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Iowa Citizen Foster Care Review Board



Annual Report

Fiscal Year 2002

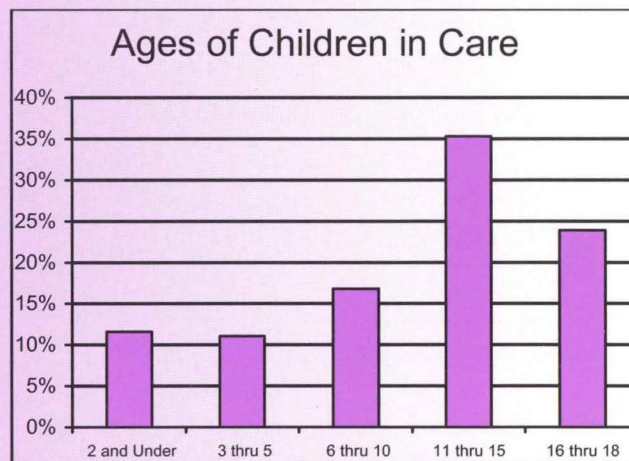
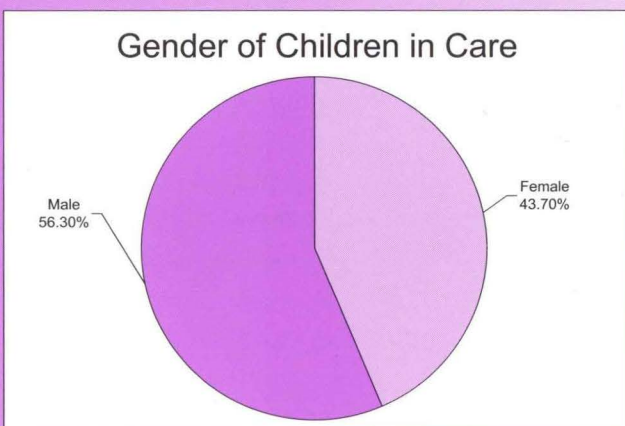
(July 1, 2001 - June 30, 2002)

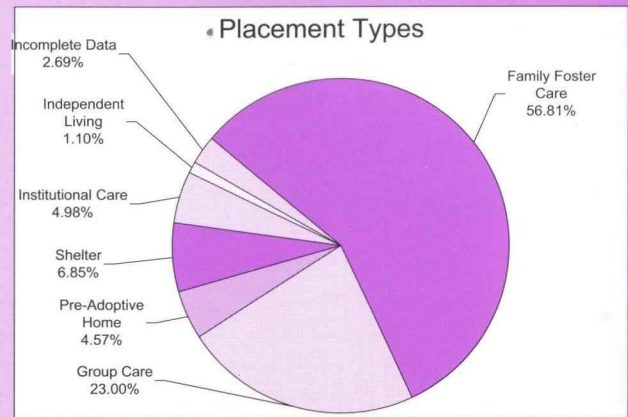
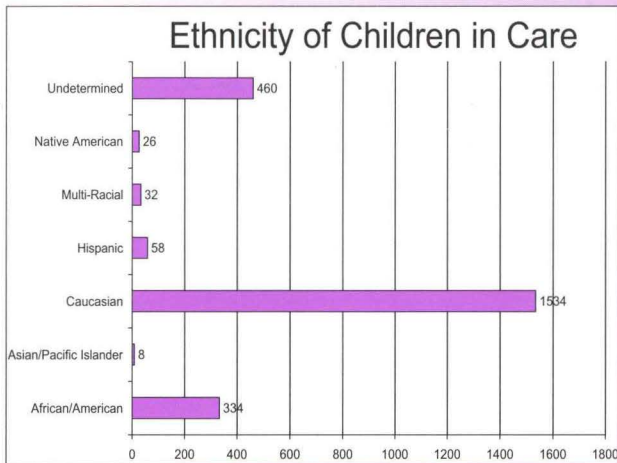
Overview

History: On any given day, there are almost five thousand children across the State of Iowa living in the foster care system. These children are the victims of abuse or neglect, or are not able to live with their own families for any number of reasons. In 1984, the Iowa Legislature created the Iowa Citizen Foster Care Review Board to ensure that planning for permanency would occur for all of Iowa's children. The enabling legislation enlisted the help of citizen volunteers from the communities of the children in care for three purposes: (1) to review the cases of children in their own communities to assure that each child has a specific and appropriate goal for achieving a permanent home in a timely manner; (2) to establish a Registry of the placements of children in foster care to assist in the formulation of policy and the allocation of resources; and (3) to prepare and disseminate foster care data with recommendations on how the foster care system can be improved. Federal and state laws require that each child in foster care be reviewed by some source once every six months. Where a Local Citizen Foster Care Review Board conducts a review, the Department of Human Services does not conduct an administrative review.

