

CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL PROGRAM

ANNUAL REPORT

FISCAL YEAR

2020-2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 1989, Florida Foster Care Review has engaged community volunteers to advance the safety, stability and success of children in Miami-Dade County's foster care system. We accomplish this by connecting children and young adults under the jurisdiction of the dependency court to essential services, supportive relationships, and permanent families. Our programs promote resilience, stability and connectedness – essential ingredients for lifelong well-being.

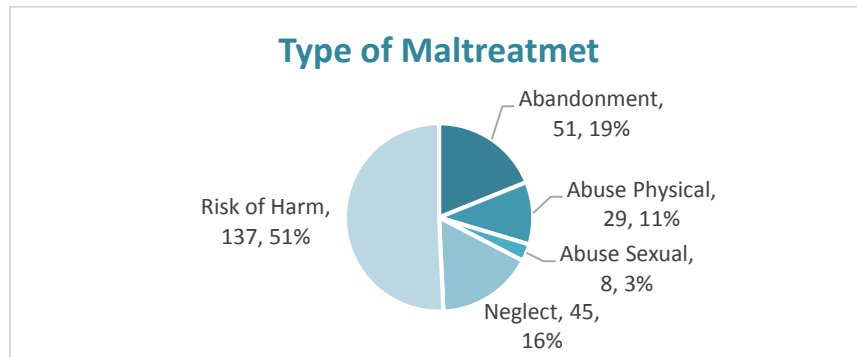
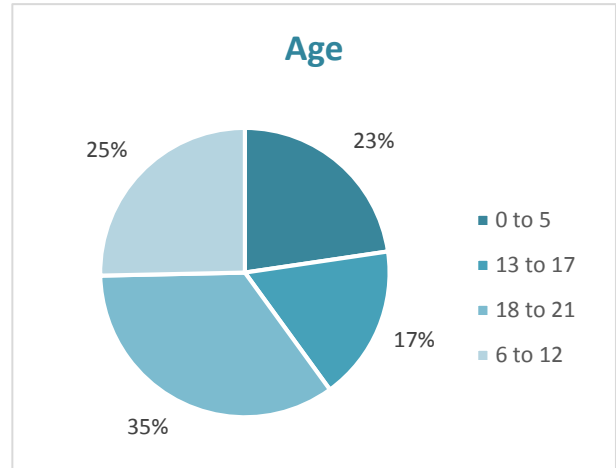
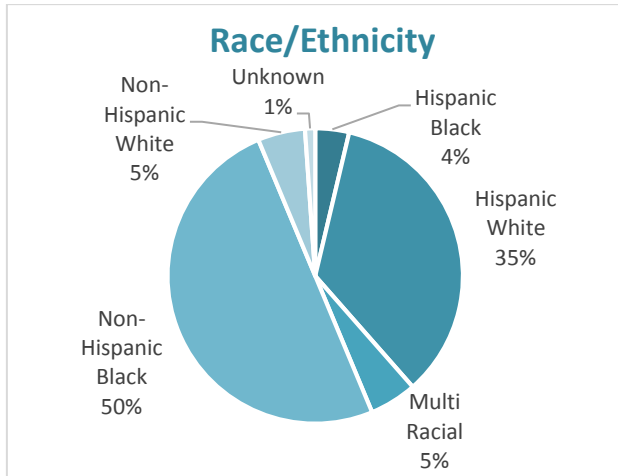
In preparation for a Citizen Review Panel (CRP) review hearing, FFCR staff, called Review Specialists, examine court documents, develop a comprehensive summary of the child's experience in care and note red flags. Prior to each hearing, CRP volunteers review the summary and discuss concerns with the Review Specialist. During the hearing, panelists interview case parties and participants – children, young adults, parents, caregivers, foster parents, Guardians ad Litem, case managers, and others involved in the child's or young adult's life such as their therapist or mentor – in order to assess the child's or young adult's needs. With guidance from staff, panelists gather information about critical therapeutic, educational, medical and other service needs for the families we serve.

Between July 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021 (fiscal year 2020-21), FFCR's Citizen Review Panel (CRP) Program conducted 420 review hearings of 270 children, youth and young adults in Miami's foster care system. This accounts for approximately 16-18% of the children and young adults under the jurisdiction of the dependency court during that time period.

At the conclusion of each hearing, after parties are excused, CRP members consider the evidence presented. They then issue recommended court orders that prioritize the child's or young adult's safety, their physical and mental wellbeing, and their attainment of a permanent home. The CRP has its most profound impact through these recommendations that, upon judicial signature, become court orders with which foster agencies must comply. Because of orders initiated by the CRP, a girl with an undiagnosed hearing impairment might receive treatment, a teenager with a substance abuse problem might receive counseling, or a child might be provided with tutoring to overcome an educational obstacle.

FFCR's team of professionals evaluate the effectiveness of our work and implement innovative approaches to improve outcomes for the children and young adults we serve. By analyzing the data collected during the CRP review process, FFCR is uniquely positioned to highlight developments and trends impacting children, youth and young adults involved with Miami-Dade's child welfare system. This report highlights both quantitative and qualitative data about the children, youth and young adults served by the Citizen Review Panel Program, describes their experiences in Miami's foster care system, and showcases the transformative impact of the Citizen Review Panel Program.

