

Foster Care Review Inc.

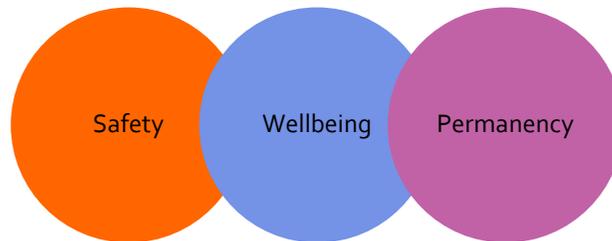


Foster Care Review, Inc. Annual Report FY 2011

Foster Care Review, Inc. — 4500 Biscayne Blvd., Ste. 100, Miami, FL 33137

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Mission and Vision



Mission: Foster Care Review promotes prompt, positive and permanent outcomes for dependent children through case review and advocacy.

Vision: A community where all children grow up in safe, permanent homes and have the potential for healthy, productive futures.

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Introduction

This annual report is provided to the Chief Judge of the Eleventh Judicial Circuit of Florida in accordance with the requirements of the citizen review panel statute (F.S. 39.702).

For the past twenty years, Foster Care Review (FCR) has been a staple of Miami-Dade's response to the needs of children foster care. During that time, we have reviewed almost 41,000 children and trained over 600 citizens from our community to serve on citizen review panels. Trained volunteers help the Juvenile Court conduct mandatory judicial review hearings on the cases of children in foster care to help assure the community meets its responsibilities. Volunteers review case documentation before the hearing, interview case managers, caregivers, Guardians ad Litem and sometimes the children themselves. The panels then make findings of fact and make recommendations for next steps that should be taken to improve the prospects for each child. The panels look not only to the safety and wellbeing of children in care, but help keep the system focused on the goal of finding them permanent homes. Children are not supposed to grow up in foster care.

We are often asked how FCR differs from other programs that exist to better the lives of children in care. FCR is unique in that it acts as an independent third-party monitor assessing the foster care agencies' compliance with mandated time frames, statutory requirements and accepted best practices in child welfare. We do not provide direct services to children, but we strive to ensure they receive them, working in partnership with community based foster care agencies. FCR's first and foremost responsibility is to objectively advocate for the safety and best interests of each child and family within the guidelines of the law. Recommendations are made to Miami's Juvenile Court, community based care agencies and other concerned parties regarding each child's safety, wellbeing and permanency. Our panels provide caring and investigative oversight for each child while data collected through our reviews help FCR to advocate for system reform.

Recently, in line with the Casey Family Programs "2020 Strategy," Florida has reduced the number of children in foster care. Fewer children are entering care as more services are being provided in the home. In addition, adoption goals are being set higher and are being exceeded. The results are fewer children in out of home care and a lower caseload for FCR, allowing us to spend more time on each child. In a foster system as complex as the one in Miami-Dade, children need not only a safety net but also advocates who have their best interests at heart.

We are grateful to the Juvenile Court for allowing us the privilege to serve abused, neglected and abandoned children in our community. Thank you for your continued support.

Ana Maria Pozo JD, Executive Director
apozo@fostercarereview.org

"Safety and security don't just happen, they are the result of collective consensus and public investment. We owe our children, the most vulnerable citizens in our society, a life free of violence and fear."

Nelson Mandela, former president of South Africa

Panels are Arranged by Age Group

Citizen Review Panels Are Specialized

FCR's citizen review panels are each assigned to an age group: 0-5, 6-12 and 13 to 17. This allows the panels to develop expertise in different stages of child development and to become more familiar with the children who come before the panel. Since this practice began, FCR also allocated more time to each review.

Independent Living

Over half of the children reviewed by FCR panels are over 13 years of age. Thus, FCR's panel specialization began with case reviews of older youth to ensure they are receiving the Independent Living (IL) services and other interventions necessary to prepare them for successful lives as adults. FCR dedicates additional staff support and volunteer training to these panels.

According to the October 2010 report "National Youth in Transition Database: Lessons Learned from the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative", studies have shown that of newly-independent foster children, a little over 50% will graduate from high school, more than 20% will be homeless after age 18, less than 3% will earn a college degree by age 25 and 25% will be incarcerated within 2 years of leaving the system. To complete the grim picture, FCR's program data also reflects that youth in foster care often have learning disabilities, a history of delinquency and, few have firm housing plans when they turn 18. The Department of Children and Families (DCF) contracts with community-based care lead agencies in Florida to provide IL services, a range of specific assessments and services to prepare and support youth in the process of transitioning from foster care to successful adult life. All 13- to 17-year-old foster youth are eligible for these services. A March 2010 report by the Florida Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability confirms that although DCF has improved some aspects of IL program oversight, there is still a need to effectively monitor if 13-17 year old youth are receiving mandated services and whether or not agencies are meeting their contractual obligations to provide such services. FCR meets this need locally through our special IL reviews.

Six to Twelve

The key to addressing the needs in this age group is to focus on prevention and education. Children in this age range are 'reachable and teachable'. Right now there is a nationwide movement around the importance of consistency in provision of education to children in foster care and minimizing any negative impact that the experience of being in foster care may have on educational progress. The panels must have a keen understanding of the educational needs and resources for this group of children so that they are engaged in school and will be able to catch up to the appropriate grade level if necessary. Many of the orders and concerns for this group are about access to tutors and extracurricular activities.

Zero through Five

Thanks to funding provided by The Children's Trust, FCR has specialized two volunteer citizen review panels on the needs of young children. For this young population it is critical that panels assess whether a child has received the proper screening and services to address the effects of the abuse, if applicable, and to promote healthy development. Addressing trauma in children at an early age can help prevent poor developmental outcomes later on in their lives. At each review, panels focus on the child's well-being: regular check-ups, developmental screenings and mental health services. While advocating for quality child care, evidence-based parenting programs and parent-child psychotherapy, panels also insist that everyone involved in the child's case do everything possible to place the child a safe permanent home, as quickly as possible. Sadly, the longer children remain in the system, the more difficult to get out unscathed. Panels ensure that the foster care agencies have referred the children for services, which may include behavioral or educational services. The most common services recommended are play therapy, speech therapy, and an appropriate educational setting (daycare or early intervention program).

When the goal is to reunify children with their parents, panels focus on the quality and quantity of interaction between the parent and child. In order to help neutralize the impact of the separation, visitation between parents and children should be closely monitored and increased once it is deemed appropriate.

FCR panel volunteers have received special training and new protocols have been added to reviews to help them identify possible developmental problems. The goal is to get help to children early. FCR has also provided community-wide educational opportunities on the needs of young children in foster care and has gathered and analyzed data about the children in this age group to help with planning system improvements.