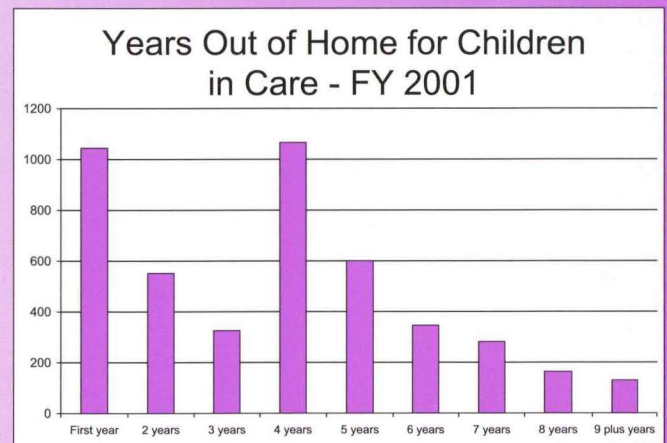
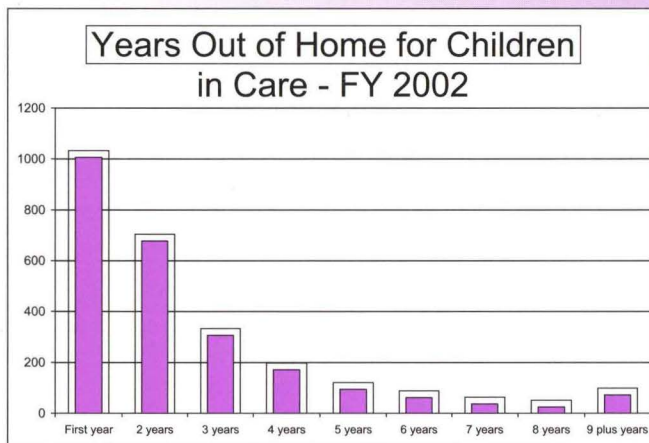
Our Mission: The Iowa Citizen Foster Care Review Board empowers the citizens of Iowa to review cases, collect data, and recommend changes to promote the safety and permanency of children who have been removed from the homes of their families.

Profile of Children Reviewed: The following is a profile of the children reviewed by these citizen volunteers, including gender, age, ethnicity, type of placements, and length of stay.





Improvements in Length of Stay

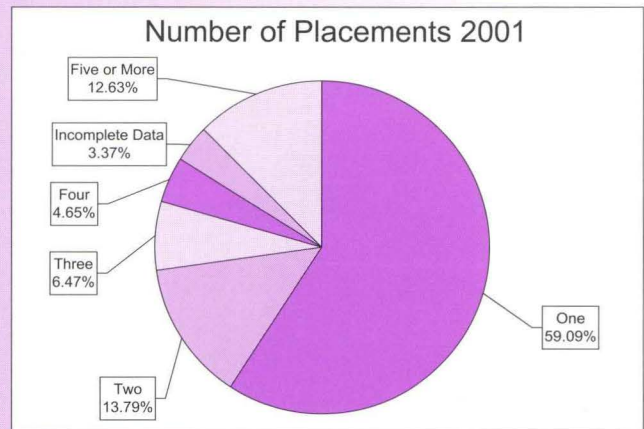
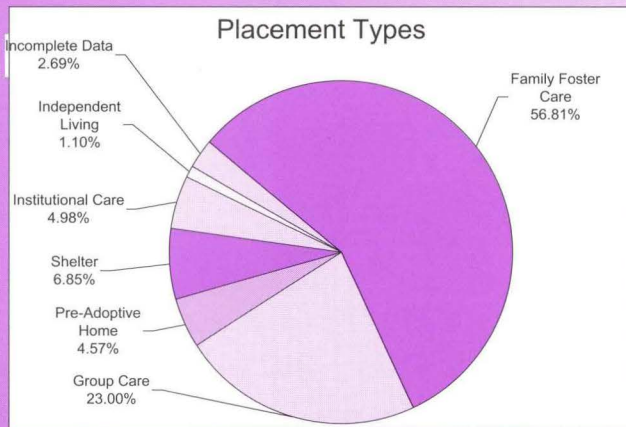


During Fiscal Year 2002, in the areas where citizen reviews were conducted, there was a substantial improvement in the length of stay. Fewer children remained in out-of-home placements for inordinate lengths of time. The charts above show the improvement in Iowa in the area of length of stay compared to the previous year.

