

Children's Foster Care Review Board

South Carolina Office of the Governor

Citizens Advocating Safety and Permanence for Children

ANNUAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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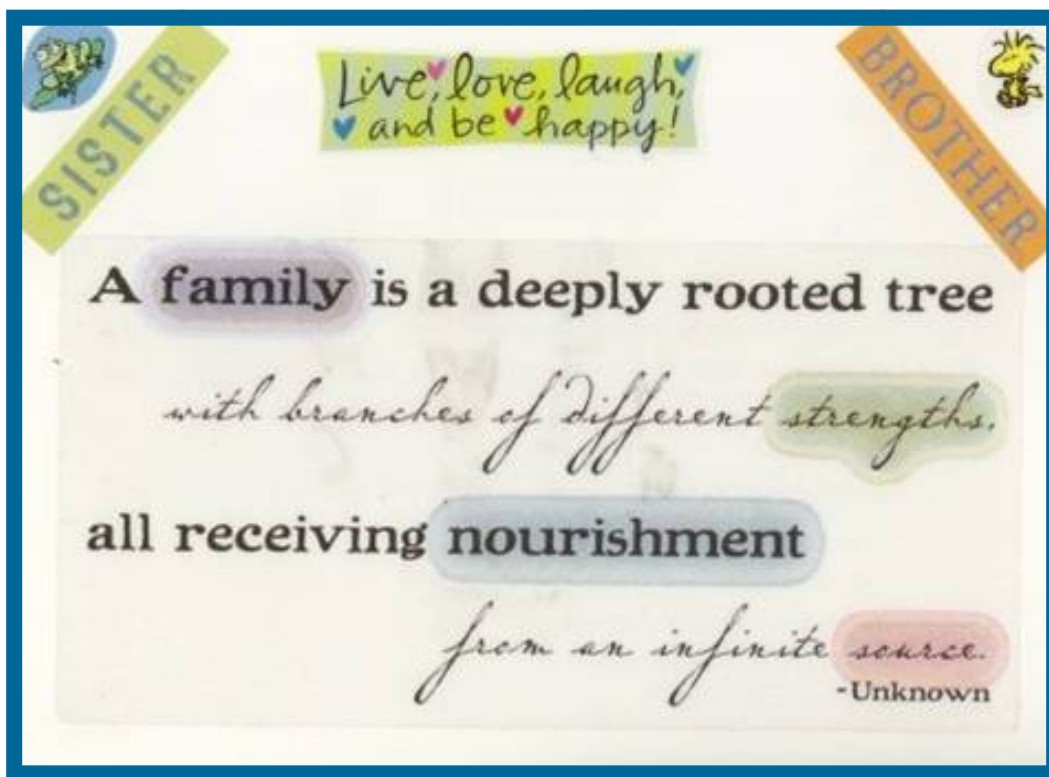


"Assuring that every child, and especially every youth, has a family he or she can turn to in good times and bad, should become a national rallying cry. Families for children and youth in foster care is possible, it is powerful, and it must be a priority. It is what we know our own children need and deserve; our foster children should have no less."

Raymond L. Torres, Executive Director, Casey Family Services

MISSION STATEMENT

The South Carolina Children's Foster Care Review Board provides an external system of accountability and advocacy for children and families involved with the foster care system; utilizes panels of community volunteers to promote safe, permanent homes for children in foster care in a timely manner; and increases public awareness regarding the impact of child abuse and neglect.



2006 Foster Youth Alumni Postcard Project

Data contained in this Annual Report represents children reported by the South Carolina Department of Social Services, who remain in foster care at least four consecutive months and are reviewed by the South Carolina Children's Foster Care Review Board.

E EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Children being removed from their homes is traumatic. In foster care, their voice is often lost, and their decision making power is minimal. Children need to be heard, and every effort needs to be taken to find permanent homes for them.”

*Vanessa Jones, former foster youth
Program Manager, Youth Services, Child Welfare League of America*

Vanessa sums it up in three sentences. **Foster care is traumatic. Children in foster care need to be heard.** And, **children in foster care need permanent homes.** Human beings are creatures of connections. These connections and the relationships we form impact our sense of self-worth, self-concept and values.

