Missouri Department of
SOCIAL SERVICES

Task Force on Recruitment, Licensing, and Retention of Foster Care and Adoptive Homes

Foster Care and Adoption
in Missouri

December 2011

Missouri Counties

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Acknowledgements

The members of the task force wish to acknowledge the important contributions of those who are not members of the task force, and yet who offered their time, energy, and expertise to the work of the task force. Among these, foremost, are the many foster and adoptive parents with firsthand experience who lent their invaluable expertise and insight through their affiliations and member organizations. Additionally, there were child advocates, child placing agencies, foster and adoptive parent associations, stakeholder organizations and departmental staff who brought forth information and data to inform the task force dialogue and recommendations.

The task force would like to recognize Governor Jeremiah Nixon for his on-going support of the children and families of Missouri, and his interest in the children who come into the state's custody. His support for related legislation is particularly valued by those charged to provide care for the state's most vulnerable children.

The task force also acknowledges members of the General Assembly who affirmatively acted on the need to ensure adequate and suitable family resource homes are available to the hundreds of Missouri children who come into the state's care annually. The sponsors of HB431 and HB604 are commended for the establishment of the Foster and Adoptive Recruitment and Retention Fund, the codification of a State Foster and Adoptive Advisory Board, and the creation of the Task Force to study and make recommendations for future system improvements. The task force is confident that, by spotlighting best practices and identifying ways to reinvest our dollars, steady gains can be made in the foster care system.

The accelerated work and finalization of recommendations were made possible through the generous donation of staff made available through the Community Partnership of the Local Investment Commission (LINC) of Kansas City. Executive Director Gayle A. Hobbs provided leadership support, availing the use of two expert facilitators, Robin Gierer of LINC and David Renz of University of Missouri-Kansas City. The facilitators guided us through difficult conversations, analysis of information and the formation of the task force recommendations. LINC's communication team successfully enabled the task force to capture key data sets for the report, to both tell the story and compel us to action.

Executive Summary

A number of strategies have been identified for improving how Missouri recruits, licenses and retains our network of foster and adoptive homes. Core themes that emerged during the development of these strategies include expansion of supports for foster and adoptive homes, training and professional development enhancements, targeted recruitment approaches, improvements in the licensure process, unique ways to support a growing number of relative and kin resource homes, reinforcing inclusion of the resource parent as part of the child's professional team, practice innovations, compensation methods, and financing strategies.

The specific recommendations outlined in the report are intended to be a starting point for improving the system related to our foster and adoptive homes. System enhancements will ultimately have a positive impact on the well-being of children who come into the state's care. Included in the report are a number of beginning steps which the Children's Division could initiate without added resources or statutory changes. The task force included these to demonstrate opportunities for early wins in transforming the system as we know it today.

Pursuing these low-cost or no-cost options would serve as a catalyst and foundation for more significant changes which could be researched, tested, and implemented over the next 1-5 years. With the growing number of children being served in kin placements and the desire to serve children in the home county, it is clear our current methods need to be refreshed (see Appendix, Fig. 9-10). This, coupled with the high needs of children entering care, suggests the time is right for altering our practice approach to garner needed system improvements. From the moment we have our first encounter with the biological family, it is imperative involved professionals work in partnership to best support the needs of the child(ren) and their family. Gaining mutual respect and understanding of our respective roles and contributions is a critical starting point.

Following is a list of the broad recommendations of the Task Force on Recruitment, Licensure and Retention of Foster and Adoptive Homes. These recommendations, along with near-term and long-term proposals, will be presented in further detail later in the report.

Recommendations

- Expand support for resource families, including real time feedback, support groups, peer-to-peer support networks, use of seasoned foster parents as mentors, respite services, and increased availability of child care.

- Enhance training and professional development by establishing competency based curriculum for pre-service and in-service to include de-escalation techniques, trauma informed approaches, sibling connections, coaching, and placement decision requirements.

- Increase focus on use of relatives and kin by intensifying early efforts to identify relative placement options and exploring models of diligent search.

- Deploy a broader range of recruitment strategies by using foster parents as recruiters, engaging in targeted recruitment for special populations, and modifying pre-placement screening activities for potential resource homes.

- Support the importance of the foster/adoptive parent as a member of the professional team by eliminating barriers to information sharing consistent with state and federal law, cross-training, and use of structured feedback mechanisms.

- Evaluate compensation for foster/adoptive parents including reimbursement for mentoring supports, subsidy reimbursement rates, timely payment of respite services, rate differences paid by contracted agencies, and behavioral rates.

- Streamline licensure requirements by creating a single license for potential resource families, eliminate delays in training schedules, and ensure consistency of definitions and process between circuits.

- Explore for possible statewide replication the use of innovative approaches such as team decision making, diligent recruitment, and expanded privatization of resourcing functions.

- Review system financing by realigning existing dollars, exploring Medicaid reimbursement options for therapeutic care, evaluating sub-recipient options through IV-E, incentivizing resource homes for desired outcomes, and appropriating resources to the Recruitment and Retention Fund.

- Continue the Task Force to advise the Children's Division, conduct additional research, steer system changes, recommend mid-course adjustments and evaluate results.

Preamble

Foster and adoptive parents play the single-most significant role in addressing the daily needs of children who have been placed in the custody of Missouri's Children's Division. These resource parents open their hearts and homes to the state's most vulnerable children, those whose lives have been disrupted due to abuse, neglect, or abandonment. Our foster parents are the bridge to helping biological families resume a connection with their children, and ultimately aiding in the reunification process. And when an alternative permanency must be sought, foster/adoptive parents once again become a key family resource to children entrusted to the state's care.

It is imperative we, as a child welfare system, recognize the multiple roles foster and adoptive parents fulfill. The foster parents' daily insights and expertise is critical to the development of the child's service plan, and key to its attainment. As professional members of the child's treatment team, our foster and adoptive parents must be lauded for their selfless support, treated with the utmost respect, and valued on a professional level with other disciplines involved in the child's life. Involving our resource families early and often in communications and decision-making will strengthen child stability and well-being outcomes. Without this level of engagement and respect for the profession of fostering, our results will continually be compromised.

The needs of children coming into care are constantly changing. The needs of our biological families are diverse. Yet our resource families constantly exercise flexibility and resourcefulness in working with children with unique service requirements. Personal and family sacrifices are commonplace for resource families parenting children who have experienced multiple traumas in their lives. Consequently, our findings and recommendations focus on what works, best practice approaches, and sufficient resources to ensure our foster and adoptive families can be preserved, supported, and enhanced.

Charge and Process

The Missouri Task Force on Recruitment, Licensure and Retention of Foster and Adoptive Homes was formed on Aug. 25, 2011, by Department of Social Services Interim Director Brian Kinkade. The panel consisted of nineteen experts and stakeholders from the public and private sectors, including the faith-based community. The charge of the Task Force was set forth in HB431 and HB604:

> The Children's Division shall convene a task force to review the recruitment, licensing, and retention of foster and adoptive parents statewide. In addition to representatives of the Division and the Department, the task force shall include representatives of the private sector and faith-based community which provide recruitment and licensure services. The purpose of the task force will be to study the extent to which changes in the system of recruiting, licensing, and retaining foster and adoptive parents would enhance the effectiveness of the system statewide. The task force shall develop a report of its findings with recommendations by December 1, 2011, and provide copies of the report to the General Assembly and to the Governor.

The task force met five times between September 2011 and November 2011. Panel members represented multiple agencies and stakeholders, all with experience in the various aspects of recruitment, licensure and retention of foster and adoptive homes. Members included the foster care case management community, child advocates, the state advisory board on foster and adoptive care, subcontractor community, faith-based community, foster and adoptive associations, and state staff. Also beneficial to the task force were several members who were foster and/or adoptive parents. Work sessions included presentations from task force members and dissemination of related laws, regulations, policies and data. Members were resourceful in researching practices and trends in Missouri and other states. The aim was to identify the most salient practices and policy approaches by which current resources could be leveraged to make significant system gains.

