



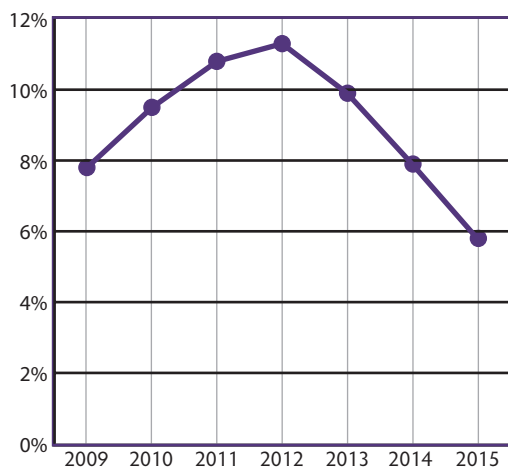
Five Findings from the 2015 *B.H.* Monitoring Report

The Children and Family Research Center (CFRC) produces the annual monitoring report of the *B.H.* consent decree, which tracks the performance of the Illinois child welfare system in achieving its stated goals of child safety, permanency, and well-being for children in or at risk of entering foster care. The full report, available on the CFRC website, contains information about Illinois performance on more than 40 measures over the past seven years. This brief highlights five key findings from the FY2016 report, which tracks performance through the end of FY2015.

1. Emergency Shelter Use Declines

The use of emergency shelters as substitute care placements was highlighted as a critical issue for the Illinois child welfare system in a series of articles published in the Chicago Tribune in December 2014. A 2015 report by an independent panel of experts also found that the prolonged use of shelter care placements “harms and exposes children to unacceptable levels of risk and leads to feelings of demoralization and helplessness” (Testa, Naylor, Vincent, & White, 2015, p. 12-13). Because of the increased interest in this issue, CFRC examined the use of emergency shelters more closely by separating them from other types of congregate care settings. As shown in Figure 1, the percentage of children initially placed in emergency shelters increased sharply from 2009 to 2012, when 11.3% of all children entering care were placed in an emergency shelter. Since then, however, the number has declined to 5.8%, which is positive news.

Figure 1. Percentage of Children Initially Placed in Emergency Shelters



2. Child Maltreatment in Substitute Care Continues to Climb

Children in substitute care should be safe from additional maltreatment, and CFRC monitors the percentage of children in substitute care who experience a substantiated report during their placement (see Figure 2). Twenty years ago, slightly over 2.0% of children in substitute care had a substantiated maltreatment report while in care. The rate declined in the late 1990s to around 1.5% and remained at that level for about a decade. Since 2007, the rate of maltreatment in care has shown a clear upward trajectory, and the rate in 2015 is at its highest level in the past 20 years (2.6%).

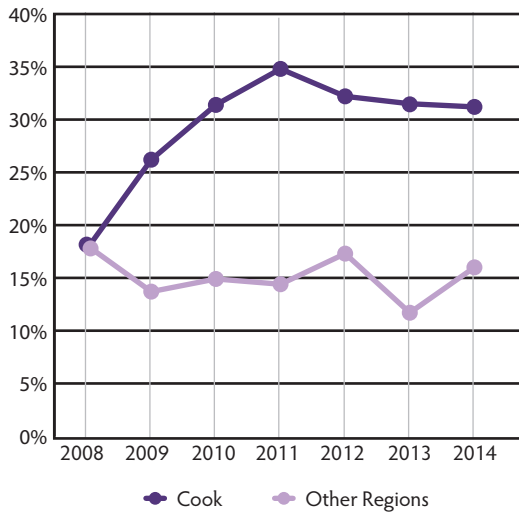
Figure 2. Children Maltreated in Substitute Care



3. High Rates of Runaway Children in the Cook Region

After a child is removed from her home because of abuse or neglect, the state assumes care for that child. If that child then runs away from care, she is no longer protected and is at much higher risk of harm, including human trafficking. CFRC tracks the number and percentage of children age 12 and older who run away from care each year. In 2008, the percentage of children who ran away from their placement was roughly equal in the Cook region and the balance of the state. Since that year, however, runaway rates in the Cook region have risen dramatically, peaking in 2011 at 34.8%. Although the runaway rate in the Cook region has declined slightly since then (31.2% of children entering care in 2014 ran away), the rates are still much higher than in non-Cook regions.