Stories behind the numbers

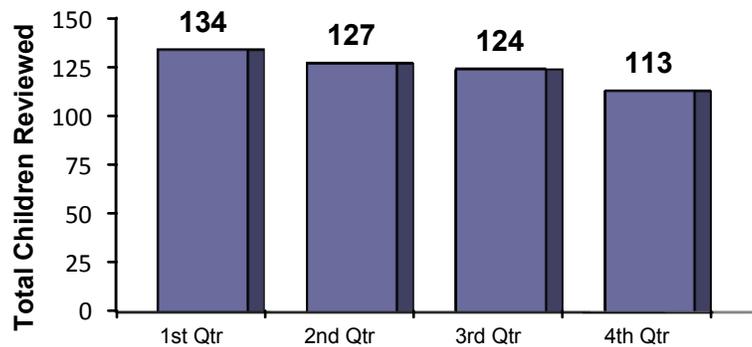
Helping case managers help children. The panel heard the case of a young child who scored very low in the areas of communication and personal and social skills on his Ages and Stages Assessment, a developmental and social-emotional screening tool for children from birth to 5 years old. The panel also learned that the child did not pass a hearing exam of the left ear, something the case manager was unaware of because she was new to the case. The case manager was advised to follow up on hearing screening and as a result it was learned that the child's lack of communication skills was associated with his hearing impairment. Because of this panel's intervention, this child is receiving treatment and therapy that will pave the way to allowing him to learn and socialize normally throughout his life.

Helping the children find their voice. Allowances are designated to older youth which teaches them money management skills and allows them some personal freedom to buy things they would like. This money is often treasured by the youth as one of the few things that belong to them. Jenny was a 16 year old female in foster care for over 5 years and had been in her current foster home for more than 3. She informed the panel at a hearing that her foster parent had stopped giving her an allowance months ago. The panel ordered the agency to ensure she received it going forward and that the money owed to her would be paid. At the following hearing, Jenny reported she had changed foster homes, but her previous foster parent was in the process of repaying her all funds that were due (over \$100.00) by the end of the month. The success in this story is not simply that Jenny received her money, a small sum, but rather that Jenny learned that there were people who cared for her and would advocate for her needs – that speaking up could make a difference and that there are individuals worthy of trust.

Summary

CHILDREN	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011	(change)
Children (single count)	649	383	265	-31%
Reviews (duplicate count, most children reviewed > 1 time)	1187	715	498	-30%
% of total foster children reviewed	649/3220 (20%)	383/2900 (13%)	265/2207(12%)	-1%
Pre-filed JRSSRs (by # children)	746/1187 (63%)	534/715 (75%)	357/498 (71%)	-4%
Post JRs (by # children)	163/1187 (14%)	55/715 (8%)	26/498 (5%)	-3%
Volunteers/ Vol. hours	115/5256 (45.7 hrs)	111/4694 (42.3 hrs)	78/3576 (45.8 hrs)	+3.5 hrs

The chart above and adjacent graph illustrate the total number of children reviewed and total volunteers/volunteer hours. In the chart this is contrasted with the totals with the last 2 fiscal years' activities.



FCR-Fiscal Year 2011

There were 265 children reviewed. This represents about 12% of the total population of foster children who were in out-of-home care in Miami-Dade County (2207 as of June 2011). Because reviews are required at least once every 6 months, 182 children (67%) were reviewed by FCR more than once during this time period.

	Reviewed 1 time	Reviewed 2 times	Reviewed 3 times	TOTAL
Number of Children	83	131	51	265
Number of Reviews	83	262	153	498

Child Demographics

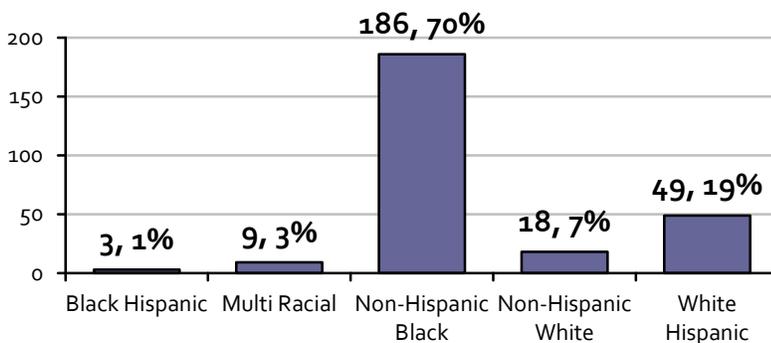
Race and Gender

Most children whose cases were referred to FCR for review were African-American. Hispanic children make up a far second percentage. This is consistent from year to year and reflects the makeup of the population of children in foster care locally - despite the fact that it contrasts with the demographics of the general population in Miami Dade County. The proportion of males to females is approximately equal, a few more males than females, and this too is consistent each year.

GENDER (n=265)

Male	Female
144	121
54%	46%

RACE (n=265)



Ages

Overall number of children and age ranges between FY 2009 – 2011

Age	2009	2010	2011
0 - 5	75	55	43
6 - 12	172	76	49
13 - 17+	402	252	173
Total	649	383	265

Consistently, the majority of children referred to Foster Care Review are in their teens. Younger children are commonly reunified or adopted before they come before our panels.

Community Based Care Agencies and Judicial Divisions

Children in foster care in Miami-Dade county are under the direct care and supervision of one of 5 Community Based Care Agencies (CBC Agencies), each of which is overseen by the Lead Agency, Our Kids of Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties. The CBC Agencies are referred to throughout this report by the abbreviations below. Two of the original agencies have closed.

❖ Community Based Care Agencies (CBC Agencies)

CFCE	Center for Family and Child Enrichment
CHARLEE	Children have all rights, legal, educational and emotional
CHS	Children’s Home Society
FCR	Family Resource Center
HHCH	His House Children’s Home
KHU	Kids Hope United (Now Closed)

Cases are referred to Foster Care Review by the Dependency Judges in the Eleventh Judicial Circuit. The following chart represents FCR’s caseload by agency and by judicial division.

<i>Children Reviewed (by agency and judicial division) – single count</i>							
<i>Agency</i>	<i>001</i>	<i>002</i>	<i>003</i>	<i>008</i>	<i>009</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>CFCE</i>		10	17	16	21	64	24%
<i>CHAR</i>	3	4	31	23	30	91	34%
<i>CHS</i>	2	3	9	26	22	62	23%
<i>FRC</i>	1	11	3	7	11	33	13%
<i>HHCH</i>				7	8	15	6%
<i>Total</i>	6	28	60	79	92	265	
<i>%</i>	2	10	23	30	35	100%	

❖ Juvenile divisions

D001 – The Hon. Jeri Cohen

D002 – The Hon. Cindy Lederman

D003 – The Hon. Maria Sampedro-Iglesia

D008 – The Hon. Rosa Figarola

D009 – The Hon. Michael Hanzman

The following chart demonstrates the age ranges of the children reviewed by FCR along with the CBC each child was assigned to.

