



FOSTER KIDS COUNT 2002

Dorchester
County

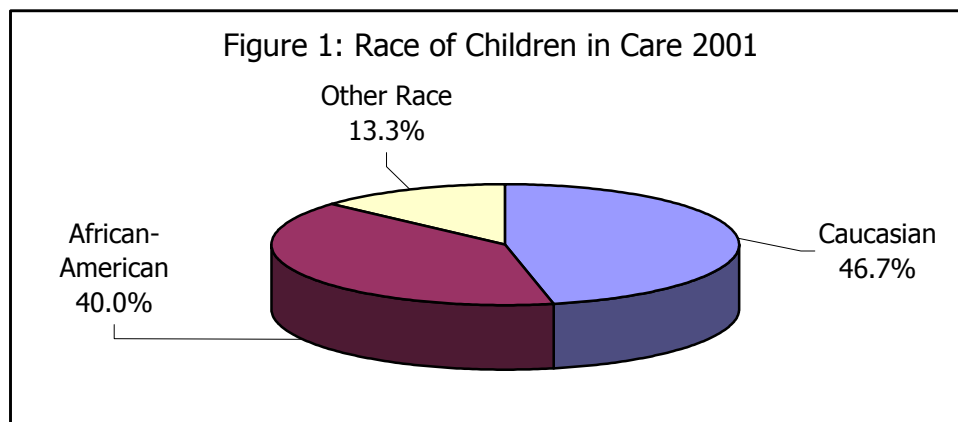
A profile of South Carolina children in out-of-home placements

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

DEMOGRAPHICS¹

In 2001, there were 60 children in out-of-home placements who were reviewed at least once while in care by the Foster Care Review Board.² Of these children, 40.0% were African-American, 46.7% were Caucasian, and 13.3% were children of other races. There were 42 children in out-of-home placements reviewed by the Review Board in 2000, 47 children in 1999, and 59 children in 1998.

Children in out-of-home placements represent a slightly decreasing 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 .21% of the population of all children in the county in 2001, compared to .15% in 2000, .19% in 1999, and .24% in 1998.



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 an equal number of boys and girls in care in 2001. Children 16 years of age or older constituted 28.3% of the children in care, 33.3% were between 10 and 15 years of age, 13.3% were between 6 and 9 years of age, and 25.0% were 5 years of age or younger.

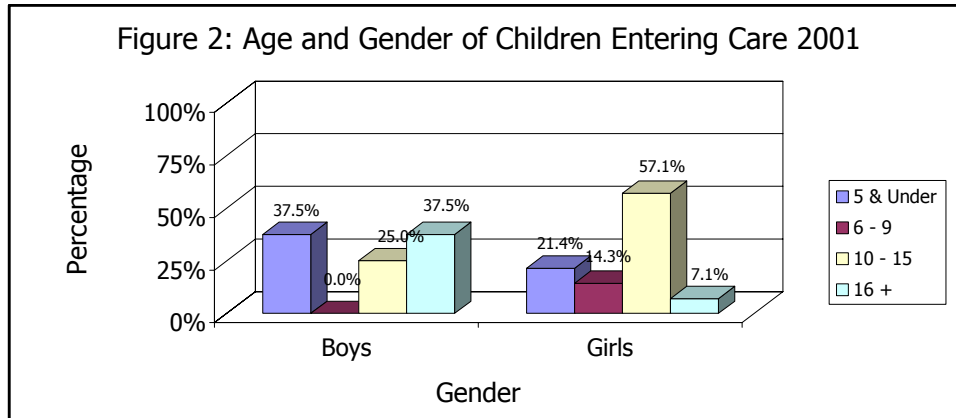
In 2001, 22 children entered the foster care system in Dorchester County and were reviewed by the Review Board. Of these children, 59.1% were African-American and 40.9% were Caucasian. There were no children of other races reviewed by the Review Board who entered care in 2001. Fewer boys entered care than girls, 36.4% compared to 63.6%. There were 5 children who entered care in 2000, 14 children in 1999, and 9 children in 1998.

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 may be 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 2001, 27.3% were 5 years of age or younger, 9.1% were between 6 and 9 years of age, 45.5% were between 10 and 15 years of age, and 18.2% were 16 years of age or older. Of the boys entering care in 2001, 62.5% were 10 years of age or older, while 64.2% of the girls were 10 years of age or older.

