



FOSTER KIDS COUNT 2002

LEE
COUNTY

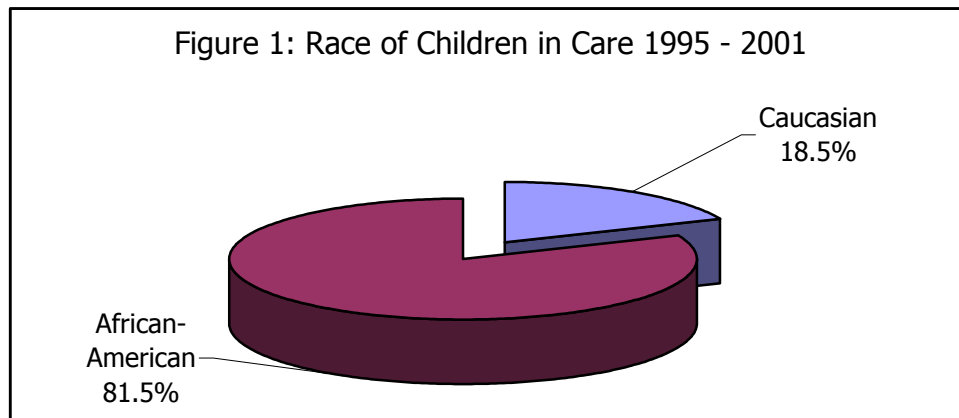
A profile of South Carolina children in out-of-home placements

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

DEMOGRAPHICS¹

Between 1995 and 2001, there were 81 children in out-of-home placements who were reviewed by the Foster Care Review Board.² Of these, 81.5% were African-American, and 18.5% were Caucasian. There were no children of other races reviewed by the Review Board between 1995 and 2001. There were 35 children in out-of-home placements reviewed by the Review Board in 2001, 32 children in 2000, 27 children in 1999, and 22 children in 1998.

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 0.68% of the population of all children in the county in 2001, compared to 0.62% in 2000, 0.51% in 1999, and 0.41% 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 fewer boys in care between 1995 and 2001 than girls, 42.0% compared to 58.0%. Children 16 years of age or older constituted 28.4% of the children in care, while 33.3% were between 10 and 15 years of age, 12.3% were between 6 and 9 years of age and 25.9% were 5 years of age or younger.

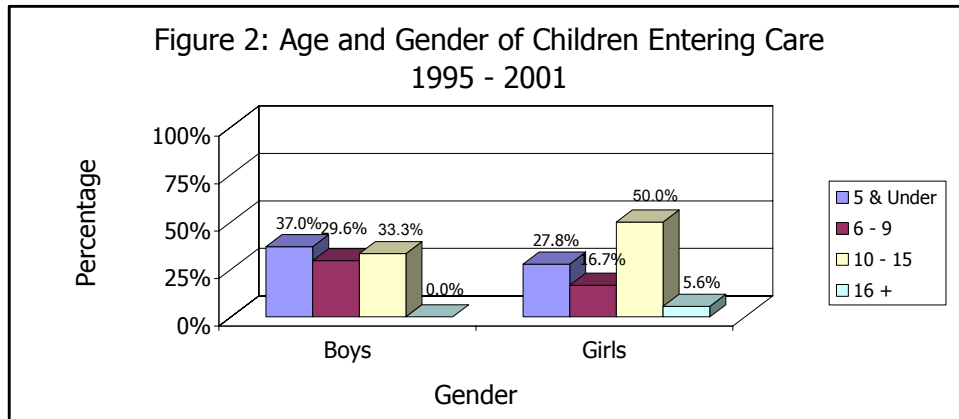
Between 1995 and 2001, 63 children entered the foster care system in Lee County and were reviewed by the Review Board. Of these children, 74.6% were African-American, and 25.4% were Caucasian. There were no children of other races reviewed by the Review Board who entered care between 1995 and 2001. Fewer boys entered care than girls, 42.9% compared to 57.1%. In 2001, 15 children entered care, compared to 12 children in 2000, 8 children in 1999 and 10 children in 1998.

¹The children included in this report are those children in out-of-home placements who have been reviewed at least once by the Review Board. Children in out-of-home placements who have not been reviewed by the Review Board are not included in this report.

