



North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services
Division of Social Services

325 North Salisbury Street • Raleigh, North Carolina 27603
Courier # 56-20-25

James B. Hunt, Jr., Governor
H. David Bruton, M.D., Secretary

Kevin M. FitzGerald, Director
(919) 733-3055

September 8, 1999

Dear County Director of Social Services

Subject: Experiences of Children Entering Child Welfare Custody in North Carolina:
Updated Report for State Fiscal Years 1994 -1998

Attached is the above report updated to include information in the state automated system as of June 30, 1999. Also attached is an informational sheet explaining the data included in each section of the report. This report includes children entering custody/placement responsibility of a county department of social services between July 1, 1993 and June 30, 1998. The next version of this report, which will be issued by November 1999, will include data for children entering DSS custody/placement responsibility between July 1, 1994 and June 30, 1999.

Data in this report for fiscal years 1994 -1998 has been updated because data in the system has been updated by counties since the last report was issued. This means that there may be changes in the length of stay estimates as well as in disruptions. If a data cell contains an NA, this means that insufficient data was available to estimate a median, rate of reentry, etc. for a particular cohort of children. The section of the report related to time in licensed care has been replaced with a section that reflects the experiences of children ever placed in non-family settings (refer to the attached informational sheet for a more complete explanation).

We will appreciate any feedback you give us on the usefulness of the attached report. Please review this report with your staff to determine if the data appear to be correct for your county.

We appreciate your continued cooperation in helping us improve our capacity to measure the performance of the child welfare system. If you have questions about this report, please call Holly Hafer at (919) 733-4622.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Chuck Harris", followed by a horizontal line.

Charles C. Harris, Chief
Children's Services Section

cc: Kevin Fitzgerald
Local Support Managers
Melinda Hamrick
Children's Programs Representatives
Children's Services Team Leaders

Experiences of Children Entering Child Welfare Custody in North Carolina: 1994-1998

The data in this report describe the experiences of children who entered the custody or placement authority of a county Department of Social Services in North Carolina for the first time between July 1, 1993 and June 30, 1998. They present analyses in five areas: volume and patterns of initial placements; length of time in placement authority; number and proportion of children ever placed in non-family settings as well as time in both placement authority and non-family care for this group of children; disruptions in care; and rates of re-entry. In addition to data for a specific county, each report includes results for North Carolina as a whole as well as data for a group of counties corresponding to the given county's Division of Social Services (DSS) designation as Level 1, Level 2, or Level 3.

The data are organized according to the cohort of children who entered North Carolina's child welfare system for the first time each fiscal year. The advantages of using these data are: complete and accurate representation of all children; valid and reliable estimates of admission trends and placement histories; and early indications of program effects and outcomes. For example: one can compare children who entered care in SFY94 with children who entered care in SFY98 according to initial placement, length of stay, or disruptions in care.

Pattern of Initial Placements describes where the child lived in his/her first living arrangement immediately following his/her entry into placement authority. Initial living arrangements include the child's own home, relatives, foster home, shelter, and other. This section also presents the total number of children who entered placement authority for the first time in each year. By reviewing this information, one can see possible trends. For example: Is there an increase, or decrease, in the number of children who are initially placed with a relative? What change in practice might cause this type of trend?

Length of Time in Placement Authority presents a profile of how long, in days, children in each cohort remained in custody/placement authority. In addition to the median number of days children had been in custody, the data describe how quickly children moved through the child welfare system and into permanent homes. For example: How many children remained in custody for more than one year?

Experiences in Non-Family Settings is a new section that replaces the section on *Licensed Care*. The data includes number and proportion of children who were ever placed in a non-family setting during their time in custody. Also included are median number of days in non-family care as well as median number of days in custody for these children. Non-family settings include placements other than own home, relative and family foster homes.

Disruptions in Care provides a profile of placement histories for each cohort of children. From these data, one can observe the percentage of children who, for example, were never removed from their own home or a relative's home, compared to the percentage of children who experience multiple facility placements.

Rates of Re-entry represent the percentage children in each cohort who left care following an initial period of custody, but later re-entered placement authority for a second time. A spell is a period of custody, beginning when the child enters placement authority and ending when they leave placement authority. The data is reported as re-entry after six, twelve and eighteen months. If a data cell contains an NA, this means that insufficient data was available to estimate either a median or a rate of re-entry for a particular cohort of children.