The task force first convened on Sept. 21, 2011.   An executive charge was provided by Interim Director Kinkade who challenged the group to study the system and recommend areas of needed improvement.   Baseline information was presented by task force chair Candy Shively, Children's Division Director. Armed with information, members shared insights and concerns, sometimes seeking more data to frame additional dialogue. Considerable energy was devoted to understanding the specific issues individual members believed were important and relevant to making system adjustments. Comments ranged from values, strategies, practice models, techniques, roles, responsibilities, definitions, to funding methods.   At the conclusion of day one, the ideas garnering the greatest level of support were role clarification, innovation, strategic investments, support for resource families, use of relatives and kin, enhanced recruitment, statewide consistency, and professional development.   Members were asked to reflect on the day's

activities, gather additional data, and share feedback via electronic survey in preparation for the next scheduled task force meeting.

Results from an internal electronic survey were shared during the Oct. 7, 2011, task force meeting. Members began categorizing ideas by examining what was immediately doable with current resources. Other categories included items with high potential requiring longer term implementation, policy options with high value, and options deemed long-term innovations and process improvements. While it wasn't necessarily the focus of the task force to identify measures the Children's Division could already implement, it was recognized some of these ideas would serve as building blocks for more substantial long term changes. It also became apparent during the dialogue the task force required a better understanding of funding streams which could optimize financing of the ideal system. The group discussed what the preferred system would look like and indicators of system effectiveness. The breadth of dialogue was key to envisioning the next generation of our system as it relates to recruitment, licensure, and retention of foster and adoptive families.

At its third meeting, on Oct. 25, 2011, the task force began to reflect more narrowly on the content of the report for submission to the Governor and General Assembly. The focus included refinement of core principles, indicators of system effectiveness, and overarching recommendations. Presentations on IV-E waivers and Medicaid proved useful in exploring financing options and understanding the less-suitable funding approaches. A framework was established by which to address remaining issues for consensus and to formalize recommendations during the fourth meeting. An electronic survey was used to garner member feedback between meetings to identify critical data sets for inclusion in the final report.

The task force convened for its fourth meeting on Nov. 7, 2011. Members reviewed annual expenditures for the recruitment, licensing, and retention of foster and adoptive parents and discussed options for maximizing resources. Members contemplated the recommendation to fully privatize the resource development function of the Children's Division which would allow greater flexibility with available funds. It was determined the group was committed to following through with recommendations made by the task force and would continue to convene after the report was submitted. The task force members reviewed the draft report and made necessary revisions to ensure it accurately reflected their findings.

The final meeting of the task force was held on Nov. 21, 2011. The group reached consensus on the recommendations presented in the report to the General Assembly and the Governor. Detailed recommendations were grouped into four clusters: practices – near term; practices – long term; policy recommendations; and long term process improvement. The task force further recommended it continue to meet as a body three to four times in the coming year as a resource to the Children's Division. Several of the recommendations require more in-depth study or entail the

identification of a practice tool for use in statewide implementation. Task force members could assess suitable instruments, shepherd next steps, and serve as champions to the system change highlighted in the report. Additionally, continued use of the task force in some fashion would heighten accountability toward steady, sustainable change.

Background and Data

In Missouri, there were 10,581 children placed in foster care as of Oct. 31, 2011. Many of these children will experience a short stay in care before being reunified with their parents or other caregivers. Many children, however, will remain in the foster care system for a longer period of time. The average length of stay in foster care in Missouri is 26.24 months (see Appendix, Fig. 1).

Nationwide, the trend shows a reduction of children in care; however, in Missouri the population of children in foster care has been on the rise since January 2009. The number of children entering care is increasing while the number of exits from care is declining. Some counties in the state experience a larger number of foster care enties than other counties (see Appendix, Fig. 2-3). The highest number of children in care was 12,521 in May 2002. Missouri experienced a decline from 2002 through 2008 to 9,149 children.

Nearly 85% of children in care are placed in family settings. Thirty-six percent (36%) of children in foster care are placed with relative or kinship providers. Placement with relatives or kinship families is the most preferred option as children can maintain familial ties, cultures, and traditions during their time in care. Federal and state law requires the Children's Division to place children with relatives or kinship providers unless such a placement is not in the best interest of the child. Approximately 40% of children in foster care are placed with non-related foster parents (see Appendix, Fig. 4).

There were 2,770 licensed foster homes, including traditional and relative, in Missouri as of Oct. 31, 2011. The number of foster homes has steadily declined over the past several years. An increase in relative and kinship placements, coupled with increasingly high needs of children in the foster care system, has contributed to a reduction in the use of traditional foster homes. Foster parents must complete the licensure process as outlined in the Missouri State Code of Regulations 13 CSR 35-60. The licensure process includes an assessment of the household to include background screenings on all individuals in the home age 17 and older, health screenings on all household members, and physical standards of the home. Foster parents must successfully complete 27 hours of a competency based pre-service training. Licenses are issued for a period of two years. Licensed foster parents must complete 30 hours of in-service training prior to each re-licensure. In-service training needs are identified through the foster parent's Professional Family Development Plan, which is completed jointly between the licensing worker and the foster parent.

Missouri utilizes the STARS (Specialized Training, Assessment, Resources and Support) curriculum to meet pre-service training requirements. STARS is a competency based model purchased from the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) and is based on the CWLA PRIDE (Parent Resources for Information, Development, and Education) training curriculum. Missouri began using the PRIDE model in 1995. Foster parents must demonstrate performance-based competence in

protecting and nurturing; meeting developmental needs and addressing developmental delays; supporting relationships between children and families; connecting children to lifetime relationships; and working as a member of a professional team.

Licensed foster parents provided placement, care, and support to 6,095 foster children during the State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2011 (July 1, 2010, through June 30, 2011). Foster parents provide a parenting role to children in foster care to include food, clothing, and shelter. They also ensure children receive appropriate services to meet educational, mental and physical health, and emotional needs. Foster parents are part of the professional team which allows them to have access to all medical and family history of the children placed in their homes. Foster parents are members of the Children's Division Family Support Team which meets regularly to develop and review the plan for each child in care and their families. The rights of foster parents are outlined in the Foster Parents' Bill of Rights, in Missouri Statute 210.566.

House Bill 1453, which was passed in 2004, mandated that the Children's Division contract for the provision of performance-based services for foster care case management. On June 1, 2005, Missouri implemented performance-based contracts in three geographical areas of the state (St. Louis City and County, Jackson County, and Greene County). The Foster Care Case Management (FCCM) contracts required providers to recruit, develop, and maintain foster homes as needed to perform the duties outlined in their contract. Recommendations for licensure are submitted to the Children's Division, which is the licensing authority for the state of Missouri. Licensed foster homes may be utilized by the Children's Division or FCCM contractors, regardless of which entity developed a home.

Foster homes are provided a monthly maintenance payment for reimbursement of costs for shelter, food, and other incidentals for children placed in their home. Foster parents receive additional funds for clothing allowances, infant diaper allowance, child care, transportation, and other special expenses. All children in foster care are covered by Medicaid to address their mental and physical health care needs. Licensed foster parents also receive a Professional Parenting allowance if they continue to meet the training requirements. All licensed foster homes are required to be contracted with the Children's Division and/or FCCM contractor in order to receive payment. All licensed foster homes can contract with the Children's Division or FCCM contractors to provide placement for youth with elevated behavioral or medical needs once they have completed the appropriate levels of training.

