CHILD WELFARE IN CALIFORNIA

Facts At A Glance

- More than 700,000 children come into contact with California's child welfare system annually.[1]
- On any given day, more than 175,000 children are in contact with the child welfare system.[2]
- More than 86,000 children are in foster care in 2004. That compares to 108,000 children who were in foster care in 2000.[2]
- Of the children in foster care, about 19,000 will reunify with their parents and 8,000 will be adopted during the course of a year.[2]
- Most children entering foster care (76%) were removed from their homes for neglect-related reasons.[2]
- Of children who enter foster care, more than 50% are age 5 or under.[2]
- Every year, California county child welfare agencies receive more than one-half million reports of suspected child abuse and neglect. Of these referrals, the vast majority of the cases receive no services, despite assessments that indicate families would benefit from services and support to prevent child abuse and neglect.[3]
- Approximately one-third of telephone hotline referrals are re-referrals of the same families from the previous year.[4]
- Many children cycle through the foster care system more than once and experience multiple placements. Of the children who entered foster care in 2000 and remained in care for 12 months, 35% experienced three or more placements.[5]
- Out of all children who first entered foster care in 1998, about 57% were reunified, 16% were adopted and 10% were still in care five years after coming into care.[5]
- About 51% of children in foster care in California have been in care for over two years. As these children remain longer in care, their likelihood of being reunified decreases, thus requiring that other forms of permanency be explored (i.e., adoption, legal guardianship).[5]
- In recent years, about 40% of all children first entering foster care in California live primarily in a relative care placement. These children are more likely to be placed with their siblings, less likely to have multiple foster care placements and more likely to maintain their living situation and family relationships when they turn 18 than children who are placed with non-relatives.[5]
- The federal system for funding child welfare services at the state and county levels provides open-ended funding for children and youth who are in foster care, but caps funds for prevention and early intervention efforts. These funding restrictions result in the states and counties having significantly more funds available for placing children into out-of-home care - as opposed to funding programs that could reduce the need for child welfare services in the first place.

- National and other studies show that of youth who emancipate from foster care:
  - 75% work below grade level[6]
  - 46% do not complete high school[7]
  - 51% are unemployed[7]
  - 10 to 25% are homeless[7]
- In 2002, 7% of California's children were African American, but this group constituted 29% of the children under child welfare services jurisdiction and 33% of the children in supervised out-of-home care.[8]
- Conservative estimates of the cost of abuse and neglect to U.S. society each year are staggering: $25 billion in direct costs (i.e., hospitalization, mental health treatment, and police services) is compounded by $69 billion for indirect costs such as juvenile delinquency, adult criminality and lost productivity to society.[9]
- African American children in California are more likely than white or Latino children to be reported for abuse and, if they are reported, are more likely to be placed in foster care, particularly if they are infants. They also are less likely to be reunified and adopted than children of other races.[10]

SOURCES:

[1] Center for Social Services Research, University of California, Berkeley. Unpublished Data.

[2] Needell, B., Webster, D., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Armijo, M., Lee, S., Lery, B., Shaw, T., Dawson, W., Piccus, W., Magruder, J., & Kim, H. (2004). *Child Welfare Services Reports for California.*

[3] California Department of Social Services, Research and Development Division. 2000 Case Dispositions.

[4] California Department of Social Services, Re-referral Trend Implications 1999-2001 (Research conducted with standardized decision-making counties).

[5] Needell, B., Webster, D., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Armijo, M., Lee, S., Lery, B., Shaw, T., Dawson, W., Piccus, W., Magruder, J., & Kim, H. (2004). *Child Welfare Services Reports for California.*

[6] Taylor, J. (1973). *Remedial education of children in foster care.* Child Welfare, Vol. 52.

[7] Cook, R. (1992). *A national evaluation of Title IV-E foster care independent living programs for youth: phase 2,* Rockville, MD: Westat.

[8] Needell, B., Webster, D., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Armijo, M., Lee, S., Lery, B., Shaw, T., Dawson, W., Piccus, W., Magruder, J., & Kim, H. (2004). *Child Welfare Services Reports for California.*

[9] Fromm, Suzette (2001). *Total Estimated Cost of Child Abuse and Neglect in the United States.* Statistical Evidence.

[10] Needell, B., Webster, D., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Armijo, M., Lee, S., Lery, B., Shaw, T., Dawson, W., Piccus, W.,Magruder, J., & Kim, H. (2004). *Child Welfare Services Reports for California.*