

The Nebraska Foster Care Review Office Quarterly Report

Submitted pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-1303(4)



Issued March 15, 2013

Executive Summary

This quarterly report is provided by the Foster Care Review Office pursuant to Neb. Rev. Statute §43-1303(4) to provide relevant data and other information to policy makers and child welfare stakeholders in order to improve conditions for children in out-of-home care.

Through an analysis of recent data the Foster Care Review Office has found the following positive trends:

- A significant decrease in the number of children (379 children) in out-of-home placements for the last half of 2012.
- A significant decrease in the number of children (600 children) in out-of-home placements when comparing December 31, 2011, to December 31, 2012.
- A significant decrease in the number of children placed in care for the first time having more than one caseworker (from 92% in 2011 to 86% in 2012).
- Of the children who entered out-of-home care for the first time in 2012, 14-16% exited out-of-home care in the same quarter of the year that they entered out-of-home care.
- Of the children who entered out-of-home care for the first time in 2011, 78% had exited out-of-home care by Feb. 2013, with 85–90% of these children reunified with parent(s).

However, the FCRO has also identified the following areas needing improvement:

- **Length of time in out-of-home care remains an issue.**
 - The average length of stay for children in out-of-home placements increased from 459 days in 2011 to 515 days in 2012. Statewide, 48% of these children had been in out-of-home care for over a year, with the Eastern Service Area averaging 53% of children and Southeast Service averaging 51% of children being placed out-of-home over a year.
 - 22% of the children who first entered out-of-home care during 2011 were still in care as of Feb. 24, 2013. This means that in 15 to 27 months the issues that led to these children's removal from the home had yet to be resolved.
 - Considering children that entered care for the first time during 2012, we find that children age 0-5 and children age 13-18 entered at the same rate. However, these populations are leaving out-of-home care at very different rates (29% of children age 0-5 have left out-of-home care, while 50% of children 13-18 have left care).
- **The rate of re-entry into out-of-home care needs to be reduced.**
 - The re-entry rate for all children returning to out-of-home placements across all Service Areas was 38%, which is consistent with prior years.
- **The number of placement changes need to be reduced.**
 - Statewide data shows that 46% of the children had 4 or more placements during their first time in out-of-home placement.

- Of the children who entered out-of-home care for the first time in 2012, children ages 0-5 had a smaller range in the number of placements (0-5) than children ages 13-18 (1-16) in the same time period.
- **Shelter placements are lasting too long.**
 - On December 31, 2012, there were 91 children in shelter placements with 89% of these children in the 13-18 age range. Only 33% of these youth were in shelter under one month and 37% of these children were in shelters 3 months or longer.
- **Caseworker changes remain an issue across all Service Areas and ages of children.**

The Foster Care Review Office has also identified the following issues with the data that is reported by DHHS to the FCRO:

- The current system of recording which caseworker or lead agency worker is assigned to a child is not consistently reliable. This impacts both the reporting of number of caseworker changes and caseload ratios.
- There needs to be a conduit for the FCRO to report to DHHS and/or NFC when we identify missing or inaccurate data on children's cases so data can be corrected quickly and to facilitate communication on data issues.
- There needs to be better use of automation, edits, and quality assurance reports in the DHHS system. This would improve accuracy and would flag omitted data elements for correction. We note that DHHS is working with the FCRO to enhance the automation of some reports DHHS is required to make to the FCRO tracking system. This will enable us to better utilize our data entry staff.

Therefore, **the FCRO makes the following recommendations to the child welfare system:**

- Continue improvements to ensure that positive trends persist.
- Collaborate with DHHS and private providers to determine why children are changing placements and what is needed to stabilize children's placements.
- Develop a plan to improve data systems.
- Complete a collaborative analysis of why youth are re-entering out-of-home care to determine next steps.
- Assure children age 13-18 and their families receive needed and age-appropriate services.
- Provide crisis stabilization services in three key areas: 1) as early intervention to prevent a child's removal from the home, 2) when youth transition home and maintain them safely in that home, and 3) to support foster homes and reduce placement disruptions.
- Complete a collaborative analysis of why time in out-of-home care is different across service areas. As part of this analysis, identify the factors that reduce time out-of-home care.

The Foster Care Review Office has a multitude of statistics available in addition to those found in this quarterly report.

Please feel free to contact us at the address below if there is a specific topic on which you would like more information, or check our website for past annual reports and other topics of interest.

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Introduction

The Foster Care Review Office's (FCRO) role under the Foster Care Review Act is to independently track children in out-of-home care, review children's cases, collect and analyze data related to the children, and make recommendations on conditions and outcomes for Nebraska's children in out-of-home care, including any needed corrective actions. The FCRO is an independent state agency, not affiliated with the Department of Health and Human Services, the Courts, or any other child welfare entity.

This quarterly report is provided pursuant to Neb. Rev. Statute §43-1303(4) to provide relevant data and other information to policy makers and child welfare stakeholders in order to improve conditions for children in out-of-home care. In addition to presenting a snapshot of all children in Out-Of-Home Care on December 31, 2012, the purpose of this report is to assess the extent to which data indicate that there are signs that the child welfare system is now stabilizing. To do so, we present data for a specific cohort of youth; youth who entered out-of-home care for the first time in 2012. An analysis of this specific cohort of children is important because it more accurately reflects the current system without the effects of changes (such as lead agency changes) that occurred prior to this time. Data for this 2012 cohort are then compared to the cohort of youth who entered out-of-home care for the first time in 2011.

Data quoted within this quarterly update to the Legislature are derived from the Foster Care Review Office's independent tracking system. Per Neb. Rev. Statute §43-1303 DHHS (whether by direct staff or contractors), courts, and child-placing agencies are required to report to the Foster Care Review Office any child's foster care placement, as well as changes in the child's status (for example, placement changes and worker changes). By comparing information from multiple sources the Foster Care Review Office is able to identify discrepancies. When case files of children are reviewed, previously received information is verified and updated, and additional information is gathered. Prior to individual case review reports being issued, additional quality control steps are taken.

This Report features the following sections:

- I. Analysis of All Children in Out-of-Home Care on December 31, 2012.
- II. Analysis of All Children Who Entered Out-of-Home Care in 2011 and 2012.