²The 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 a younger age. Of those children entering care between 1995 and 2001, 31.7% were 5 years of age or younger, 22.2% were between 6 and 9 years of age, 42.9% were between 10 and 15 years of age, and 3.2% were 16 years of age or older. Of the boys entering care between 1995 and 2001, 66.6% were under 10 years of age, while 55.6% of the girls were 10 years of age or older.

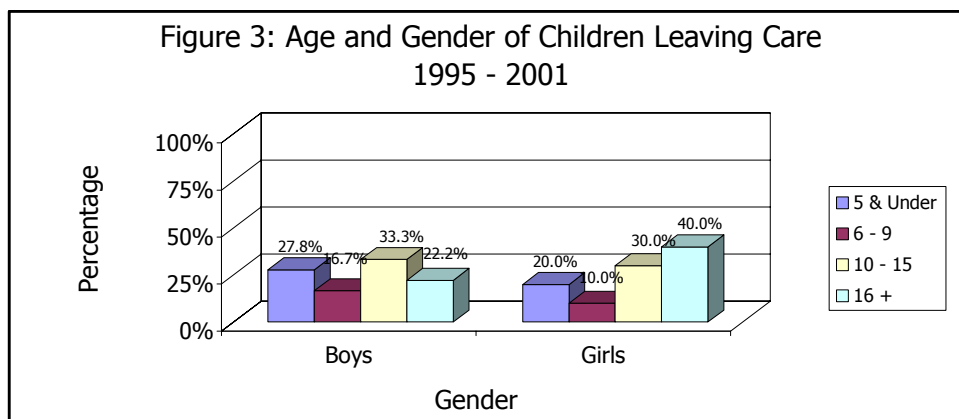
Of the children who entered care between 1995 and 2001, 55.3% of the African-Americans, and half of the Caucasians were under the age of 10.



Between 1995 and 2001, 58 children left custody of the county. Of these children, 82.8% were African-American, and 17.2% were Caucasian. There were no children of other races reviewed by the Review Board who left care between 1995 and 2001. There were 12 children who left care in 2001, 8 children in 2000, 5 children in 1999, and 3 children in 1998. Fewer boys left care between 1995 and 2001 than girls, 31.0% compared to 69.0%.

Children tend to leave care at an older age. Of those children leaving care between 1995 and 2001, 22.4% were 5 years of age or younger, 12.1% were between 6 and 9 years of age, 31.0% were between 10 and 15 years of age, and 34.5% were 16 years of age or older. Of the boys leaving care between 1995 and 2001, 55.5% of the boys and 70.0% of the girls were 10 years of age or older.

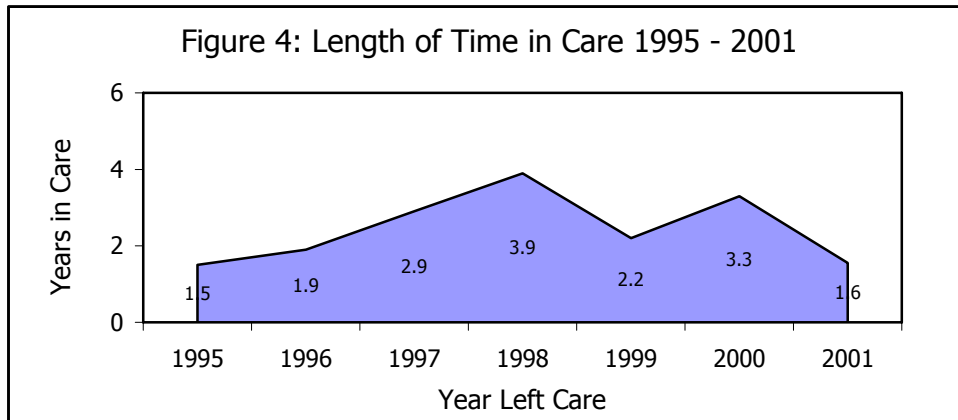
Of the children who left care between 1995 and 2001, 90.0% of the African-Americans and 60.5% of the Caucasians were 10 years of age or older.