Unfortunately, many children in foster care never develop healthy relationships and far too many leave the foster care system without any connection to a permanent family. If our society is to have healthy communities, we must provide America’s more than half-a-million children in foster care safe, stable, and permanent connections. If we fail to do so, our communities will continue to be haunted by the social ills of poverty, unemployment, homelessness, mental illness and substance abuse.

South Carolina’s local review board volunteers understand that our communities are only as strong as the people who live in them. They also understand that all children, especially those who experience the trauma of foster care, need healthy, permanent connections to become productive members of society.

In 2006, local review board members spent thousands of hours reviewing the cases of nearly 5,000 children in foster care and subsequently advocating on their behalf. I am pleased to present a compilation of their activities, accomplishments and findings in this year’s 2006-2007 Annual Report. Local review board members, the State Board of Directors, and The Children’s Foster Care Review Board staff remain committed to working with local and state partners to ensure all children in South Carolina have the opportunity to experience a safe, permanent home. Working together we continue our efforts to achieve that goal.

Denise Turbeville Barker
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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ROGRAM DESCRIPTION

South Carolina was the first state in the nation to pass a law allowing citizens from each community to become involved in the child welfare system by participating in individual case reviews of children in foster care. The purpose of foster care review is to recommend a permanent home for the child in foster care without unnecessary delay by returning the child home or placing the child in another stable, permanent home. Foster care review promotes safety and permanence, identifies gaps in services, and increases public awareness regarding abuse and neglect.

The goals of citizen review are to:

- independently monitor the safety, progress toward permanency, and well-being of individual children and groups of children in foster care;
- continually stimulate progress and improvements in individual cases and child welfare system performance;
- hold individuals, organizations, and systems accountable for achieving positive outcomes for children in foster care; and
- serve as an early-warning assessment tool for families, policy makers, and child welfare decision makers, reporting foster care practice that significantly deviates from policy and regulations.

Each of South Carolina's sixteen judicial circuits must have at least one local review board. Citizen volunteers in each circuit review the cases of all children who spend longer than four consecutive months in foster care. Each child's case is reviewed every six months by a local review board until the child reaches the age of 18 or is no longer in the custody of the South Carolina Department of Social Services. Following a review, a written recommendation on each case is sent to the Family Court, the Department of Social Services, and other interested parties. The population of children in foster care in each circuit determines the number of review boards necessary to meet the legal mandate.

Currently there are 42 local foster care review boards serving 4,976 children statewide. Local review boards meet monthly to review the cases of children in foster care. Each local review board has five members, who are appointed by the Governor, upon recommendation of the local legislative delegation. All local review board members are trained and supported by the Children's Foster Care Review Board professional staff.

S TATE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The South Carolina Children’s Foster Care Review Board is supported by a seven-member State Board of Directors. The State Board meets quarterly and is responsible for reviewing and coordinating the activities of local review boards and making recommendations in an annual report to the Governor and General Assembly.

The seven members of the South Carolina Children’s Foster Care Review Board of Directors are appointed by the Governor and are confirmed by the Senate. The State Board of Directors supports, guides, and directs the agency and the local review boards through holding quarterly meetings, visiting local review boards, and advocating on behalf of children in foster care.

The current State Board of Directors consists of:

- Vernon McCurry, Chairperson, Member-at-Large, Greenville County
- D. Ed Andersen, 1st Congressional District, Horry County
- Jo Hecker, 2nd Congressional District, Richland County
- Anne Thayer, 3rd Congressional District, Anderson County
- Dorothy (Dot) Bailey, 4th Congressional District, Greenville County
- Martha (Sissy) Brock, 5th Congressional District, Cherokee County
- Kenneth Mance, 6th Congressional District, Clarendon County



“If we don’t stand up for children, then we don’t stand for much.”