Section I. Analysis of All Children in Out-of-Home Care on December 31, 2012

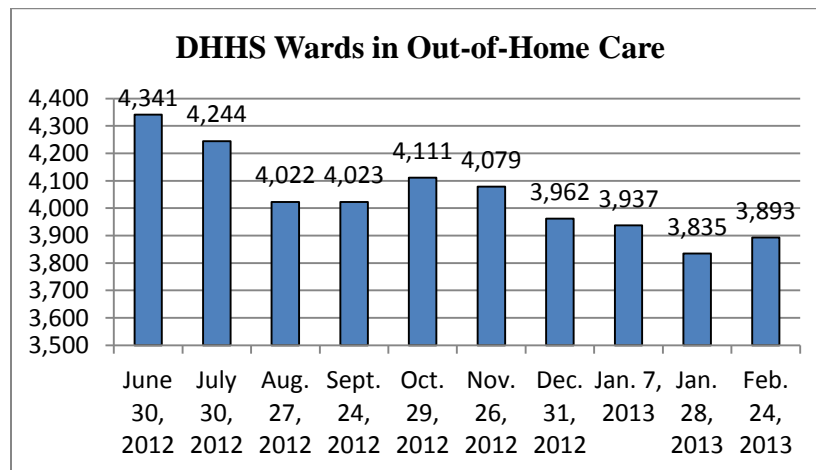
This section will provide an analysis for all children that were in out-of-home care as of December 31, 2012. This data includes all children that were removed prior to December 31, 2012, and who had not left out-of-home care by that date.

A. Trend Data

Youth in Out-Of-Home Care

As shown in the following chart featuring point-in-time data¹ the number of DHHS wards in out-of-home care **decreased significantly** during the last six months of 2012, with a slight decrease continuing into 2013. Part of the decline is due to fewer children entering out-of-home care as there were **over 600 more children who entered out-of-home care in 2011 than children who entered out-of-home care in 2012**. A comparison of each quarters for 2011 and 2012 show significantly less children entered out-of-home care during 2012 than during 2011. The percentages of children by age range remained consistent between 2011 and 2012. There are also differences in the rates of children returning home.

Both of these are very positive reasons but more detailed analysis would assist in identifying needed services. For example, what services can be put in place to prevent removals? A number of children return home quite quickly, so rapidly as to lead to questions regarding whether that child should have been removed from the home or not. In addition, we find that many children are re-entering care. Children re-entering care and children entering care for the first time may need different types of services. The Foster Care Review Office will continue a review of this trend data for each quarter of 2013.



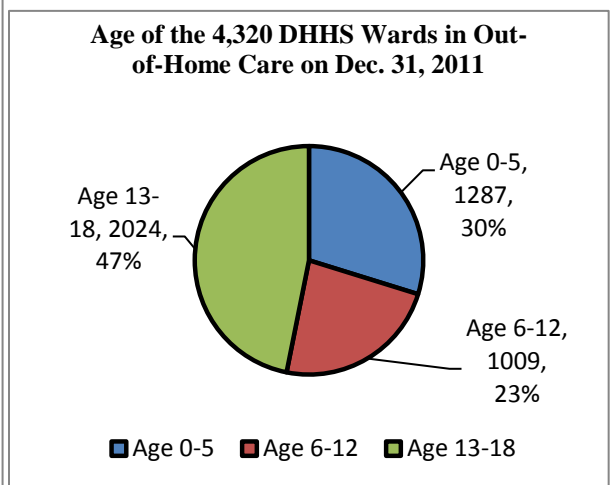
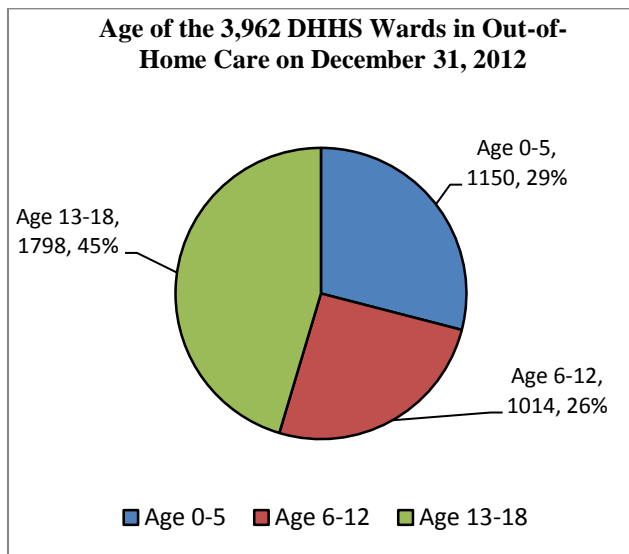
¹ Source for all statistics: Foster Care Review Office Independent Tracking System

Length of Time in Out-Of-Home Care and Placement Changes

Although the number of children in out-of-home care is decreasing, the length of time children may spend in out-of-home **is increasing**. Further, the number of placement changes for these children was not impacted by a decrease in out-of-home care numbers.

Additional Statistics of Interest				
Category	Dec. 31, 2011	June 30, 2012	Dec. 31, 2012	Comments
Number of children in out-of-home care	4,320	4,341	3,962	Point-in-time.
Average number of days (excluding prior removals) children had been in out-of-home care	459 days	485 days	515 days	The current median is 353 days. This may indicate that the children left in the system are from families less amenable to change. This trend impacts the number of re-reviews needed by the FCRO. ²
% of children with 4 or more lifetime placements	46%	50%	46%	
% of children in out-of-home care from area of current lead agency (Eastern)	44%	44%	43%	

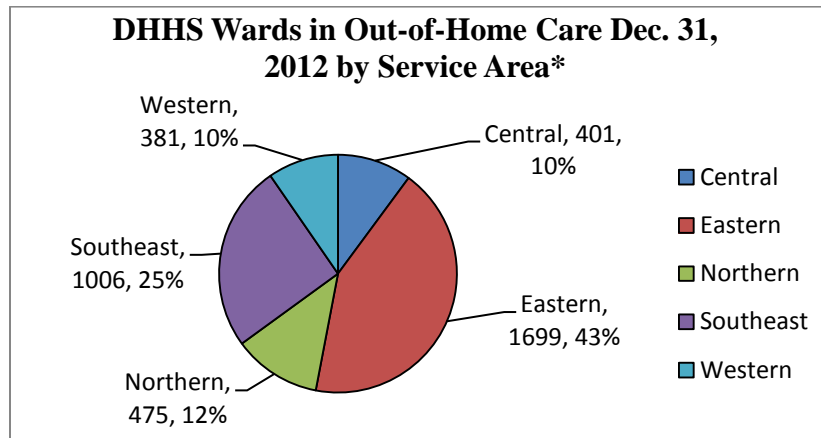
The age breakdowns of the children in out-of-home care have remained consistent. Resources need to be developed and targeted for the 13-18 age group since they comprise 45% of the children in out-of-home care.



