

Foster Care Review, Inc.

Program Activities Fiscal Year 2009-10



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.

For over 20 years, Foster Care Review (FCR) has served the community through our core citizen review panel program. Our 100+ volunteers undergo extensive pre-service training and dedicate one full day per month to review the cases of children in foster care. We have reviewed the cases of over 41,000 foster children throughout our history in accordance with federal and state mandates and best practices in child welfare. Cases are referred to FCR for review by the dependency judges of Miami-Dade County, and many have lauded the thoroughness and effectiveness of our model.

Through our program and reporting activities, FCR 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. 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.

FCR is a key partner in Miami-Dade County's child welfare system and as such, has observed trends and legal changes since our inception. Recently, in line with the Casey Family Programs "2020 Strategy", Florida has implemented several measures to reduce the overall number of children in foster care. Fewer children are entering care as more services are being provided in a preventative manner in order to keep children safely in their homes with their families. In addition, adoption goals are being set higher and are being exceeded. This has resulted in fewer children in out of home care and a lower caseload for FCR, allowing us to spend more time on each child and on collecting data to help us identify issues in need of advocacy.

Program Data

The chart below illustrates the total number of children/cases reviewed and total volunteer hours while contrasting the totals with last fiscal year's activities.

CHILDREN	FY 2009	FY 2010	('10 +/-)
Children (single count)	649	383	-41%
Children (duplicate count – many children are reviewed more than once within a one-year period)	1187	715	-40%
% of total foster children reviewed	649/ 3220 (20%)	383/2900 (13%)	-7%

CASES AND REVIEWS	FY 2009	FY 2010	('10 +/-)
Cases reviewed (single count)	428	261	-40%
Cases reviewed (duplicate count- – many children are reviewed more than once within a one-year period)	798	480	-40%
Children per case	649/428 (1.5)	383/261 (1.5)	No Change
Volunteers/ Vol. hours	115/5256 (45.7 hrs)	111/4694 (42.3 hrs)	-3.4

There were 383 children reviewed. Of these, 332 (87%) were reviewed twice. This represents about 13% of the total population of foster children in out-of-home care in Miami-Dade County during this timeframe.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Most children whose cases are referred to FCR for review are in their teens and are African-American or Hispanic. The proportion of males to females is approximately the same.

Age Range	0-5	6-12	13-17+	Total	%
Non-Hispanic Black	26	51	177	254	66%
Hispanic	16	19	55	90	23%
Multi-Racial	0	3	7	10	3%
Native American	3	0	0	3	1%
Non-Hispanic White	6	5	15	26	7%
Total	55	76	252	383	100%

Gender	Total	%
female	176	46%
male	207	54%
Total	383	100%

Before the Case Review

Judicial Review Social Study Reports

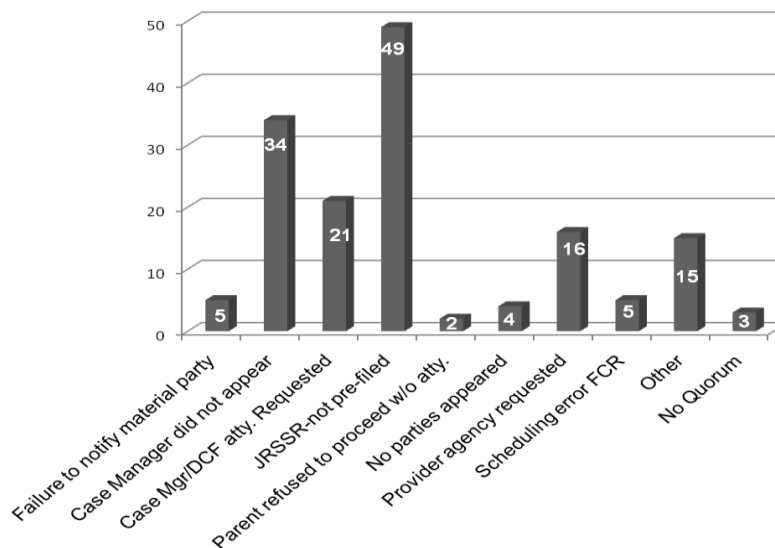
The community based care agency in charge of a child's case is required to file a Judicial Review Social Study Report (JRSSR) with the court 72 hours before the review. This document and its attachments contain information necessary for an effective review regarding: the child's placement, educational 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 requirement by the agency. The percent of compliance has improved substantially over the previous year but there is ample room to improve.