Foster parent maintenance rates in Missouri are among the lowest in the nation (see Appendix, Fig. 6-8). Several national reports and surveys depict information on rates paid by states for traditional foster care. Most reports find it difficult to make national comparisons, however, because of variations in the cost of living among states and the extent to which supplemental payments are provided for a variety of child expenditures. With the inclusion of the professional parenting fee of

$100 per child (paid to 90% of Missouri resource homes as an incentive for heightened training), Missouri is clustered among the lower reimbursement states of Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Oregon and Washington (National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning, "Foster Care Maintenance Payments," http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/downloads/foster-care-maintenance-payments.pdf). Steady gains in reimbursement, in the form of rate adjustments or incentives, are critical in maintaining a network of resource homes to adequately provide for the state's children in care.

In SFY2011, 48% of children exited the foster care system and returned home to their biological parents or caregivers. If children are unable to return home, the Children's Division is charged with ensuring that children are placed in another permanency arrangement such as adoption or guardianship. In SFY2011, 20% of children exited the foster care system to adoption and 3% exited to guardianship. Six percent (6%) of children aged out of the system in SFY2011.   All children should be released from care with a life-long permanent connection in place.

Adoptive families are required to complete the same licensing and training process as foster parents. However, adoptive families must also complete an additional 12 hours of STARS pre-service training entitled "Making the Commitment to Adoption" or "Spaulding."

There are currently 8,516 homes caring for children adopted from foster care in Missouri. Many licensed foster parents ultimately adopt children who are placed in their homes. Each year over 1,000 children are adopted from the child welfare system. Non-related foster parent adoptions account for 64% of these adoptions.

In SFY11, the State of Missouri, through the Children's Division and its contractors, expended approximately $11 million in recruitment, development, licensing, and retention of foster and adoptive homes. While the state benefits from an array of entities performing these functions, there is sometimes a gap in having the needed resource homes in the desired location when a child or sibling group comes into state care.

Background data provided by Missouri Department of Social Services-Children's Division.

Framework for Action

Core Principles

The task force identified a set of core principles to guide the system and its future development. These principles became an index for testing our ideas and subsequent recommendations. As the task force engaged in sometimes spirited dialogue, these principles were evident and embraced. These commonly shared beliefs pushed us to think beyond the system as it exists today to envisioning what it could be.

Core principles identified by the task force:

- Understand the needs of our children and families today and develop the system that can best serve them

- Ensure early efforts are made to locate family or kin placement (e.g., family in 30 days)

- Place children as close to home as possible and with siblings

- Build on what works and remove barriers

- Utilize evidence-based models to support kinship and foster recruitment and retention

- Reinforce a system that both enables and rewards good relationships

- Recognize respite as a key retention strategy

- Address and meet the ongoing needs of adoptive families

- View training as an ongoing service which is high quality, up-to-date, and available to all

- Be innovative and open to changing the system to produce better results for children, even if the new system will look much different than it does today

- Maximize and leverage the unique value that private agencies bring to the public/private partnership

Indicators of System Effectiveness

Given our overarching charge of making improvements in how resource homes are recruited, licensed and retained, it was equally important to identify indicators of system effectiveness. Task force members discussed overall system performance. This dialogue led to delineation of indicators of foster and adoptive family system success or effectiveness.

- Maintaining family connections, as seen through an increase in the number of kinship placements at onset and during the time a child is in care

- Children are served in their home county, with siblings and in home school, measured by placement demographics and child well-being outcomes (see Appendix, Fig. 9-10)

- Placement stability for children in care, as evidenced through lengths of stay and the number of placement changes

- Heightened family engagement, including non-custodial and incarcerated parents, as measured through Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) outcomes and surveys

- System offers an array of options to more ably address a range of child and family needs, documented through overall child well-being and reduced placement disruption

- Movement to permanency is more expedient, as evidenced by a reduction in the amount of time children spend in care

- There is a safe reduction in frequency of re-entry into the system, determined by number of children who re-enter care

- Children are safe and feel safe while in the system, measured through reduction in repeat maltreatment

- Increased foster family retention, as measured by foster families serving five years or more

- Improved long-term outcomes for children, data reflects children are successful during placement, have necessary supports and positive adult connections upon exiting the system

- Available resources are fully and effectively utilized, as demonstrated through implementation of innovation and best practice approaches by optimizing existing dollars with flexible financing strategies

- Satisfaction and success of key stakeholders, including resource families, children, case managers, and biological families, as evidenced through satisfaction surveys, increased retention

- System is in compliance with federal requirements, with gains shown in CFSR outcomes

Findings and Recommendations

The process allowed the task force to identify several recommendations to enhance the current system of recruitment, licensure, and retention of foster and adoptive parents. The recommendations were separated into four categories beginning with options that are attainable in the near future involving practice changes within the Children's Division and its contracted foster care case management providers. The second category of recommendations includes practice changes which have high potential yet require a longer-term implementation period. The third category lists recommendations that require policy revisions. The final category of recommendations is deemed long-term innovations and process improvements requiring further research and evaluation.

Practices: Near Term

In the course of discussion during the task force meetings, it became apparent that modifications to current practice could result in increased retention of resource families. These recommendations would not require legislative changes but may require a change in Children's Division practice to ensure support services are provided to resource families in a consistent manner.

A) **Expand support for resource families**

Foster parents should have access to a supportive network of caseworkers and other more experienced foster parents when challenges and crises arise. Foster families experience a lack of supportive services from their case workers and the system as a whole (Casey Family Programs National Center for Resource Family Support, http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/downloads/retention-overview.pdf).

Current practice requires licensing workers to meet with foster parents on a quarterly basis in the resource home. The worker and foster parents should engage in a discussion that includes regulatory concerns, household changes, training needs, and services needed to support placements in the home.   Foster care case managers visit foster children in their placement setting at least one time per month to assess child safety, adjustment, and services needed to maintain placement.

The Task Force makes the following recommendations to enhance support services for resource families:

1. Develop and employ a "real time feedback" tool to determine, on an ongoing basis, the status and support needs of foster parents

2. Develop and implement additional support for foster and adoptive parents:

a. Encourage more foster parent and adoptive support groups
b. Develop peer-to-peer support network
c. Match seasoned foster parents with new foster parents to serve as mentors

B) Enhance training and professional development

Pre-service and in-service training opportunities are provided through the STARS training curriculum model. The available STARS in-service training modules are limited and foster parents must obtain required training hours through other community resources such as universities, foster parent associations, private agencies, and other state entities.

These recommendations would enhance training opportunities for foster parents and provide beneficial learning and growth:

1. Review, expand, reenergize, and revise training and professional development for foster parents to ensure it is relevant and useful, including, but not limited to:

   a. De-escalation training
   b. Programs which provide an emphasis on sibling connections
   c. Training specific to the needs of foster parents (e.g., how to deal with teens; parenting with love and limits)
   d. Education on the impact of trauma, brain development, and trauma informed care
   e. Employ alternative approaches to classroom training (e.g., weekly coaching)

2. Provide better education, for both foster parents and case managers, on the laws regarding placement decisions

C) Increase focus on the use of relatives and kinship providers

Current Missouri Statute 210.305 requires the notification of grandparents within the first three hours of a child coming into foster care. The Children's Division is required to search for relatives within the first 30 days of a child placed in care. The federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoption Act of 2008 also supports placement with relatives or kinship providers. There has been an increase in children placed with relative or kinship providers over the past several years. In 2006, 26% of children in foster care were placed with relatives/kin compared to 37% in 2011. This practice, however, is not consistent statewide.

If relatives are not located at the onset of a child entering the foster care system, siblings must often be separated and children become bonded with foster parents. When relatives are located at a later time, children experience additional trauma and emotional stress in placement moves. Similarly, these moves may create additional stress and grief for the

foster parent who has been the primary caregiver during the time the child is in custody. Relative and kinship providers may not understand the traumatic impact on the child and the benefit of immediate placement with family.