Marian Wright Edelman

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CCOMPLISHMENTS IN 2006

- Review Board Volunteers donated 13,115 hours of service in 2006. Based on the nationally established rate of \$18.77 per hour for volunteer service, the monetary value of service totaled \$246,169.
- From January through December 2006, local review boards held 436 individual local review board meetings and conducted 8,464 reviews of children in foster care.
- Local review board members participated in 88 county-based partners' meetings with representatives from the Department of Social Services, the Foster Parent Association, and the Guardian ad Litem programs to discuss county specific issues and needs.
- Five local review boards presented the South Carolina Children's Foster Care Review Board Annual Report to their county legislative delegations.
- Fourteen local review boards regularly submitted reports to their local legislative delegations, outlining issues and trends noted during case review meetings.
- As a result of requests from local review boards, the Children's Foster Care Review Board's General Counsel and Staff Attorney advocated on behalf of 184 children, and attended 101 court proceedings. Also, Review Board Program Staff conducted advocacy on behalf of 252 children outside of regularly scheduled review board meetings.
- Ron Rossi of Review Board 13B was named "2006 Review Board Member of the Year."
- Local Review Boards 13B and 13C of Greenville County were named co-winners of the "2006 Review Board of the Year." Winning Review Board 13B members consisted of Doris Blazer, Jan Brown, Courtney Madden, Tommy Rice, and Ron Rossi. Winning Review Board 13C members consisted of Roberta Anderson, Dot Bailey, Melita Graham, Nancy Jones, and Vernon McCurry.
- Local review board members demonstrated their commitment to supporting children and the system that serves them by completing 25 service projects this year. These service projects provided many "extras" to the foster care system and to individual children in foster care who might otherwise not receive the routine things many children take for granted.

LOCAL FOSTER CARE REVIEW BOARD 2006 SERVICE PROJECTS

FUNDS FOR EXTRA ACTIVITIES SUCH AS CAMPS, MUSIC LESSONS, AND PROM DRESSES

GIFT CARDS FOR CHILDREN

SCHOOL SUPPLIES

SHOES AND CLOTHING

EASTER BASKETS

GRADUATION GIFTS

CHRISTMAS GIFTS

PERSONAL ITEMS FOR CHILDREN ENTERING FOSTER CARE

FRAMING FOR PHOTOGRAPHS FEATURING CHILDREN FOR THE SC HEART GALLERY OPENING
(a specialized Adoption Recruitment project)

HOSTING THE SC HEART GALLERY OPENING

PARTICIPATION IN FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES TO SUPPORT COUNTY FOSTER PARENT
ASSOCIATIONS

APPRECIATION PARTIES FOR CASEWORKERS WORKING WITH CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE
AND THEIR FAMILIES



Charlotte Lynch, representing the Greenville County Legislative Delegation, congratulates Ron Rossi, 2006 Review Member of the Year.



Richland County Review Board members donated gift baskets for foster children graduating high school.

E NTERING FOSTER CARE



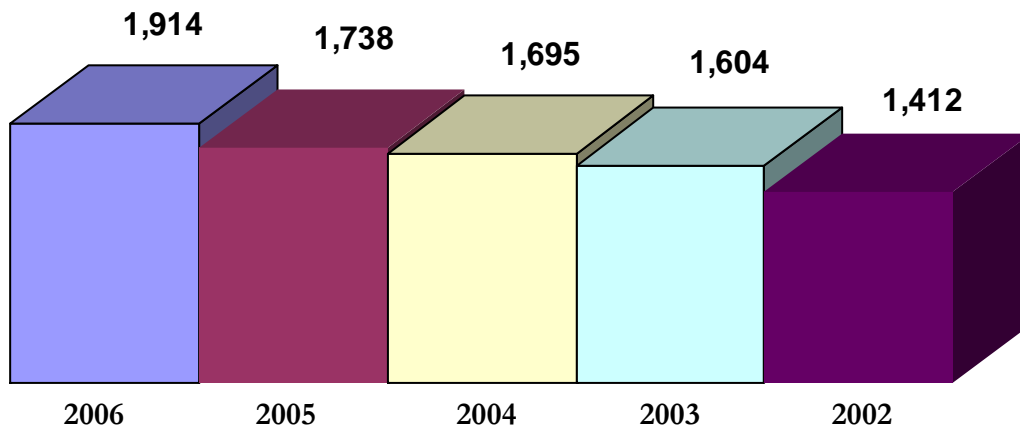
1,914

represents the number of children who entered foster care and were reviewed by the Children's Foster Care Review Board in 2006 - 9% more children than in 2005.

Fifty-three percent (53%) of children who entered foster care in 2006 entered due to physical neglect, while 25% entered care due to abuse. The remaining children entered care due to abandonment, voluntary placement, dependency, or juvenile offenses.