² The Foster Care Review Office is to review children's cases at least once every six months for as long as the child is in out-of-home care.

Out-Of-Home Care by Service Area

Children in out-of-home care come from every area of the state. The chart below shows the number and percentage of children from each DHHS Service Area. The percentage of children from each service area has been consistent in 2011 and 2012. All charts in this document use the counties of each service area defined in LB 961 (2012):



*Throughout this document:

The Central Service Area includes Adams, Blaine, Boyd, Brown, Buffalo, Cherry, Custer, Franklin, Garfield, Greeley, Hall, Harlan, Holt, Howard, Kearney, Keya Paha, Loup, Phelps, Rock, Sherman, Valley, Webster, and Wheeler Counties.

The Eastern Service Area includes Douglas and Sarpy Counties.

The Northern Service area includes Antelope, Boone, Burt, Butler, Cedar, Colfax, Cuming, Dakota, Dixon, Dodge, Hamilton, Knox, Madison, Merrick, Nance, Pierce, Platte, Polk, Saunders, Seward, Stanton, Thurston, Washington, Wayne, and York Counties.

The Southeast Service area includes Cass, Clay, Fillmore, Gage, Jefferson, Johnson, Lancaster, Nemaha, Nuckolls, Otoe, Pawnee, Richardson, Saline, and Thayer Counties.

The Western Service Area includes: Arthur, Banner, Box Butte, Chase, Cheyenne, Dawes, Dawson, Deuel, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Garden, Gosper, Grant, Hayes, Hitchcock, Hooker, Keith, Kimball, Lincoln, Logan, McPherson, Morrill, Perkins, Red Willow, Scotts Bluff, Sheridan, Sioux, and Thomas Counties.

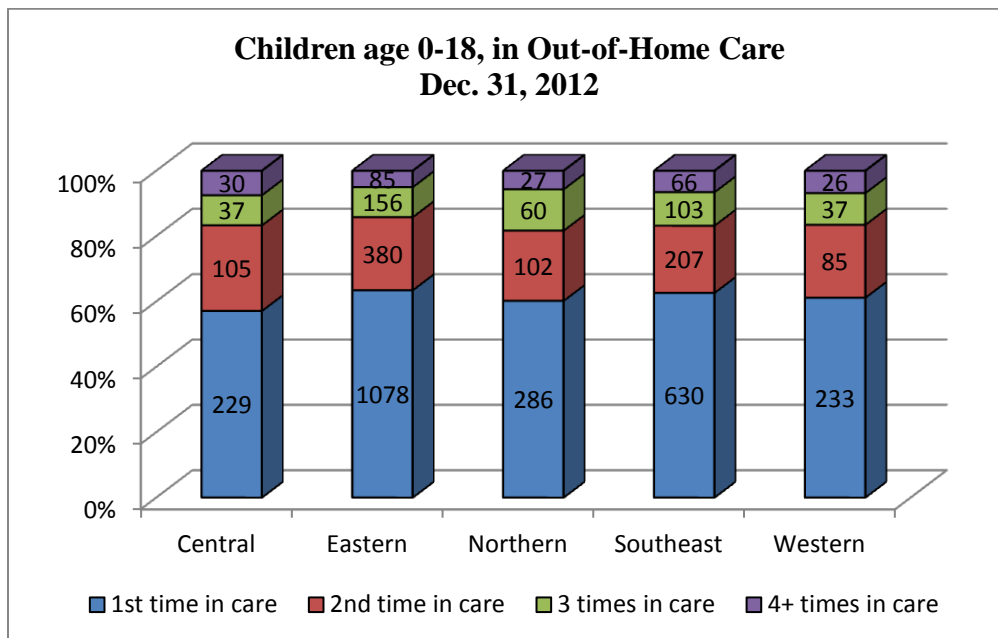
B. Data on Re-entry Rates

Next, we reviewed how many of the 3,962 children in out-of-home care on December 31, 2012, had previously been in out-of-home care. Every out-of-home entry is additional trauma for the child. There can be a number of reasons for re-entry, such as premature reunification, multiple mental health episodes, or the need for children to reintegrate prior abuse or neglect as they become adolescents.

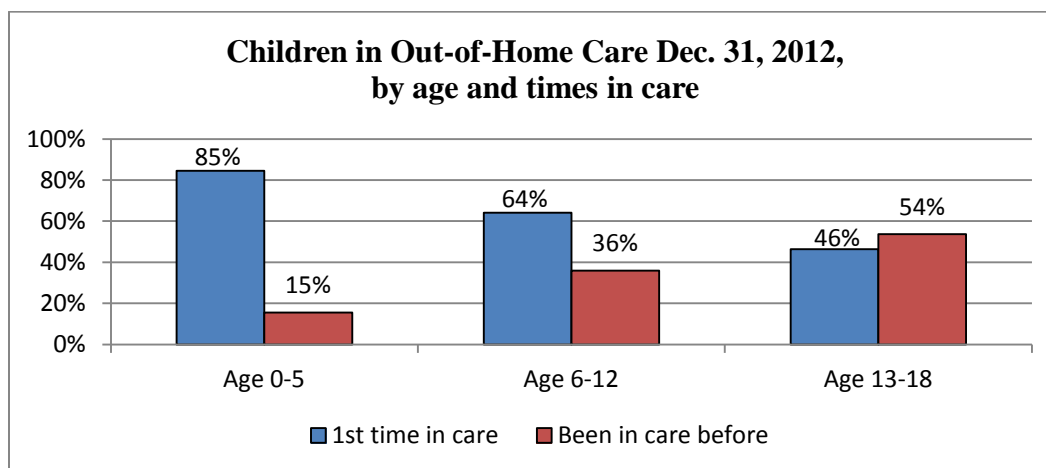
For **38% of the children** in out-of-home on December 31, 2012, **it was their second or more times placed in out-of-home care**. The data below shows that this issue is not new. More collaborative efforts are needed to determine the reasons for re-entry so as to avoid unnecessary repeat episodes of “in care.”

Statewide Percent of Children in Out of Home Care on Dec. 31 st who had been in care before				
2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
40%	39%	39%	37%	38%

This is true across each of the DHHS Service Areas. The chart that follows illustrates re-entries by geographic region and shows that children are re-entering out-of-home care at about the same rate in each of those regions.