LENGTH OF TIME IN CARE

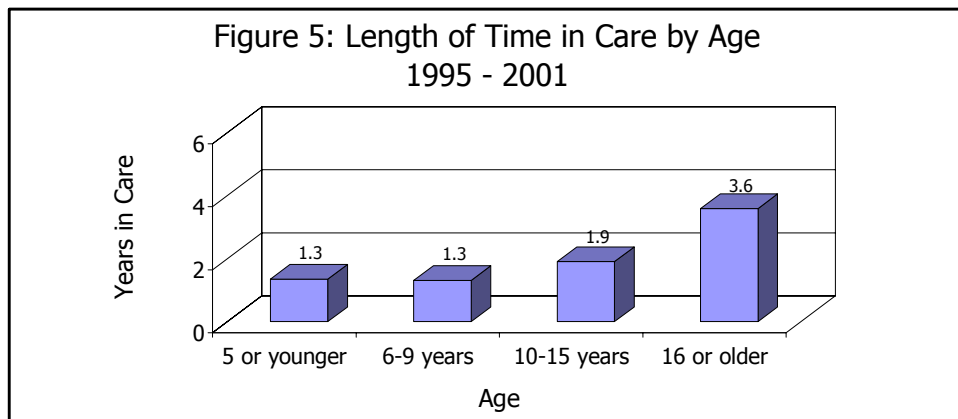
The longer a child is away from their home or a nurturing family environment, the more damaging it can be to the normal development of the child. For this reason, a major goal of the Review Board is to ensure that children achieve permanency as quickly as possible.

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 children spent in care is down by an average of 1 year from the length of time children spent in care between 1995 and 2000. In 2001, the average length of time spent in care was 1.6 years, compared to 3.3 years in 2000, 2.2 years in 1999 and 3.9 years in 1998.



Between 1995 and 2001, children who left care spent an average of 2.3 years in out-of-home placements in the county. African-American children spent longer in care on average than Caucasian children. Between 1995 and 2001, African-American children spent 2.3 years in care, compared to 2 years for Caucasian children. There were no children of other races reviewed by the Review Board who left care between 1995 and 2001.

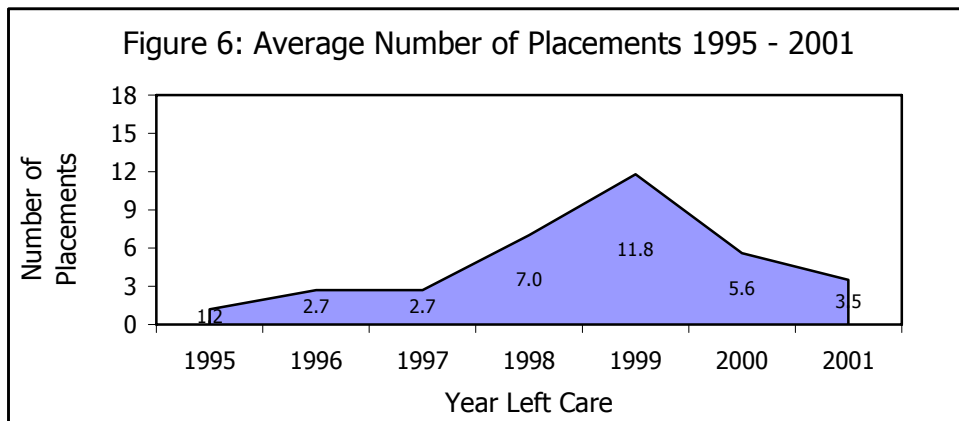
Boys spent on average 2.2 years in care between 1995 and 2001, compared to girls who spent on average 2.3 years in care. Children 16 years of age or older spent the longest amount of time in care, averaging 3.6 years in care, compared to 1.9 years for children between 10 and 15 years of age, 1.3 years for children between 6 and 9 years of age, and 1.3 years for children 5 years of age or younger.