Agency and Age Ranges 2011

	0-5	6-12	13-17+	Sum:
CFCE	15	15	34	64
CHAR	7	16	68	91
CHS	7	8	47	62
FRC	11	8	14	33
HHCH	3	2	10	15
Sum:	43	49	173	265

Before the Review

Judicial Review Social Study Reports

The CBC agency in charge of a child's case is required to file a Judicial Review Social Study Report (JRSSR) with the court 72 hours before the review. This document and its attachments contain information necessary for an effective review regarding: the child's placement, educational progress, relatives involved in the child's life, mental/physical health, legal status of the child's parents, the case plan goal and more. The chart below shows compliance with this reporting requirement by CBC agency. The percent of compliance has decreased by 4% from last year. Judicial reports submitted to the panel on the same day as the review do not allow for a thorough preparation by the panels before the review.

The following chart reflects the percentage of compliance with JRSSR pre-filing by CBC Agency.

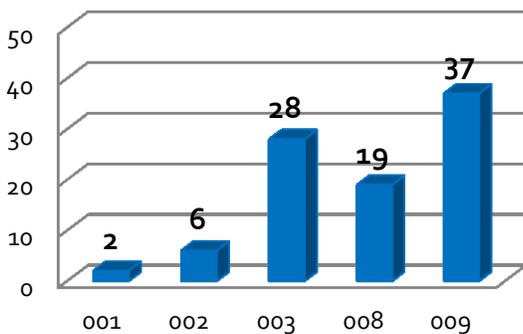
Agency compliance with JRSSR pre-filing (by total number of reviews)						
	2010			2011		
	# Child rev/d	# JRSSR Pre-filed	%	# Child rev/d	# JRSSR Pre-filed	%
CFCE	137	120	88%	114	81	71%
CHARLEE	230	174	76%	180	129	72%
CHS	119	85	71%	122	81	66%
FRC	84	70	83%	55	42	76%
HHCH	16	13	81%	27	22	81%
KHU	129	73	57%	closed	closed	
NTF	closed	closed		closed	closed	
Total/.	715	535	75%	498	355	71%

Case continuances (Resets)

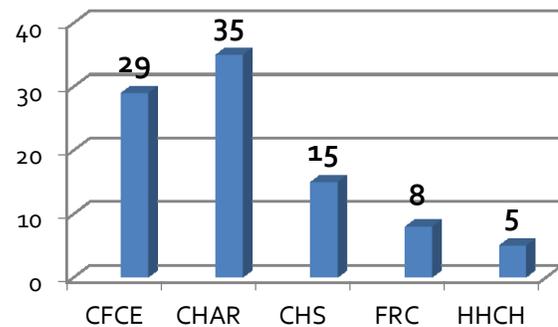
It is common for scheduled cases to be continued to a later date because there was a change in the child’s status, such as the child being adopted or reunified. However, a case may be continued or “reset” for significantly less valid reasons, such as when the JRSSR is not filed or the case manager does not show up. This is an inconvenience to all parties involved and most importantly results in a delay in the child’s permanency. In FY 2010-11, there were 92 resets representing 16% of all reviews that were scheduled and not moved for more ‘valid’ reasons.

Resets (n=92):

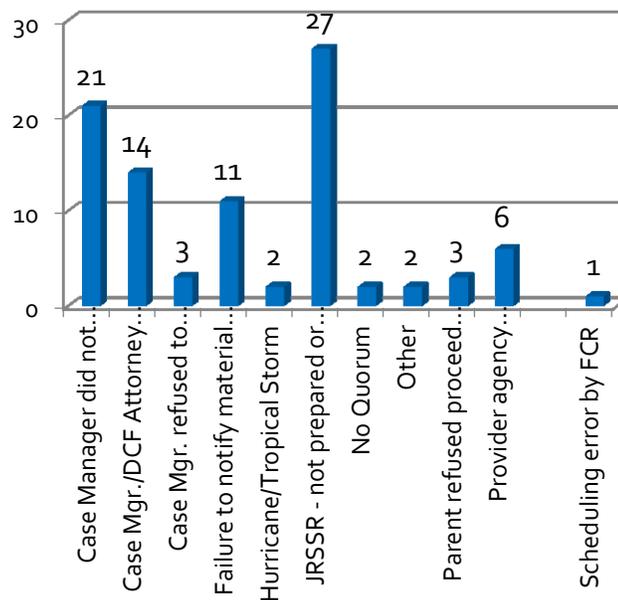
Case continuances (resets) by judicial division



Case continuances (resets) by agency



Reasons for Resets



Priority Findings of Fact

As a result of each review, findings of fact and recommendations are made regarding a child's safety, permanency and wellbeing. While reviews encompass a variety of subjects, there are some that are particularly important, as discussed in the following section.

Compliance with ASFA

Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA)

Federal funding for child welfare is determined, in part, by the States' compliance with statutory requirements. ASFA is a federal statute that establishes timeframes and standards for children's permanency and periodic review of case-plans. The percentage of agency noncompliance and the reasons for it are demonstrated below.

Compliance with case plan requirements under ASFA

Case plan noncompliance (assessed at each review, n=498)			
Agency	# of Reviews	Determined to be in Non-Compliance	%
CFCE	114	10	9%
CHARLEE	180	13	7%
CHS	122	7	6%
FRC	55	1	2%
HHCH	27	3	11%
Total	498	34	7%

Reasons for noncompliance:

- No case plan was in effect (2);
- Tasks from previous orders were not completed (24);
- No reasonable efforts were made to reunify the family (1);
- No reasonable efforts to place the child into a permanent placement (11);
- Did not make reasonable efforts to assure all court order visitation occurs (1),
- Case management was inadequate (15);
- Case manager did not perform tasks as stated in the case plan (11).

Note: More than one reason may be selected for each child.

Post Judicial Review Hearings

In situations where there are unresolved issues at reviews that need immediate attention, FCR requests an emergency hearing before the Court (a "post JR"). There were 26 post judicial reviews in FY 2011, meaning 5% of our reviews resulted in a Post Judicial Review Hearing. This is down by 3% from last year, a favorable improvement.

Permanency Case Plan Goals

Case plan goals are assessed at each review and can change between reviews depending on what happens over the course of time. The case plan goal for any child in care is of extreme importance as all efforts toward permanency are dictated by it. If a goal is reunification, the buy-in from the parent(s) will determine the success; if a goal is adoption, finding an adoptive family in a short amount of time is key. The chart below demonstrates the goals over the course of the year's reviews with the most common being "another planned permanent living arrangement" (APPLA) followed by adoption.