As the data on the chart below illustrates, there are stark contrasts between the different age groups in terms of re-entry into out-of-home care. It is positive that fewer very young children (0-5 age group) experience multiple removals, but youth age 13-18 are experiencing a higher re-entry rate, signaling the need to develop age appropriate services.

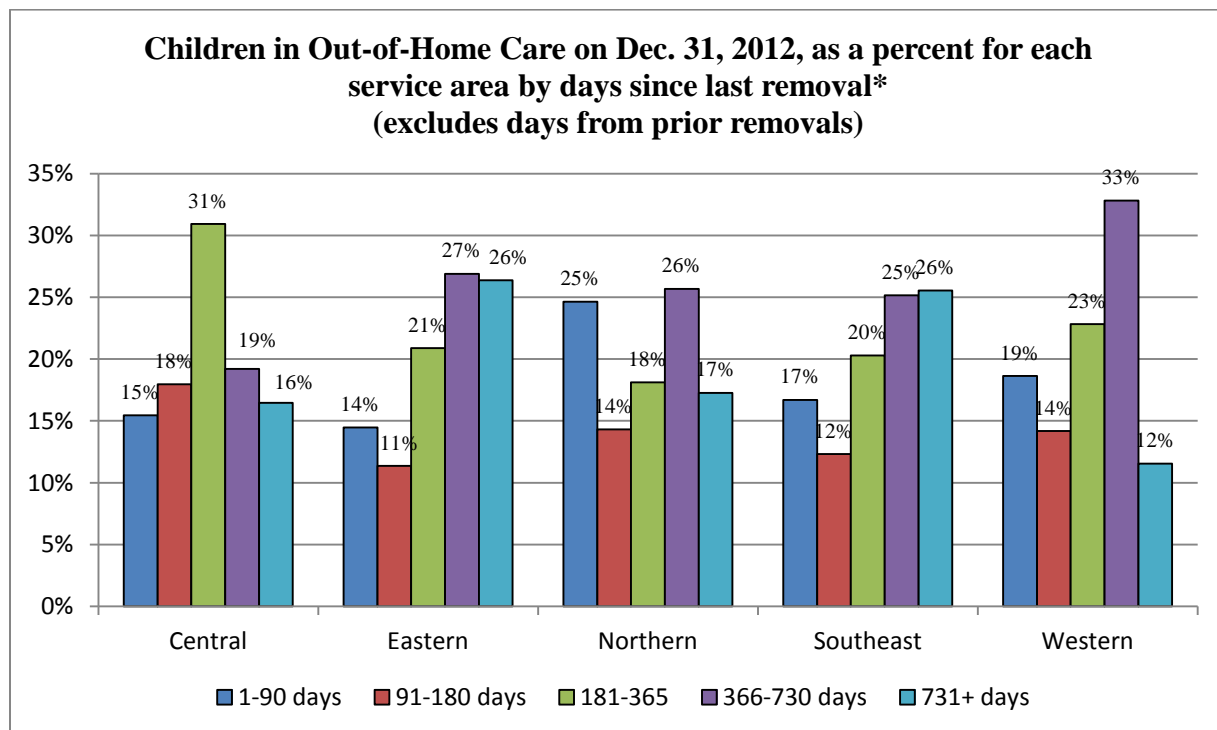


C. Data on Length of Out-of-Home Care

The Foster Care Review Office then analyzed the length of time that these 3,962 children had been placed in out-of-home placements. There is a wide variance in the number of days children remain in out-of-home care. One very concerning issue raised by this data is that **48% of the children had been placed in out-of-home care for over a year.** 70% of youth had been placed in out-of-home placement for more than six months (see the table below which shows the number of days in out-of-home care for DHHS wards who were in out-of-home care on December 31, 2012. The number of days in this chart does **not** include prior episodes in care.

Days since last removal		
Category	Children	Percentage
1-30 days	187 children	5%
31-60 days	233 children	6%
61-90 days	244 children	6%
91-180 days	511 children	13%
181-365 days	864 children	22%
366-730 days	1,027 children	26%
731+ days	<u>896 children</u>	<u>22%</u>
Total	3,962 children	100%

This information is presented below regarding length of stay by service area. Length of time in out-of-home care has been an issue for many years, and has not shown any improvement.



D. Data Regarding Number of Placements

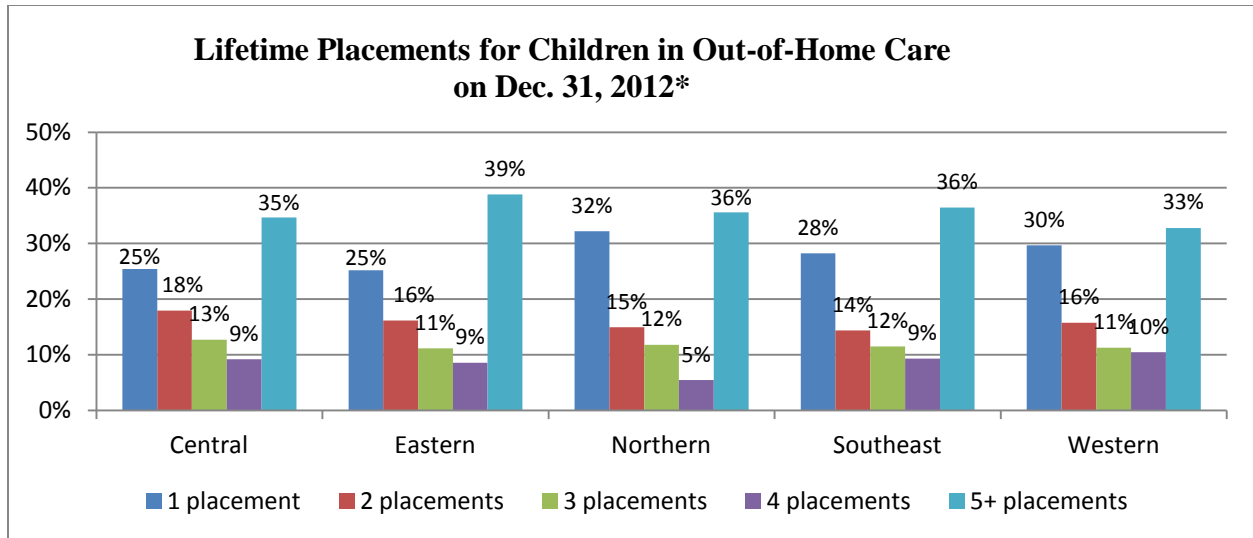
The number of placements for these 3,962 children that were in out-of-home care as of December 31, 2012, is also relevant. Children may be moved between placements (foster homes, group homes, special facilities) while in out-of-home care. Moves might be a positive thing in the case of a youth who needed a high level of care when he/she first entered care and is now progressing toward less restrictive, more family like care. Often moves are due to issues within the system rather than children's needs. In some instances, the cumulative additional turmoil of changing who they live with can be temporarily or permanently harmful for children.

