11.8	
10+	0	0.0	1	5.6	2	9.5	0	0.0	
Total	22	100.0	18	100.0	21	100.0	17	100.0	

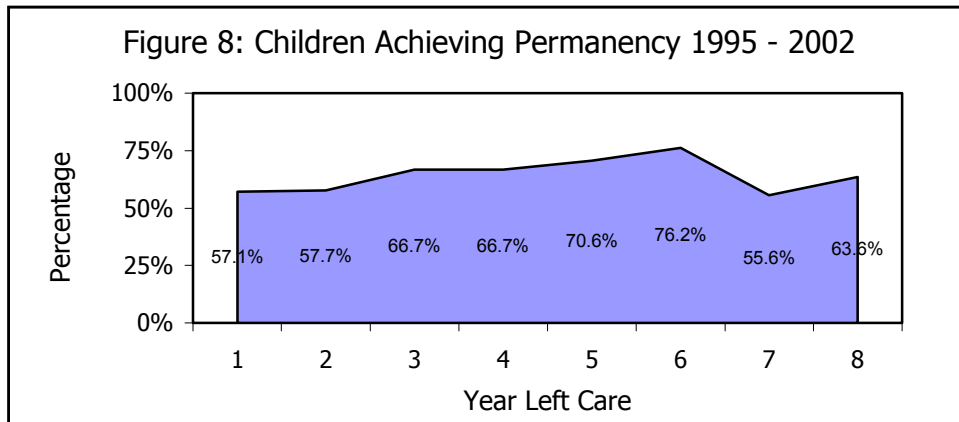
It seems that those children who are hardest to place are more likely to change placements and spend longer in care than children who are not as difficult to place. There is a strong, positive relationship between the number of placements children experience in the county and how long they spend in care ($r = .560$). The number of changes in placement that a child experiences accounts for 31.4% 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.

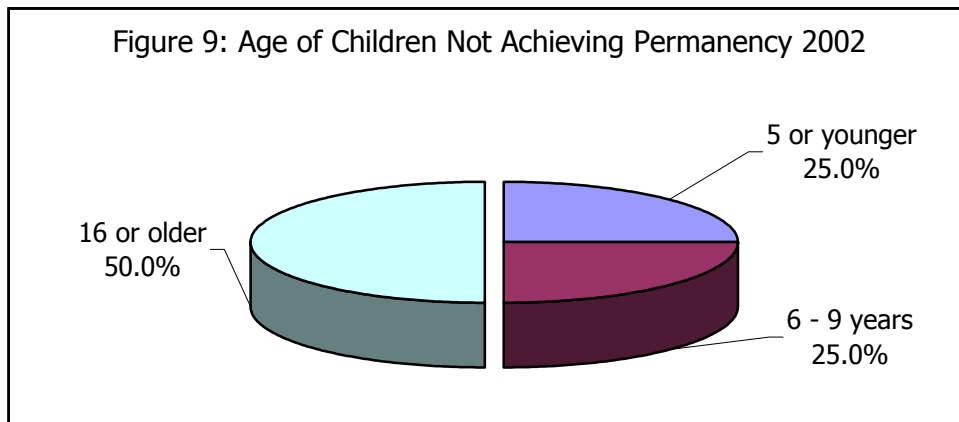
The same number of children today are achieving permanency as children in previous years. The number of children who achieved permanency in 2002 is down by an average of less than 1% from the average number of children who left care between 1995 and 2001. In 2002, 63.6% of the children who left care achieved permanency, compared to 55.6% in 2001, 76.2% in 2000, and 70.6% in 1999.

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



In 2002, African-American children constituted all of the children who left care and did not achieve permanency. Boys constituted 37.5% of those children who did not achieve permanency, compared to 62.5% girls. Boys were more likely than girls to age out of care, comprising 75.0% of all children aging out.

Children leaving care without achieving permanency were likely to be all ages of children. Children 16 years of age or older constituted half of those children who did not achieve permanency in 2002, while 25.0% were between 6 and 9 years of age, and 25.0% were 5 years of age or younger. All of the children who were between 10 and 15 years of age achieved permanency upon leaving care. Of the children 16 years of age or older, all aged out of care.