Of the children who entered foster care in 2006, nearly half were caucasian, 39% were African American, and 10% were other minorities. Gender was evenly divided. Over 50% were age 9 and younger, and only 5% were 16 and older.

Children Entering Foster Care by Year



“The community does not think of neglect as a type of maltreatment. The prevalence of neglect goes unrecognized.”

Dr. Carol Wilson Spigner

National Judicial Leadership Summit on the Protection of Children, September 2005

R E-ENTERING FOSTER CARE

474

of the 1,914 children who entered foster care in 2006 had previously been in foster care. Compared to 2005 data, there was an 28% increase in the number of children re-entering foster care from a birth parent, and a 4% decrease in children returning to care from relatives.

The previous location with the fewest re-entries is adoptive homes. In 2006, only 3% of the children who re-entered foster care re-entered from an adoptive home.

RE-ENTRIES BY PREVIOUS LOCATION	2006		2005		2004		2003		2002	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Parent	276	58%	198	51%	236	59%	240	54%	153	60%
Relative	143	30%	149	39%	117	29%	153	35%	79	31%
Other	40	10%	27	7%	31	8%	26	6%	13	5%
Adoption	15	3%	12	3%	17	4%	21	5%	10	4%
TOTAL	474	24%	386	22%	401	24%	440	27%	257	18%

► POINT TO PONDER ...

Healthy, well-adjusted children live in healthy communities, and healthy communities are the cornerstone of a safe and productive society. For children who have been abused and neglected, the trauma of even one placement into a foster home or group home can have a negative impact on their overall development and jeopardize their ability to become healthy and well-adjusted adults. Coming in and out of foster care, or moving repeatedly from home to home, can be devastating for a child. Perhaps we should pay more attention to children's individual journeys through the child welfare system if we are serious about creating healthy futures for them and for our society as a whole.



L EAVING FOSTER CARE

1,679

During 2006, 1,679 children who were reviewed by the Foster Care Review Board left foster care. The largest percentage of children (38%) returned to a birth parent, followed by 25% who were adopted. Twenty-two percent (22%) of the children who left care were emancipated or turned 18, and 15% were placed with relatives.

Of the children who left foster care in 2006:

- twenty-nine percent (29%) were age 16 or older - a decrease from 2005;
- slightly more girls left care than boys;
- more African American and other minorities left than Caucasians; and
- sixty-nine percent (69%) of the children spent less than three years in foster care, compared to 66% in 2005.

Many children in foster care are diagnosed as having emotional problems and are placed in therapeutic placements. These placements can be therapeutic foster homes, moderate or high management group homes, supervised independent living programs, residential treatment facilities, or inpatient hospitals. Based on placement at the time of the child's last foster care review, 21% of the children who left foster care in 2006 left from some type of therapeutic placement. Of the 488 children who left care in 2006 who were 16 and older, 65% (225) left from a therapeutic placement.



► POINT TO PONDER . . .

From an emotional, financial and societal perspective, therapeutic placements are the most costly of all foster care placements. Of the 348 children who left care from therapeutic placements, more than half were emancipated. Large sums of state and federal dollars were expended, while these children remained in foster care an average of five years and experienced five or more placements, only to then enter society without a legal permanent connection to an adult. Is this the best outcome and a good use of resources?



OUTCOMES BY DEPARTURE REASON

CHILDREN LEAVING BY DEPARTURE REASON	2006		2005		2004		2003		2002	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Return to Parent	624	38%	495	33%	550	36%	591	37%	679	41%
Adoption	427	25%	408	27%	367	24%	297	21%	374	23%
Emancipated	371	22%	353	23%	390	25%	376	26%	335	20%
Relative	254	15%	252	17%	242	16%	228	16%	236	14%
Other	3	<1%	12	<1%	10	<1%	6	<1%	15	<1%
Total Number	1,679		1,520		1,559		1,448		1,639	