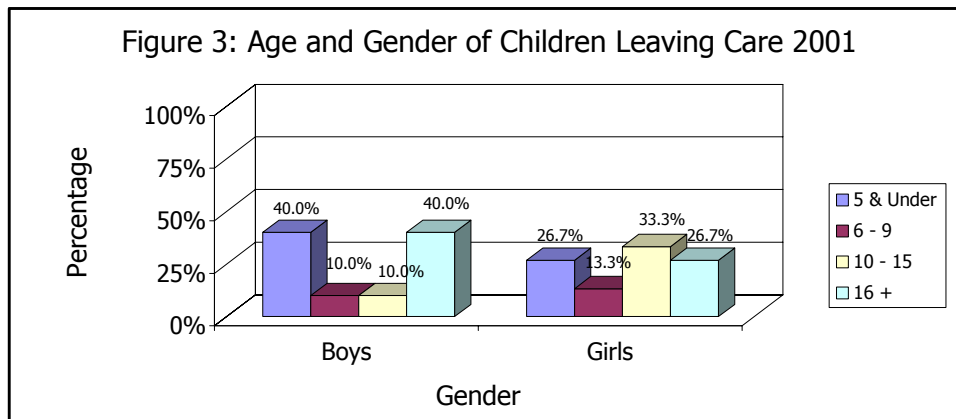
Of the children entering care, 44.4% of the African-Americans and 77.0% of the Caucasians were 10 years of age or older.



In 2001, 25 children left custody of the county. Of these children, 32.0% were African-American, 56.0% were Caucasian, and 12.0% were children of other races. There were 42 children who left care in 2000, 15 children in 1999 and 31 children in 1998. Fewer boys left care in 2001 than girls, 40.0% compared to 60.0%.

Children tend to leave care at an older age. Of those children leaving care in 2001, 32.0% were 5 years of age or younger, 12.0% were between 6 and 9 years of age, 24.0% were between 10 and 15 years of age, and 32.0% were 16 years of age or older. Of the boys leaving care in 2001, half were 10 years of age or older and half were under the age of 10, while 60.0% of the girls were 10 years of age or older.

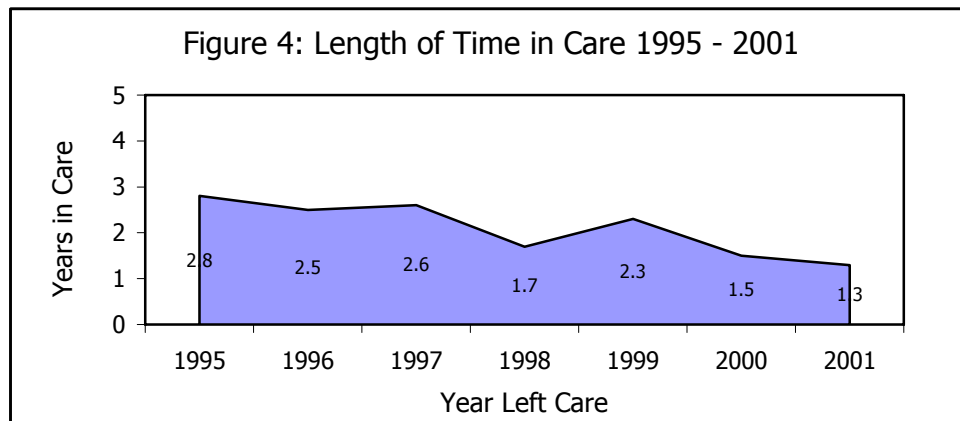
Of the children leaving care, half of the African-Americans, 57.2% of the Caucasians, and 66.7% of the children of other races were 10 years of age or older.