The Task Force recognizes the importance and benefit of placing children with relatives or kinship families and recommends:

1. Expand and intensify early efforts to identify relative options for children upon entry into foster care
2. Identify and share best practices for high percentage kinship placements

D) Improve recruitment of resource providers

The Children's Division and Foster Care Case Management contractors utilize a variety of methods to recruit foster and adoptive families. Recruitment campaigns have been implemented including county, region, and statewide efforts. Recruitment is primarily targeted to placements for minority children, siblings, and older youth. Adoption recruitment activities are geared towards identifying families who are interested in adopting children with special needs. Some events, such as the Heart Gallery, spotlight specific children who are available for adoption.

As of Oct. 31, 2011, there were 10,581 children in foster care and 1,107 children available for adoption in Missouri. There is an on-going need for foster and adoptive homes, and recruitment activities are a key element in reaching potential families.

The Task Force makes the following recommendations to improve the recruitment of resource providers:

1. Employ a broader range of recruitment strategies, including, but not limited to:
    a. Use foster parents and older foster youth as recruiters
    b. Employ targeted recruitment for older youth and children with special needs
    c. Recruit potential resource families by doing targeted outreach to individuals who are fingerprinted for other employment or licensing purposes
    d. Seek previously successful foster families who have closed their license
2. Recruit relative or kinship home as licensed providers for non-related children
3. Increase preliminary screening of potential resource providers to identify skill sets and type of children desired prior to pre-service training and home assessment
4. Research best practices for increasing the maximum number of placements of children with elevated behavioral or medical needs in a licensed foster home

E) Increase mutual understanding of the importance of roles and relationships

Research indicates that understanding the role of the resource provider, sharing of information, and respect are concerns shared nationwide (Casey Family Programs National Center for Resource Family Support, 2002). The Casey Family Programs Breakthrough Series Collaborative on the Recruitment and Retention of Resource Families in 2005 concluded that resource families want to receive information, early in the process, to support the children who were being placed in their homes and when an issue arose, they should receive a rapid callback (http://www.casey.org/resources/publications/BreakthroughSeries_RecruitmentRetentio n.htm). This report also indicated that case managers were unsure what information they should share with resource providers due to confidentiality concerns. These concerns are consistent with those expressed during the Task Force meetings.

In response to clarification of roles and responsibilities, the Task Force recommendations are:

1. Increase professionalism and corresponding relationships by respecting the role of foster parents

2. Eliminate barriers to the sharing of appropriate information with resource families by educating Children's Division and private agency staff and resource providers on state and federal confidentiality laws and regulations

3. Implement activities to foster better relationships between foster parents and case managers including:

    a. Relationship building with the agency and the resource provider

    b. Seek caseworker-specific feedback from foster parents

4. Provide training for case managers regarding foster parent support and vice versa to help foster parents understand system

Practices: Long Term

The Task Force identified practice changes that would increase retention of resource providers. The recommendations for practice changes outlined below can be completed by the Children's Division, but will involve additional research and planning with a longer term implementation period.

A) Expand support for resource families

Support services are provided to resource families when a foster youth is placed in their home. These services are vital to placement stability and foster parent retention.

1. Public and private agency staff should provide support services to families

2. Improve response to resource family respite needs:

    a. Support quarterly respite events

    b. Allow respite services for resource providers for shorter increments of time, which is currently 12 hour increments

    c. Ensure timely payment

    d. Enhance availability of resources to address respite needs for higher levels of care

3. Encourage the development and ongoing operation of support groups:

    a. Support the efforts of local foster parent groups to provide retention services in their communities, including funds and other resources

4. Examine alternative payment methodology enabling residential treatment providers to extend more family based services to resource families and biological families when transitioning children to homelike settings

    a. Provide wraparound services such as schools located on the grounds of residential treatment centers, recreational activities, group and individual therapy, respite, peer socialization, and caregiver support groups

5. Enhance use of foster parent mentors, including flexible use of funding to pay for this service

B) Enhance training and professional development

The task force identified developmental needs which can be addressed by providing additional training opportunities to resource providers. Further enhancements to the current training and professional development system would increase knowledge, competencies, and retention of resource providers. The current training curriculum, STARS/Spaulding, has been in use since 1995 and should be updated or replaced. These longer-term recommendations will require research into evidence based practices, evaluations, additional or revised funding streams, and significant practice changes.

The recommendations to enhance training and professional development are:

1. Realign resources so highly-skilled resource providers are compensated to provide mentoring and "on the job training" to new foster, relative, kinship and adoptive families

2. Refine and improve the program of training and professional development, and focus on improved training for all levels in a continuum of care:

a. Utilize competency-based, strength-based evaluation system instrument to help foster families identify their strengths and growth areas, and use for targeted training and to identify families that would be outstanding foster family mentors

b. Improve the quality and relevance of pre-service and in-service training for foster and adoptive parents to ensure they have the skills needed to care for children

c. Ensure improved and accessible training is available to every resource provider regardless of location and schedule

d. Create/identify training enhancements and increase specialized home development

e. Reduce time required for potential resource family to begin pre-service training

f. Individualize ongoing training and support of foster parents

g. Combine foster care, adoption, reunification, and other permanency options into one pre-service training

C) Improve recruitment of resource families

Recruitment efforts can be enhanced with the development and implementation of consistent approaches. Recruitment models and screening tools can assist in identifying potential resource families who are more likely to be successful.

Long term recommendations to improve the recruitment process are:

1. Improve recruitment processes:

   a. Evaluate diligent recruitment as a statewide approach

   b. Expand recruitment activities to include new efforts and strategies

   c. Develop consistent practices to be utilized by licensing staff

2. Employ a research-validated screening tool that would help identify resource families that are more likely to be successful

3. Recruit based on child specific, geographically specific needs

4. Address discrepancy in pay to contracted agencies when a foster parent completes the licensing process or is selected out

D) Enhance consistency across state and among providers

Children's Division staff and foster care case management contracted staff must follow the same licensing rules for foster and adoptive parents. However, there are noted discrepancies in practices between the entities.

The following recommendations would improve consistency throughout the system:

1. Standardize the licensure practice, ensuring it is the same across the state, including making resources available so that all areas have timely access to training and assessment

2. Increase consistency of practice from county to county and circuit to circuit

Policy Recommendations

The Task Force recognized some recommendations would require policy changes. These recommendations involve statutory or rule changes or have a fiscal impact to the agency. Any policy changes should include sufficient funding for implementation.

The Task Force recommends the following items be explored for future policy changes:

A) Expand support for resource families

1. Evaluate foster care reimbursement, identify a suitable payment methodology, and adjust rates accordingly

2. Review adequacy and allocation of funds/resources to develop and sustain support services

3. Realign existing and additional resources to support resource families, which includes, but is not limited to, more flexible use of funding to support recruitment, retention, mentors, respite, and placement stability

B) Improve licensure process

1. Create a single license for potential resource families, with a focus on permanency

C) Invest in what works

1. Review incentive-oriented, performance-based foster care. Incentives would include placement stability, sibling placement together, therapeutic foster care providers, and high school graduation

D) Refine the budget for the Department of Social Services

1. Appropriate funds to the Recruitment and Retention Fund

2. Establish a specific appropriation to fund the implementation of new ideas for system improvement and innovation that maximizes return on investment

Long-Term Process Improvement

The task force reviewed numerous research materials involving best practices, evidence-based programs, and new initiatives from across the nation. The group agreed Missouri should explore best-practice options and strive to maximize resources to enhance our system of recruitment and retention of resource providers.

The following recommendations would require research, focus groups, and significant statutory, regulatory and/or practice changes.

