



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

325 North Salisbury Street • Raleigh, North Carolina 27603
Courier # 56-20-25 MSC 2409

Michael F. Easley, Governor
Dempsey Benton, Secretary

Sherry S. Bradsher, Director
(919) 733-3055

December 4, 2007

Dear County Director of Social Services

**Attention: Directors Child Welfare Program Managers and Supervisors
Child Welfare Workers**

Subject: Placement of Children in Group Care

The Administration for Families and Children is required to report annually on the number of children in residential/group care in each state and specifically how many of those children were under the age of twelve years.

Specifically, Child Welfare Outcome 7: Reduce placements of young children in group homes or institutions. This outcome reflects the requirement at 475(5) A of the Social Security Act to place children in the least restrictive environments, e.g., family foster homes. It is acknowledged that a group home placement setting may be appropriate when the child's needs dictate this type of placement. However, the Department believes that such placements should only be considered after other less restrictive and/or more family-like options have been seriously pursued. The Department believes, even more so, that children under 12 should not be placed in these settings because of the benefits of a stable and loving family, and that States should take steps to reduce the number of young children who are placed in group homes or institutions. The measure designed to assess this outcome is as follows:

Measure 7.1: For all children who entered foster care during the reporting period and were age 12 or younger at the time of their most recent placement, what percentage was placed in a group home or an institution?

The Division does not support the placement of children under twelve in group care. As a state, we have been working hard to emphasize the importance of assuring that our younger children are placed in family settings when removal from their home is necessary. We have seen a reduction in these residential placements in the past 18 months. Still there is much work to do. In October, there were 176 children in residential/group care from 43 counties.

Residential/group care should only be used when it clearly meets the well-being needs of the child and no other family setting is available for that child. NC's goal is for every child to be placed in a family setting **and** to have the opportunity to remain in their own community.


In addition, the Federal Child and Family Services Review assesses (in Permanency Outcome 2) the states performance in (1) placing children in foster care in close proximity to their parents and close relatives; (2) placing siblings together; (3) ensuring frequent visitation between children and their parents and siblings in foster care; (4) preserving connections of children in foster care with extended family, community, cultural heritage, religion and schools; (5) seeking relatives as potential placement resources; and (6) promoting the relationship between children and their parents while the children are in foster care. North Carolina did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2.

There appears to be two general issues given as reasons for placing children under twelve in group care. They are: 1) Keeping siblings together. 2) Meeting the specific needs of the child
In many of these placements, a sibling group may in reality not be placed together at all, but rather in different cottages that may not even be close together. It is important to consider the specifics of the situation when placing children in group care. Children should not be placed in residential/group care unless there is a clear need to do so, based on the specific needs of the child.

It is especially concerning when children are placed in group home care solely due to a lack of available foster homes. When this is the case, the county should develop a plan to address the need for recruiting and licensing new foster homes and to support and maintain current foster homes. Both the Regulatory and Licensing Team in Black Mountain and your CPR are available and willing to help in this process.

CPR's have also been working directly with counties around this issue and will continue to follow up with counties regarding this matter. Information regarding children and their placement is one of the management tools provided to you monthly. I would urge you to become active in the decision making process for children when the recommendation is for a residential placement. This too, should provide added insight to you as a manager with regards to evaluating resource needs. In January, we will begin posting information about all 100 counties and their performance in this area. I encourage you to look at this information and talk with your counterparts who have been successful with achieving family settings as placements for their children. Statewide, there are roughly 35 counties who are successful in keeping their children in family settings within their own community. In addition, we will continue the dialogue with Children's Services Committee as to other next steps necessary to improve our performance in this area. If you have questions or need any clarification, please contact your CPR or Thomas Smith (thomas.smith@ncmail.net) at (919) 733-9465.

Sincerely,



Sherry S. Bradsher

cc: Charisse Johnson
JoAnn Lamm
Sarah Barham
Local Business Liaisons
FSCWS Team Leaders
Children's Services Programs Representatives

FSCWS-75-07