LENGTH OF TIME IN CARE

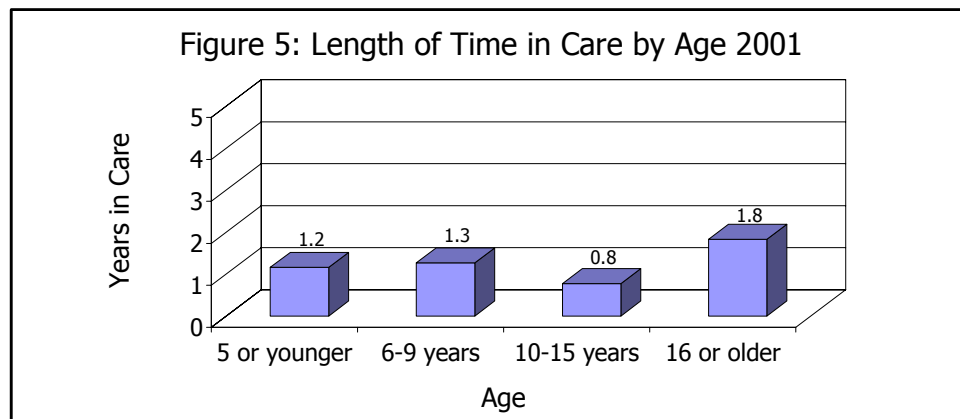
The longer a child is away from their home or a nurturing family environment, the more damaging it can be to the normal development of the child. For this reason, a major goal of the Review Board is to ensure that children achieve permanency as quickly as possible.

Children today are spending less time in the custody of the county than children in previous years. Of those children who left care in 2001, the average length of time spent in care is down by an average of 1 year from the average length of time children spent in care between 1995 and 2000. In 2001, the average length of time spent in care was 1.3 years, compared to 1.5 years in 2000, 2.3 years in 1999, and 1.7 years in 1998.



Caucasian children spent longer in care than African-American and children of other races. In 2001, Caucasian children spent on average 1.7 years in care, compared to 10 months for African-American and 9 months for children of other races.

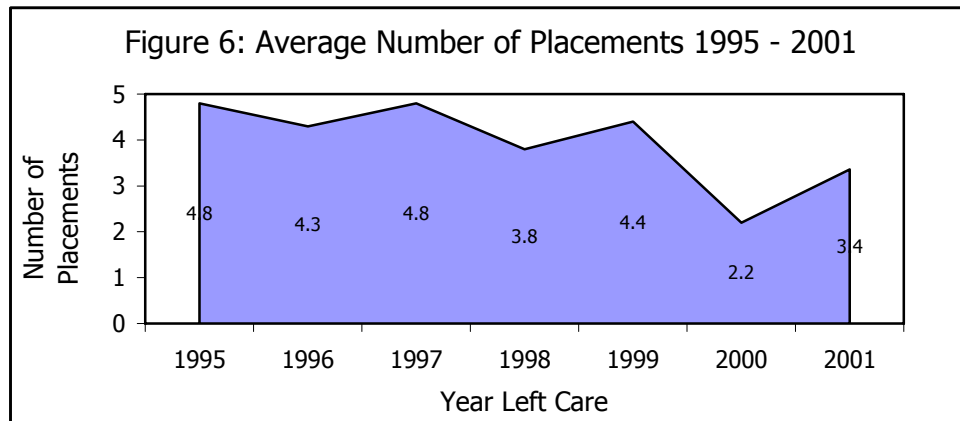
In 2001, boys spent on average 1.2 years in care, compared to girls who spent on average 1.4 years in care. Children 16 years of age or older spent the longest amount of time in care, averaging 1.8 years in care, compared to 10 months for children between 10 and 15 years of age, 1.3 years for children between 6 and 9 years of age, and 1.2 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.

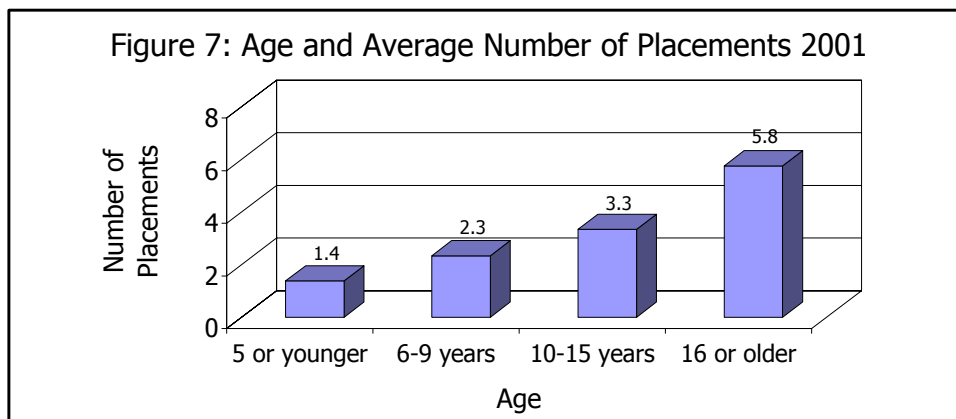
Children today are experiencing fewer changes in placement than children in previous years. Of those children who left care in 2001, the average number of changes in placement was down by an average of 1 placement from the average number of changes in placement children experienced between 1995 and 2000. In 2001, the average child who left care had lived in 3.4 different placements while in the custody of the county, compared to 2.2 in 2000, 4.4 in 1999, and 3.8 in 1998.



