

22. Foster Care

What It Is

The incidence of child placement into foster care due to child abuse or neglect is measured by the rate of first-time out-of-home placements either in foster homes, foster family agencies, or group homes. This rate is expressed as the number of children placed for every 1,000 children under the age of 18.

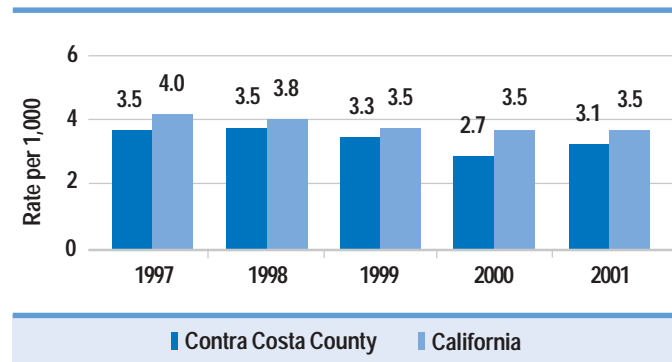
Why It Is Important

Child victims of abuse or neglect can be placed in foster care by the court if they cannot remain safely in their homes. Although there are some families for which it is not feasible to return the children to the home, public policy and law generally hold that the children's best interests are served by being with their parents, and there is typically an effort to help address the issues so that the family can be reunited. In cases where this is not appropriate, permanent placement including adoption is promoted. The rate of out-of-home placements is important because it reveals the number of children who experienced such unsafe environments that they had to be removed from their homes.

How We Are Doing

The rate of first entries into foster care in Contra Costa County remained lower than the state rate, and relatively stable between 1997 and 2001, while the statewide rate decreased during that time. Between 1998 and 2002, 31.7% of foster care entries were for African American children, who made up only 12% of children in the general population. Latinos represented 19.5% of first entries into foster care and 24.1% of children, while Caucasians represented 44.4% of entries into foster care and 49.9% of children. Once in foster care, African American children also stayed longer. For example, the median length of stay for African American foster children was 427 days when placed with non-relatives compared to 388 days for all children.

Figure 22.1 — First Entries into Foster Care per 1,000 Entries



Source: Needell, B. et al (2002). Child Welfare Services Report for California.

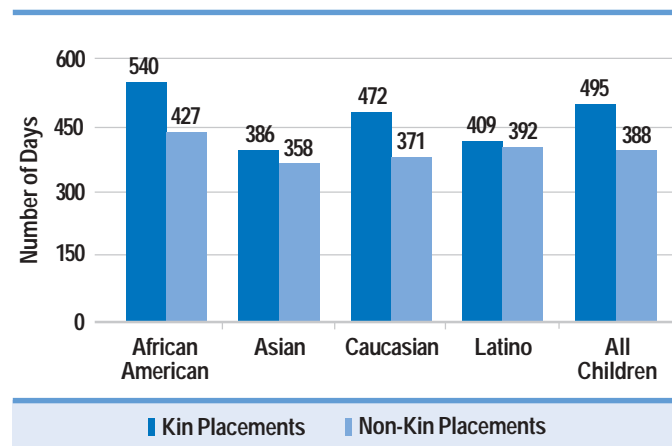
Table 22.1 — First Entries into Foster Care by Ethnicity, 2001

Caucasian	339	44.4%
African American	242	31.7%
Latino	149	19.5%
Asian/Pacific Islander	33	4.3%
Total	763	100%

Source: Needell, B. et al (2002). Child Welfare Services Report for California.

Note: Foster care is analyzed by first-time entries into the foster care system, which measures how safe kids are by looking at how many need to be removed from their homes. For this report, first-time entries is a more effective method of analysis than a "point-in-time" analysis, which is partly a measure of how safe kids are (how many need to be taken from their families) and partly a measure of how effective the child welfare system is.

Figure 22.2 — Median Length of Stay in Foster Care Placements by Ethnicity, 1998-2000



Source: Needell, B. et al (2002). Child Welfare Services Report for California.

Note: Includes only placements of children in foster care five days or longer.