SNAPSHOT OF YOUTH SERVED



PERMANENCY PLAN	YEARS IN CARE				TOTAL
	<1	1-2	3-4	5+	
Adoption	5	69	35	18	127
APPLA	0	5	6	2	13
Maintain & Strengthen	2	13	0	0	15
Permanent Guardianship	0	1	2	0	3
Reunification	8	11	4	0	23
TOTAL	15	99	47	20	181

Note: This data includes all 181 children who had at least one review before the CRP while under age 18 during FY 2020-21. Some may have subsequently aged out or transitioned to Extended Foster Care.

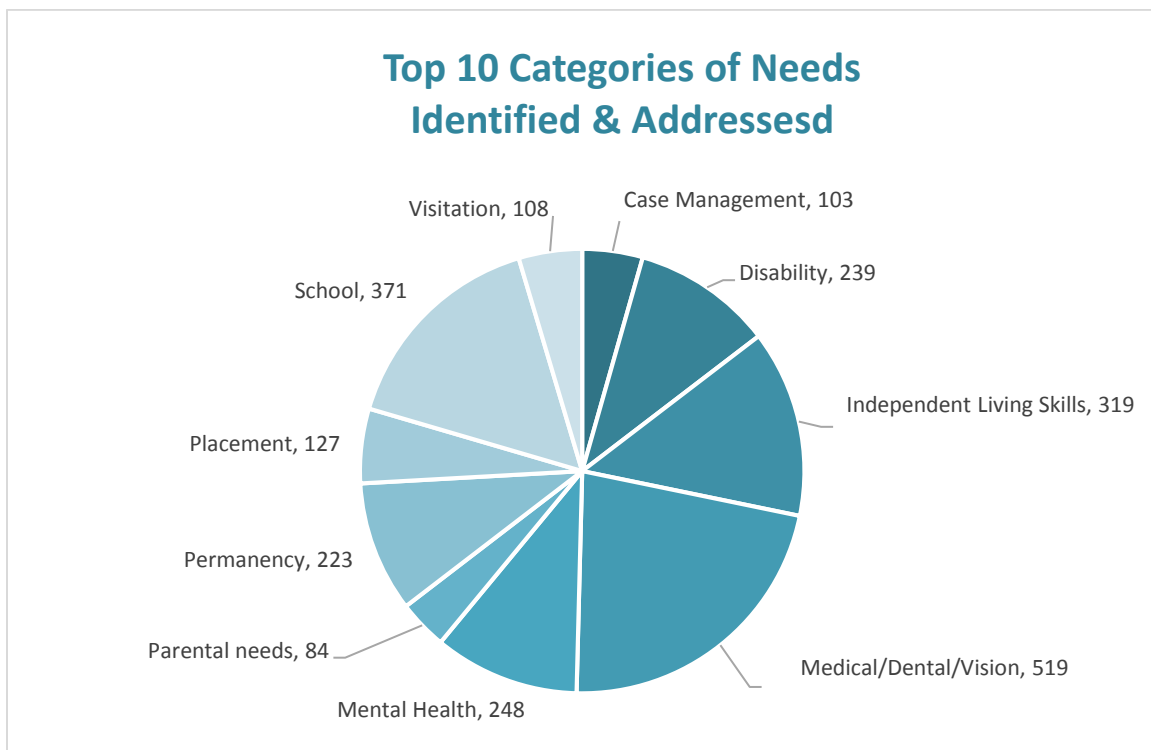
PLACEMENT TYPE*	# OF CHILDREN
Foster Home	98
Group Home	4
Group Shelter	2
APD Home	19
Relative/Non-Relative	56
Institutional/Therapeutic	7
Independent Living or Transition Housing	54
With Parent(s)	15
Incarcerated/Other	15
TOTAL	270

THE VALUE OF VOLUNTEERS

Collectively, FFCR'S 73 volunteers active during FY 2020-21 contributed nearly 2272 hours of volunteer service valued at just under \$200,000. About 34% of our volunteers have served on a monthly review panel for six or more years, far longer than the average case manager has been in the field. Most (89%) of our volunteers are professionals or have retired from a profession. Nearly all have a college degree, with about 51% of our volunteers holding an advanced degree. Many of our volunteers are involved with other organizations and are able to provide information about community resources to case managers, caregivers, and/or youth who participate in review hearings. More than half of our volunteers not only contribute their time and talent, but they also financially support FFCR's mission.

THE IMPACT OF CITIZEN REVIEW PANELS

To thrive, children and youth need stable, supportive relationships with stable adults as well as safe environments within which to grow and learn. Citizen Review Panels (CRPs) assess the extent to which children in foster care are safe and well-cared for. Most critically, CRPs work to ensure that every child, youth and young adult in the foster care system is connected in both the short and long-term to a forever family. To accomplish this, CRPs recommend detailed actions to the Court to specifically address identified needs.



CITIZEN REVIEW PANELS IMPROVE AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS

At every review hearing, pursuant to statute, the CRP determines the compliance of child welfare agencies with their court-ordered tasks and responsibilities. In fiscal year 2020-21, the case management agency/DCF was found in *compliance* with their obligations under the case plan in 79% of all reviews conducted by the Citizen Review Panel. The agency/DCF was found to be in *non-compliance* in 1% of the reviews and found in *partial compliance* with their obligations to the child and/or family in 20% of the reviews conducted by the Citizen Review Panel.