A) **Maximize use of federal funds and private dollars for recruitment and retention**

1. Work with outside consultants to identify options for maximizing federal funding streams

    a. Understand opportunities available through the use of Title IV-E waivers and make plans accordingly

2. Develop a model of therapeutic care that is Medicaid reimbursable to include support for therapeutic care foster parents

    a. Develop a foster care performance model to enhance access to federal funds

B) **Research and assess the use of team decision making and develop a plan to establish it in other parts of the state**

C) **Build consensus across the state regarding the roles and responsibilities of the public and private entities doing this work**

1. Evaluate the business need, in terms of resources and service delivery, to fully privatize recruitment and retention functions:

    a. Establish a pilot for full privatization of recruitment and retention services in two areas of the state. The pilot will begin in FY13 and will continue for two years from date of implementation. One site should be a location that already has a strong contractor presence and the second site should have little or no existing contractor presence

    b. The pilot will recognize the importance of providing a smooth transition to resource families and the consistency within the specific area

    c. Recognizing the challenge with the current data, the Children's Division will create a contract that provides clear and reasonable benchmarks

    d. The plan should allow resource families to choose from among multiple private sector providers, where applicable

D) Establish a Children's Division task force to continue efforts to assess and enhance the effectiveness of the foster and adoptive homes system. The task force shall:

1. Prioritize and develop an implementation plan to further the recommendations outlined in this report

2. Conduct research to assess evidence based or promising practices across the country

3. Meet 3 to 4 times per year beginning in 2012

4. Produce an annual report outlining the progress in each of the recommendations described herein

5. Sunset two years from implementation

Definitions

Adoptive parent: A person who adopts a child of other parents as his or her own child.

Child and Family Services Review (CFSR): The federal Child and Family Services Review began in 1994 as a mechanism to review state child and family service programs and ensure conformity with Title IV-B and Title IV-E of the Social Security Act. Accompanying the review process is an opportunity for states to make program improvements before imposing penalties. These reviews enable the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Children's Bureau, to ensure conformity with federal child welfare requirements, determine what is actually happening with children and families engaged in child welfare services and assist states to enhance their capacity to achieve positive outcomes for children and families.

Diligent recruitment: Conducting diligent searches to reconnect children in foster care with kin and achieving permanency through general, targeted and/or child specific recruitment.

Elevated needs: Foster Care for Youth with Elevated Needs is a program designed for the youth who has identifiable and documented moderate or serious emotional and/or behavioral needs. Such a youth requires intensive and individualized intervention to succeed in a community-based family setting and to achieve permanency. Resource providers of youth with elevated needs have received specific training in addition to Specialized Training Assessment Resources and Support (STARS) pre-service training to enable them to work with youth with elevated needs.

Family Support Team: The group of individuals assembled to participate in a Family Support Team meeting, a meeting convened by the Children's Division or another children's services provider on behalf of the family and/or child for the purpose of determining service and treatment needs, determining the need for placement, developing a plan for reunification or other permanency options, determining the appropriate placement of the child, evaluating case progress, and establishing and revising the case plan.

Foster care: A form of substitute care, usually in a home licensed by a public agency, for children whose welfare requires that they be removed from their own homes.

Foster Care Case Management (FCCM): In the state of Missouri, foster care case management contractors provide services to the child welfare population in targeted areas of the state. These services include: assessment; case planning; service planning; placement services; permanency and concurrent planning; and community resource development.

Foster care maintenance: The maintenance payment is the amount that the Children's Division will contribute to cover the cost of (and the cost of providing) food, clothing, shelter, daily

supervision, school supplies, a child's personal incidentals, liability insurance with respect to a child.

Foster Care Recruitment and Retention Board/Fund: The board, administered by the Department of Social Services, will grant awards to licensed community-based foster care and adoption recruitment programs. The fund will be generated from gifts, donations, transfers, and moneys appropriated by the general assembly, and bequests to the fund.

Foster child: A person in the custody of the Children's Division to a maximum age of twenty-one (21).

Foster parent: A resource provider licensed under 13 CSR 35-60 who operates a foster family home, or relatives of a child in foster care who are licensed to provide relative care.

Guardianship: Guardianship is a permanency option for those children where neither family reunification nor adoption is feasible/desirable and the caretaker family is willing to assume a greater level of responsibility and authority over the child.

Kinship care: Care provided by persons who are non-related by blood, marriage or adoption who have a close relationship with the child or child's family (godparents, neighbors, teachers, close family friends, and fellow church members) or affinity beyond the third degree.

Permanency: Permanency is a process of carrying out a set of goal-directed activities designed to help children enter a stable and continuous relationship with nurturing and loving caregivers. Permanency is both a process and a result that includes involvement of the youth in finding a permanent connection with at least one committed adult who provides a safe, stable, and loving environment. At the time of a child's entry into out-of-home care, the child's case plan shall be developed which specifies the services to be provided by the agency and others toward the goal of permanency.

Professional Family Development Plan: The Children's Division works collaboratively with each foster parent to develop their unique Professional Family Development Plan. The Plan is comprised of four components: assessment of the resource provider's present level of competencies, their annual educational goals, methods of reaching those goals, and a way to determine if goals have been met. The Professional Family Development Plan is reviewed and revised quarterly and annually as necessary.

Relative care: Care provided by persons related to the foster youth in any of the following ways by blood, marriage or adoption: grandparent, brother, sister, half-brother, half-sister, stepparent, stepbrother, stepsister, uncle, aunt or first cousin.

Resource provider: An adult individual who has been approved by the Children's Division to provide care for youth who have been placed in legal custody the Children's Division. This includes Foster, Adoptive, Relative or Kinship (licensed or unlicensed), Respite, and Transitional Living Advocates.

Respite care: Respite care is the provision of periodic and/or intermittent, temporary substitute care of children who are in the care and custody of the Children's Division, placed in a licensed resource home (foster, relative or kinship, emergency). Respite services may be approved as part of an adoption or guardianship agreement. Respite is designed to provide relief from the stresses of the constant responsibilities of providing out-of-home care. It is not for use in regular child care situations when a parent would normally use ordinary child care. Respite care may be planned in advance or used in emergency situations. Respite care may be provided to licensed resource providers a minimum of 12 hours, daily, overnight, or on a weekly basis.

Spaulding training: The adoption portion of STARS training provided to resource families who are interested in adopting children through the foster care system. Spaulding may also be called Making the Commitment to Adoption training.

STARS: Specialized Training, Assessment, Resources and Support (STARS) is a pre-service training curriculum required for prospective foster and adoptive parents to become licensed. The training is 27 hours in duration with ten hours of assessment interwoven with the training. The curriculum is competency based. Foster and kinship care providers wanting to adopt must take an additional 12 hours of STARS, Making the Commitment to Adoption (Spaulding) pre-service training.

Team Decision Making (TDM): TDM is a structured meeting held when a child's safety is in question. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss child safety, and make recommendations regarding safety, intervention, and placement of children. The Team Decision Making model is based on the philosophy that the well-being of a child is best served through the collaboration of family, community, and service providers.

Title IV-E: The Title IV-E Program is a federal entitlement program established by Congress and administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The program provides financial support and best practice guidance for states' work with children in foster care and adoption. The financial support covers some of the direct service and administration costs associated with these child welfare programs. Title IV-E reimbursement of foster care costs can be claimed in three different areas: care of the child in foster or preadoptive home or child care institution; administration of the foster care system; and training of staff, providers and foster and adoptive parents.