Case Plan Goals by Age Range – Assessed at each review

	0-5	6-12	13-17+	Total
Adoption	43	67	99	209
Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement		3	226	229
Permanent Guardianship			22	22
Expired	1		1	2
Reunification with Father	10			10
Reunification with Mother	7	17	2	26
Total	61	87	350	498

Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA)

Recently, an important initiative in the foster care system has been to reduce the number of children with an APPLA goal. APPLA is used specifically for older youth who will likely age out of foster care without being adopted or in a guardianship arrangement. This is a major concern, as once a child is assigned an APPLA goal, adoption or other permanency efforts stop.

During July 2010 to June 2011, FCR panels conducted 498 reviews of 265 children. Over the course of the year, 50% of the children had a case plan goal of APPLA at some point, reflecting the fact that the majority of children reviewed by FCR are 13 or older. **No matter the age, our panels review the case plan goal at each review. If there is the slightest chance of an adoption, permanent guardianship or reunification that is in the child's best interest, FCR's panels will advocate for an APPLA goal to be changed.** The number of children with the goal of APPLA is shown to the right, categorized by the child's age.

Age	Total
10	1
11	1
12	1
13	4
14	7
15	15
16	24
17+	80
Total	133

Length of Stay and Placement

FCR believes that children should live with their family in a safe permanent home, and that foster care is a last resort, only to be used when other safe and permanent arrangements cannot be made for the child. Nevertheless, children stay in foster care for long periods of time. The chart below displays the length of stay by age range for children reviewed. As expected, older youth make up the majority of those in care for longer periods of time. Babies and young children have shorter stays, as they are more likely to be adopted or reunified.

Age range	Length of Stay in Foster Care (months)					Total
	0-12	13-24	25-36	37-48	48+	
0-5	7	35	11	0	0	53
6-12	4	18	17	7	43	89
13-17+	3	23	34	23	273	356
Total reviews	14	76	62	30	316	498

Whether or not a child is in a placement that is safe, appropriate to his/her needs and allows for 'normalcy' – the opportunity to live in a similar fashion to his or her peers – is also a priority consideration for FCR's panels. This too is assessed at each review. The placement types are shown on the next chart, with the most common being foster homes, therapeutic foster homes and group homes.

Child Placement types (Reported at each review, n=498)

	Total		Total
Adult jail	1	Pre-adoptive Non-Relative Home	15
APD Foster Home	3	Pre-adoptive Relative Home	15
Detention	1	Psych Residential Treatment Facility	11
Developmental Group Home	10	Relative Care (Licensed)	7
Enhanced Residential Group Care	3	Relative Care (Not Licensed)	29
Foster Home	222	Residential Group Facility	7
Group home (non-therapeutic)	44	Runaway Status	17
Juvenile Justice Facility	7	Shelter	6
Medical Foster Home	33	Specialized Therapeutic Group Home	10
Non-relative (not licensed)	8	Subsidized IL Program	1
Nursing Facility	1	Substance abuse treatment facility	1
Pre-adoptive Foster Home	6	Therapeutic Foster Home	40

As required by statute, panels assess the child’s current placement at each review for appropriateness based on the child’s age and specific needs. In only 7% of reviews (36 times), it was determined that a child’s placement was not appropriate, in which case a Post Judicial Review is scheduled before the Court to address the issue immediately. This is positive in that it reflects a decrease from last fiscal year.

AGENCY	Placement Not Appropriate					
	(n=649)			(n=498)		
	# Reviews	2010	%	# Reviews	2011	%
CFCE	137	26	4%	114	10	9%
CHARLEE	230	16	2%	180	10	6%
CHS	119	9	1%	122	5	4%
FRC	84	8	1%	55	7	13%
HHCH	16	4	1%	27	4	15%
KHU	129	12	2%	closed	closed	0
NTF	closed	0	0	closed	closed	0
TOTAL	715	75	12%	498	36	7%

Reasons Placement Not Appropriate:

- Placement does not meet child’s physical needs (9);
- Placement is not a step towards permanency (17);
- Safety cannot be assured (21);
- Other (12).

Note: More than one reason may be selected for each child.

Reasons for placement being deemed not appropriate (more than one reason may be selected)

CFCE	16
Other	2
Placement does not meet child physical needs	3
Placement is not a step towards permanency	6
Safety cannot be assured	5
CHAR	21
Other	3
Placement does not meet child physical needs	6
Placement is not a step towards permanency	6
Safety cannot be assured	6

Reasons for placement being deemed not appropriate – Continued (more than one reason may be selected)

CHS	9
Other	4
Placement is not a step towards permanency	1
Safety cannot be assured	4
FRC	8
Other	1
Placement is not a step towards permanency	4
Safety cannot be assured	3
HHCH	5
Other	2
Safety cannot be assured	3
Grand Total	59

Stability is the key to a child’s sense of security and to a child’s social and educational progress. Unless it is solidly in the best interests of the child, placement disruptions should be minimal. In 147 out of 498 reviews (30%), children were determined to have had at least one placement change over the last 6 months.

The chart below lists the number of placement changes per child in the last 6 months, by CBC:

Child / youth had a change of placement in 6 months

Number of Placement changes	CFCE	CHAR	CHS	FRC	HHCH	Total
0	81	130	97	48	16	351
1	20	30	16	2	8	92
2	0	0	0	0	1	1
3	4	9	5	1	0	21
4	5	8	1	2	0	17
5	2	0	1	1	1	6
>9	2	3	2	1	1	10
Total	114	180	122	55	27	498

As referenced before, placement changes may be for positive reasons. In the course of the year, placement changes took place for the following reasons: NOTE - *child/youth may have more than one reason for placement change.*

	0-5	6-12	13-17+	Total
Allegation of abuse	0	1	1	2
Child behavior	0	2	33	35
Child request	0	0	7	7
Child unsafe in current placement	0	1	1	2
Delinquency	0	0	9	9
Foster parent requested removal	0	0	9	9
Home lost licensing or closed	1	2	4	7
Less restrictive placement	0	0	7	7
Other	0	1	7	8
Placement provides progress toward permanency	1	6	4	11
Placement with sibling	1	1	3	5
Ran away	0	0	22	22
Returned from runaway	0	0	4	4
Return to parent	0	0	1	1
Return to relative	1	2	3	6
Severe mental health issues	0	0	6	6
Therapeutic needs	0	1	15	16
To be placed with sibling	1	0	0	1
Total	5	17	136	158

Review Participation

The more parties involved in a review, the more information is provided to the citizen review panels and the more effective the review. FCR strongly believes in encouraging the participation of caregivers and, in the case of older youth, that the youth attend and provide as much information as possible about his or her case. In recent years, FCR has been involved in initiatives to increase caregiver and youth participation at reviews.