Once a child has been reviewed by the CRP, at each subsequent review hearing before the CRP the panel assesses agency compliance with prior CRP recommended orders that were adopted by the court. In FY 2020-21, case management agencies complied with 75% of the orders recommended by the CRP program and approved by the court. Even with the many challenges created by the global COVID-19 pandemic during the 4th quarter of the fiscal year, this represents an increase from 68% compliance in FY 2018-19 and 72% in FY 2019-20.

We believe this improvement is due in large part to FFCR's robust Post Review Advocacy efforts. To promote increased compliance with court orders on behalf of children and families, in October 2019, FFCR developed an Advocacy Manager position to focus on increasing the impact of the CRP through compliance with the panel's judicially adopted recommended orders. Post Review Advocacy ranges from sending reminders and information about community resources to case managers to setting and participating in Post-Judicial Review Hearings before the court. Post Review Advocacy has proven especially critical during the pandemic, which has exacerbated the many challenges and barriers to the safety, well-being and permanency of children and young adults in the foster care system. During FY 2020-21, FFCR engaged in Post Review Advocacy for 243 children and young adults, including 166 Post-Judicial Review Hearings before the Court to resolve critical safety issues, child/family needs and overall barriers to permanency (compared to 73 Post-Judicial Review Hearings last fiscal year). We believe that the improved agency compliance noted above correlates with the increase in FFCR's Post Review Advocacy efforts, especially Post-Judicial Review Hearings.

KATELYN

Katelyn, a young adult in the Extended Foster Care Program, is the mother of a two-year old child. At the time of her CRP review hearing, she was expecting her second child. Katelyn participated in her review hearing and was praised by her case worker for being an excellent mother. During the review hearing, Katelyn openly asked for guidance scheduling some bloodwork ordered by her doctor, learning about diaper banks, and making academic progress. Although Court intervention was not deemed necessary, Katelyn did not have an attorney, mentor or guardian ad litem to turn to and was definitely in need of some assistance, but had not communicated this to her case worker and was not aware of community resources available to her.

Through our Post Review Advocacy follow up process, FFCR’s Advocacy Manager contacted the lead agency’s Education Specialists and a local mentoring program. Katelyn was quickly linked with a medical office near her so she could complete the bloodwork, and she was linked to tutoring resources to help her prepare for the GED. Katelyn was also connected with a mentor and was provided information about free resources for parents of young children, including how to access diaper banks.

Katelyn is an independent and determined young woman who simply needed some assistance that most young people receive from their family or other trusted adults. However, this type of support is often extremely difficult for even the most resourceful young people in foster care to obtain. For Katelyn, and many other young adults in foster care, the CRP provides a forum where they can express their needs and, most importantly, ensure that they receive the help and information they need to take positive steps forward in their lives.

**Names and identifying information have been changed to protect privacy*

CITIZEN REVIEW PANELS ADDRESS UNMET NEEDS AND GAPS IN SERVICE

Our experienced staff and seasoned volunteers are trained to assess each child’s case systematically and objectively, evaluating testimony and documentation in order to identify gaps and offer solutions. Equally important, they bring to the table a deep knowledge of policies and resources that are particularly helpful when it comes to solving complex problems. Unfortunately, due in large part to Covid-19, CRP academic, developmental and well-being data from 2020-21 are more concerning than what we observed in 2019-20. This past year, the pandemic severely impacted participation in extracurricular activities by youth in foster care – only 9% of 6-12 year olds were involved in an extracurricular activity compared to 22% last fiscal year, and 13% of 13-17 year olds, compared to 35% last year. This is a deeply concerning trend considering the critical importance of extracurricular activities to all children, but especially those in foster care.

Age Range	Developmentally on Target	Academic Achievement of C’s and above	Enrolled in Extracurricular Activities
0-5	49%	N/A	N/A
6-12	75%	71%	9%
13-17	98%	41%	13%

CITIZEN REVIEW PANELS TREAT EACH CHILD AS A UNIQUE INDIVIDUAL

During every review hearing, no matter how many siblings, the CRP addresses one child at a time. CRP volunteers, supported by our expert staff, evaluate all documentation and seek information related to children's physical, emotional, developmental and academic needs. Often, judges refer large sibling groups to the CRP for review, acknowledging the challenge of conducting a thorough review for 6, 8 or 12 children from the same family. Many of the children and youth referred to the CRP have complex physical, cognitive and/or emotional disabilities or conditions.

THE SMITHS

The five Smith children entered foster care in mid-2019. Each child has special developmental and/or educational needs. At the time of their most recent CRP review hearing, they were living with three different pre-adoptive families. The panel meticulously prepared for their review hearing by reading the Judicial Review Social Study Report and combing through stacks of supporting documentation detailing the children's history, special needs and services. During the review hearing, it became clear that the five siblings had not been having consistent visits with each other for nearly a year, since the Covid-19 pandemic began, the adoptions process had stalled and that each child had at least one unaddressed medical, developmental or educational need. The panel noted that one of the younger children needed in-home developmental services and identified the fact that, due to her diagnosis, one of the older children may be entitled to SSI benefits that may assist her adoptive family in caring for her special needs. Furthermore, this child needed a therapeutic assessment which had been pending for quite some time.