Appendix

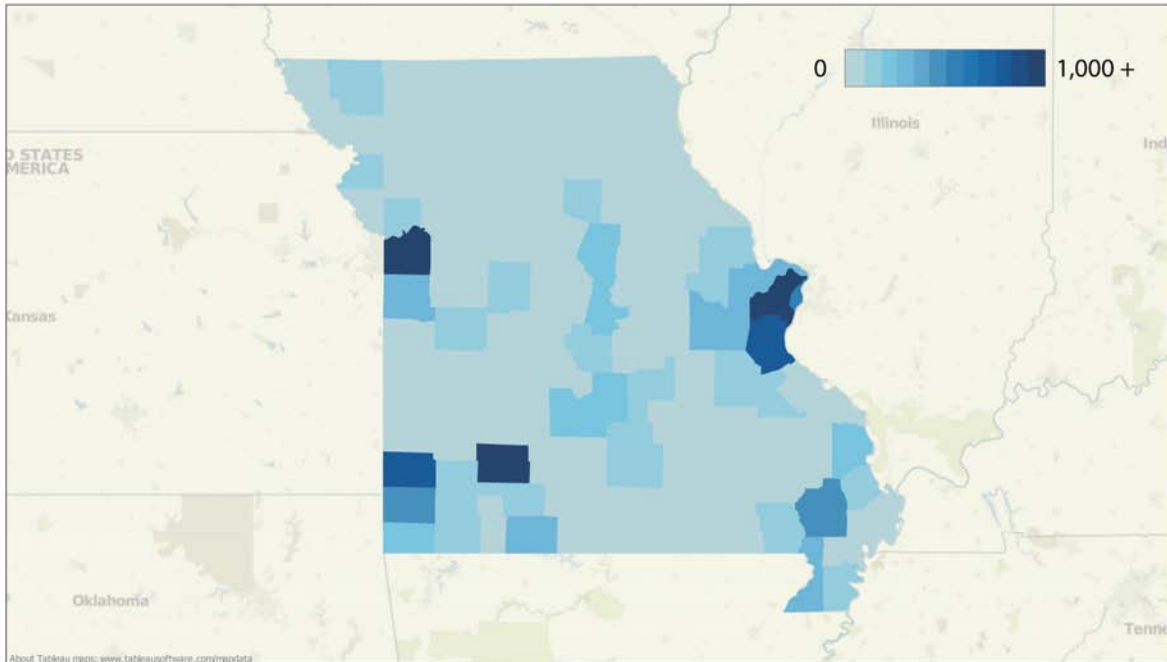*For county names, see Missouri state map inside front cover.*

Figure 1

Foster Care Average Stay in Months
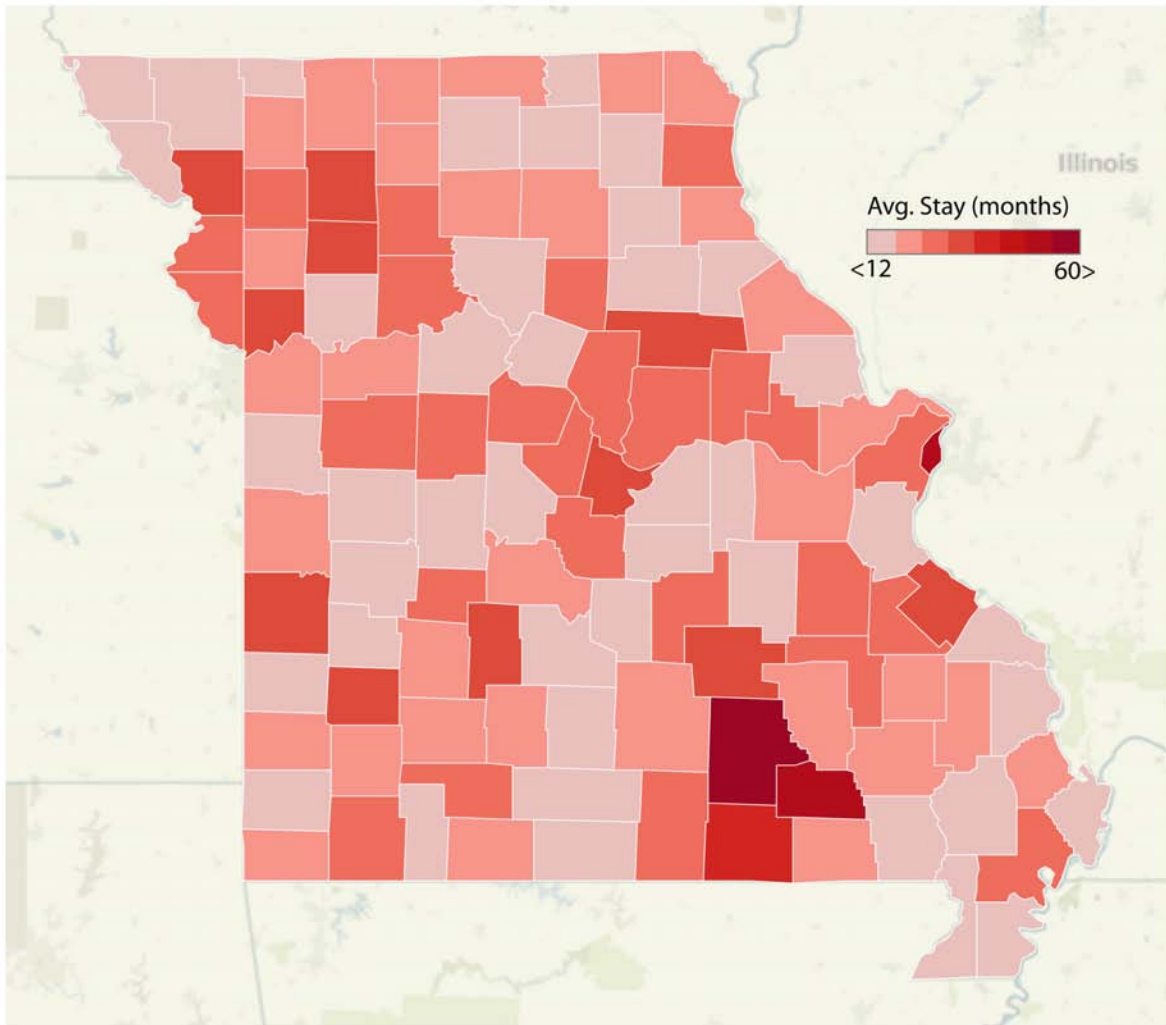
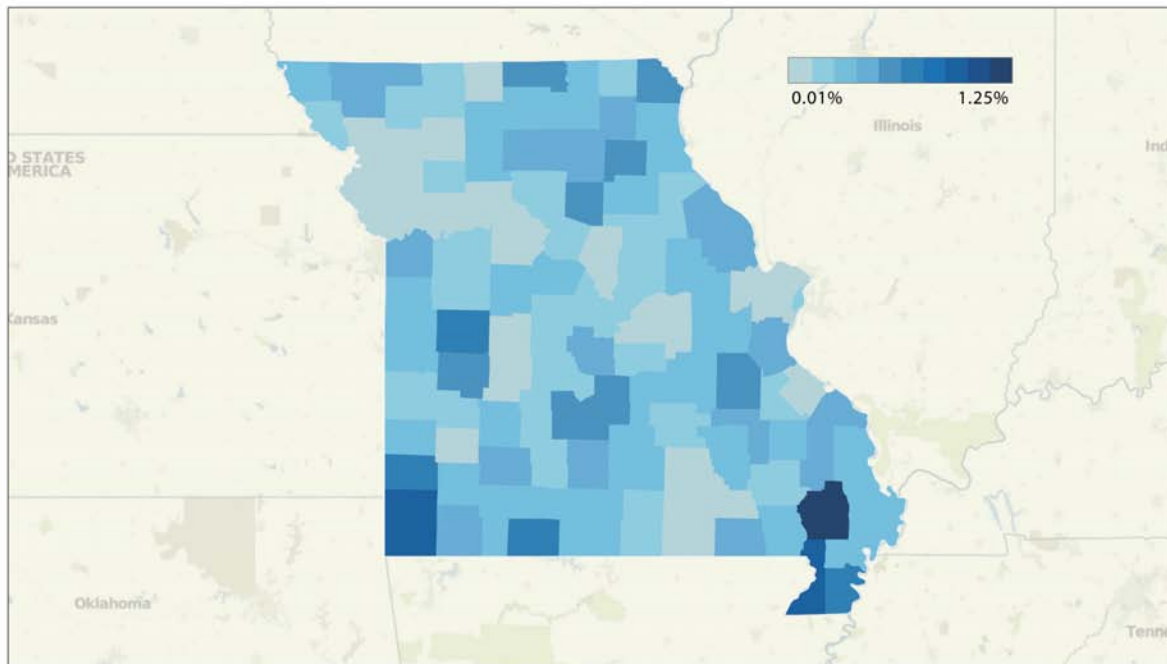
Source: Children's Division, Missouri Department of Social Services. As of 9/30/2011. Darkest areas indicate 60 or more months of care.
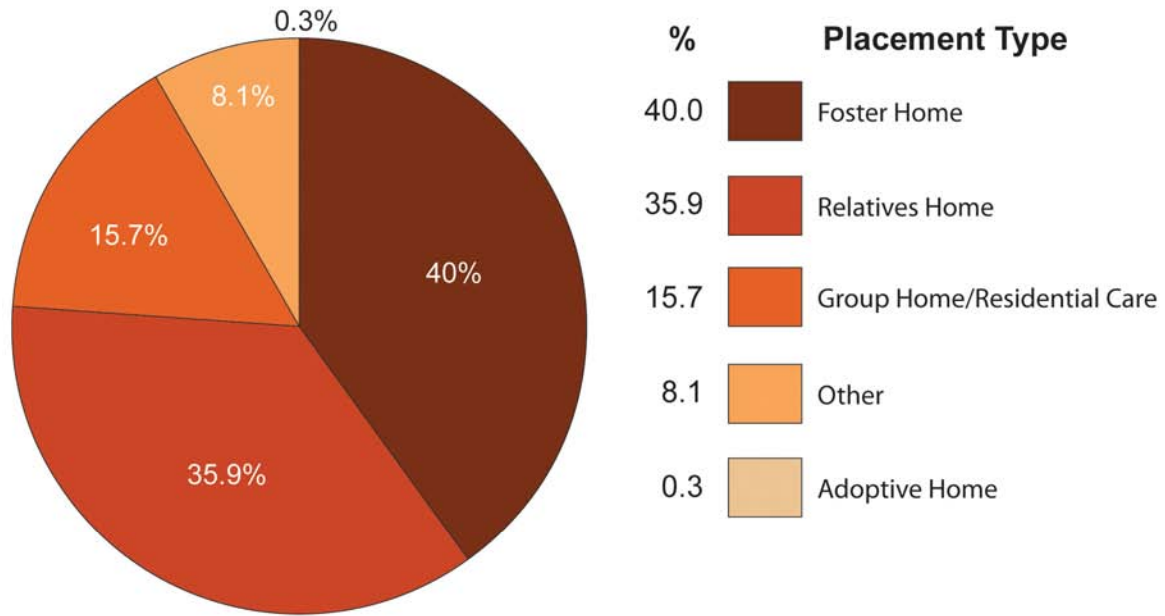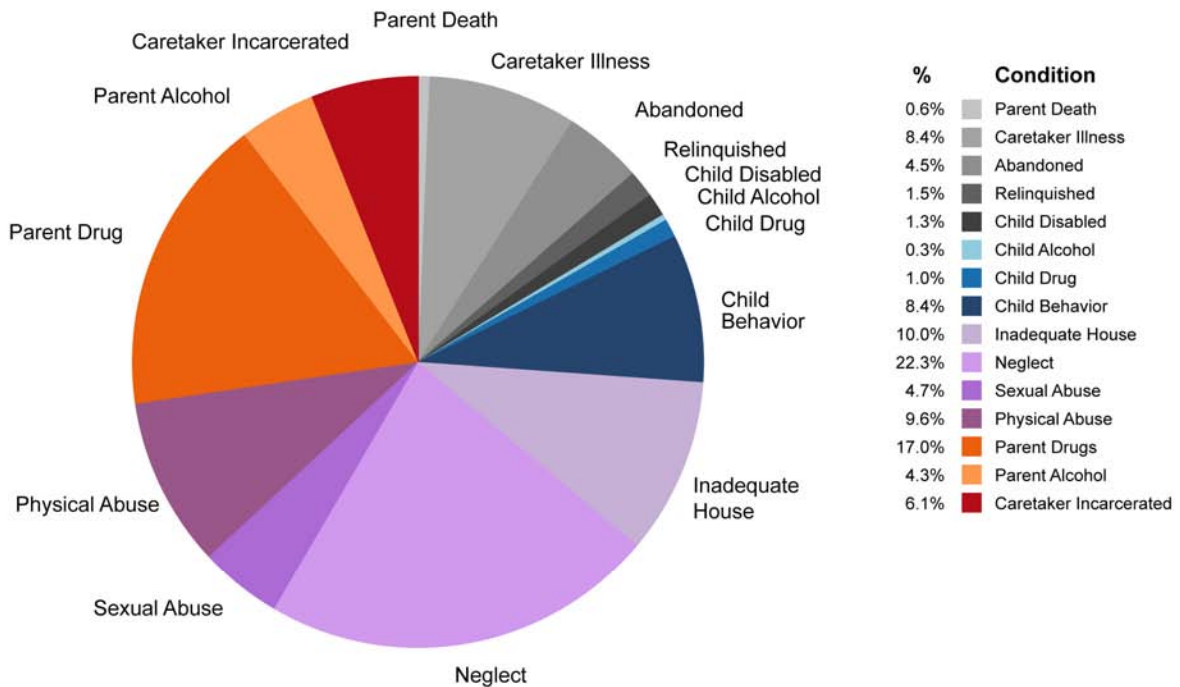
Figure 2