NUMBER OF PLACEMENTS

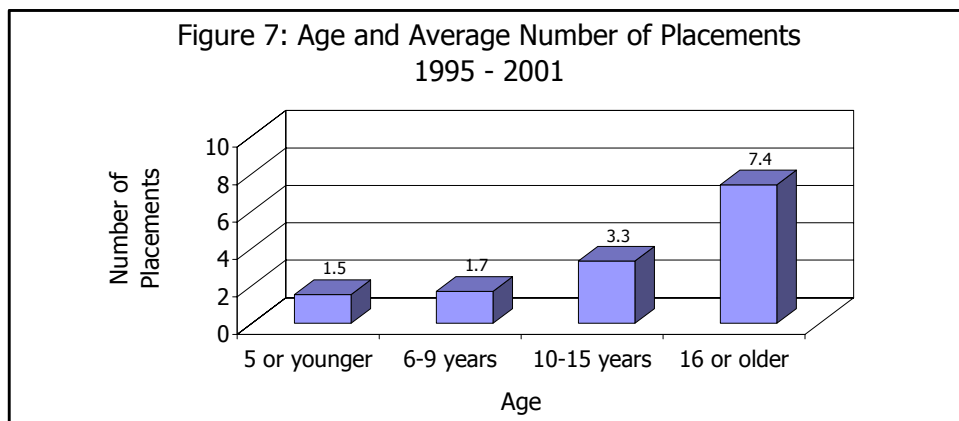
Research shows the initial placement in foster care is extremely traumatic for a child. Additional changes in placement once in the foster care system can be detrimental to children's development, affecting their ability to learn, establish relationships and develop as stable, secure individuals.

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 is down by an average of almost 2 placements from the number of changes in placement children experienced between 1995 and 2000. In 2001, the average child who left care had lived in 3.5 different placements while in the custody of the county, compared to 5.6 in 2000, 11.8 in 1999 and 7 in 1998.



Between 1995 and 2001, children who left care had lived in 4.1 different placements while in out-of-home placements in the county. Caucasian children experienced more changes in placement on average than African-American children. Between 1995 and 2001, Caucasian children experienced 6.8 changes in placement, compared to 3.6 for African-American children. There were no children of other races reviewed by the Review Board who left care between 1995 and 2001. Boys experienced on average 4.5 changes in placement, compared to 4 for girls.

Children 16 years of age or older had experienced the most changes in placement on average, 7.4 changes in placement, compared to 3.3 for children between 10 and 15 years of age, 1.7 for children between 6 and 9 years of age, and 1.5 for children 5 years of age or younger.



Most children who leave care experience 1 or 2 changes in placement while in the custody of the county. Between 1995 and 2001, 53.4% of the children experienced 1 or 2 changes in placement while in care, while 27.6% experienced 5 or more placements.

Table 1: Number of Placements for Children Leaving Care 1995-2001		
Number of Placements	1995 - 2001	
	Number	Percent
1	22	37.9
2	9	15.5
3	9	15.5
4	2	3.4
5	3	5.2
6	2	3.4
7	1	1.7
8	0	0.0
9	3	5.2
10+	7	12.1
Total	58	100.0

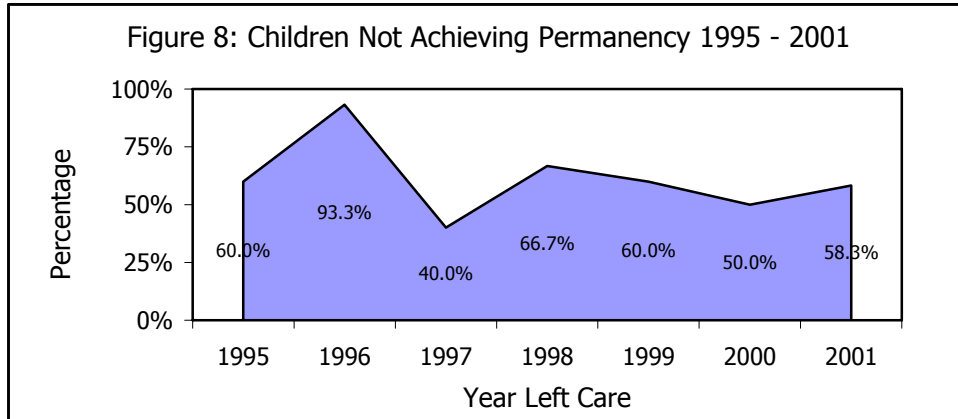
Of the children who left care between 1995 and 2001, 46.6% were placed in foster homes, 22.4% were in Medicaid therapeutic placements, 10.3% were in group homes or institutions, 5.2% were in adoptive placements, 5.2% were with relatives, 6.9% were with one or both natural parents, and 3.4% were runaways. There were no children placed in other types of placements.