To ensure timely compliance with the many orders issued by the panel for each child, a Post Judicial Review hearing was set before the judge. By the time of the hearing, many of the issues raised had finally been addressed by the agency. They had re-initiated sibling visits among the older children via zoom (due to the pandemic); however, the younger children were not able to participate in the zoom visits. The Court ordered that all children have a sibling visit at least once a month in person, once safe. The agency also provided a detailed adoption status report listing precisely what was needed to finalize each child's adoption. In preparation for the Post Judicial Review Hearing, FFCR's Advocacy Manager obtained each child's school reports from Miami-Dade County Public Schools which showed that one of the children was particularly struggling in school. In response, the judge set a follow up hearing to maintain close oversight of her educational progress and to ensure she received appropriate tutoring services and accommodations.

Dependency court cases involving large sibling groups are some of the most complex and time intensive cases. To effectively address each child's needs as well as relationship needs of the siblings, it is crucial to provide individual attention to each child, which is one of the unique aspects of the CRP process. By sharing the CRP's insights with the court and harnessing the court's capacity to hold parties accountable, Post Judicial Review hearings are a valuable tool for ensuring children in foster care have their needs met. **Names and identifying information have been changed to protect privacy*

CITIZEN REVIEW PANELS ENSURE OLDER YOUTH RECEIVE ASSISTANCE WITH TRANSITIONING TO ADULthood

Youth ages 13-17 who are placed in a licensed care setting are required to receive specific services and supports to prepare them for adulthood. Of the 43 youth ages 13-17 reviewed by the CRP in 2020-21, 41 youth qualified for “independent living services” and are thus entitled to life skills training and other supports to help them prepare for the transition to adulthood. Of these 41 youth, 13 had a “permanency goal” of APPLA (Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement), which, ultimately, does not lead to permanency, but rather to aging out of the system when they turn 18. Nearly all of the youth who qualified for independent living services were reported to be receiving some sort of life skills preparation and training by their caregivers. Because these services are not standardized and foster families are expected to provide hands on training, the quality and effectiveness of efforts to prepare youth for independent living is difficult to verify.

The CRP also determines whether these 13-17 year olds have important documents so that they can apply for a job, obtain a driver’s license and/or access benefits. As the table below demonstrates, 73% did not have any form of Florida ID.

	Has	Does not have	Case manager did not know
Florida ID	22%	73%	5%
Social Security Card*	54%	27%	9%
Birth Certificate	85%	10%	5%
Medicaid Card	76%	12%	2%

**Note: 4 children were not eligible for a social security card.*

For youth 15-17 years old who qualify for independent living services at the time of their most recent review hearing, the CRP seeks to determine whether they have been provided critical information and linkages to services and supports available to them as older teens who are approaching their 18th birthday. Some information is only related to those who are 16+ years old, and, on occasion, a service is deemed “not applicable” due to a youth’s physical or emotional disability and/or specialized placement at the time of the review (i.e. psychiatric hospital or correctional facility).

	Yes	No	Case manager did not know	Not applicable
Was youth provided information about Post-Secondary Educational Support Services (PESS)	66%	28%	3%	3%
Was youth informed about Extended Foster Care (EFC)	69%	25%	3%	3%
Did youth complete Financial Literacy training*	23%	77%	0%	0%
Does youth have has a Bank Account*	14%	86%	0%	0%
Does youth have a Driver's License or Permit*	4.5%	91%	0%	4.5%
Is youth employed*	27%	64%	0%	9%
If youth is not employed, does youth wish to be employed*	21%	43%	36%	0%
* Information only sought from 16-17 year olds				

The panel also seeks to ensure that youth who are 17 and facing the potential of aging out of foster care when they turn 18, have a stable place to live, even for those youth who are planning to go into Extended Foster Care. During FY 2020-21, of the 15 seventeen year-olds reviewed by the CRP, only nine (9) had a formal document detailing their plans for transitioning out of the foster care system. The data below describe both the formal and informal plans of all 15 youth.

Transition to Extended Foster Care

- 66% were reportedly planning to transition to Extended Foster Care upon turning 18
- 20% of the youth were undecided about whether or not to enter Extended Foster Care
- 1 youth did not plan to enter Extended Foster Care

Post Foster Care Living Arrangements

- 1 youth did not know where she would live once she transitioned from foster care
- 47% planned to live in their current foster home or new foster home upon entering Extended Foster Care
- One youth planned to return to his biological parent(s)
- One youth planned to join the U.S. Military

Employment Preparation

- 33% had a resume
- 33% had some work experience

CITIZEN REVIEW PANELS ENSURE YOUNG ADULTS IN EXTENDED FOSTER CARE CONTINUE TO RECEIVE CRITICAL SUPPORT

Between July 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021, FFCR's CRP conducted judicial reviews for 92 young adults ages 18-21 who were participating in the Extended Foster Care (EFC) program at the time of their review. To qualify for Extended Foster Care, a former foster youth must be enrolled in school or employed part-time and they must reside in a living arrangement approved by Citrus Family Care Network (Miami's lead community based care agency). A young adult may also qualify for the program if they are participating in an activity that eliminates the barriers to attend school or gain employment, or if a young adult has a disability that prohibits them from engaging in any of these qualifying activities. Young adults may voluntarily enter or exit EFC at any time between the ages of 18 and 21 (22 if disabled). They may also be removed from EFC when they no longer have a qualifying activity or approved living arrangement.