Compliance with JRSSR Pre-filing (by # children)						
	2009			2010		
	# Child rev/d	# JRSSR Pre-filed	%	# Child rev/d	# JRSSR Pre-filed	%
CFCE	238	168	70%	137	120	88%
CHARLEE	331	211	64%	230	174	76%
CHS	182	116	64%	119	85	71%
FRC	131	100	76%	84	70	83%
HHCH	40	23	58%	16	13	81%
OHU	242	113	47%	129	73	57%
NTF	23	15	65%	Agency closed	Agency closed	
Total/Ave.	1187	746	63%	715	535	75%

Case Resets/Continuances

There are situations in which panels are unable to legally proceed with a scheduled review and it must be scheduled again or "reset/continued". This is an inconvenience to all parties involved and most importantly results in a delay in progress in a child's case and potentially a barrier to permanency. FCR saw an increase in the percentage of resets in FY 2009-10 for the reasons listed below.

Reasons for Resets (n=154)



Review Findings

Noncompliance- The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA)

Federal funding for child welfare is determined, in part, by the States' compliance with statutory requirements such as ASFA. ASFA has set forth the timeframes for children's permanency and standards on safety and wellbeing, including making reasonable efforts to permanency and periodic review of caseplans. FCR's panels are trained to track compliance with ASFA. If a serious noncompliance issue is discovered or there is determined to be risk to a child, the panel will request a post-judicial review before the Court for immediate judicial action.

Non-compliance with case plan requirements under the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA)

Case plan noncompliance (n=715)			
Agency	Children reviewed	Non Compliance	
			%
CFCE	137	14	10%
CHARLEE	230	20	9%
CHS	119	20	17%
FRC	84	6	7%
HHCH	16	1	6%
OHU	129	3	2%
Total/Ave.	715	64	9%

Reasons for noncompliance:

- No case plan was in effect (2);
- Tasks from previous orders were not completed (38);
- No reasonable efforts to place the child into a permanent placement (28);
- Did not make reasonable efforts to assure all court order visitation occurs (4),
- Case management was inadequate (31);
- Other (10)

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

Post-Judicial Reviews (by # children)	57/715 (8%)	-6% under FY 2008-09
--	--------------------	-----------------------------

Special Circumstances

	FY 2009	FY 2010	(+/-)
Emancipation	124 (19%)	75 (20%)	+1%
Delinquency	138 (21%)	100 (26%)	+5%
Special needs	266 (41%)	204 (53%)	+12%
Placement concerns	75 (12%)	52 (14%)	+2%
Runaways	28 (4%)	23 (6%)	+2%
Length of stay: 3yrs+	53%	65%	+12%

Of particular concern to FCR are trends in indicators that may lead to a decreased chance of achieving permanency or reflects that a child is at a higher risk of harm. The above chart lists the numbers of children who: were emancipated during this time frame, had a history of delinquency, have special education needs, had concerns identified regarding the safety/appropriateness of current placement, were on runaway status at the time of review and those who had a length of stay in foster care that was longer than 3 years.

Despite the fact that there was a decrease in the total number of children reviewed by FCR, the percentage of children with the circumstances reflected in the chart **increased** in all categories. Another byproduct of Florida's initiatives to reduce the children in care is that when children are placed in out of home care, they are placed for shorter periods of time and thus, their cases do not come before FCR's panels for review. This has always been the case with younger children who are commonly reunified or adopted before they come before our panels. The children referred to FCR for review have always disproportionately represented older children in more complex scenarios with poorer prospects for the future and even more so at the present time. FCR recognizes this and has used its resources to dedicate more time and volunteer training to the review of these cases.

Citizen Review Panels Are Specialized

In fact, FCR's citizen review panels have each been specialized to review cases of children within a specific age range. Funding from The Children's Trust, the Dade Community Foundation's Safe Passages Initiative, The Joseph H. and Florence A. Roblee Foundation and other smaller grants have allowed us to provide volunteer training opportunities to enhance our panels to specialize in the needs and outlook for children ages 0-5, 6-12 and youth ages 13 and above.

You can see in the chart below, the total numbers of children reviewed in each age range. The table also demonstrates the differences in final case plan goals by age range. The youngest children are most likely to have a goal of adoption or reunification whereas the oldest children most frequently have the goal of Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement.