The following chart shows DHHS wards in out-of-home care on Dec. 31, 2012, by the number of placements they have experienced in their lifetime. There is also a comparison regarding the number of placements for children as of December 31, 2011. There has been no significant change in the percentages below. In both years, approximately **46% of the children in out-of-home placement had 4 or more placements**. Positively, there was a slight increase in the number of children having only one placement. This analysis will continue each quarter to gauge improvements.

Lifetime placements (foster homes, group homes)

	In Out-of-Home Care on Dec. 31, 2011		In Out-of-Home Care Dec. 31, 2012	
	# of Youth	% of Youth	# of Youth	% of Youth
1 placement	1,071	25%	1,080	27%
2 placements	734	17%	623	16%
3 placements	511	12%	456	12%
4 placements	392	9%	343	9%
5-9 placements	950	22%	837	21%
10-19 placements	507	12%	466	12%
20-29 placements	122	3%	126	3%
30-39 placements	28	1%	26	1%
41 or more placements	<u>5</u>	<u>0%</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>0%</u>
Total	4,320	100%	3,962	100%

The following chart provides a comparison by DHHS Service Areas regarding placement stability. While there are some statistical differences between the Services Areas, each of the Service Areas continues to struggle in achieving placement stability. The **highest number of placements across all DHHS Service Areas was 5 + placements**.



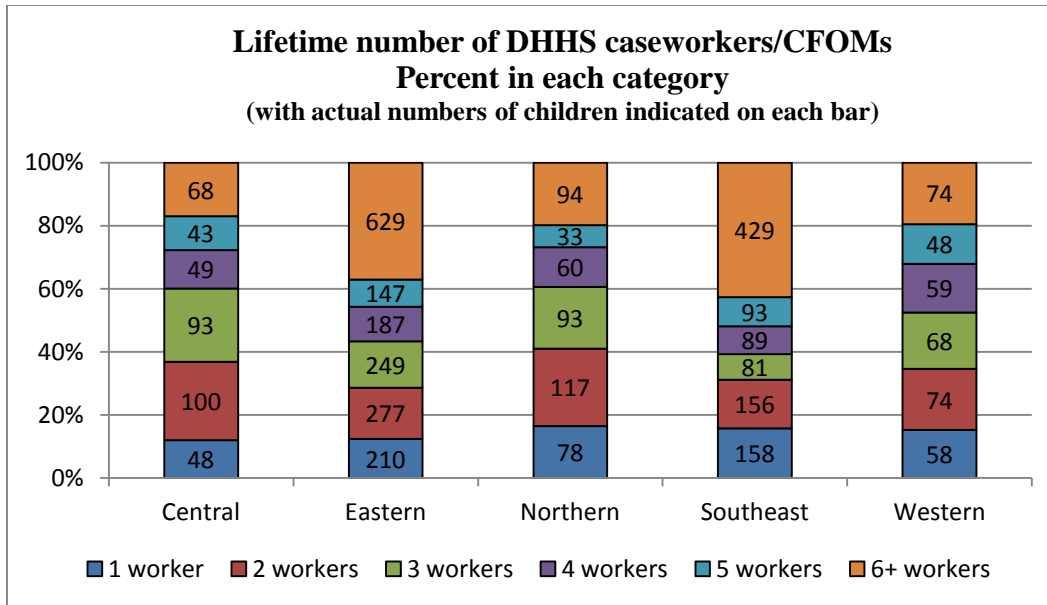
*Note that in most cases it is better for children to have fewer placements.

E. Data on Caseworker Changes per Youth

Some level of caseworker turnover is inevitable, but recent years have greatly increased the number of caseworker changes that children and families have experienced. Each change increases the likelihood of lost documentation and delays as caseworkers become familiar with the individual needs of those involved in each of their new cases.

The following shows the lifetime number of caseworker changes DHHS wards in care on Dec. 31, 2012, have experienced as reported by DHHS to the Foster Care Review Office. It includes both the number of children by worker changes and also the percent of the total cases for that service area. The category FPS (Family Permanency Specialist) changes refers to changes in lead agency workers.

The FCRO recently learned that there could be issues with how DHHS reports caseworker and FPS changes to the Foster Care Review Office. It is the understanding of the Foster Care Review Office that this information is generated from N-FOCUS by DHHS and there is no clear audit trail of case manager changes currently available on the N-FOCUS system. This does lead to the concern of the potential inaccurate reporting of changes, either under or over. A cleaner, clearer audit trail must be created on N-FOCUS or a manual process developed to properly report on this very important systems issue. The Foster Care Review Office is working with DHHS on this issue.



The charts which follow give more details on the information shown in the above graph. Please note the number of children with 6 or more workers in the Eastern and Southeast areas may be due, at least in part, to the multiple changes to lead agencies and assignments between DHHS and lead agencies in those regions.

	DHHS Caseworker of CFOM (DHHS Case Monitor) changes						FPS Changes
	Central	Eastern	Northern	Southeast	Western	Statewide	Omaha FPS
1 worker	12%	12%	16%	16%	15%	14%	16%
2 workers	25%	16%	25%	16%	19%	18%	20%
3 workers	23%	15%	20%	8%	18%	15%	17%
4 workers	12%	11%	13%	9%	15%	11%	16%
5 workers	11%	9%	7%	9%	13%	9%	12%
6+ workers	17%	37%*	20%	43%*	19%	33%	20%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

*This data is significantly higher for these two Service Areas. Youth in these areas remain in care longer, thus they are increasingly likely to have multiple workers.

While much of the data above is quite concerning, the chart below shows that in the past year there has been a **significant increase in the percentage of children with only one worker** while in out-of-home care. This is important because worker stability increases the likelihood of complete documentation of parental progress or lack thereof, which is important information that forms the evidence used by courts, DHHS, and other stakeholders to determine case direction. National research clearly shows that under stable case management children's cases tend to progress through the system faster.