JORDAN

Jordan entered foster care when he was 13 years old. Instead of aging out when he turned 18, Jordan transitioned to the Extended Foster Care (EFC) program, which provides young adults with housing, resources, and other valuable tools as they enter adulthood. Upon entering EFC, Jordan was referred to the Citizen Review Panel. Prior to the hearing, FFCR's Advocacy Manager, emailed and called Jordan to encourage him to attend the review hearing, explain the review process and discuss the value of participating in the hearing. She also provided an FAQ document with information that young adults often have about CRP hearings and their dependency case in general.

During the review, the panel learned that Jordan was at risk of termination from the EFC program for failing to participate in a "qualifying activity." However, during the hearing, Jordan explained that he was in the process of enlisting in the United States Marines Corps and recently completed the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) test. He provided an official letter showing his acceptance into the Marines recruitment program. Unaware of this information, Jordan's case manager was unsure whether this qualified him for continued participation in EFC. After the review hearing, CRP staff discussed this with the lead CBC agency, Citrus Family Care Network, and they decided to reverse their decision regarding terminating Jordan from EFC.

Jordan's participation in the review hearing provided him an opportunity to share his personal and professional goals and to provide details about specifically what he was doing to meet his future goals by actively participating in the Marine's recruitment and physical training program, while he waited for Boot Camp to begin. If Jordan had not participated during the review, the panel would not have known he was taking steps to enlist in the Marines and the CRP could not have helped pursue his eligibility for EFC benefits. Ensuring that Jordan was able to remain in EFC was critical to his ability to successfully pursue his long-term goals.

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Ninety-six percent (96%) of the young adults reviewed were in the EFC program for the first time. Five of the young adults reviewed were at risk of being discharged from the program at the time of their review. Seventy percent (70%) of the young adults reviewed qualified for EFC because they were working towards obtaining their high school diploma or GED. Just over 10% qualified through participation in a postsecondary or vocational program and 14% qualified through employment.

Nearly all of the young adults reviewed by the CRP in FY 2020-21 were determined to have been engaged monthly by their case manager, received life skills preparation, received an educational stipend (most received \$200/month), and were assisted by their case manager with maintaining their qualification for the EFC program.

Housing

More than half (58%) of the young adults reviewed were living in “transitional housing” at the time of their review. The “approved living arrangement” for the remaining young adults reviewed included:

- APD foster home (18%)
- Own apartment or an apartment/home with roommate(s) (5%)
- College campus housing (1 young adult)
- Two (2) of the young adults did not reside in an approved living arrangement at the time of their review
- Armed forces (1)
- Shelter (1)
- Relatives (3)
- Licensed foster home (3)/Group foster home (1)
- Mental health facility (1)/Nursing facility (1)/Detention Center (1)

Education

Sixty-nine of the 92 young adults reviewed were in school:

- 16% were enrolled in post-secondary or vocational programs
- 17% were studying for a GED
- 45% were working towards a high school diploma
- 13 young adults were enrolled in a high school completion/credit recovery program
- 1 young adult was enrolled in an ESOL program
- 1 young adult was enrolled in a vocational rehabilitation program

Employment

- 33% of the young adults were employed at the time of their review
- 37% of those employed had full-time employment
- 31% of all young adults reviewed reported having no work experience

KEVIN

Kevin entered foster care along with his five siblings when he was 17 years old. Although a relative was able to care for his brothers and sisters, Kevin went into a foster home. Since he was never reunified with his parents or adopted, Kevin chose to participate in the state's Extended Foster Care (EFC) program. It was at this point his case was referred to the CRP for review. FFCR's Advocacy Manager contacted Kevin to explain the CRP process, answer any of his questions, and encouraged him to participate in his CRP hearing. Kevin actively participated in the review and engaged with the panel, openly answering their questions and sharing his concerns and questions. Kevin told the panel members he was in need of a new laptop, a bed, a dresser, and a desk. He also needed assistance with his educational progress and applying for food stamps. The panel explained that some youth have mentors to help them with exploring their interests and providing general guidance and assistance, and Kevin said he was interested in being linked to a mentor.

The CRP set a Post Judicial Review hearing before the judge in charge of his case to ensure that the agency addressed his needs timely and provide Kevin with an opportunity to voice his concerns. In Kevin's case, the panel was particularly concerned with ensuring Kevin's basic needs were met and in assisting him with continuing to qualify for the EFC program, which is vital to his future success. At the Post Judicial Review hearing several weeks after the panel's review hearing, the judge inquired about the agency's follow up with each of the recommendations in the CRP's report. The case manager reported that, since the CRP hearing, Kevin had been provided specific information about the next steps for obtaining his high school diploma and he had received a new laptop and furniture. Kevin was also assisted with applying for food stamps and had been linked to an organization that provides mentors for youth and young adults in foster care.