Children reviewed by case plan goal and age group

Case Plan Goals	# children by goal/age range			
	0-5	6-12	13-17+	Total
Adoption	42	69	49	160
Another Planned Perm Living Arrangement		2	194	196
Permanent Guardianship			6	6
Reunification with Father	1			1
Reunification with Mother	10	3		13
Reunification with Parents	2	2	3	7
Grand Total	55	76	252	383

Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA)

One recent initiative in the foster care system is to reduce the number of children with an APPLA goal. APPLA is used specifically for older youth who are likely to age out of foster care. Our concern is that once a child is assigned an APPLA goal, adoption or other permanency efforts stop.

During July 2009 to June 2010 there were *487* citizen reviews for *252* youths between the ages of 13 and 17.

Total # of youths reviewed age 13-17+ with goal of APPLA = 194 (**77%**)

Total # of youths reviewed age 11 with goal of APPLA = 2

GOAL: Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement

Age	Total
11	2
13	6
14	13
15	15
16	39
17+	121
Total	194

The following scenario, as described by one of FCR's citizen review specialists, demonstrates the seriousness of a goal of APPLA.

Both 11 year olds with a goal of APPLA have disabilities. One is profoundly mentally handicapped and the other has specific learning disabilities. In the case of the latter, the foster mother reported that she and her husband will care for her until one or both of them can longer do it, including once she is reaches 18 years old. No one in the home is willing to provide permanency for her.

Independent Living Reviews

Without adequate planning and resources, the prospects for the futures of the older youth are dim. Therefore, FCR dedicates considerable time and resources to providing continuing education to the volunteers who serve on the review panels for Independent Living Youth and partnering with other agencies in the community to ensure that the resources available to the youth are well known. The panels' primary goal is to ensure the youths are prepared for successful adult living and the community based care agencies comply with statutory requirements.

Zero to Five Reviews

Prevention is the key when it comes to FCR's reviews of children up to age 5 who are in foster care. Although this is a small percentage of our overall population of children reviewed (14%), special care is taken to address their needs now to ensure they are physically, developmentally and emotionally on target. Panels determine: whether or not the children have had timely physical and dental exams, if a required Level of Care assessment has been completed by the community based care agency and the access the child has to an appropriate educational setting for social and emotional growth. Due to local efforts in increasing the rate of adoption, many of these younger children are getting adopted.

Review Participation

The more parties involved in a review, the more information is provided to the citizen review panels and the effective the review. At FCR we strongly believe in encouraging the participation of caregivers and, in the case of older youth, that the youth be present as well in order to know as much as possible about his or her case and be able to speak up about his or her needs.

Thanks to a pilot youth outreach project funded through the GAP Foundation and the work of our Review Specialist for the Zero to Five project, combined with the efforts of the courts, we saw an overall increase in review participation in FY 2009-10 by parents, foster parents and youth.

Participation at reviews (n=715)

** = Marked increase in both number and percentage over FY 2008-09

Participants at reviews	Total
Atty. for Child	69
Atty. for DCF/Case Mgmt. Agency	715
Atty. for Parent - Father	50
Atty. for Parent - Mother	64
Case Mgr. - Private Agency	716
Case Mgr. - Rep./Substitute	17
Child	367**
Guardian ad Litem	431
Guardian ad Litem - Rep.	61
Other	89
Other Representative	65
Parent - Father	54**
Parent - Foster	184**
Parent - Mother	93**
Parent - Pre-Adoptive	12
Relative	16
Sibling	1
Supervisor of Case Mgr.	5
Total	3009

Other Activities and Successes

- FCR's peer advocate program, funded by The GAP Foundation, was completed in December 2009. Peer advocates are former foster youth who notify current foster youth of their reviews, encourage them to attend and answer questions they might have.
- The Florida Association for Women Lawyers chose to partner with FCR to host a fundraising event – Fiesta Miami! at the Bakehouse Art Complex.
- FCR held a symposium, open to volunteers, community partners and foster parents on the subject of co-parenting successfully between biological parents and foster parents.
- Through a grant in April 2010 from the Dade Community Foundation's Safe Passages Initiative, FCR was able to begin a new project of performing administrative reviews of youth who have recently exited foster care. This will allow us to determine what is working and what is lacking with regards to the preparation for independent living within our community's system of care.