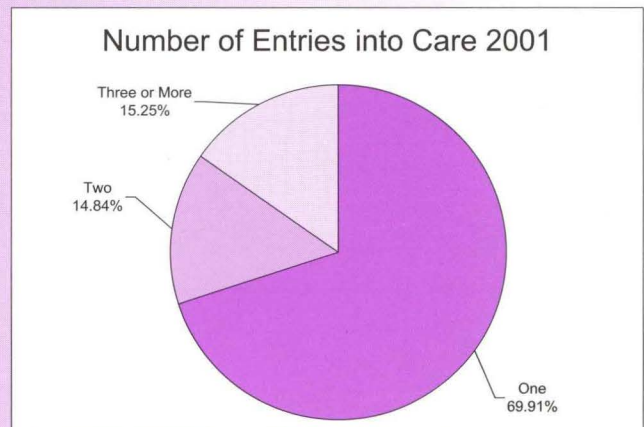
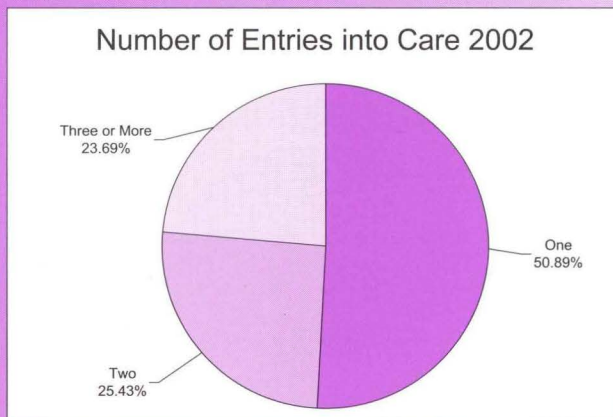
Barriers to Permanency

Two significant measures of the effectiveness of a child welfare system in providing permanency to children are: the number of times a child is moved from one placement to another while in care and the number of children who re-enter care after being returned to their homes. Both of these measures of permanency for children have deteriorated in those areas of the state where citizen reviews were conducted in Fiscal Year 2002, as compared to the previous year.

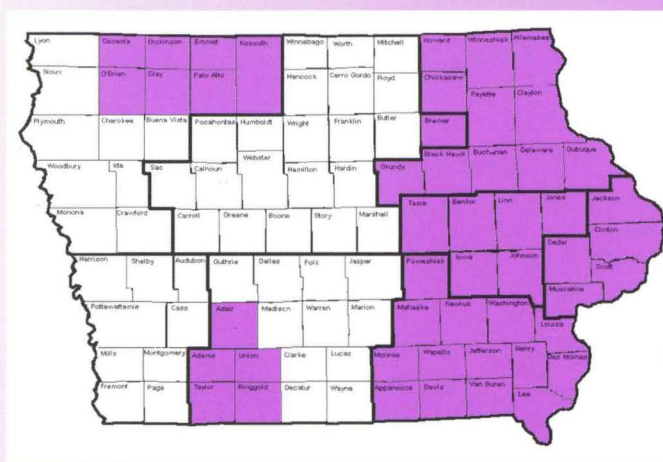
More children are moved while in care.



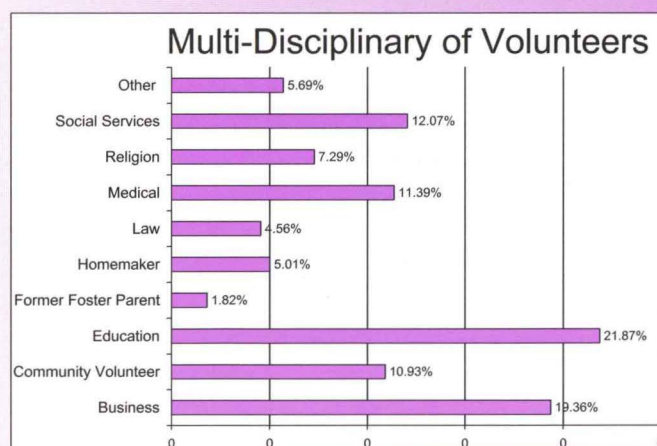
More children re-enter care.