Without Kevin's participation in his CRP hearing, the panel would have had to rely on the case manager's impressions of what Kevin needed rather than hearing directly from Kevin himself. Further, Kevin experienced the power of expressing his needs, and, most importantly, in doing so, was able to receive the help, resources and information he needed to improve his quality of life and take greater control of his life and his future.

**Names and identifying information have been changed to protect privacy*

THE CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL ACTIVELY ENGAGES CAREGIVERS & YOUNG ADULTS IN THE LEGAL PROCESS

The importance of ensuring the participation of children, young adults and caregivers in CRP review hearings cannot be overstated. Their involvement elevates the impact of the entire process by providing firsthand accounts of what is taking place in their lives and also allows panel members to hear directly about children's current needs and future aspirations. This, in turn, leads to more targeted recommendations by the CRP. Over the past several years, FFCR has devoted time and resources to educating foster parents about the CRP process and to engaging in outreach to caregivers prior to their foster child's CRP review hearing to ensure the caregiver is aware of the hearing and to answer any questions about the process. The CRP panel members also make sure that caregivers and children are

provided time during the review to share information they believe is critical and to ask questions about the process.

Due to both the accessibility of remote reviews and continuous outreach efforts by FFCR, participation of young adults increased from 45% in fiscal year 2019-20 to 48% in 2020-21. Caregiver participation increased from 29% to 46% between the two time periods.

JANICE & JOHN

Janice (2 years old) and John (4 years old) are siblings who had been in foster care for most of their young lives at the time of their CRP review hearing. The children had extensive medical and developmental needs. The children lived together with a pre-adoptive medical foster family. To prepare, CRP staff and volunteers reviewed the numerous reports, medical records, therapeutic assessments, and developmental evaluations available in the child's court file. Also in advance of the hearing, FFCR's Advocacy Manager contacted the children's foster parent, explained the purpose of the CRP review hearing and encouraged her to participate. She was also provided with an FAQ document to explain the CRP review process and the value of her participation in the review hearing.

During the review hearing, the case management agency was not able to provide written or verbal updates regarding Janice or John's current medical, psychological, educational or developmental status. Thankfully, their foster parent was able to provide a detailed account of the children's daily activities, needs, and progress with the many interventions and services they were receiving and, as a result, the CRP provided the Court with an extensive, detailed, and up-to-date report that highlighted each child's needs and recommended orders to address barriers to their safety, permanency and well-being.

Without the caregiver's participation, the absence of information and documentation would have painted a very different picture of the children's needs. The panel thanked Janice and John's foster parent for participating in the review hearing and commended her incredible commitment to the children as well as her involvement in their complex care.

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BARRIERS TO PERMANENCY

Data gathered during CRP review hearings continue to reflect a number of recurring barriers to children achieving permanency within 12 months of removal. Every time the CRP reviews a child 0-17 years old, the panel determines whether there are barriers to permanency and, if so, describes the barrier(s) in the written report submitted to the court and the parties. CRP staff code each barrier in the CRP database. The top five most frequently identified barriers to permanency identified during FY 2020-21 are discussed below.

LENGTH OF TIME THE CHILD HAS BEEN IN CARE

Although many children in Miami-Dade's foster care system eventually achieve permanency, the process still takes far too long for most children. Children who stay in foster care for extended periods often bounce from home to home while also contending with a revolving door of case managers, clinicians and other child welfare professionals. It is well-established that the longer a child stays in foster care, the lower the likelihood of that child achieving permanency. The instability while in care is compounded when the system fails to ensure the child exits foster care to a permanent family (through reunification, adoption or permanent guardianship) and/or a supportive adult who is committed to the child forever. Youth who are failed by the system and end up aging out, typically face poor life outcomes as adults across all measures of well-being.

Last fiscal year, the CRP conducted 251 review hearings for 178 children who were 0-17 years old during at least one of their review hearings. Nearly all of these children (164) had been under the court's jurisdiction with an open dependency case longer than 12 months at the time the CRP reviewed their case. For children with a goal of reunification, the delay was typically due to the parents needing more time to continue to progress with their services. For children with a goal of adoption, the delay was often due to the lack of an identified adoptive family or the failure to finalize adoption with an identified family (see Legal and Procedural delays below).

LEGAL OR PROCEDURAL DELAYS

There are a variety of legal and procedural issues that delay permanency for children. A child may have one or more of the following, which are discussed and addressed (when applicable) at each review:

- Paternity has not been established
- No Legal Father order has not been entered
- Diligent Search pending
- TPR petition has not been filed

- TPR trial is pending
- TPR final judgement is being appealed
- Adoptive placement has not been identified
- Parent was not referred to services in a timely manner
- Home study for placement is pending (particularly out of county or out of state home studies)
- Adoption finalization is pending

SPECIAL NEEDS AND/OR BEHAVIORAL ISSUES

In some instances, the child's special medical, cognitive or emotional needs may require a living arrangement that is not conducive to permanency. For example, a child may have cerebral palsy and require the care and support offered by a medical foster home; however, most medical foster parents are not looking to adopt a child and many prospective adoptive parents are not willing or able to take on an extremely medically needy child (although there are parents who adopt special needs children).