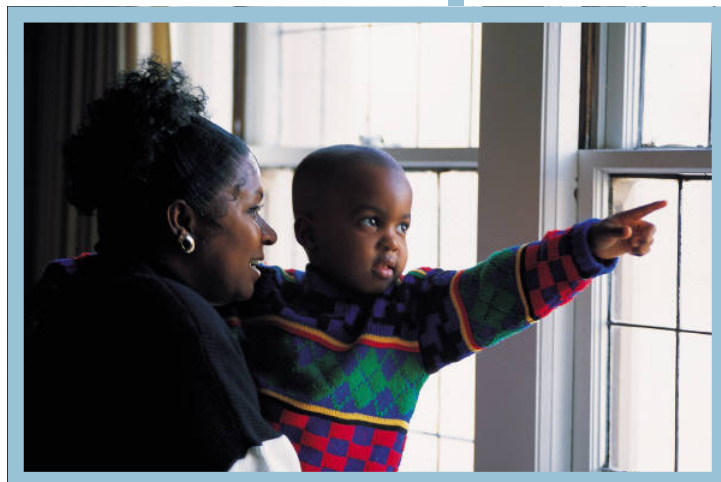
RETURN TO PARENT

624

More than one-third of the children who left foster care in 2006 were placed with a parent. Compared to 2005 data, the number of children leaving foster care and returning to a birth parent increased by 129. These children remained in care an average of 1.2 years and experienced 2.3 placements.

“*This is not a rent case or a land dispute, this is a child’s life and a year is an eternity for a child.*”

The Honorable William R. Byars, Jr.
Director, South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice



427

or one-fourth of the children who left foster care in 2006 were adopted. Compared to 2005 data, 19 more children left foster care through adoption. The 427 children who left care through adoption remained in foster care an average of 3.5 years, and averaged 2.3 placements.

Seventeen percent (17%), or 71 children, were adopted within the federal standard of 24 months of entering foster care, an increase of 12 children from 2005. The average age of children who left care through adoption was 6.4 years. In 2006, 41 children age 13 and older were adopted. Teen adoptions consistently account for 10% of all adoptions.

“ *Permanence is not a philosophical process, a plan, or a foster care placement . . . Rather, permanence is about locating and supporting a lifetime family* ”

The Casey Center for Effective Child Welfare Practice

ADOPTIONS	2006		2005		2004		2003		2002	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Total Adoptions	427	25%	408	27%	367	24%	297	21%	374	24%
Adoptions by 24 Months	71	17%	59	15%	68	19%	48	16%	45	12%
Teen Adoptions	41	10%	40	10%	36	10%	25	8%	36	10%

► POINT TO PONDER . . .

We should question why so few of our teens are being adopted. Is it that teens do not want permanent families, or is it how teens are approached about the benefits of adoption? Is it that families do not want to adopt teens, or is it how recruitment is conducted? Are we thoroughly assessing adoption with relatives and giving them the opportunity to adopt? Is it that the financial incentives associated with Independent Living services have created a disincentive to adopt? Considering that the majority of teens are in therapeutic placements, is it that permanency is not a top priority for this population? Perhaps we should consider whether we, as a society, believe that teens need and deserve the permanence of adoption if they cannot return to their families. These are all complex questions worthy of discussion.

E MANCIPATION

The Foster Care Review Board reviews the cases of children in public foster care until a child turns age 18 or is emancipated by court order.


371

or 22% of all children leaving foster care in 2006 turned 18 or were emancipated by the court. These children spent an average of 5.25 years in foster care and experienced 6.7 placements. More than half were in therapeutic placements at age 18 or at the time of emancipation.

The following table highlights national statistics for children leaving foster care at age 18 or through emancipation.

Emancipation—Then What? *

- 15% Don't Have a High School Diploma
- 22% Experience Homelessness
- 25% Experience Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
- 33% Earn Below the Federal Poverty Level
- 33% Don't Have Health Insurance
- 84% Don't Have a Vocational Degree
- 98% Don't Have a Bachelor's Degree



“We can put our money in the play pens, or we can put our money in the state pen.”

Texas District Court Judge James Farris
1932-2004

* Findings from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study, Casey Family Programs

► POINT TO PONDER ...

The faces of youth leaving foster care by “aging out” or emancipation is sobering. Like all young people, youth in foster care deserve and benefit from enduring, positive relationships with caring adults. Without these permanent connections, former foster children are far more likely than their peers to experience homelessness, poverty, compromised health, unemployment, incarceration and other adversities after they leave the foster care system. They deserve better outcomes.

“Having a family helps with identity formation, a sense of belonging, and the security of knowing that no matter what, you will always have a place to go. Having family to care about them can be the single most healing experience for many youth in foster care.”