Of the children reviewed by the Review Board, 52.0% were placed in foster homes, 12.0% were in Medicaid therapeutic placements, 16.0% were in group homes or institutions, 8.0% were with relatives, 8.0% were runaways, and 4.0% were in other types of placements. There were no children in adoptive placements or with one or both natural parents.

Caucasian children experienced more changes in placement on average than children of other races and African-American children. In 2001, Caucasian children experienced on average 4.2 changes in placement, compared to 3.3 for children of other races and 1.9 for African-American children. In 2001, boys experienced on average 3.2 changes in placement, compared to 3.5 for girls.

Children 16 years of age or older had experienced the most changes in placement on average, 5.8 placements, compared to 3.3 for children between 10 and 15 years of age, 2.3 for children between 6 and 9 years of age, and 1.4 for children 5 years of age or younger.



Most children who leave care experience between 1 and 3 changes in placement while in the custody of the county. In 2001, 60.0% of the children experienced between 1 and 3 changes in placement, compared to 83.3% in 2000, 53.3% in 1999, and 58.1% in 1998.

Fewer children today are experiencing multiple changes in placement than children in previous years. In 2001, 24.0% of the children who left care experienced 5 or more placements, compared to 5.6% in 2000, 33.4% in 1999, and 22.6% in 1998.

Table 1: Number of Placements for Children Leaving Care									
Number of Placements	2001		2000		1999		1998		
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
1	8	32.0	6	33.3	2	13.3	4	12.9	
2	3	12.0	6	33.3	2	13.3	12	38.7	
3	4	16.0	3	16.7	4	26.7	2	6.5	
4	4	16.0	2	11.1	2	13.3	6	19.4	
5	4	16.0	1	5.6	0	0.0	2	6.5	
6	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	6.7	1	3.2	
7	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	13.3	1	3.2	
8	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	
9	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	6.7	1	3.2	
10+	2	8.0	0	0.0	1	6.7	2	6.5	
Total	25	100.0	18	100.0	15	100.0	31	100.0	

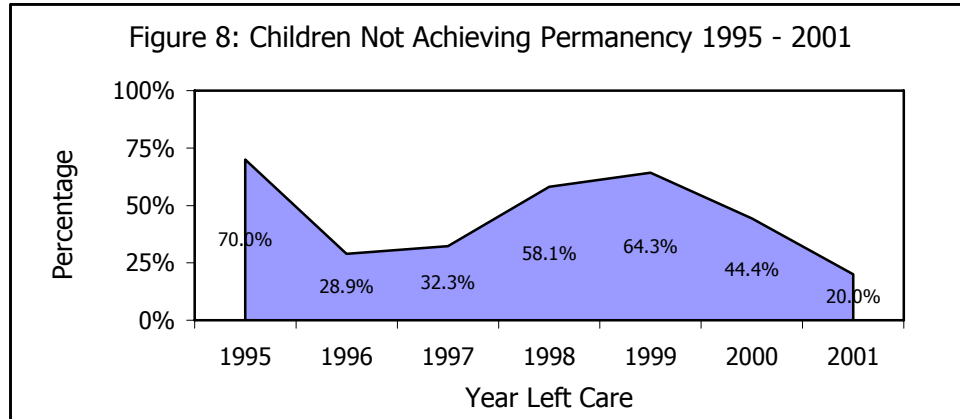
It seems that those children who are hardest to place are more likely to change placements and spend longer in care than children who are not as difficult to place. There is a strong, positive relationship between the number of placements children experience in the county and how long they spend in care ($r = .570$). The number of changes in placement that a child experiences accounts for 32.5% 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.

