



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

Mail Service Center 2408
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Courier # 56-20-25

Michael F. Easley, Governor
Carmen Hooker Odom, Secretary

Pheon E. Beal, Director
(919) 733-3055

November 13, 2003

Dear County Director of Social Services

Subject: Experiences of Children Entering Child Welfare Custody in North Carolina:
Report for State Fiscal Years 1998 -2002

Attached is the above report updated to include information in the state automated system as of March 31, 2003. 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, 1997 through December 31, 2002.

We want to make sure that the information accurately represents the number of placements for children in your county. Please review this report with your staff to determine if the data appear to be correct for your county. **Note:** *If a data cell contains a NA, this means that insufficient data was available to estimate a median, rate of reentry, etc. for a particular cohort of children.*

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 Adolph Simmons, Jr (919) 733-3801.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jo Ann Lamm".

Jo Ann Lamm, Program Administrator
Family Support and Child Welfare Services Section

cc: Pheon E. Beal
Sherry Bradsher
Children's Program Representatives
Work First Representatives
Family Support and Child Welfare Services Team Leaders
Local Business Liasons

FSCWS-30-2003

Experiences of Children Entering Child Welfare Custody in North Carolina: 1998-2002

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, 1997 thru December 31, 2002. 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 settings for this group of children; placement stability; 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 custody in SFY98 with children who entered custody in SFY02 according to initial placement, length of stay, or placement stability.

Pattern of Initial Placements describes where the child lived in his/her first living arrangement immediately following his/her entry into custody/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 custody/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 Custody/Placement Authority presents an estimated profile of how long, in days, children in each cohort remained in custody/placement authority. In addition to the estimated median number of days, the data describe how quickly children moved through the child welfare system and into permanent homes. For example: How many children remained in custody/placement authority for more than one year? For Level 1 counties that have less than 10 placements per year, we have collapsed five years of data to generate a median number of days. For Level 2 counties with less than 10 placements in a particular year, we cannot generate a reliable median number of days. Therefore we will include a N/A in the cell.

Experiences in Non-Family Settings 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 settings 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.

Placement Stability includes the percentage of children that will experience one, two, three, or four or more placements while in DSS custody/placement authority. Placement stability does not include short term placements such as respite care, hospital visits, etc.

Rates of Re-entry represent the percentage children in each cohort who left custody/placement authority following an initial period of custody, but later re-entered custody/placement authority for a second time. A spell is a period of custody, beginning when the child enters custody/placement authority and ending when they leave custody/pa. 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.