Total Foster Care Entries

Source: Children's Division, Missouri Department of Social Services. Map based on data for total Foster Care entries from Jan. 2009 - Aug. 2011. Darkest color indicated 1,000+ entries.

Figure 3

Total Foster Care Entries Per Capita

Source: Children's Division, Missouri Department of Social Services. Map based on data for total foster care entries from Jan. 2009 - Aug. 2011. Color indicates entries per capita % based on 2010 U.S. Census. Darkest colors indicate highest rates of entries per capita.

Figure 4

Foster Care Placement by Type

%	Placement Type
40.0	Foster Home
35.9	Relatives Home
15.7	Group Home/Residential Care
8.1	Other
0.3	Adoptive Home

Source: Children's Division, Missouri Department of Social Services. As of 9/30/2011.

Figure 5

Conditions for Foster Care Entries

%	Condition
0.6%	Parent Death
8.4%	Caretaker Illness
4.5%	Abandoned
1.5%	Relinquished
1.3%	Child Disabled
0.3%	Child Alcohol
1.0%	Child Drug
8.4%	Child Behavior
10.0%	Inadequate House
22.3%	Neglect
4.7%	Sexual Abuse
9.6%	Physical Abuse
17.0%	Parent Drugs
4.3%	Parent Alcohol
6.1%	Caretaker Incarcerated