Fewer children today are not achieving permanency than children in previous years. The number of children who did not achieve permanency in 2001 is down by an average of 29.7% from the average number of children who left care between 1995 and 2000. In 2001, 20.0% of the children who left care did not achieve permanency, compared to 44.4% in 2000, 64.3% in 1999, and 58.1% in 1998.

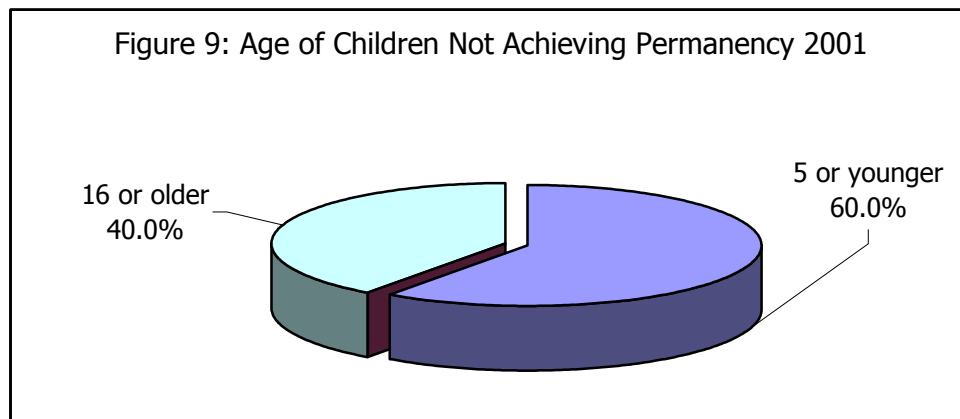
Of the children not achieving permanency in 2001, 40.0% aged out of the system, and 60.0% were placed in the care of someone other than their parent.



In 2001, African-American children constituted 20.0% of the children who left care and did not achieve permanency, compared to 60.0% Caucasians, and 20.0% children of other races. Boys constituted 40.0% of those children who did not achieve permanency, compared to 60.0% girls. Girls were more likely than boys to age out of care, comprising all of the children aging out.

Children leaving care without achieving permanency were more likely to be younger children. Children 16 years of age or older constituted 40.0% of those children who did not achieve permanency in 2001, while 60.0% were 5 years of age or younger. All of the children between 6 and 15 years of age achieved permanency upon leaving care.

Of the children 16 years of age or older, 25.0% aged out, and 75.0% returned home to at least one of their natural parents.

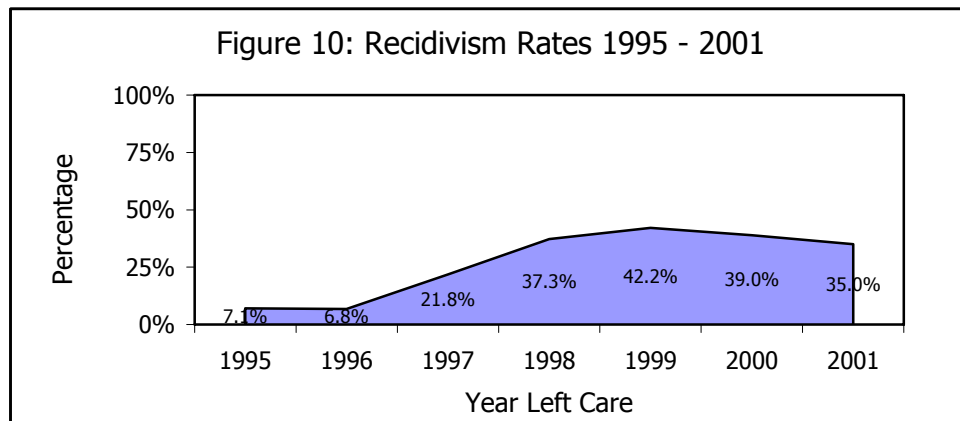


Children who did not achieve permanency when leaving care in 2001 spent longer in care and experienced more changes in placement while in care than children who achieved permanency. The average length of time these children spent in care was 2.8 years, compared to 11 months for children who achieved permanency. The average number of changes in placement experienced by these children was 4.2 placements, compared to 3.2 placements for children who achieved permanency.