The Foster Care Review Office commends everyone who has worked to reduce the number of worker changes that children and families experience.

Lifetime Number of Case Workers for Children in Out-of-Home Care				
	In Out-of-Home Care on Dec. 31, 2011		In Out-of-Home Care on Dec. 31, 2012	
1 DHHS worker	344	8%	552	14%
2 DHHS workers	726	17%	724	18%
3 DHHS workers	718	17%	584	15%
4 DHHS workers	608	14%	444	11%
5 DHHS workers	499	12%	364	9%
6 or more workers	<u>1,425</u>	33%	<u>1,294</u>	33%
Total	4,320	100%	3,962	100%

Changes in persons with whom they interact can be more traumatic for younger children, so we also looked at the number of caseworker changes specifically for children under age six. Many of these young children have experienced multiple worker changes.

	For Children Under the Age of Six DHHS caseworker or CFOM (DHHS case monitor) changes						FPS changes
	Central	Eastern	Northern	Southeast	Western	Statewide	Omaha FPS
1 worker	11%	13%	19%	15%	13%	14%	15%
2 workers	34%	23%	39%	19%	18%	25%	20%
3 workers	32%	22%	18%	7%	22%	19%	22%
4 workers	10%	13%	14%	10%	21%	13%	14%
5 workers	10%	8%	3%	12%	18%	9%	13%
6+ workers	<u>4%</u>	<u>21%</u>	<u>7%</u>	<u>37%</u>	<u>8%</u>	<u>20%</u>	<u>16%</u>
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

F. Data on Type of Placements

When children cannot safely live at home, then they need to live in the least restrictive, most home-like temporary foster placement possible in order for them to grow and thrive. The chart below compares where children in out-of-home care were living on December 31, 2011 and December 31, 2012. **In 2012, Foster and relative homes, the least restrictive, account for 71% of children that are placed out-of-home** (47% in foster homes and 24% with relatives). This is comparable to data from 2011 which showed similar percentages, except for a decrease of 4% in the children placed in a group home setting during 2012 compared to 2011.

Types of Placement for Children in Out-of-Home Care on Dec. 31, 2011 and 2012				
Type	Number of Children December 31, 2011	Percentage of Children December 31, 2011	Number of Children December 31, 2012	Percentage of Children December 31, 2012
Foster homes	1,987	46%	1,855	47%
Relatives	1,053	24%	945	24%
Group homes	650	15%	434	11%
Detention/YRTC	369	9%	314	8%
Psych. Residential Treatment Facility (PRTF)	27*	< 1%*	129 *	3%*
Institute for Mental Disease	n/a	n/a	2	< 1%
Other psychiatric	n/a	n/a	19	< 1%
Emergency shelter	72	2%	91	2%
Runaway	99	2%	80	2%
Independent living	44	1%	40	1%
Other	<u>19</u>	<u><1%</u>	<u>53</u>	<u>1%</u>
Total	4,320	100%	3,962	100%

* PRTF became a placement type in July 2011, with some placements meeting that licensing criteria thereafter. This is part of the reason for the difference between 2011 and 2012. Coding issues due to the timing of the availability of the new placement type code also played a role.

G. Data on Shelter Care Placements

Some children are placed in an emergency shelter pending a more permanent foster placement. Best practice would be for shelters to be used for a short period of time. Unfortunately, that doesn't always occur; 37% of placements are for a time period of three months or longer.

On December 31, 2012, there were 91 children in shelter placement. Shelter placements are predominantly used for youth aged 13-18 (89%). Youth aged 6-12 comprised only 8.8% of placements and youth aged 0-5 comprised only 2.2% of shelter placements.

The length of stay in shelters was then analyzed. There was no statistically significant difference between Service Areas. It is unacceptable for children to be in shelter care for months on end.

<u>Days in shelter</u>	<u>Central</u>	<u>Eastern</u>	<u>Northern</u>	<u>Southeast</u>	<u>Western</u>	<u>Statewide</u>
Under 1 month	2	12	8	5	3	30 (33%)
1-2 months	2	8	7	6	4	27 (30%)
3 months or longer	<u>3</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>34 (37%)</u>
Total Number	7	33	23	19	9	91
Total Percent	7.6%	36.3%	25.3%	20.9%	9.9%	100%

DHHS is in the process of instituting changes in the usage of shelter placements. As of July 1, 2013, shelter placements are to add a triage and assessment component to assist in determining appropriate placement matches for the children, that is a placement best suited to meet the individual child's needs. Also, children can only remain in shelter placement for 20 days and any longer time period requires Director approval. FCRO finds these are positive changes.

Section II. Analysis of All Children Who Entered Out-of-Home Care for First Time in 2011 and 2012

Are there signs that Nebraska’s child welfare system is now stabilizing? To examine this we looked at youth who entered care during 2011 for the first time and 2012 for the first time. These cohorts of youth do not include children that had been placed in out-of-home placement prior to January 1, of each year or children who were removed in these years but it was their second or more removal to out-of-home care. An analysis of these two specific cohorts of children is important because it more accurately reflects the current system without the effects of prior removals.

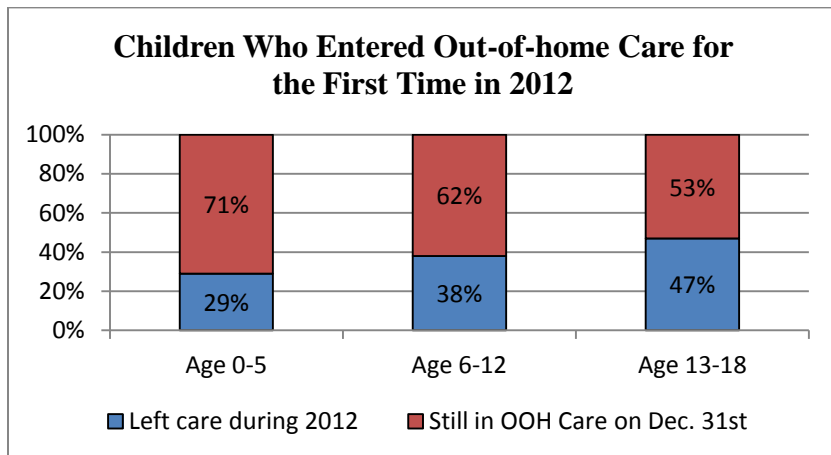
Data indicate that the number of children placed out-of-home did decrease in the second and third quarter of 2012 but again increased during the last quarter. There was an equal distribution between children ages 0-5 and children ages 13-18.