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 moderate, positive relationship between the number of placements children experience in the county and how long they spend in care ($r = .331$). The number of changes in placements a child experiences accounts for 11.0% of the variability in the number of months a child spends in out-of-home placement.

ACHIEVING PERMANENCY

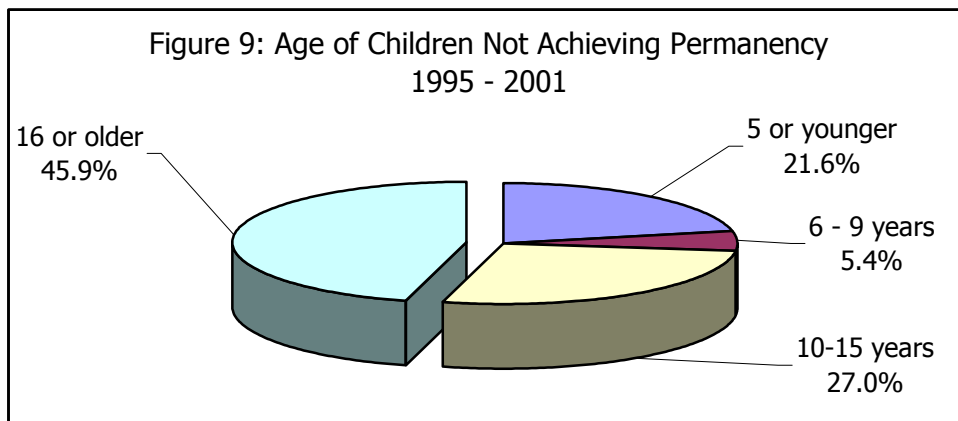
Permanency for a child means placement with a “forever family.” Families are the single most important influence in a child’s life. Children depend on their families for their material needs and wants, nurturing and leadership. A child can achieve legal permanency upon leaving the foster care system either by returning home to their natural parent or by being adopted.

The same number of children today are failing to achieve permanency as children in previous years. The number of children who did not achieve permanency in 2001 is down slightly by an average of less than 1% from the average number of children who left care between 1995 and 2000. In 2001, 58.3% of the children who left care did not achieve permanency, compared to half of the children in 2000, 60.0% in 1999, and 66.7% in 1998. Between 1995 and 2001, 63.8% of the children who left care did not achieve permanency. Of these, 62.2% were placed in the care of someone other than their parent, and 37.8% aged out of the system.



Between 1995 and 2001, African-Americans constituted 83.8% of the children who left care and did not achieve permanency, compared to 16.2% Caucasians. There were no children of other races reviewed by the Review Board who left care between 1995 and 2001. Boys constituted 32.4% of those who did not achieve permanency, compared to 67.6% girls. Girls were more likely than boys to age out of care, comprising 78.6% of all children aging out between 1995 and 2001.

Children leaving care without achieving permanency were more likely to be older children. Children 16 years of age or older constituted 45.9% of those children who did not achieve permanency between 1995 and 2001, while 27.0% were between 10 and 15 years of age, 5.4% were between 6 and 9 years of age, and 21.6% were 5 years of age or younger. Of the children 16 years of age or older, 70.0% aged out, 15.0% returned home to at least one of their natural parents, and 15.0% were placed in the custody of a non-parent.