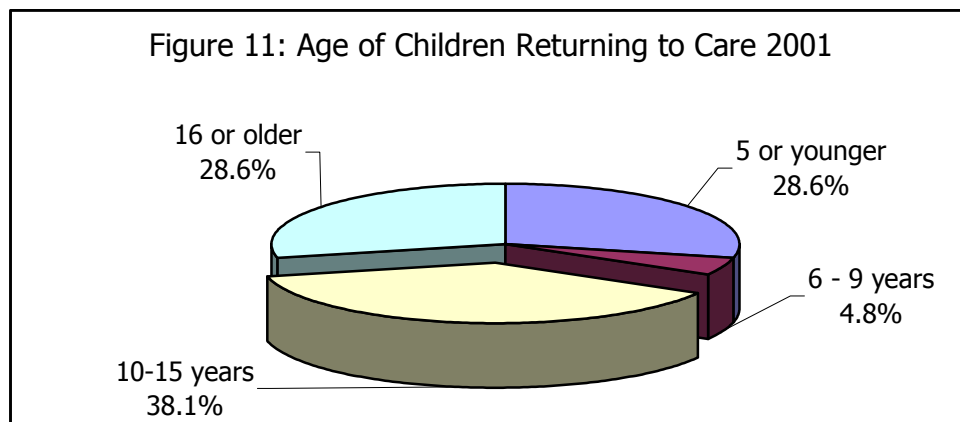
RECIDIVISM RATES

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 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 2001, the number of children who had been in care before is up by an average of 9.3% from the number of children reviewed between 1995 and 2000 who had been in care before. In 2001, 35.0% of the children reviewed by the Review Board had been in care before, compared to 39.0% in 2000, 42.2% in 1999, and 37.3% in 1998.



In 2001, most of the children who had been in care before were Caucasians, comprising 42.9% of these children, compared to 33.3% African-Americans, and 23.8% children of other races. Boys returned to the custody of the state at a slower rate than girls, 38.1% compared to 61.9%. Of these children, 28.6% were 16 years of age or older, 38.1% were between 10 and 15 years of age, 4.8% were between 6 and 9 years of age, and 28.6% were 5 years of age or younger. Children who had been in care before have spent an average of 1.3 years in care and have experienced an average of 4.1 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.

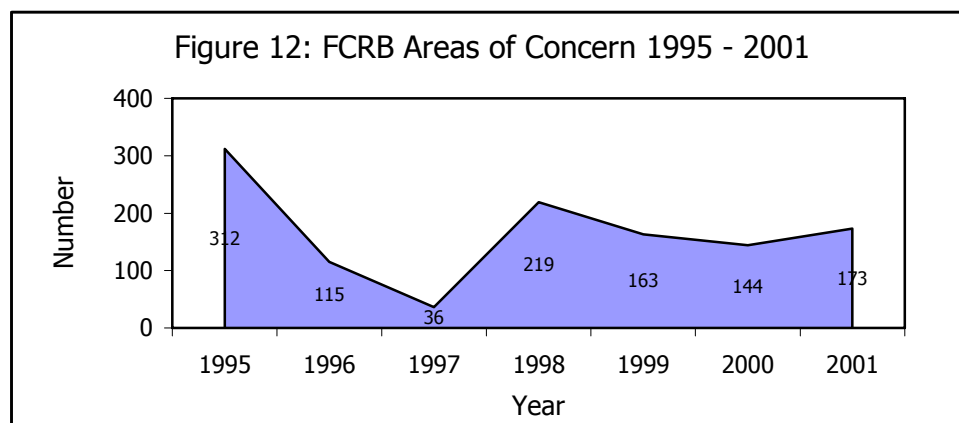
A child who leaves care to return home or go live with a relative has a greater risk of coming back into care than children who leave care and are adopted. Children who came back into care from home or from a relative constituted 95.2% of the children in 2001 who had been in care before, compared to 93.8% in 2000, and 95.2% in 1999.