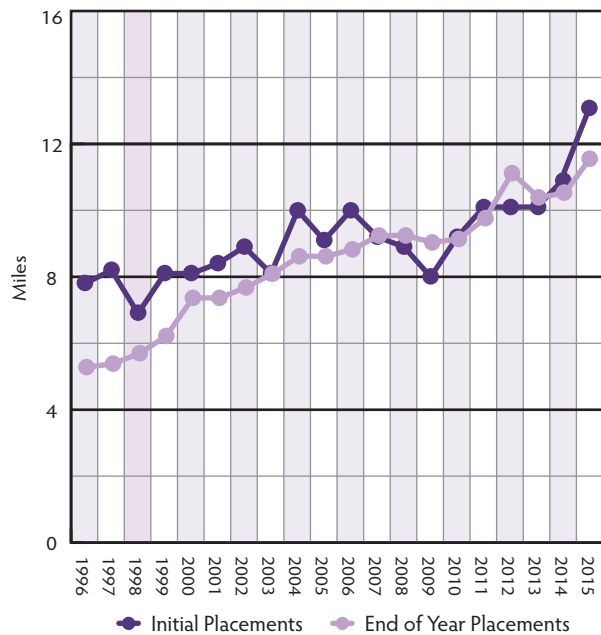
Figure 3. Children who Run Away from Substitute Care



4. Children's Placements are Further from Home

When a child is removed from her home of origin, her relationships with friends and non-abusing family can become strained. The child will have a better chance at maintaining these important connections if she is placed into a new home close to her old one (Lee, 2011). The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 also requires states to place children in settings that are close to their parent's home, if they will benefit from this closer setting. Unfortunately, distance from home for both initial and end-of-year placements continue to rise in Illinois and are at their greatest in the past 20 years (see Figure 4). The median distance from home of initial placements in Illinois was 13.3 miles in 2015, almost twice as large as it was in 1998 (6.9 miles). The median distance at the end of the year has also increased, from 5.4 miles in 1996 to 11.4 miles in 2015.

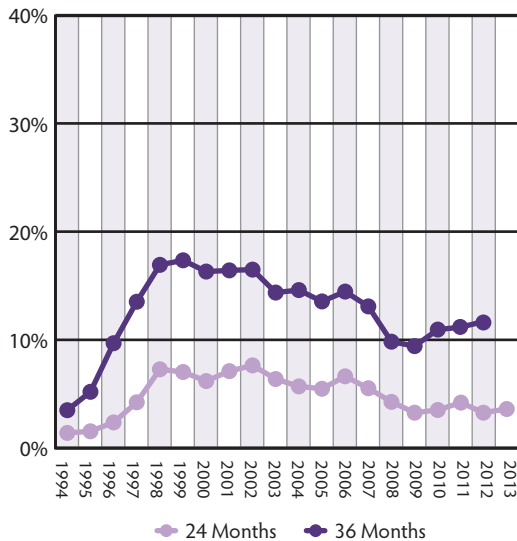
Figure 4. Median Distance of Placements from Home



5. Small Increase in Adoption Rates

After a child is removed from her family of origin and taken into care, the primary goal of the child welfare system is to return that child to her family. If reasonable efforts to achieve this goal fail, then adoption is another option for that child to exit care into a permanent placement. The percentage of children adopted within 24 or 36 months nearly quadrupled over a 3-year period in the late 1990s, as the Illinois child welfare system implemented several innovative new permanency initiatives such as performance-based contracting. After their peak among children who entered substitute care in 1999, adoption rates slowly declined over the next decade, and reached their lowest point for children who entered care in 2009. Since then, there have been small but meaningful increases in the percentages of children adopted in each entry cohort, including the most recent cohorts. In the most recent year, the percentage of children adopted within 24 months increased from 3.2% to 3.6%, while the percentage adopted within 36 months increased from 11.1% to 11.8%. This is another positive trend that hopefully will continue.

Figure 5. Children Exiting to Adoption Within 24 and 36 Months



Recommended Citation

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Related Publications

Children and Family Research Center. (2016). *Conditions of children in or at risk of foster care in Illinois: The 2015 monitoring report of the B.H. consent decree*. Urbana, IL: Children and Family Research Center, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

References

Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980, Pub. L. 96-272.

Lee, L. J. (2011). Adult visitation and permanency for children following residential treatment. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33, 1288-1297.

Testa, M. F., Naylor, M. W., Vincent, P., & White, M. (2015). *Report of the expert panel: B.H. vs. Sheldon consent decree*.