Participation at reviews (Total reviews =498)

	Present	Verbal Contact w/FCR	Via speaker phone	Total
Atty. for Child	27	1	11	39
Atty. for DCF/Case Mgmt. Agency	498	0	0	498
Atty. for Parent - Father	4	0	3	7
Atty. for Parent - Mother	7	2	0	9
Case Mgr. - Private Agency	491	0	3	494

Participation at reviews - Continued (Total reviews =498)

	Present	Verbal Contact w/FCR	Via speaker phone	Total
Case Mgr. - Rep./Substitute	16	0	0	16
Child	87	2	4	93
Guardian ad Litem	169	2	2	173
Guardian ad Litem - Rep.	179	0	0	179
Other	29	1	3	33
Other Representative	39	1	2	42
Parent - Father	3	0	0	3
Parent - Foster	21	6	7	34
Parent - Mother	19	1	0	20
Parent - Pre-Adoptive	8	1	6	15
Relative	11	2	1	14
Supervisor of Case Mgr.	5	0	0	5
	1613	19	42	1674

Guardians ad Litem

Without a doubt FCR's reviews are more thorough and effective when a child has dedicated GAL representation. Children need a voice and most cannot speak for themselves. GALs speak on behalf of the child's best interest and often provide case information that other parties may not supply. In FY 2010-11, 73% of children had an assigned GAL, and there was GAL representation for 71% of our reviews.

Total reviews	498
GAL or GAL representative present	352
GAL not present	13
% representation at reviews	71%
<i>Total single count</i>	193
<i>Total children reviewed</i>	265
<i>% children w/GAL assignment</i>	73%

Citizen Review Panel Orders

At the end of each review, citizen review panels issue findings of fact and recommendations that become orders once approved by the child's division judge. These recommended orders are the chief output of FCR's reviews and, when carried out, translate to children receiving things they need, services they need, homes and permanent families. For FY 2011, the rate of compliance for cases reviewed by the citizen review panels was 75%. While this outcome has increased from previous years, there is definitely room for improvement.

Compliance with CRP Recommended Orders by CBC Agency

CBC Agency	Total Reviews	Total orders issued that were no longer applicable – not assessed for compliance	Total orders issued and assessed for compliance	Compliant	Not Compliant
CFCE	114	237	699	531 (76%)	168 (24%)
CHAR	180	158	554	388 (70%)	166 (30%)
CHS	122	103	355	280 (79%)	75 (21%)
FRC	55	80	153	113 (74%)	40 (26%)
HHCH	27	28	56	47 (84%)	9 (16%)
Total	498	606	1817	1359 (75%)	458 (25%)

Most Frequent Recommended Orders

As would be expected by our emphasis on permanency and our high percentage of children over age 13, the most common orders issued by our panels related to adoption as a permanency plan and to independent living services. Educational need was a very close third. The chart below reflects the most common categories of recommendations and is by no means an exhaustive list. FCR's panels have been requiring documentation to substantiate reports of certain services as opposed to relying on verbal reports – i.e. Mental Health and Dental.

Top 6 most recommended orders FY 2010-11	Total
Case mgt. documentation-Mental Health reports-children	67
Dental health services - child	115
Educational needs of child	188
Emotional /MH services - child	85
Independent living services	224
Permanency plan - adoption	246

Mental Health

The events leading up to entry into foster care and often, the trauma associated with the experience of being in care are addressed at each review. The need to test for a child's psychological needs early on and intervene effectively is an important subject of each review. Mental health assessments are typically not performed on children in the zero to five age range, although it does rarely occur. Eighty nine percent of all children reviewed (235/265) were reported to have received a mental health assessment, which is the necessary first step before services are made accessible. Of those, 113 were reported to have been receiving services as a result. The breakdown by age range and by type of service is shown. The most common services received by children in foster care are individual therapy and psychotropic medication. The use of psychotropic medication within the foster care population has received substantial attention in the public arena.

Children receiving services as a result of a mental health assessment.

Age Range	Total
0-5	3
6-12	25
13-17	85
Total	113

Type of Therapeutic Services	0-5	6-12	13-17	Total
Behavior management	0	7	15	22
Family therapy	0	7	3	10
Group therapy	0	0	11	11
Individual therapy	1	18	71	90
Play therapy	2	1	0	3
Psychotropic medication	0	19	63	82
Sexual abuse program	0	1	0	1
Substance abuse treatment-outpatient	0	0	3	3
Total	3	53	166	222

*A child may have more than one recommended Therapy Service.

Physical Exams

- 264 of 265 children had current physical exams.
- We have seen continual progress with compliance on having documentation of a current physical exam and this year's number is exceptional.

Dental and Vision

At each review, panels address whether or not a child is current with recommended dental exams and treatment. For FY 2010-2011, the majority of children were reported to be current—an improvement over last year. In some instances, a lower rate of compliance often points to a larger issue (i.e. Medicaid dental provider contract changes.). If a child's dental or vision exam is not current, FCR panels will include a dental evaluation in their recommendations.

Child is current with recommended Dental exams and treatment?	Case Mgr. could not report	N/A	No	Yes	Total
CFCE	1	6	31	76	114
CHAR	0	4	17	159	180
CHS	0	5	20	97	122
FRC	0	0	11	44	55
HHCH	1	0	4	22	27
Total	2	15	83	398	498

Vision	No	Yes	Sum:
CFCE	18	96	114
CHAR	16	164	180
CHS	8	114	122
FRC	5	50	55
HHCH	10	17	27
Total	57	441	498

Special Educational Needs

Special Educational needs are identified in more than half of the school-aged children reviewed by FCR. This is one of the major obstacles in their lives. If left to 'age out' of care, many youth leave without completing high school and face poor prospects for the future. The charts below demonstrate the number of children ages 5 and up with an ESE classification. The two most significant disabilities are emotional-behavioral issues and specific learning disabled.

Individual Education Plan (127 children Age 5 and above)

Educational Needs Yes (excluding 2 gifted)	Total Children Reviewed \geq 5 years old	% Children \geq 5 years old
125	233	54%

ESE Classification (*Children may have more than 1.)	CFCE	CHAR	CHS	FRC	HHCH	Total:
Autism Spectrum Disorder	1	1				2
Developmentally delayed				2		2
Educable mentally handicapped		2	2			4
Emotional-Behavioral Disability	11	29	22	4	3	69
Emotionally handicapped			3			3
Gifted		1	1			2
Intellectual disabilities	1	5			1	7
Language impaired	2	3				5
Occupational therapy			1			1
Orthopedically impaired			1			1
Other	1	2	2	1		6

ESE Classification- Continued (*Children may have more than 1.)	CFCE	CHAR	CHS	FRC	HHCH	Total:
Other	1	2	2	1		6
Other health impaired (Code: V)	1	3	2			6
Profoundly mentally handicapped	1		3			4
Severely emotionally disturbed		2	1			3
Specific learning disabled	4	17	8	3	2	34
Speech impaired		1	1			2
Trainable mentally handicapped			1			1
Visually impaired	1					1
Total:	23	66	48	10	6	153 *

Mentors and Tutoring

FCR panels have witnessed the positive impact of mentors and tutoring on the youth we review—a frequent subject of panel recommendations. The charts below represent the number of children with an ESE classification who are receiving tutoring or have a mentor. Please note that the 2 gifted children are included, as they too need mentoring/tutoring to stay on target.