Children entering out-of-home care for the first time in 2012				
Quarter entered out-of-home care	Total #	Age 0-5	Age 6-12	Age 13-18
First Quarter Jan-March 2012	547	210	119	218
Second Quarter Apr-June 2012	466	175	81	210
Third Quarter July-Sept. 2012	445	173	103	169
Fourth Quarter Oct-Dec. 2012	<u>535</u>	<u>208</u>	<u>139</u>	<u>188</u>
Total	1,993	766 (38%)	442 (23%)	785 (39%)

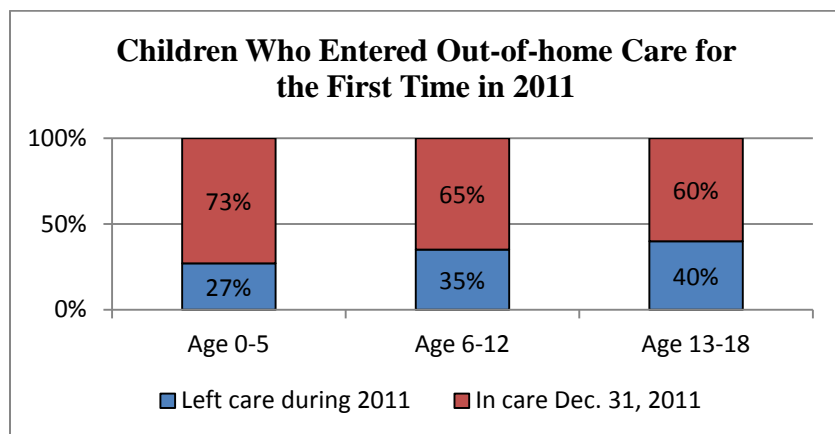
We also compared this to statistics for 2011. As you can see, in 2011 there were 2,625 children who entered out-of-home care for the first time. In 2012, there were 1,993 children who entered care for the first time, a decrease of 632 children from the prior year. The percentage in care by age group remained the same.

Children entering out-of-home care for the first time in 2011				
Quarter entered out-of-home care	Total #	Ages 0-5	Ages 6-12	Ages 13-18
First Quarter Jan-March 2011	682	254	136	295
Second Quarter Apr-June 2011	600	235	138	227
Third Quarter July-Sept. 2011	672	263	133	276
Fourth Quarter Oct-Dec. 2011	<u>671</u>	<u>242</u>	<u>146</u>	<u>283</u>
Total	2,625	994 (38%)	553 (21%)	1,081 (41%)

The following shows how many children by age entered care in 2012 had left care by Dec. 31, 2012 and how many remained in out-of-home care.



A similar cohort of children who entered care for the first time in 2011 was examined, and the percent that left care within the year are shown in the chart below. The only statistical difference between the years was in the 13-18 age range, due to more of those children leaving out-of-home care.



Another disturbing statistic is that of the **children that had exited out-of-home care during 2011, 22% of these children had incurred a subsequent time in out-of-care by Feb. 24, 2013.** Further research is needed to determine whether and how children’s age affects re-entry.

A. Data on Caseworker Changes for Children Removed in 2012

The Foster Care Review Office specifically wanted to analyze caseworker changes for children entering out-of-home care for the first time in 2012 since most of the transition of case management from/to lead agencies occurred by March 1, 2012. As discussed in the previous

section, caseworker stability is tied to better documentation and shorter lengths of stay in foster care.

When we compared all children in care in 2012 to those removed for the first time in 2012, we found that there was a significant increase in the number of children with only one or two caseworkers in each DHHS Service Area. There was a **7-10% increase**. There was a very slight increase in the number of children in out-of-home care having one or two FPS workers for children for the same time period.

From the data below, it is clear that some areas are doing much better than the statewide average and others are doing worse. At least part of the reason for this is that the Eastern and Southeast areas, which are the most populous, also have recently had significant changes in who is assigned to children's cases. For example, in Southeast the previous lead agency withdrew, so those children's cases were subsequently assigned to DHHS workers, thus increasing the total number of workers assigned to their case. We did not compare this cohort to 2011 due to the lead agency changes that happened during that year which affected the statistics.

This cohort of youth will continue to be monitored during 2013 to see what impact the length of out-of-home placement for a child has on the number of caseworkers. Historically, the longer a child is placed out-of-home, the more caseworkers have been assigned to the child's case.

	DHHS caseworker or CFOM (DHHS case monitor) changes 2012						FPS Changes
	Central	Eastern	Northern	Southeast	Western	Statewide	Omaha FPS
1 worker*	15%	17%	23%	22%	21%	19%	18%
2 workers	34%	21%	33%	22%	25%	24%	21%
3 workers	28%	18%	24%	7%	16%	17%	18%
4 workers	14%	12%	10%	9%	15%	11%	14%
5 workers	5%	7%	3%	8%	14%	8%	10%
6+ workers	5%	24%**	6%	33%**	8%	21%	18%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

*The percentages with one worker are significantly better for children who entered for the first time in 2012 as compared to all children in out-of-home care as would be expected. The longer children remain in care the more likely it is that they will experience worker changes.

**This data is significantly higher for these two Service Areas.

B. Data on Placement Changes for Children Removed in 2012

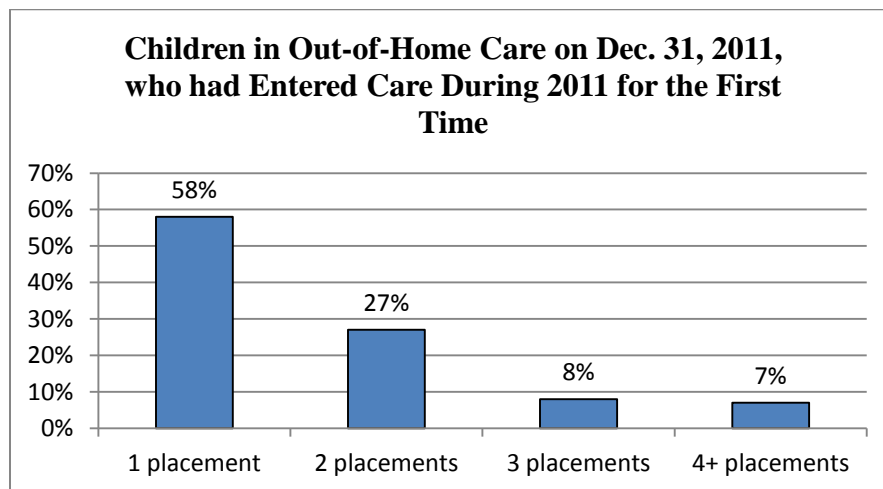
Nothing is more important to a child than where they live. While some changes may be due to youth moving from more intensive levels of care to more family like levels, often changes in placements (foster homes, group homes, other living arrangements) can be traumatic, can impact the child's education, and are made due to systemic issues.

