

Definition of Indicator

When the Juvenile Court determines that a child cannot safely remain with his or her own family, the Social Services Agency (SSA) identifies a placement for the child. Relative/guardian care is the primary placement considered in order to comply with state law and best practice of placing children in the least restrictive, most family-like setting.¹ If relatives are not available, the next best option is a non-related extended family member (NREFM). If relatives and NREFMs are not available, SSA may place the child in a county licensed foster home (FFH) or a home provided by a Foster Family Agency (FFA). FFA homes are provided by certified non-profit agencies licensed by the State to develop and supervise specialized foster homes for the placement of children who require a higher level of care due to emotional or behavioral problems. Finally, a child with even more significant behavioral issues may be temporarily placed in a group home or other residential setting to meet their treatment needs.

Findings

In April 2009, there were a total of 2,655 children in out-of-home placements.

Of the 2,655 youth in out-of-home care, children age 6 and younger represented the largest group with 1,129 (42.5%). Among all children in out-of-home care, most resided with relatives or guardians, 1,377 (52%). There were 629 (24%) children in FFA Certified Home placements. County Licensed Foster Family Homes cared for 249 (9%) children, and there was a total of 169 (6%) children in group homes.

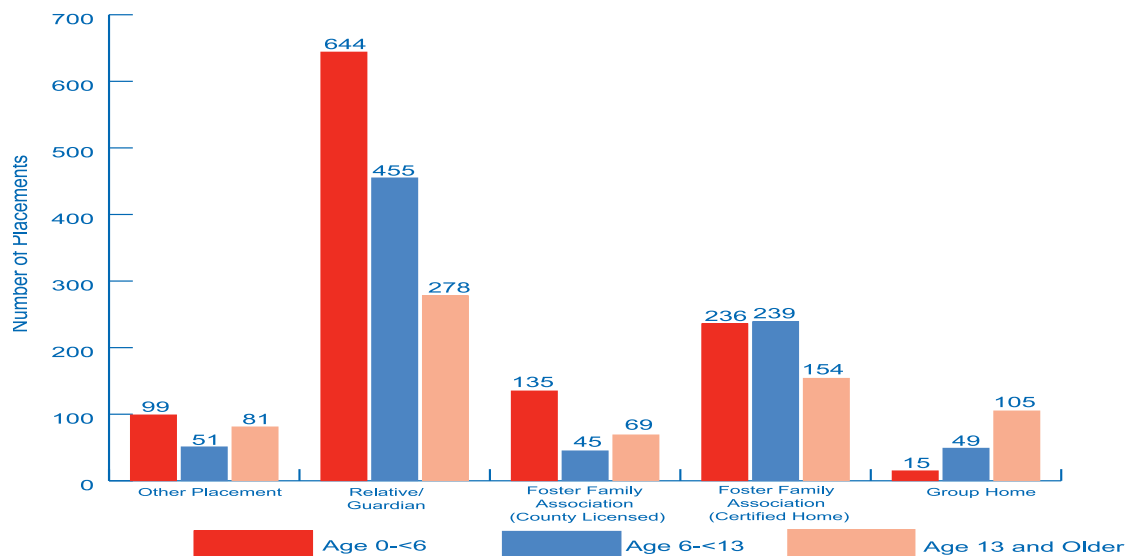
STATEWIDE:

As of July 2008, there were 65,385 children 0 to 17 years of age in child welfare supervised foster care, a rate of 6.5 children per 1,000. This is a 9.8% decrease from last year's 72,557 children.¹

RELATED INDICATORS:

- Child Abuse Reports
- Dependency Petitions
- Adoptions
- Dependents of the Court

Foster Care Placements by Type and Age Range, April 2009



Trends

There was a 24.3% decline in the number of children placed in foster care from 3,509 in April 2000 to 2,655 in April 2009, based on an annual point-in-time comparison. Over the same time period, there was a 4.2% increase in the number of children placed with a relative (1,321 in 2000 to 1,377 in 2009) and a 73.7% decrease in the number of children placed in a group home (642 in 2000 to 169 in 2009). However, in the last year (2008 to 2009) the percent of children placed with a relative or guardian decreased slightly from 54% to 52%.

Why is this Important?

Foster care is designed to be a necessary but temporary service until permanency* can be achieved. This is coupled with the vision of placing children in the best familial environment. However, there are many challenges compounding the provision of time-limited foster care services. For instance, there is a shortage of suitable placement options - the most critical shortages faced are in the areas of 1) licensed family foster care; 2) Orange County community-based care; 3) placements that can take sibling sets; and 4) caregivers willing to take on the special challenges presented by teenagers. As a result, more children have to be placed in FFAs, group home, and other residential placements outside Orange County, often at increased support costs.

What's Happening in Orange County?

Orange County Children and Family Services endorses the Family-to-Family principle that every child in foster care deserves to reside in a safe and stable family setting that preserves neighborhood and community connections. SSA continues to support efforts to keep children with siblings and in family-like settings in their own neighborhoods and schools. Additionally, SSA continues to divert children from shelter care, reduce the number of placements children experience, and lessen reliance on group (congregate) care resources.

- From 2003 to 2009 there were striking declines in the number of children residing in group home settings.
- The same time period has shown an increase in the proportion of children in foster care placed with relatives or non-related extended family members (NREFMs).
- First Step Assessment Center was established in 2003 to locate and qualify relatives as caregivers in order to reduce the number of children entering Orangewood Children's Home.

What's working:

- A Field Response Protocol that dispatches a social worker to assist police officers has reduced the number of child protective removals initiated by law enforcement.
- In 2007/08, SSA's First Step Assessment Center, and Placement and Diversion programs successfully diverted more than 40% of children from entering Orangewood Children's Home by locating and qualifying relatives as caregivers when placement was necessary.
- Expanded foster care recruitment and training and support efforts such as Parent Resources for Information, Development, and Education (PRIDE) training have increased placement resources and stability.
- Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC) is a community-based treatment model that is an alternative to group home or residential placement. MTFC uses specialized treatment foster homes to stabilize the youth's behavior while at the same time preparing the child's family for the youth's transition home and back to the community.
- Menu of in-home intervention services available to families and social workers are allowing children to safely return home earlier from foster care. The services are Wraparound, Multi-disciplinary Treatment Foster Care and Court Returned Intensive Supervision Program.

 See page 183 in Supplemental Tables for additional data

NATIONWIDE:

The number of children in foster care has decreased steadily over the past 7 years, from 552,000 in 2000 to 496,000 in 2007.²

DATA SOURCE:

Orange County Social Services Agency

NOTES:

¹University of California at Berkeley, Center for Social Services Research, Child Welfare Supervised Foster Care, 2008

²U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, 2009

*Permanency is defined as achieved when the child is reunited with the family, placed with a legal guardian, or adopted.