Ages	Special Ed	Mentor	Tutor
5 - 12	26	7	13
13 - 17+	101	27	34
	127	34 (28%)	47 (37%)

Children with special educational needs who have a mentor or are participating in tutoring, by age range.

ESE class	Mentor & Tutoring	%
Emotional-Behavioral Disability	9 / 69	13%
Specific learning disabled	7 / 34	21%

The number of children with classifications of either Emotional-Behavioral Disability or Specific learning disabled who have both a mentor and tutor.

FCR's Other Activities and Successes

➤ SPECIAL PROJECTS

- **Administrative Reviews:** Throughout its 20+ years of service, FCR has gained a wealth of knowledge and insight about "aging out" youth. Although we perform judicial reviews of children across the developmental spectrum, cases of older youth are a special concern for our staff and volunteers. Generally, an older youth has no reliable family connections; is below the appropriate educational level; has difficulty trusting others; and, is living in a placement that is temporary with no potential for permanency once their monthly stipend ceases. It would be unthinkable to allow youth in this predicament to try and survive alone - yet it happens every day. For several years now, our community has recognized this problem and there have been improvements in the way youth are prepared for independent living. The question remains, however, as to the effectiveness of our efforts. To explore these questions, FCR received funding from the Miami Foundation to help us assess the status of youth who had transitioned out of foster care. An FCR volunteer panel questioned 25 young adults who had left foster care within 24 months, and collected data on indicators of success (economic self-sufficiency, housing, parenthood and educational attainment). Our findings tell us that there is a lot of work to do to help youth have more successful transitions to adulthood:
 - Fewer than half had a high school diploma or GED.
 - Of the 6 young adults who were enrolled in college, 4 had mentors.
 - Few had received assistance from foster parents to teach them basic life skills such as light cooking and laundry.
 - Half of the females interviewed had children or were pregnant.
 - Almost half had been in foster care for more than 10 years. The young adults recounted histories of moving from place to place while in care, some were positive, more were negative. One recounted more than 20 placements.
 - A little more than half reported receiving assistance from their agency in finding a place to live and two who had were forced to move shortly thereafter because the apartment owner foreclosed.
 - **FCR's Advocacy Initiative:** This initiative was intended to address the need for better documentation by the agencies, the urgency in providing prompt services to older youth, and our volunteers' interest in increasing their advocacy. With funding from The Miami Foundation's Safe Passages Initiative, we trained volunteers to contact the foster care agency, after a review, to urge their compliance with panel recommendations. The project is currently serving the oldest youth who need intervention urgently before they age out of foster care. The project has resulted in increased agency compliance with orders and better service provision to the youth. With success and continued funding, FCR will expand this project.
 - **Expansion of FCR's Board of Directors:** In 2010, FCR's Board of Directors was increased to 20 members, with broad representation of various professions, skills and backgrounds. FCR's new
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board is clearly committed to continue strengthening our organization and our mission. A strategic planning session is planned in 2012 to develop a new three-year plan.

- **Office Relocation:** After 5 years in The Justice Building in Downtown Miami, FCR moved back to the Midtown/Design District area. It was a huge undertaking but the new location in The Atrium is lighter, brighter and much more conducive to training events due to its access to ample parking. A Holiday Open House was held in December 2010 for volunteers, board and community partners.
- **Technological Advancement:** In connection with the office relocation, FCR transitioned to 'cloud computing.' This initiative not only improved IT safety and security by making FCR less dependent on local equipment, but also increases efficiency by allowing staff to work from any location with access to internet. The new IT infrastructure, together with our office move, has resulted in significant savings to FCR.

➤ TRAINING EVENTS

- As part of our focus on children ages 0-5, funded by The Children's Trust, FCR offered 2 training workshops. In April 2011 FCR offered a workshop in coordination with the Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System entitled "Is My Child Developing and Learning Appropriately." The aim was to help caregivers and volunteers recognize developmental/educational delays. In May 2011, FCR offered "System Integration around the Developmental Needs of Young Children" –a workshop about the reforms and best practices within the Child Welfare system based on the science of human development.

➤ FUNDRAISING AND COMMUNITY EVENTS

- FCR held its 5th Annual Fundraising Luncheon at Joe's Stone Crab Restaurant in November 2010. The event is growing in success each year!
 - At FCR's 2011 Spring Friendraiser and Silent Auction at Sabadell United Bank, Kathy Ezell, Esq., of Podhurst Orseck, also a member and immediate past president of FCR's Board of Directors, was awarded FCR's Douglas M. Halsey Award for Community Service for her extensive work on behalf of children.
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CRP Recommendations Regarding Barriers to Permanency

We believe that the judicial review process, whether carried out by a judge or a citizen review panel, is effective and necessary in ensuring that foster children are safe, that they are getting services they need, and that the case is progressing towards permanency. That is our goal when conducting review hearings. However, there are barriers that challenge the effectiveness of the process and impede progress to children's permanency, specifically when detailed, accurate information is not readily available or when there is a lack of compliance by the agencies in observing judicial orders.

To eliminate some of these barriers, it is critical that all system partners agree to promote a culture of respect for the requirements and the goal of the review process. In other words, everyone must be accountable for ensuring that children get what they need. Below are our recommendations to address barriers to permanency.

