



A Joint Study by the Foster Care Review Board and
the Nebraska Department of Health & Human Services

Finding Permanent Homes



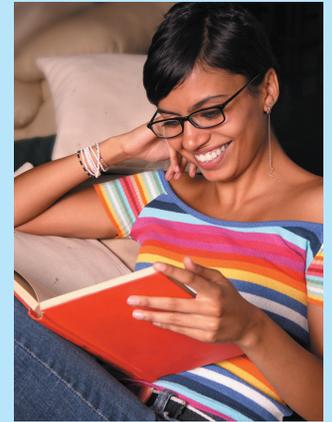
February 2009



Working Together for Children in Foster Care

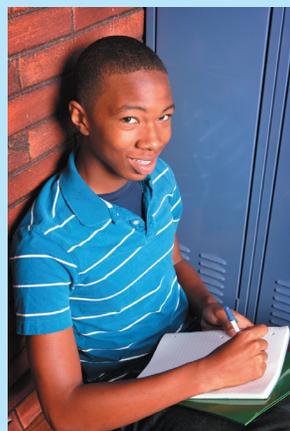
The **Nebraska State Foster Care Review Board** and the **Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)** continue to work to better understand children in foster care and the barriers they face to finding permanent homes. In fall 2008, caseworkers and supervisors in the DHHS Division of Children and Family Services teamed up with Foster Care Review Board staff to study 230 children and youth who have been in foster care for two years or longer. Staff focused on parental compliance and placement issues.

Working together on this special study, DHHS and the Foster Care Review Board learned many lessons and also identified some areas of concern. Here's a brief overview of the results of that study. The complete study can be found on-line at www.dhhs.ne.gov/fostercare.

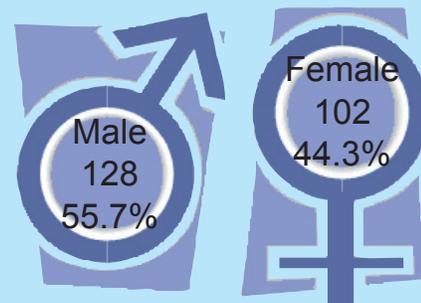


Who Was Included?

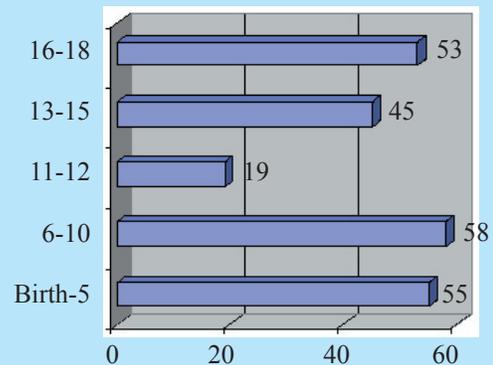
Originally, we wanted to examine cases from April 2008 involving 550 children and youth. By the time the study began in August, plans for many of those children had already changed from reunification to another form of permanency, so the final study included 230 youth. Here's a look at who was included in the study.



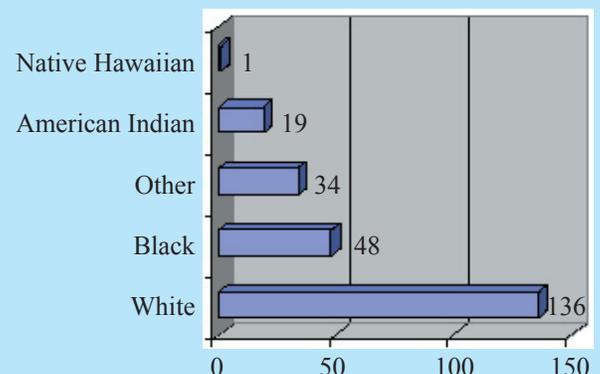
Gender of Youth in Study



Age of Youth in Study

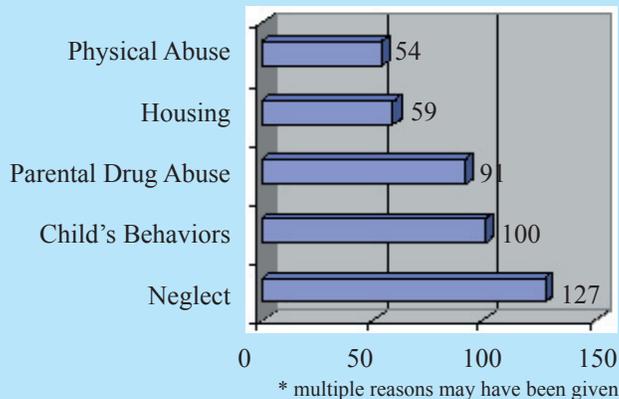


Race of Youth in Study



Positive Results, Concerns, and Lessons Learned

Top 5 Reasons Youth are in Care*



Positive Results for the Youth

The special study validates that indicators are moving in the right direction. For example:

- Services were provided within 60 days of removal for 192 children (83.5%).
- Current services were appropriate for 183 children (79.6%).
- Paternity was established for 173 children (75.2%).
- Of 230 youth, 111 plans changed because of the study.
- Mothers were allowed contact for 197 children (85.7%).
- Over half (50.9%) of the children had no more than three caseworkers over the lifetime of the case.
- Children's court hearings are occurring every 6 months for 82.2% of the children.

Areas of Concern

- For children in out-of-home care for two years or longer, the number one barrier to reunification is the parent not being able or willing to parent (121 of the 230 children, or 52.6% of cases).
- Mothers did not comply at all or only partially complied with visitation for 69 children (35.0%).
- Safety concerns were identified for 22 of the 117 children (18.8%) whose visitation was



Areas of Concern, continued

supervised or monitored by a contractor.

- There were aggravated circumstances at the time of removal for 26 youth (11.3%), however the plan remained reunification. In only 3 of the 26 children's case was expedited permanency sought (a court ruling that efforts to reunify were not necessary).
- Court permanency hearings did not occur for 11.5% of the children.
- The required court hearing to determine if a termination of parental rights petition should be filed did not occur for 41% of the children.
- Many children who have siblings were not having contact with those siblings (20.6%) and for many children it was unclear if sibling contacts were occurring (18.5%). Sibling bonds often are extremely important to children and youth in foster care and a lack of contact can be distressing.

Lessons Learned

DHHS and the Foster Care Review Board learned many lessons from this special study.

- Parental willingness needs to be assessed early, and parental compliance monitored throughout the case.
- Foster parents should be better prepared and supported for the unique challenges of caring for children with a disability.
- A consistent focus is needed on identifying cases of extreme abuse and requesting a hearing where a court may be able to find that efforts to reunify are not necessary.
- There needs to be a particular focus on strengthening placement knowledge.
- It is paramount to have a consistent, relentless focus on the best interest of the child if timely, appropriate permanency is to be achieved, and if children and youth are to be safe while in foster care and have their individual needs met.

Next Steps, On-going Efforts

From this special study, DHHS and the Foster Care Review Board identified important next steps, on-going efforts and partnerships that must continue to ensure that the best interests of foster children are being met. Joint monthly staffings are being held on the cases of the 230 children in the study. Many of these children's plans have now changed, and 29 of the children have left foster care.

In addition to finding permanent resolutions for more children and families, we have made a concerted effort in the past year to develop stronger relationships with others involved in child welfare, particularly the courts.

- DHHS, the courts, and the FCRB are focusing

on identifying those cases where courts can rule that DHHS can bypass efforts to reunify children with their parents in cases of severe abuse or neglect.

- The FCRB is identifying cases where guardians ad litem are not meeting the Supreme Court's guidelines for representation of children and youth. The FCRB is flagging this information for the judges responsible for those appointments.

- DHHS, the courts, and the FCRB are working on making the court's mandatory 12-month permanency hearings more meaningful.

The complete study can be found on-line at www.dhhs.ne.gov/fostercare.

Partners in Foster Care and Finding Permanent Homes

DHHS...Helping People Live Better Lives

Helping people live better lives is more than a mission statement. It's what employees do every day at the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

DHHS is made up of six Divisions: Behavioral Health, Children and Family Services, Developmental Disabilities, Medicaid and Long-Term Care, Public Health and Veterans' Homes. On any given day, approximately 6,500 children and their families receive child welfare services, including comprehensive safety assessments, safety planning and services, foster care and adoption services.



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ADA/AA/EOE

About the Foster Care Review Board

The State Foster Care Review Board's (FCRB) mission is to ensure the best interests of children in out-of-home care are being met through external citizen review, monitoring facilities that house children and youth, maintaining up-to-date data on a statewide tracking system, and disseminating data and recommendations through an Annual Report.

FCRB Logo

Special thanks to DHHS and Foster Care Review



Board staff for their dedication and willingness to work together on this study. Continued collaboration is key to help assure that Nebraskan's children in foster care reach timely, appropriate permanent homes, and that they are safe while in out-of-home care.