The following chart details the number of placement changes for children that were placed in out-of-home care Dec. 31, 2012, who had entered care for the first time in 2012. Section “C” details these placement changes by age of the children. It is difficult to compare this data to the data for all youth, as the longer youth are in care the more likely it is that they will experience placement changes.

Placement Changes by Percentages of Youth For Youth Removed for the First Time in 2012						
	Central	Eastern	Northern	Southeast	Western	Statewide
1 placement	50%	50%	64%	56%	64%	55%
2 placements	31%	31%	25%	26%	27%	28%
3 placements	13%	10%	6%	10%	5%	9%
4+ placements	5%	9%	5%	8%	4%	9%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

The chart above is significantly better than the picture of all youth in care given earlier (see page 11). This is to be expected as many of the youth in care on Dec. 31, 2012, had been in care previously. The more time children spend out-of-home the greater the likelihood of multiple placements.

The following chart from 2011, while not exactly the same cohort as in the previous chart, indicates that there was not much difference from 2011 to 2012 in this regard.



C. Data on Length of Stay, Caseworker Changes

To determine if there were significant differences by age group, we looked at children age birth-5, age 6-12, and age 13-18 that were removed for the first time during 2012. Some key points are:

- 50% of children ages 0-5 who entered in the first quarter of 2012 were still in out-of-home care on Feb. 24, 2013, as were 45% of those ages 6-12. However, only 28% of those ages 13-18 remained in care.
- Children ages 0-5 had a smaller range in the number of placements (1-5) than children ages 13-18 (1-16) did in the same time period.
- The range of number of caseworkers remained consistent across age groups, as did the range of lead agency staff assigned to children's cases.
- About 14-16% of all children exited out-of-home care in the same quarter that they entered out-of-home care. The original reason for entering out-of-home care needs to be researched to determine whether these children could have remained home.
- Children who cannot return home safely shortly after removal are likely to remain in out-of-home care for a significant period of time; for example 50% of the children entering care during the first quarter of 2012 were still in care Feb. 24, 2013.

Age	# of Children	Children Entering Each Quarter of 2012					
		Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4	Left care	Remaining in care on Feb. 24, 2013
Age 0-5	766	210 (27%)	175 (23%)	173 (23%)	208 (27%)	288 (38%)	478 (62%)
Age 6-12	442	119 (27%)	81 (18%)	103 (23%)	139 (31%)	196 (44%)	246 (56%)
Age 13-18	785	218 (28%)	210 (27%)	169 (22%)	188 (24%)	427 (54%)	358 (46%)
Total	1,993	547 (27%)	466 (23%)	445 (22%)	535 (27%)	911 (46%)	1,082 (54%)

We next examined children who entered care for the first time during 2011 to children who entered care for the first time in 2012. Sadly, **22% of the children placed in out-of-home care during 2011 were still in an out-of-home care placement** as of Feb. 24, 2013. This is unacceptable.

Another disturbing statistic is that of the **children that had exited out-of-home care during 2011, 22% of these children had incurred a subsequent time in out-of-care in 2012.** This is a high rate of children returning to out-of-home within a year's time.

D. Where Children Go When They Leave Out-of-Home Care

We also looked at the reasons that children left care. Please note that few adoptions could be completed on children who had recently entered foster care. For example, even if the parents had voluntarily relinquished rights to the children, by law an adoption could not be completed until the children had lived with the potential adoptive parents for at least six months. This is why the adoption percentages in the charts below are so low.

Children who Entered and Exited Care in 2012 by Reason for Exit						
Reason for Exiting in 2012						
When entered	Total Left Care	Reunification with parents	Adoption	Guardianship	Becoming age of majority*	Other
1 st Qtr 2012	296	260 (88%)	7 (2%)	5 (2%)	8 (3%)*	16 (5%)
2 nd Qtr 2012	213	199 (93%)	0	2 (1%)	2 (1%)*	10 (5%)
3 rd Qtr 2012	154	140 (91%)	0	8 (5%)	1 (<1%)*	5 (3%)
4 th Qtr 2012	96	83 (86%)	0	1 (1%)	2 (2%)*	10 (10%)
Total	759	682 (90%)	7 (1%)	16 (2%)	13 (2%)*	41 (5%)

* The youth show here as reaching age of majority had entered out-of-home care for the first time while age 18 (a rare occurrence), thus these totals are not reflective of the total number of youth who exit foster care each year due to reaching the legal age of majority (age 19).

Children who Entered and Exited Care in 2011 by Reason for Exit						
Reason for Exiting in 2011						
When entered	Total Left Care	Reunification with parents	Adoption	Guardianship	Becoming age of majority	Other
1 st Qtr	302	270 (95%)	6 (2%)	11 (4%)	5 (2%)*	10 (3%)
2 nd Qtr	197	173 (88%)	1 (<1%)	7 (4%)	2 (1%)*	14 (7%)
3 rd Qtr	137	130 (95%)	0	3 (2%)	2 (1%)*	2 (1%)
4 th Qtr	87	85 (98%)	0	0	1 (1%)*	1 (1%)
Total	723	658 (91%)	7 (1%)	21 (3%)	10 (1%)*	27 (4%)

* The youth show here as reaching age of majority had entered out-of-home care for the first time while age 18 (a rare occurrence), thus these totals are not reflective of the total number of youth who exit foster care each year due to reaching the legal age of majority (age 19).

The data in the charts above confirm that most Nebraska children who enter out-of-home care are reunited with their parents.

This is important to recognize as Nebraska examines how it may be able to prevent some removals, as consideration is given to the services needed by children in out-of-home care to

address past traumas and the services needed by the parents, and as consideration is given to the types of supports that are needed to ensure that reunifications are successful and re-entries into care are significantly reduced.

The Foster Care Review Office looks forward to continuing our collaboration with the Department of Health and Human Services, the Courts, and the other stakeholders to address the issues identified in this update and in our annual report.