Table 2: Previous Location of Children Re-Entering Care						
Previous Location	2001		2000		1999	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Parents	15	71.4	10	62.5	13	61.9
Relatives	5	23.8	5	31.3	7	33.3
Adoptive Parents	1	4.8	1	6.3	1	4.8
Other	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	21	100.0	16	100.0	21	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 2001, Review Board members held 9 meetings with an average of 8 children reviewed at each meeting. Of the 53 children reviewed, 96.2% had at least one area of concern cited by the local Review Board. A total of 173 deficiencies in systemic efforts to secure permanent homes for children in care were cited in 2001. Of these deficiencies, 45.7% were direct violations of the law, and 54.3% were violations of program policies or procedures. The number of deficiencies cited by the Review Board increased by 20.1% from the number of deficiencies cited in 2000.



In 2001, the most often cited legal violation was "No Timely Merits Hearing," which constituted 30.4% of all legal Areas of Concern, up from 24.6% in 2000. 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.

Table 3: Legal Areas of Concern 2000 - 2001				
Previous Location	2001		2000	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
No Timely Merit Hearing	24	30.4	16	24.6
No Timely Permanency Plan Hearing	14	17.7	12	18.5
Other Statutory Violation	9	11.4	2	3.1
No Thorough Adoption Assessment	9	11.4	13	20.0
No Face-to-Face Contact	7	8.9	7	10.8
Non-Compliance with Court Order	6	7.6	6	9.2
No Timely Probable Cause Hearing	4	5.1	0	0.0
No Court Order at Review	4	5.1	7	10.8
No Child Specific Recruitment	2	2.5	1	1.5
Adoption Complaint Not Filed Timely	0	0.0	0	0.0
Adoption Not Consummated Timely	0	0.0	0	0.0
No Timely FCRB	0	0.0	1	1.5
Total	79	100.0	65	100.0

The most often cited program violation was the lack of available progress reports from treatment providers, which constituted 26.6% of all program Areas of Concern, up from 22.8% in 2000. 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 2000 - 2001				
Area of Concern	2001		2000	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
P: No Progress Reports	25	26.6	18	22.8
Incomplete/Inappropriate Case Plan	15	16.0	13	16.5
Lack of Progress Permanent Plan	13	13.8	13	16.5
Interested Parties Not Invited	13	13.8	13	16.5
P: No Advance Packets	8	8.5	3	3.8
No 3 Week Notice to Parties	7	7.4	0	0.0
P: Conflict with Permanent Plan	5	5.3	1	1.3
P: TPR Summary Not Submitted Timely	3	3.2	6	7.6
No Current Case Plan	2	2.1	1	1.3
Other	2	2.1	0	0.0
P: No Timely Referral to Adoption	1	1.1	2	2.5
No Case Plan Within 60 Days	0	0.0	1	1.3
P: Case Plan Expired	0	0.0	1	1.3
P: Lapse in Case Planning	0	0.0	0	0.0
P: No Psychological Reports at Review	0	0.0	0	0.0
P: No Copy of Pleadings	0	0.0	0	0.0
P: No Diligent Search	0	0.0	3	3.8
P: Other Policy/Procedure	0	0.0	4	5.1
Total	94	100.0	79	100.0

Note: "P:" Indicates Agency Policy/Procedure Violation

SUMMARY

Facing the Scope of Problems:

The data on foster children and the length of time spent in care, the number of changes in placements experienced, whether permanency is achieved, and recidivism rates provide a problematic picture of children in out-of-home placements in Dorchester County. Children in out-of-home placements in this county are spending nearly 1/10th of their childhood in foster care. The average child entering care today can expect to change placements 3 times before leaving care. More than 1 in 5 children will leave the system without being placed with a "forever family."

Of the children reviewed at least once by the Review Board, more than 1 in 3 children had been in care before. Of the children who had been in foster care before, 7 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 the county, almost 4 in 4 children who leave foster care are placed with a "forever family," and this number is more than three times higher than 6 years ago. Of the children less than 16 years of age, 4 in 5 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 between 1 and 3 placements while in care and children under 5 years of age experience on average just 1 placement while in care. Almost 2 in 3 children in the custody of the county were there for the first time. Children who leave 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 and copies of reports for other counties should be made to Tina Hudson, Data Management and Research Administrator or Denise Barker, Director, Division of Foster Care Review, 1205 Pendleton St., Columbia, SC 29201 Phone: (803) 734-0474 Fax: (803) 734-1223.

Comparable reports for all 46 counties and for the state can also be found on the World Wide Web at:
<http://www.govoepp.state.sc.us/children/foster.htm>