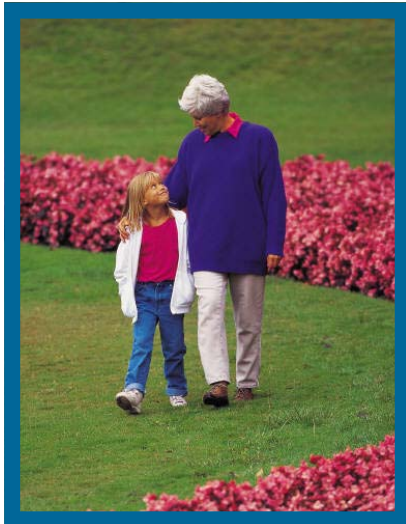
Sarah Greenblatt, Casey Family Services

R ELATIVE CUSTODY

254

or fifteen percent (15%) of the children who left care in 2006 were placed in the legal custody of relatives. Compared to 2005, the number of children placed in the legal custody of relatives has remained relatively unchanged.

Of the 254 children who left foster care and were placed in the legal custody of a relative, only 87 (34%) had an agency plan of Relative Custody at the time of their last foster care review. The largest percentage (41%) of children who were placed in the custody of a relative had an agency plan of Return to Parent at their last foster care review. Termination of Parent Rights and Adoption was the agency plan for 10% of the children who were placed in the custody of a relative.



► POINT TO PONDER . . .

Perhaps consideration should be given as to why two-thirds of the children who were placed in the custody of relatives in 2006 had other permanent plans presented at the time of their last foster care review. Of the children who were adopted in 2006, 98% had a plan of adoption at the time of their last foster care review. Of the children who were placed in the custody of a parent, 86% had a plan of Return to Parent. Also, 86% of the children who were emancipated had Independent Living or Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) as their designated permanent plan. So, why then, did only one-third of the children who were placed in the legal custody of relatives have a permanent plan of Relative Custody at the time of their last foster care review?

REMAINING IN FOSTER CARE

2,884

represents the number of children who entered foster care prior to January 1, 2006 and remained active in the foster care system as of January 1, 2007. Since 2002, there has been a 5% increase in the number of children remaining active in foster care. Thirty-eight percent (38%) of these children are in therapeutic placements.

Since 2002, there has been an 10% increase in the number of children remaining in foster care and residing in therapeutic placements, and a 3% increase in the number of children remaining in foster care and residing in regular foster care placements. Sixty percent (60%) of the children remaining in foster care are age 10 or older, and 57% are African American or other minorities. Slightly more boys than girls remain in foster care.

“We are normal kids in abnormal circumstances.”

Former foster youth, Maine

CHILDREN REMAINING IN FOSTER CARE	2006	2005	2004	2003	2002
Total Number	2,884	2,935	2,933	2,860	2,729
% in Regular Foster Care	62%	62%	62%	64%	64%
Average Number of Years in Care	3.3	3.2	3.4	3.7	4.2
Average Number of Placements	2.8	2.8	2.9	3.4	3.9
% in Therapeutic Placements	38%	38%	38%	36%	37%
Average Number of Years in Care	4.6	4.4	4.5	4.8	5
Average Number of Placements	6	6	6.5	7.4	7.9

► POINT TO PONDER ...

On average, these children have spent more than three birthdays in foster care and have lived in three different placements. While this is too much time and too many placements, progress has been made in both areas. Since 2002, the average length of time in foster care has decreased by one year, and the number of placements has decreased by two. We must continue to strive to improve in the area of timely permanence for the children who remain in foster care.

W

AITING FOR AN ADOPTIVE FAMILY

1,684

of the 2,884 children remaining in foster care, (57%) have had Termination of Parental Rights and Adoption as their permanent plan for a year or longer. Of the children remaining in foster care, 1,070 (36%) are legally free for adoption and have had an agency plan of adoption for a year or longer.

“*They were like, ‘you’re 16. You’re going off to college in a couple of years, why do you want a family?’ It’s about my entire life, it’s not just about my childhood. I want to know that I’m going to have a place to come during Christmas breaks. I want to know that I’m going to have a dad to walk me down the aisle. That I’m going to have grandparents for my child.”*

Mary, former foster youth, Tennessee



► POINT TO PONDER ...