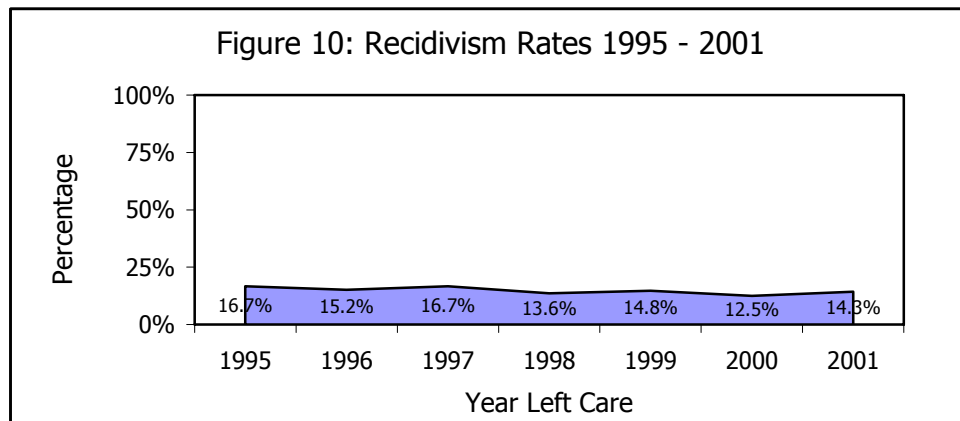


Children who did not achieve permanency when leaving care between 1995 and 2001 had spent more time in care and experienced more changes in placement while in care than children who achieved permanency. The average length of time these children spent in care was 2.5 years, compared to 2 years for children who achieved permanency. The average number of changes in placement experienced by these children was 4.7 placements, compared to 3.1 placements for children who achieved permanency.

RECIDIVISM RATES

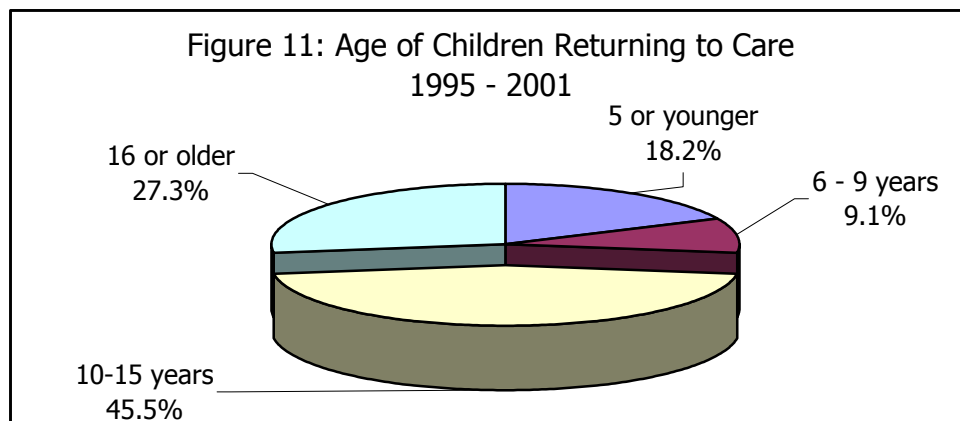
Children who come back into care are some of the most vulnerable children in foster care because they have been taken into custody more than once. Subsequent removals increase the risk for further developmental delays and have even greater impact on a child's ability to succeed later in life.

The same number of children today are returning to foster care as children in previous years. In 2001, the number of children who had been in care before is down by an average of less than 1% from the number of children between 1995 and 2000 who had been in care before. In 2001, 14.3% of the children reviewed by the Review board had been in care before, compared to 12.5% in 2000, 14.8% in 1999, and 13.6% in 1998.



Between 1995 and 2001, 13.6% of the children reviewed by the Review Board had been in care before. Of these children, most were African-Americans, comprising 72.7%, compared to 27.3% Caucasians. There were no children of other races reviewed by the Review Board between 1995 and 2001 who had returned to care. Boys returned to custody of the county at a slower rate than girls, 45.5% compared to 54.5%.

Of these children, 27.3% were 16 years of age or older, 45.5% were between 10 and 15 years of age, 9.1% were between 6 and 9 years of age, and 18.2% were 5 years of age or younger. Children who had been in care before have spent an average of 2.8 years in care and have experienced an average of 6.4 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.