State Board: This seven-member board is appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate. The board members are a diverse group of citizens from across the State of Iowa who have demonstrated an exceptional interest in the welfare of children. The State Board establishes policies and procedures for the entire program, and is responsible for ensuring adequate funding and staff to support the work of the community volunteers. The State Board is also charged with ensuring that the agency is in compliance with the Iowa Code, which provides the legal basis for supporting community involvement in foster care issues. Beginning July 1, 2002, the State Board name was changed to the Child Advocacy Board, two more members were added, and the Board took over operation of the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program.



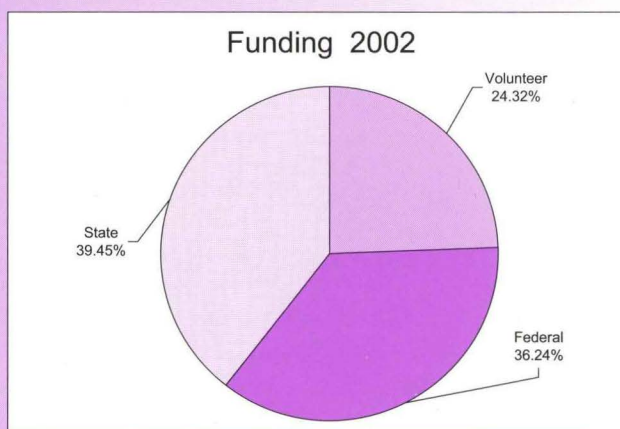
Local Boards: Local Citizen Foster Care Review Boards meet once each month to review the case of each child in foster care in their community. Each child is reviewed once every six months. These seven-member boards consist of citizen volunteers selected by the State Board and appointed by the Chief Judge of that judicial district. Almost four hundred volunteers serve as local reviewers in their communities. Volunteers are selected from a variety of ethnic and professional backgrounds and are committed to the welfare of the children in their own community. Board members are given an extensive, nationally recognized training prior to reviewing cases, and continue to receive ongoing training throughout their service. A conscious effort is made to recruit volunteers with a diverse ethnic and racial background. The Local Citizen Foster Care Review Boards have a higher percentage of minority volunteers than exists in the general population and have a relatively balanced gender makeup. The following is a profile of the multi-disciplinary background of the local volunteer reviewers.



Program Funding

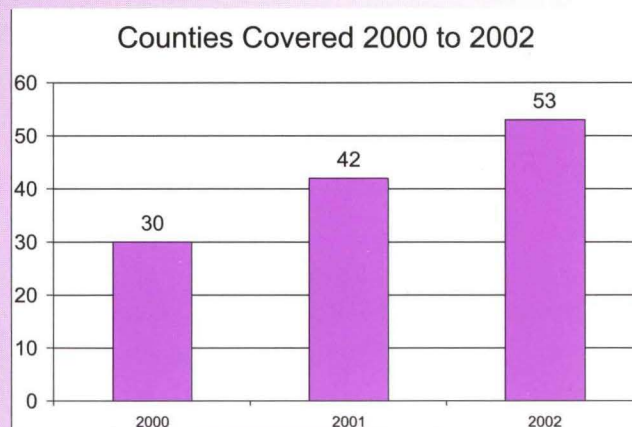
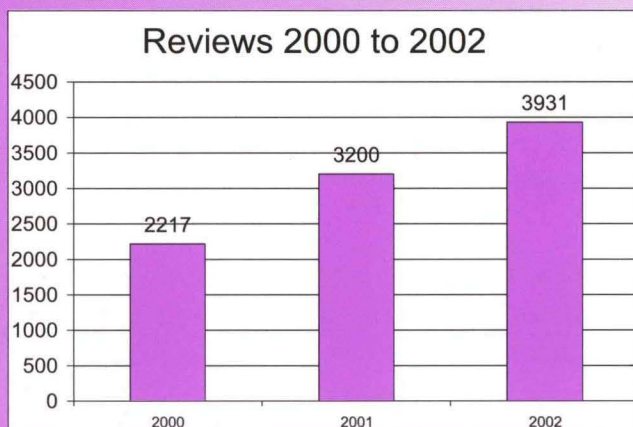
Reviews: Local Citizen Foster Care Review Boards meet at various community locations to conduct their reviews. Interested parties are invited to come before the board to discuss the progress of meeting the permanency goal for the child and any barriers they are experiencing in reaching the goal. Based on the information provided, the local board makes recommendations to the Juvenile Court Judge. These recommendations are advisory in nature, with the Judge having the final decision-making responsibility. The local board members identify barriers to permanency and report these barriers to the State Board for use in preparation of the Annual Report and Recommendations.