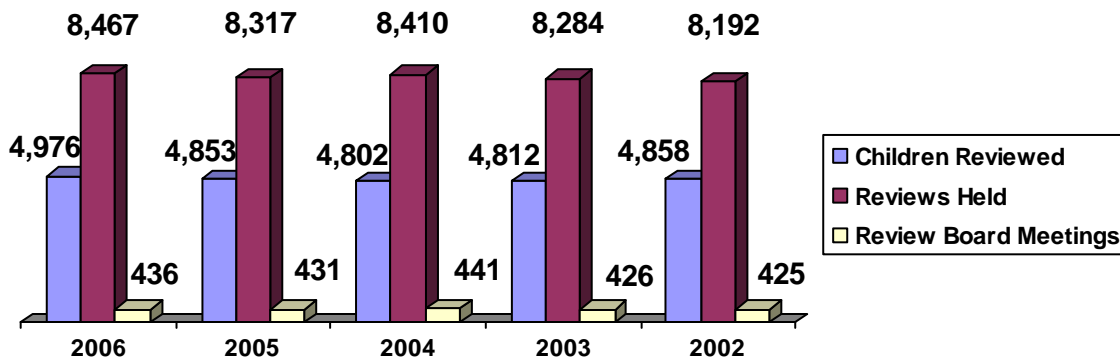
There are over one thousand legally free children who have a plan of adoption and remain in foster care. The majority of these children are 13 and older. As South Carolina averages 40 teens leaving foster care through adoption each year, the chance of these one thousand children receiving forever families is unlikely. The system must change if we hope to provide more of these children with the permanent families that they need and deserve.

SUMMARY OF REVIEWS

4,976

Local foster care review boards reviewed 4,976 children in 2006. Compared to 2005 data, there was a slight increase in the number of children reviewed, the number of reviews conducted, and the number of review board meetings. The average of 19 children reviewed at each of the 436 local review boards meetings remains high.

In an effort to work toward reviewing the optimum number (12) of children per review board meeting, four additional review boards were created and become operational in January 2007.



AREAS OF CONCERN

The monthly review process allows local review boards to identify systemic concerns that are barriers to permanence for children in foster care. These systemic deficiencies, or Areas of Concern, are defined as violations of law or policy. Review boards identified 11,168 Areas of Concern in 2006, nearly 12% more than in 2005. The lack of timely permanency planning hearings remains the most frequently noted legal violation, followed by the lack of timely merits hearings. In 2006, the lack of timely permanency planning hearings was identified as an Area of Concern at 1,357 reviews, a 13% increase over 2005 data. The most frequently identified programmatic Areas of Concern were related to case planning, lack of progress toward the permanent plan, and lack of progress reports from providers.

AREAS OF CONCERN	2006	2005	2004	2003	2002
AOC Cited	11,168	9,816	10,706	9,325	8,318
No Timely Permanency Planning Hearing	1,357	1,180	1,306	1,242	1,132
No Timely Merits Hearing	940	936	844	925	948
No Timely Probable Causing Hearing	150	114	154	160	88

R ECOMMENDATIONS

“ *We cannot take comfort in the status quo. We must confront it.*”

The Honorable Kathleen Blatz, Chief Justice, Minnesota Supreme Court

2006 STATE BOARD OF DIRECTOR’S RECOMMENDATIONS

In State Fiscal Year 2006—2007, the State Board of Directors met with the Governor, four United States Congressional representatives and numerous South Carolina state legislators to discuss issues impacting permanence for children in foster care in South Carolina. In an effort to continue to address the challenges highlighted in this report, the State Board of Directors makes the following recommendations:

- **Local foster care review boards will continue to address systemic deficiencies, issues, and needs of the foster care system by continuing to meet quarterly with county partners and adopting annual service projects.**
- **Local foster care review boards will educate local legislative delegations regarding the status and needs of the foster care system through quarterly reports and presentations of the Children’s Foster Care Review Board Annual Report.**
- **The State Board of Directors for the South Carolina Children’s Foster Care Review Board will establish and maintain a connection with all local review boards and attend review board meetings, to promote and support and activities of local review boards.**



“ *Our beliefs and attitudes are so strong, that we always seek the familiar. This makes change difficult without a compelling vision of what you want in the future.*”

Lou Tice, President and Chairman
The Pacific Institute

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