- **Case Management and Supervision.** Case managers should be knowledgeable about the case and prepared for the review with timely and thorough completion of required documentation. Worker turnover affects the information that is provided at reviews. When case managers are not familiar with the case, their supervisor should attend the review. Many cases must be rescheduled when the case manager is not prepared and cannot present information to the panels. Supervisors should also make sure that case managers attend reviews, and they should attend when the case manager cannot. There should be training of case managers related to judicial reviews, and there should be better supervision regarding compliance with case plan tasks.
 - **JRSSR.** An effective review requires a complete, accurate social study report that is pre-filed 72 hours before the reviews—as required by law. To that end, there should be greater efforts by the agencies in complying with these requirements. Reviewing a case without having verification of services makes for an incomplete assessment. Reviewing the report before the hearing makes a big difference in the quality of the review. Instead, most reports are filed the day of the hearing, causing delays while the panels review the report. Incomplete reports result in case resets, unproductive down time, a delay in the ability to intervene in critical situations and worst of all, children who wait too long for a permanent home.
 - **Resets.** Again, resets result in a lack of progress towards permanency for children. The majority of resets are preventable. Reasons include a failure to file the social study report, the case manager's failure to appear, lack of notice by the clerk's office and last minute requests by attorneys/agencies. Agencies need to have a system for tracking court hearings and making sure the case managers show up at the hearing and file their social study reports in a timely fashion. They also need to work with the clerk's office to ensure that they have the correct address for the parties.
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- **Participation at reviews.** Increased participation by relevant parties at case reviews is key to having access to the most thorough, relevant information and to making the best assessment of the child's situation. Youth participation is especially important. Community based care agencies should notify foster youth of reviews and encourage their attendance. According to national judicial and bar associations involved in juvenile justice, participation at court hearings gives youth a sense of control over their life and helps them to understand the court process. Other added benefits are that it better engages the participants as well as the panels, and provides better information to the court. Some of the reasons why youth do not attend are lack of notice and lack of transportation to reviews. Foster parent participation is also critical to provide the panels with current information about the child.
 - **Compliance with orders.** Lack of compliance with orders from previous reviews is too common, and there should be better agency supervision to enforce compliance with case plan tasks. Currently, panels review case plan progress every six months. Much too often, however, instead of complying with court orders immediately after the review hearing, many case managers wait to complete case plan tasks until it is time to prepare for the next review. This means that a child must wait an additional 6 months before receiving a service. If that child is getting ready to age out of the foster care system, he or she may never receive the service.
 - **Family engagement.** Family engagement is a good indicator for a successful reunification. Yet panels often find that case managers are not making the effort to engage parents. Without help in navigating the complexities of the system, parents have a difficult time complying with case plan expectations. Additionally, case managers should come to judicial reviews prepared to provide verification of the parents' progress with their case plan or lack thereof. Without all of the information, CRP cannot make an accurate assessment of the parent's compliance.
 - **Education.** Poor academic achievement is a serious barrier for many of our children, and there has to be a stronger emphasis on academic achievement for youth. Most of the youth reviewed by CRP will not be in the 12th grade when they turn 18, and most will age out without giving much thought to their future career or education. Youth need to be engaged to start thinking about what they can achieve, and then be given the tools to do it. While the education career plans are a start, there has to be accountability by the case manager, foster parents, child, therapist, GALs, and any other participants to monitor the children's academic performance and provide services such as tutoring when necessary.
 - **Foster parents.** While many of our children have excellent foster parents, it is not uncommon to find foster parents that lack the skills to work with children who act out or have emotional or other issues. This often results in placement disruptions. All foster parents must be held accountable to a higher standard of care. As primary caretakers, they should provide nurturing, stable, family-like environments, support family visitation, involve the children in extracurricular activities, and monitor their academic performance. To that end, foster care agencies must assume the responsibility for training and supporting foster parents.
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History and Program

Foster Care Review (FCR) was created by United Way of Miami in 1988, when a task force of 150 community leaders recommended the implementation of a foster care citizen review program—a program that trains citizen panels to help the Juvenile Court monitor the status of children’s cases. FCR trains citizen volunteers to serve as independent, third-party reviewers and to advocate for children in the foster care system. The concept addresses both the need to help the courts with system oversight and to involve the community in caring for all its children. The Florida Legislature enacted legislation in 1989 that authorized citizen review panels to participate in the judicial review process.

Statutory Authority

In 1980, Congress enacted Public Law 96-272, the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act. This landmark legislation, the foundation for the current child welfare system, placed significant responsibility on the courts to review child welfare cases on a regular basis, and required States to make reasonable efforts towards permanency.

The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), as amended in 1999, shortened timeframes for permanency and focused on safety, wellbeing of the child and adoption. ASFA also established performance standards and a state accountability system whereby states face financial penalties for failure to demonstrate improvements in child outcomes. FCR assists the State’s compliance with these federal mandates by conducting case reviews of children, making judicial determinations of reasonable efforts, and by tracking ASFA compliance.

The Florida citizen review legislation is found at F. S. 39.701 and 39.702. Section 701 provides the requirements for conducting a judicial review by a court or citizen review panel, and section 702 outlines the requirements for administering the program.

Judicial Reviews of Children by Citizen Review Panels

F.S. 39.701 requires a judicial review at least every six month for each child in the dependency system. The purpose of the review is to monitor the child’s safety, wellbeing and progress towards permanency. After each review, the panels make recommendations to the Juvenile Court based on the information provided at the review. Any party objecting to the panel’s findings and recommended orders may request an exception hearing before the court.

Cases are referred to the panels by the dependency judges. FCR’s 14 citizen review panels meet one day per month to conduct an average of 6 cases per day, for one hour each. Over the past few years, panels have been trained to specialize in different age groups: 0 to 5, 6 to 12 and 13 to 17. Review hearings are held at the Citizen Review Courtroom located at the Miami-Dade Children’s Courthouse and Juvenile Justice Center. Staff support is provided by FCR review specialists, who facilitate the review process, collect data and prepare the findings and recommendations submitted to the Court for approval.

The review serves as a barometer of case management, continually stimulating progress and improvements to ensure that needed services are provided, that the child is appropriately and safely placed and that the

tasks identified in the case plan are being performed. Upon suspicion of risk to a child, or in the event of serious noncompliance with orders, the citizen review panels request a post-judicial review before the Court for immediate judicial action.

Data Collecting and Reporting

FCR's database serves multiple functions: the tracking of individual case information, the production of the recommendations reports submitted to the Juvenile Court, and the production of aggregate data reports. With assistance from the Children's Trust, FCR upgraded to a new web-based database in 2008.

The review process provides a unique source for quantitative and qualitative information regarding children in foster care—information not readily available through any other mechanism. Once customized to perform system level tracking, FCR reports can be used as quality assurance tools by public and private child welfare agencies, the Juvenile Courts, the Legislature and others to improve practice and develop responsive policies. The results are better decisions, better compliance with federal and state laws and improved outcomes for children. FCR data reports can:

- Monitor the extent to which policy and practice are being implemented according to laws, regulations and expectations in a timely fashion;
- Determine compliance with the requirements of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), monitoring case by case the safety and wellbeing of children in care, their progress toward permanency, and timeframes for permanency decision-making;
- Monitor casework performance to determine if reasonable efforts and critical casework activities are occurring timely and in accordance with federal and state laws and local standards and expectations;
- Inform decision-makers about potential case and systemic problems; and
- Hold agencies and professionals accountable for the care and treatment of children by monitoring quality and delivery of services.