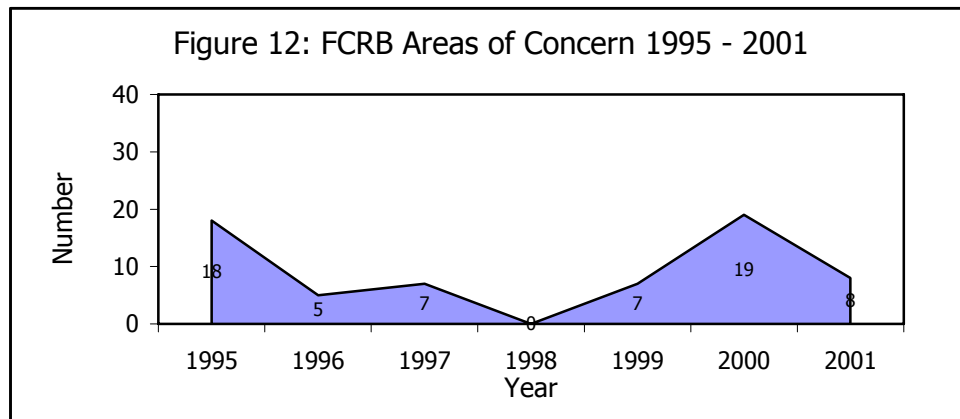
A child who leaves care to return home or go live with a relative has a greater risk of coming back into care than children who leave care and are adopted. Children who came back into foster care from home or from a relative constituted 90.9% of the children between 1995 and 2001 who had been in care before.

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 12 meetings with an average of 4 children reviewed at each meeting. Of the 35 children reviewed, 22.9% had at least one area of concern cited by the local Review Board.

A total of 8 deficiencies in systemic efforts to secure permanent homes for children in care were cited in 2001. Of these deficiencies, 62.5% were direct violations of the law, and 37.5% were violations of program policies or procedures. The number of deficiencies cited by the Review Board decreased by 57.9% from the number of deficiencies cited in 2000.



In 2001, the most often cited legal violation was "No Timely Merits Hearing," which constituted 60.0% of all legal Areas of Concern, slightly down from 62.5% 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 2: Legal Areas of Concern 2000 - 2001				
Area of Concern	2001		2000	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
No Timely Merit Hearing	3	60.0	5	62.5
Non-Compliance with Court Order	2	40.0	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 Child Specific Recruitment	0	0.0	0	0.0
No Court Order at Review	0	0.0	0	0.0
No Face-to-Face Contact	0	0.0	1	12.5
No Thorough Adoption Assessment	0	0.0	2	25.0
No Timely FCRB	0	0.0	0	0.0
No Timely Permanency Plan Hearing	0	0.0	0	0.0
No Timely Probable Cause Hearing	0	0.0	0	0.0
Other Statutory Violation	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	5	100.0	8	100.0

The most often cited program violation was lack of available progress reports from treatment providers which constituted 66.7% of all program Areas of Concern, up from 36.4% 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 3: Program Areas of Concern 2000 - 2001				
Area of Concern	2001		2000	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
P: No Progress Reports	2	66.7	2	18.2
P: No Timely Referral to Adoption	1	33.3	0	0.0
Incomplete/Inappropriate Case Plan	0	0.0	1	9.1
Interested Parties Not Invited	0	0.0	0	0.0
Lack of Progress Permanent Plan	0	0.0	0	0.0
No 3 Week Notice to Parties	0	0.0	0	0.0
No Case Plan Within 60 Days	0	0.0	0	0.0
No Current Case Plan	0	0.0	0	0.0
Other	0	0.0	0	0.0
P: Case Plan Expired	0	0.0	0	0.0
P: Conflict with Permanent Plan	0	0.0	0	0.0
P: Lapse in Case Planning	0	0.0	0	0.0
P: No Advance Packets	0	0.0	4	36.4
P: No Copy of Pleadings	0	0.0	0	0.0
P: No Diligent Search	0	0.0	0	0.0
P: No Psychological Reports at Review	0	0.0	2	18.2
P: Other Policy/Procedure	0	0.0	2	18.2
P: TPR Summary Not Submitted Timely	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	3	100.0	11	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 Lee County. Children in out-of-home placements in this county are spending more than 1/10th of their childhood in foster care. The average child entering care today can expect to change placements 4 times before leaving care. Almost 2 in 3 children will leave the system without being placed with a "forever family."

Of the children reviewed by the review board between 1995 and 2001, 1 in 10 children had been in care before. Of the children who had been in foster care before, 2 in 3 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. 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, more than 1 in 3 children who leave custody of the county are placed with a "forever family." Of the children less than 16 years of age, half 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 1 or 2 changes in placement while in care and children under 10 years of age experienced on average 2 placements while in care. Almost 9 in 10 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>