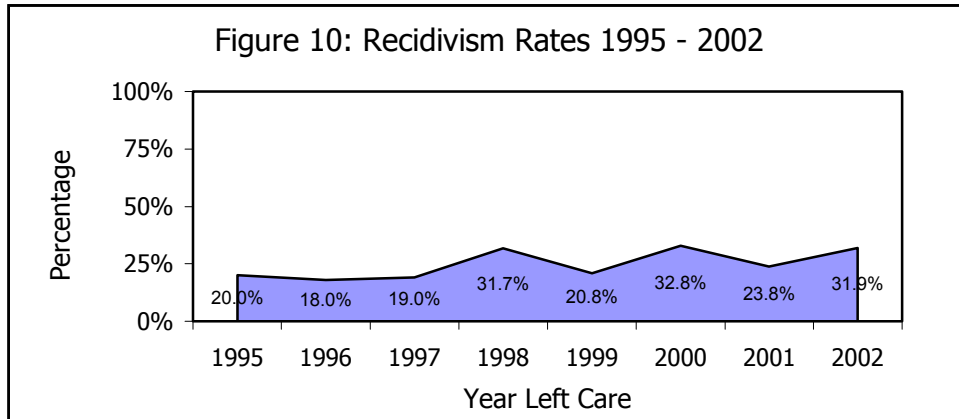


Children who did not achieve permanency when leaving care in 2002 spent longer in care and experienced more changes in placement while in care than children who achieved permanency. The average length of time these children spent in care was 1.4 years, compared to less than 1 year for children who achieved permanency. The average number of changes in placement experienced by these children was 2.6 placements, compared to 1.9 placements for children who achieved permanency.

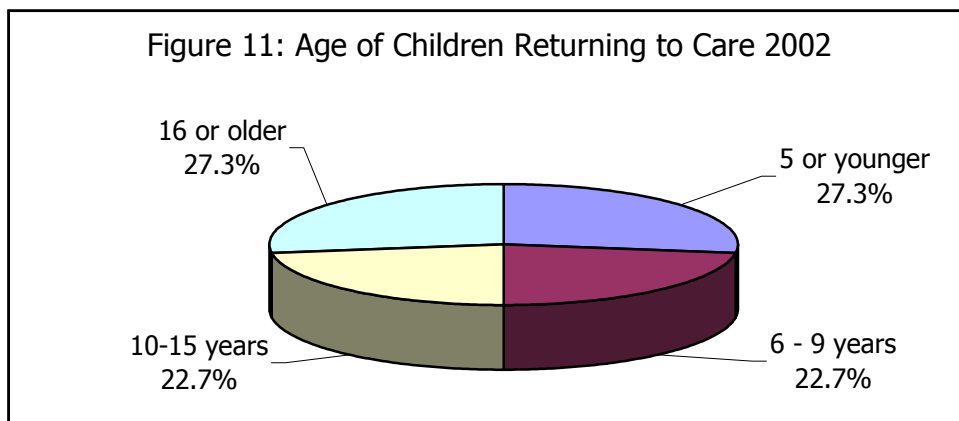
RECIDIVISM RATES

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 8.2% from the number of children reviewed between 1995 and 2001 who had been in care before. In 2002, 31.9% of the children reviewed by the Review Board had been in care before, compared to 23.8% in 2001, 32.8% in 2000, and 20.8% in 1999.



In 2002, most of the children who had been in care before were African-Americans, comprising 68.2% of these children, compared to 31.8% Caucasians. 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 greater rate than girls, 63.6% compared to 36.4%. Of these children, 27.3% were 16 years of age or older, 22.7% were between 10 and 15 years of age, 22.7% were between 6 and 9 years of age, and 27.3% were 5 years of age or younger. Children who had been in care before have spent an average of 1.6 years in care and have experienced an average of 3.5 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.

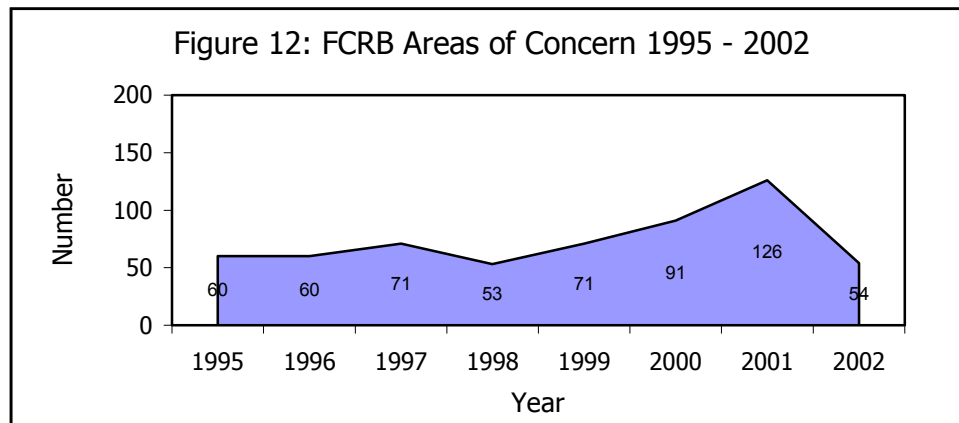
A child who leaves care to return home or go live with a relative has a greater risk of coming back into care than children who leave care and are adopted. Children who came back into care from home or from a relative constituted all of the children in 2002, 2001, 2000, and 1999 who had been in care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