Volunteer Training

Quality citizen reviews depend on FCR volunteers that are highly knowledgeable of the foster care system and statutory requirements, including areas of child development, substance abuse, mental health, case management, court process, and community resources. Volunteers must also be culturally responsive during their work at review hearings, and must know how to build trust and engage the meaningful participation of foster children and their families.

FCR volunteers are required to attend 25 hours of pre-service training before they can participate in a citizen review panel. In addition, all volunteers must attend a minimum of 10 hours of continuing education. Training of volunteers is a collaborative effort that involves FCR staff, local child abuse experts, foster parents, DCF, the Guardian ad Litem Program, and private child welfare agencies.

CRP Statutes

F.S. 39.701 - Judicial reviews (selected statutes)

(2)(a) The court shall review the status of the child and shall hold a hearing as provided in this part at least every 6 months until the child reaches permanency status. The court may dispense with the attendance of the child at the hearing, but may not dispense with the hearing or the presence of other parties to the review unless before the review a hearing is held before a **citizen review panel**.

(b) **Citizen review panels** may conduct hearings to review the status of a child. The court shall select the cases appropriate for referral to the **citizen review panels** and may order the attendance of the parties at the review panel hearings. However, any party may object to the referral of a case to a **citizen review panel**. Whenever such an objection has been filed with the court, the court shall review the substance of the objection and may conduct the review itself or refer the review to a **citizen review panel**. All parties retain the right to take exception to the findings or recommended orders of a **citizen review panel** in accordance with Rule 1.490(h), Florida Rules of Civil Procedure.

(c) Notice of a hearing by a **citizen review panel** must be provided as in subsection (5). At the conclusion of a **citizen review panel** hearing, each party may propose a recommended order to the chairperson of the panel. Thereafter, the **citizen review panel** shall submit its report, copies of the proposed recommended orders, and a copy of the panel's recommended order to the court. The **citizen review panel's** recommended order must be limited to the dispositional options available to the court in subsection (9). Each party may file exceptions to the report and recommended order of the **citizen review panel** in accordance with Rule 1.490, Florida Rules of Civil Procedure.

(3)(a) The initial judicial review hearing must be held no later than 90 days after the date of the disposition hearing or after the date of the hearing at which the court approves the case plan, whichever comes first, but in no event shall the review be held later than 6 months after the date the child was removed from the home. **Citizen review panels** shall not conduct more than two consecutive reviews without the child and the parties coming before the court for a judicial review.

F.S. 39.702 - Citizen review panels.

(1) **Citizen review panels** may be established in each judicial circuit and shall be authorized by an administrative order executed by the chief judge of each circuit. The court shall administer an oath of office to each **citizen review panel** member which shall authorize the panel member to participate in **citizen review panels** and make recommendations to the court pursuant to the provisions of this section.

(2) **Citizen review panels** shall be administered by an independent not-for-profit agency..... All independent not-for-profit agencies conducting citizen reviews must submit citizen review annual reports to the court.

(3) For the purpose of this section, a **citizen review panel** shall be composed of five volunteer members and shall conform with the requirements of this chapter. The presence of three members at a panel hearing shall constitute a quorum. Panel members shall serve without compensation.

(4) Based on the information provided to each **citizen review panel** pursuant to s. 39.701, each **citizen review panel** shall provide the court with a report and recommendations regarding the placement and dispositional alternatives the court shall consider before issuing a judicial review order.

(5) The independent not-for-profit agency authorized to administer each **citizen review panel** shall:

(a) In collaboration with the department, develop policies to assure that **citizen review panels** comply with all applicable state and federal laws.

(b) Establish policies for the recruitment, selection, retention, and terms of volunteer panel members. Final selection of **citizen review panel** members shall, to the extent possible, reflect the multicultural composition of the community which they serve. A criminal background check and personal reference check shall be conducted on each **citizen review panel** member prior to the member serving on a **citizen review panel**.

(c) In collaboration with the department, develop, implement, and maintain a training program for citizen review volunteers and provide training for each panel member prior to that member serving on a review panel. Such training may include, but shall not be limited to, instruction on dependency laws, departmental policies, and judicial procedures.

(d) Ensure that all **citizen review panel** members have read, understood, and signed an oath of confidentiality relating to written or verbal information provided to the panel members for review hearings.

(e) Establish policies to avoid actual or perceived conflicts of interest by panel members during the review process and to ensure accurate, fair reviews of each child dependency case.

(f) Establish policies to ensure ongoing communication with the department and the court.

(g) Establish policies to ensure adequate communication with the parent, the foster parent or legal custodian, the guardian ad litem, and any other person deemed appropriate.

(h) Establish procedures that encourage attendance and participation of interested persons and parties, including the parents, foster parents, or legal custodian with whom the child is placed, at citizen review hearings.

(i) Coordinate with existing **citizen review panels** to ensure consistency of operating procedures, data collection, analysis, and report generation.

(j) Make recommendations as necessary to the court concerning attendance of essential persons at the review and other issues pertinent to an effective review process.

(k) Ensure consistent methods of identifying barriers to the permanent placement of the child and delineation of findings and recommendations to the court.

(6) The department and agents of the department shall submit information to the **citizen review panel** when requested and shall address questions asked by the **citizen review panel** to identify barriers to the permanent placement of each child.

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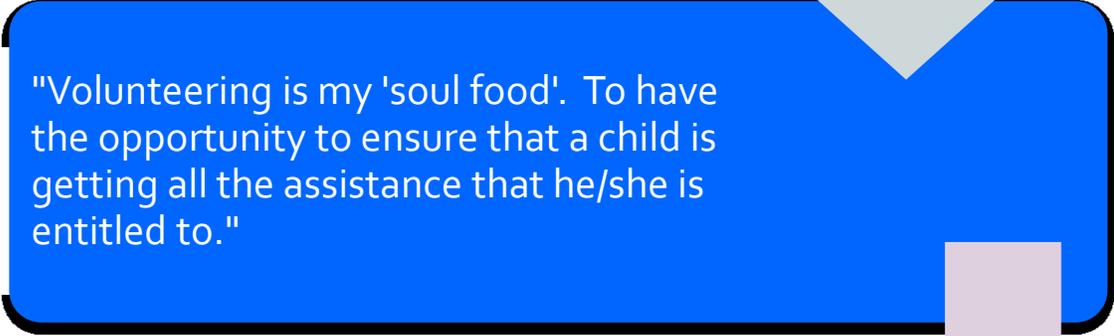


From Our Volunteers

"This is the most rewarding volunteer experience I have ever had. At the end of the day, I can leave court knowing that I had a direct effect on the life of a child and maybe made it a little better."



"Volunteering is my 'soul food'. To have the opportunity to ensure that a child is getting all the assistance that he/she is entitled to."



"We are making a difference for kids in foster care by providing another set of eyes and ears to address issues which are helping to improve the welfare of vulnerable children in our community."