FAMILY IS PROGRESSING, BUT NEEDS MORE TIME TO ADDRESS ISSUES

In fiscal year 2018-19, the CRP reviewed 175 children with the goal of reunification; however, for a variety of reasons, including, but not only the pandemic, the CRP reviewed only 29 children with a reunification goal in 2019-20 and 23 in 2020-21. (Please see Successes & Challenges section below for further explanation of this trend). In addition to the children with a goal of reunification who were reviewed by the CRP during FY 2020-21, the program also reviewed 15 children who were living with one or both parents and had a permanency goal to "maintain and strengthen placement" with parent(s).

The CRP assessed the mother's compliance with the case plan in 57 review hearings and assessed the father's compliance with the case plan in 39 reviews. The panel found the mothers substantially compliant in 23% of the reviews, partially compliant in 61% of the reviews, and in non-compliance with their case plans in 16%. Fathers were determined by the panel to be substantially compliant in 7 % of the reviews, partially compliant in 85% of the reviews, and in non-compliance in 8% of the reviews.

Throughout fiscal year 2020-21, most parental visits took place via telephone or zoom. Interestingly, although there had been an overall decrease in parental compliance with visitation requirements from fiscal year 2018-19 to 2019-20, which accounted for the onset of the pandemic, during fiscal year 2020-21, there were significant improvements with parents' ability to comply with visitation requirements.

Mother's Compliance with Visitation Requirements	FY 2020-21	FY 2019-20
Substantial Compliance	46%	48%
Partial Compliance	51%	18%
Non-Compliance	3%	34%

Father's Compliance with Visitation Requirements	FY 2020-21	FY 2019-20
Substantial Compliance	79%	41%
Partial Compliance	18%	14%
Non-Compliance	3%	45%

The CRP only determined a parent non-compliant with services or visitation when it was feasible to complete these tasks. For example, when visits via video conference were appropriate and offered, the panel assessed compliance. When visits via video conference were not found to be appropriate (often because of the child's age or ability to engage in such a visit), the parents were not held accountable/found in non-compliance. Hopefully, once the pandemic subsides, parents can supplement in person visitation with additional and frequent contact via videoconference.

NUMBER OF PLACEMENT DISRUPTIONS

In 23% of the review hearings conducted by the CRP last fiscal year, the child or young adult had experienced at least one change of placement during the 6 months preceding their review hearing. Although changes in a foster child's living arrangement are often distressing and have a negative impact on permanency, a change of placement can also be a step towards permanency, such as when a child moves to live with a pre-adoptive family.

In 35% of the reviews of children 0-17 years old who had at least one placement change, the panel determined that the change did *not* lead to permanency.

PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In mid-March 2020, when the global pandemic caused the closure of many government offices, courthouses, schools and businesses, FFCR quickly and efficiently transitioned our business operations to a remote environment. The ease with which we accomplished this transition was the result of the technology and processes already in place that enabled us to conduct core operations remotely as delineated in our Disaster Preparedness and Business Continuity Policies and Procedures. With the pandemic still creating significant health and safety concerns throughout fiscal year 2020-21, all reviews and nearly all program and business operations were conducted remotely.

INCREASED NUMBER OF REFERRALS TO THE CRP

By statute, the decision to refer a child to the CRP is entirely at the discretion of each individual judge. To promote and facilitate the referral process and to ensure the full utilization of the CRP's resources, our team employs a variety of strategies. One of our most successful, albeit time-intensive, strategies is securing the agreement of DCF and the GAL Program (when applicable) to refer a child to the CRP for their next review. This only occurs when the child's permanency goal is adoption and the parent's rights have been terminated. However, even when the referral is agreed to by the parties, the decision to refer a child to the CRP rests solely with the judge responsible for that child's case.

During fiscal year 2020-21, juvenile court judges made 332 referrals to the CRP. This is a significant increase from 126 children referred in fiscal year 2019-20. Because referrals are made 5 months in advance, children referred after February 1, 2021 were scheduled for review during fiscal year 2021-22.

INCREASED PERCENTAGE OF REVIEWS HEARD

Since children are referred to the CRP 5-6 months in advance of their review hearing, there are a number of intervening factors between the time of the referral and the date of the review that may cause the child's case to come off of the CRP's calendar. Some children who are referred reach permanency or age out prior to their scheduled CRP review hearing. Additionally, the court may consolidate the judicial review hearing with another hearing set before the court. On other occasions, a party may petition the court to hear the judicial review instead of the CRP.

Typically, for the foregoing reasons, the CRP reviews about 50-55% of the children scheduled for review in any given year. Over the past several years, our team has worked diligently to ensure that a child's case is only removed from the CRP's calendar when he or she achieves permanency or turns 18 and does not choose to participate in Extended Foster Care. These efforts have come to fruition. In fiscal year 2020-21, the CRP conducted 67% of the scheduled reviews. This was due largely to the accessibility of

remote reviews which allowed increased participation by all of the parties, thus avoiding the need to reset hearings due to “no shows” as well as a commitment to ensuring that reset requests made in advance were only accommodated if unavoidable.