The cost of the Iowa Citizen Foster Care Review Board program was born almost equally by the State of Iowa, the Federal Government and the private volunteers. The State contributed about 39% of the cost of the program, the Federal Government contributed over 36%, and the volunteers (using nationally accepted value rates for volunteer time) contributed almost 1/4 of the program cost. In FY 2002, volunteers contributed over 30,000 hours to the program (an equivalent of 15 full time employees – a number equal to 3/4 of the program's authorized FTEs.)



Program Expansion

At the end of Fiscal Year 2000, approximately 300 volunteers conducted 2,217 reviews in 30 counties. By the end of Fiscal Year 2001, 375 volunteers conducted 3,200 reviews (an increase of 44%) in 42 counties. During Fiscal Year 2002, **in spite of budget cuts**, 366 volunteers conducted 3,931 reviews (an increase of 23% over FY 2001 and 77% over FY 2000).



FINDINGS

The Local Citizen Foster Care Review Boards, as part of their duties, identify barriers that delay or prevent permanency for Iowa's children in out-of-home placement, and, in turn, help formulate Findings and Recommendations for improvement of Iowa's child welfare system. Based upon reviews conducted in almost 4,000 cases this past fiscal year, the Iowa Citizen Foster Care Review Board makes the following findings:

- Changes in Appellate Rules by the Iowa Supreme Court in Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) cases have had a dramatic effect in shorting the delay in permanency for children who have had their parental rights terminated. The delay in appeals of Child in Need of Assistance (CINA) cases continues to create a barrier to permanency for children.
- The quality of representation of children by court appointed attorneys continues to vary greatly, ranging from outstanding to substandard. Throughout the state, some attorneys appointed to represent children do not fulfill many of the duties set forth in the Iowa Code [§232.2(22)(b)]. In many cases, the rights of children are largely unprotected due to the lack of involvement by the child's attorney.
- Funding cuts, DHS reorganization, and turnover of child welfare professionals have resulted in a breakdown of continuity of the treatment and supervision of Iowa's most vulnerable children. More and more of Iowa's children in out-of-home placement are at risk of falling victim to the failure of the traditional "safety net" provided by the child welfare system.
- Compliance with the deadlines established by the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (Public Law 105-89) by the legal system is sporadic, with some areas strictly complying with those deadlines and other areas largely ignoring them. In some instances, this is a result of local county attorneys having insufficient resources to complete the necessary filings. This creates not only a risk of loss of federal funding for Iowa's child welfare system, but also a lack of consistency in permanency for children throughout the state.
- The downturn in the economy has resulted in a reduction in the services being offered to children and families who enter Iowa's child welfare system. This is occurring at a time when the number of children and families struggling for services and the complexity of the difficulties experienced by these children and families is on the increase. The result is that some children and families are being denied the services necessary to assist them while others are being offered services that are not appropriate to their needs.





RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations to the Iowa Legislature

- Fund the expansion of volunteer programs designed to monitor and improve Iowa's child welfare system, including the Iowa Citizen Foster Care Review Board and the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program, to maximize community ownership and involvement in providing safety and permanency for Iowa's most vulnerable children.
- Allocate sufficient resources to the Iowa Department of Human Services to allow the full array of necessary services, including preventative services, to be available to families and children in crisis, thereby allowing provision of services to be determined by need rather than by availability.
- Pass necessary legislation to authorize the Juvenile Courts across the state to order that the CASA volunteers serve in the capacity of a guardian ad litem for the children assigned to them, but continuing the appointment of an attorney to represent the child in court.
- Provide resources and legislation to provide for assistance from the Iowa Attorney General's office to local county attorneys who have insufficient resources to make the necessary filings to comply with the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA),

Recommendations to the Iowa Department of Human Services

- Maintain funding streams necessary to ensure that children are offered the full array of services that are appropriate to their needs without arbitrary limits or caps on particular services.
- Develop appropriate strategies to ensure continuity of supervision and treatment, without the possibility of gaps in attention, to children whose direct supervision is affected by reorganization or worker turnover.
- Revise the State's IV-E plan to increase the draw down of federal funds for training of ICFCRB volunteers.

Recommendations to the Iowa Supreme Court

- Implement changes in the Appellate Rules for appeals of Child in Need of Assistance (CINA) cases similar to those implemented relative to appeals of Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) cases to reduce the delays in permanency experienced by children when an appeal is taken.
- Implement rule changes to ensure that attorneys appointed to represent children in juvenile matters comply with the minimum requirements set forth in the Iowa Code. In the alternative, authorize CASA volunteers to serve in the capacity of a guardian ad litem for the children assigned to them.
- Develop a reporting system to monitor compliance with the time deadlines established by the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), and develop a mechanization to ensure compliance with those deadlines.