Previous Location	2002		2001		2000	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Parents	19	86.4	12	80.0	16	80.0
Relatives	3	13.6	3	20.0	4	20.0
Adoptive Parents	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Other	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	22	100.0	15	100.0	20	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 8 children reviewed at each meeting. Of the 72 children reviewed, 52.8% had at least one area of concern cited by the local Review Board. A total of 54 deficiencies in systemic efforts to secure permanent homes for children in care were cited in 2002. Of these deficiencies, 63.0% were direct violations of the law, and 37.0% were violations of program policies or procedures. The number of deficiencies cited by the Review Board decreased by 57.1% from the number of deficiencies cited in 2001.



In 2002, the most often cited legal violation was "No Timely Merits Hearing," which constituted half of all legal Areas of Concern, substantially up from 23.1% in 2001. The failure to hold merits hearings according to time frames outlined by state and federal law unnecessarily lengthens the time children remain in foster care. The failure to attach the most recent Review Board recommendation to pleadings for the permanency planning hearing as required by statute comprised the majority of this area of concern. Recommendations are updated following each child's review and state the circumstances surrounding the child's entry into care, the agency's plan for the child, the progress the agency has made towards accomplishing this plan, the Review Board's recommendation concerning the permanent placement of the child, and the areas of concern cited during the review. This information is used by family court judges in making their decisions during permanency planning hearings.

Table 3: Legal Areas of Concern 2001 - 2002				
Previous Location	2002		2001	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
No Timely Merit Hearing	17	50.0	12	23.1
No Court Order at Review	5	14.7	11	21.2
No Timely Permanency Plan Hearing	4	11.8	5	9.6
No Timely FCRB	4	11.8	2	3.8
Other Statutory Violation	3	8.8	12	23.1
Non-Compliance with Court Order	1	2.9	1	1.9
No Timely Probable Cause Hearing	0	0.0	0	0.0
Adoption Complaint Not Filed Timely	0	0.0	0	0.0
Adoption Not Consummated Timely	0	0.0	0	0.0
No Face-to-Face Contact	0	0.0	7	13.5
No Thorough Adoption Assessment	0	0.0	2	3.8
No Child Specific Recruitment	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	34	100.0	52	100.0

The most often cited program violation was the lack of available progress reports from treatment providers, which constituted 55.0% of all program Areas of Concern, up from 24.3% in 2001. Progress reports should be provided by treatment providers and should detail the progress children are making in their therapy settings. This information is necessary to make the best decision as to the safety and the appropriate permanent plan for the child.

Table 4: Program Areas of Concern 2001 - 2002				
Area of Concern	2002		2001	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
P: No Progress Reports	11	55.0	18	24.3
Incomplete/Inappropriate Case Plan	3	15.0	16	21.6
Lack of Progress Permanent Plan	3	15.0	0	0.0
No Current Case Plan	1	5.0	6	8.1
P: Other Policy/Procedure	1	5.0	2	2.7
Interested Parties Not Invited	1	5.0	1	1.4
No Case Plan Within 60 Days	0	0.0	3	4.1
P: Case Plan Expired	0	0.0	0	0.0
P: Lapse in Case Planning	0	0.0	0	0.0
P: No Psychological Reports at Review	0	0.0	0	0.0
P: Conflict with Permanent Plan	0	0.0	6	8.1
P: No Advance Packets	0	0.0	11	14.9
P: No Copy of Pleadings	0	0.0	4	5.4
P: No Diligent Search	0	0.0	1	1.4
P: No Timely Referral to Adoption	0	0.0	0	0.0
P: TPR Summary Not Submitted Timely	0	0.0	0	0.0
No 3 Week Notice to Parties	0	0.0	6	8.1
Other	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	20	100.0	74	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 Darlington County. Children in out-of-home placements in this county are spending almost 1/10th of their childhood in foster care. The average child entering care today can expect to change placements 2 times before leaving care. More than 1 in 3 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 3 children had been in care before. Of the children who had been in foster care before, 9 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 Darlington County, almost 2 in 3 children who leave foster care are placed with a "forever family," and the number of children who achieve permanency has remained this percent since 1998. Of the children less than 16 years of age, 3 in 4 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 one placement while in care and children under 10 years of age experience on average 2 placements while in care. More than 2 in 3 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>