FULLY REMOTE TRAINING OF VOLUNTEERS & STAKEHOLDERS

FFCR successfully transitioned many aspects of its training series and volunteer recruitment efforts to an online platform. In September 2020, we held a two-part Advanced Training Institute (ATI) for staff, volunteers, and community partners that focused on Independent Living laws, best practice protocols to build life skills, Extended Foster Care, promoting higher education, transitional support services and resources, and strengthening our engagement of older youth. Additionally, in March 2021, we continued our tradition of the Annual FFCR Volunteer Summit. This year’s Summit, “The Volunteer’s Role in Advancing Racial Equity for Children,” explored Miami’s history of discrimination, political maneuvers, and civil unrest along with how individual bias and institutional racism have impacted black children and families involved with the foster care system. Discussion and learning surrounding race and equity were also incorporated into several of our other trainings throughout the year.

During the 4th quarter of our fiscal year, our team designed our first 100% remote Preservice Volunteer Training planned for rollout in July 2021. In addition to adapting our hands-on, experiential preservice curriculum to the virtual environment, our team developed an entire new component that covers the remote review process from beginning to end.

As always, our expert staff continued to provide training to our partners and stakeholders. Over the course of the year, our team provided 76.5 hours of training to 830 FFCR volunteers, case managers, GALs, attorneys, court interpreters, foster parents, and other child welfare stakeholders (note that this includes those who participated in more than one training during the course of the year).

BUILDING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCY TO ADDRESS DISPARITIES

In Miami-Dade County last year, black children comprised only 20% of the county’s children under the age of 18, while black children made up 41% of the children confirmed by DCF as maltreated, 56% of the children who entered foster care, 65% of the children in foster care for two or more years, and 57% of youth who aged out of foster care upon turning 18. According to a 2013 report submitted to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 50% of children of color in foster care for a period of at least 18 months were considered to be in poor health.

Our Racial Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (REDI) Task Force has prioritized achieving the following 4 goals:

1. Our leadership, staff, board and volunteer ranks hold a critical mass of people of color whose perspectives help us fulfill our mission and reinforce our commitment to race equity;
2. Our staff, volunteers, and leaders are confident and skilled at talking about race and racism and its implications for the organization and for society;
3. Our programs are culturally responsive and program policies and practices explicitly address race, racism, and race equity; and
4. Our resources are spent on services, vendors, and consultants that reflect our organizational values and a commitment to race equity.

With support from United Way Miami, FFCR launched our DEI + SEI Initiative. We engaged Dr. Issac Carter to serve as our guide, consultant and coach as we individually and collectively work to develop a more equitable and culturally responsive organization. With over 25 years of experience, education, teaching, coaching, and consulting, Dr. Carter's customized, competency-based approach supports the development of Emotional Intelligence (EQ) and Cultural Intelligence (CQ) capacities that equip people, organizations, and communities with the power to take on the challenges of our collective humanity and become champions for diversity.

By pairing psychometrically validated tools, such as the Intercultural Development Inventory, with Dr. Carter's unique expertise and skillset, FFCR's DEI (diversity, equity, inclusion) + SEI (social emotional intelligence) Initiative will increase the intercultural competence and emotional intelligence of staff and board members to better equip them to:

1. Use intercultural competence and emotional intelligence to improve interpersonal behavior, communication, and organizational practices to serve clients, volunteers, and partners
2. Recognize and respond to individual and institutional power to improve outcomes for FFCR clients and partners
3. Effectively manage intercultural conflicts that lead to restorative outcomes
4. Disrupt dominant relationships and redirect our individual and collective time and energy towards co-creating new, mutually informed relationships with staff, volunteers, and the children and families we serve.

Ultimately, the Initiative will improve our organizational capacity to meaningfully address racial disparities – particularly physical and mental health disparities – faced by the children, families and young adults we serve.

MOVING FORWARD WITH HOPE

Since our founding in 1989, we have been driven by the belief that every child deserves a loving family, a safe place to call home and the opportunity to fulfill their potential. Our dedication to this vision and our organizational values serve as the bedrock for all of FFCR's programs, practices and partnerships. We view the children and young adults we serve as unique individuals with limitless potential. Our programs intentionally employ strength-based, collaborative, and inclusive practices, and we communicate honestly and openly about our strengths, as well as our challenges, with a keen focus on continuous learning and growth.

Above all else, we are propelled by a sense of hopefulness. Far too often in this field, professionals and families feel helpless and unable to make positive changes for themselves and others. Barriers become insurmountable and overwhelm sets in. We push forward against this hopelessness by staying firmly grounded in our belief that children, families, professionals, and even systems can change for the better. We view challenges as opportunities and barriers as temporary road blocks. We show compassion to the children, young adults and families we serve, provide support to our colleagues, and promote self-care. We continue to build on more than 30 years of harnessing the power of volunteers and community resources to advance the safety, stability and success of youth in foster care, and we are committed to continuing to improve our work to better meet the needs of those we serve as well as those who work for or with FFCR.

Now more than ever, we are grateful for the extraordinary support from the administration and judiciary of the 11th Judicial Circuit, and for our critical partnerships with child welfare leadership, system stakeholders, community based providers, governmental and private agencies, and the many dedicated supporters who generously contribute their time, treasure and talent to promote a bright future for children, youth and young adults in foster care.