Source: Children's Division, Missouri Department of Social Services. Conditions for entry into Missouri State Foster Care. Each child may have multiple conditions for entry. State totals indicate total conditions and not individual children. Data as of 8/31/11.
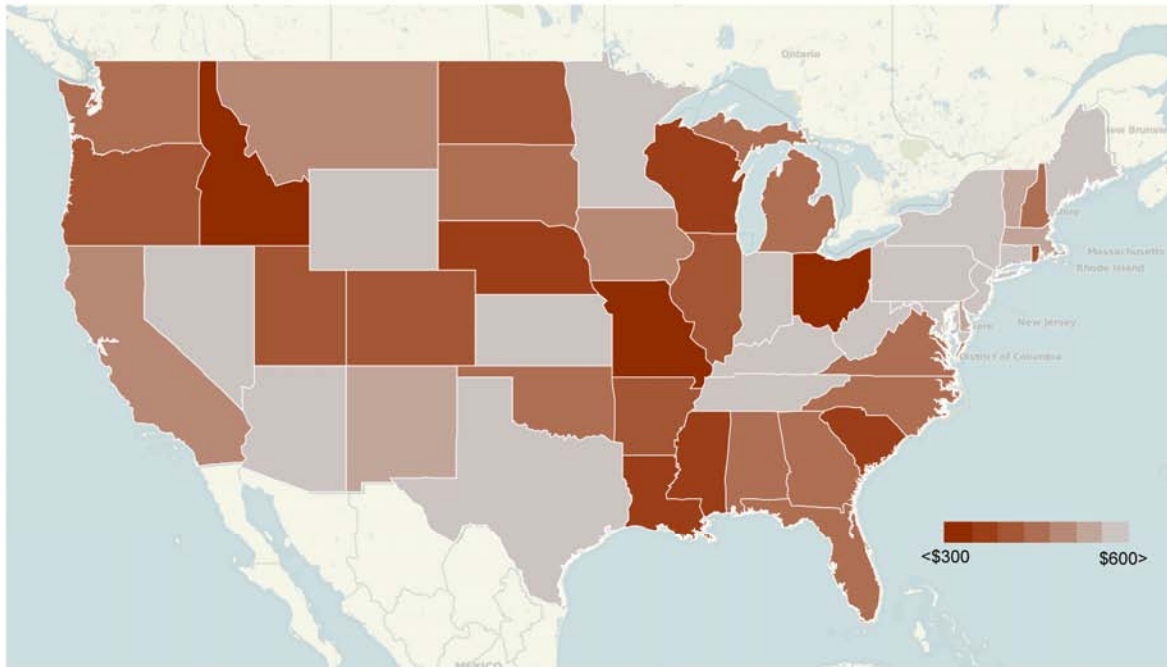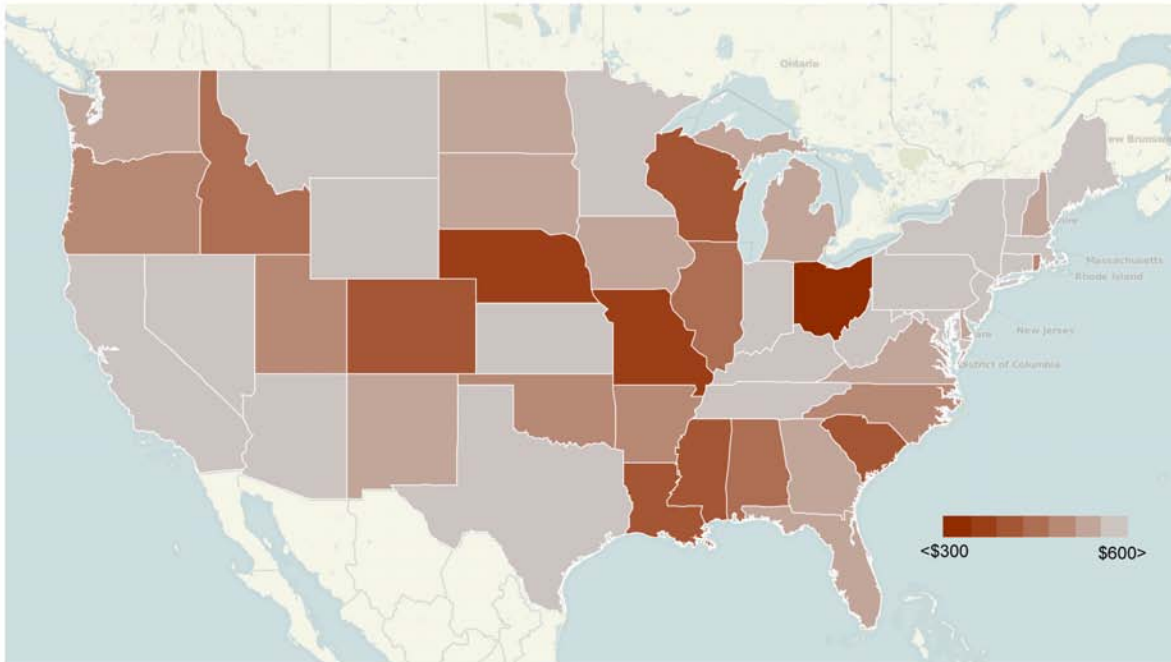
Figure 6

U.S. Reimbursement Rates by State - Age 2
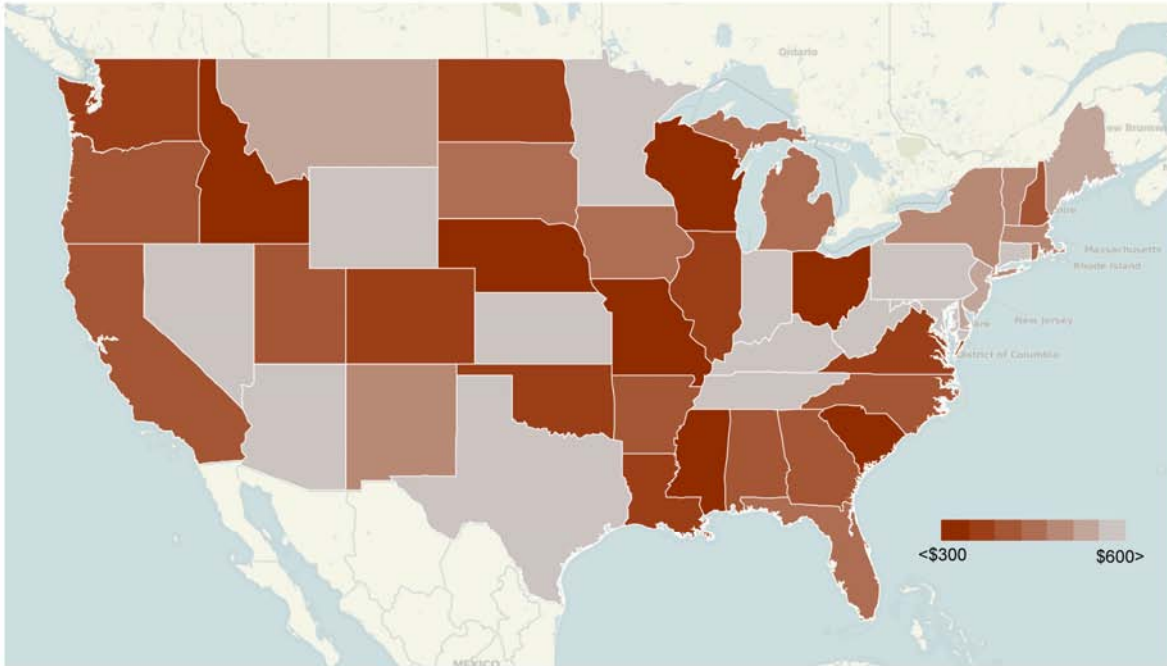
<$300 $600>

Source: Hitting the MARC: Establishing Foster Care Minimum Adequate Rates for Children, Oct. 2007.
State shading is based on reimbursement rates. Darker areas represent low reimbursement rates.

Figure 7

U.S. Reimbursement Rates by State - Age 9

<$300 $600>

Source: Hitting the MARC: Establishing Foster Care Minimum Adequate Rates for Children, Oct. 2007.
State shading is based on reimbursement rates. Darker areas represent low reimbursement rates.

Figure 8

U.S. Reimbursement Rates by State - Age 16

Source: Hitting the MARC: Establishing Foster Care Minimum Adequate Rates for Children, Oct. 2007.
State shading is based on reimbursement rates. Darker areas represent low reimbursement rates.

Note for Figures 6-8:

The Department of Social Services recognizes it is difficult to make comparisons among states due to varying factors. The Department questions the veracity of this report as it applies to Missouri.
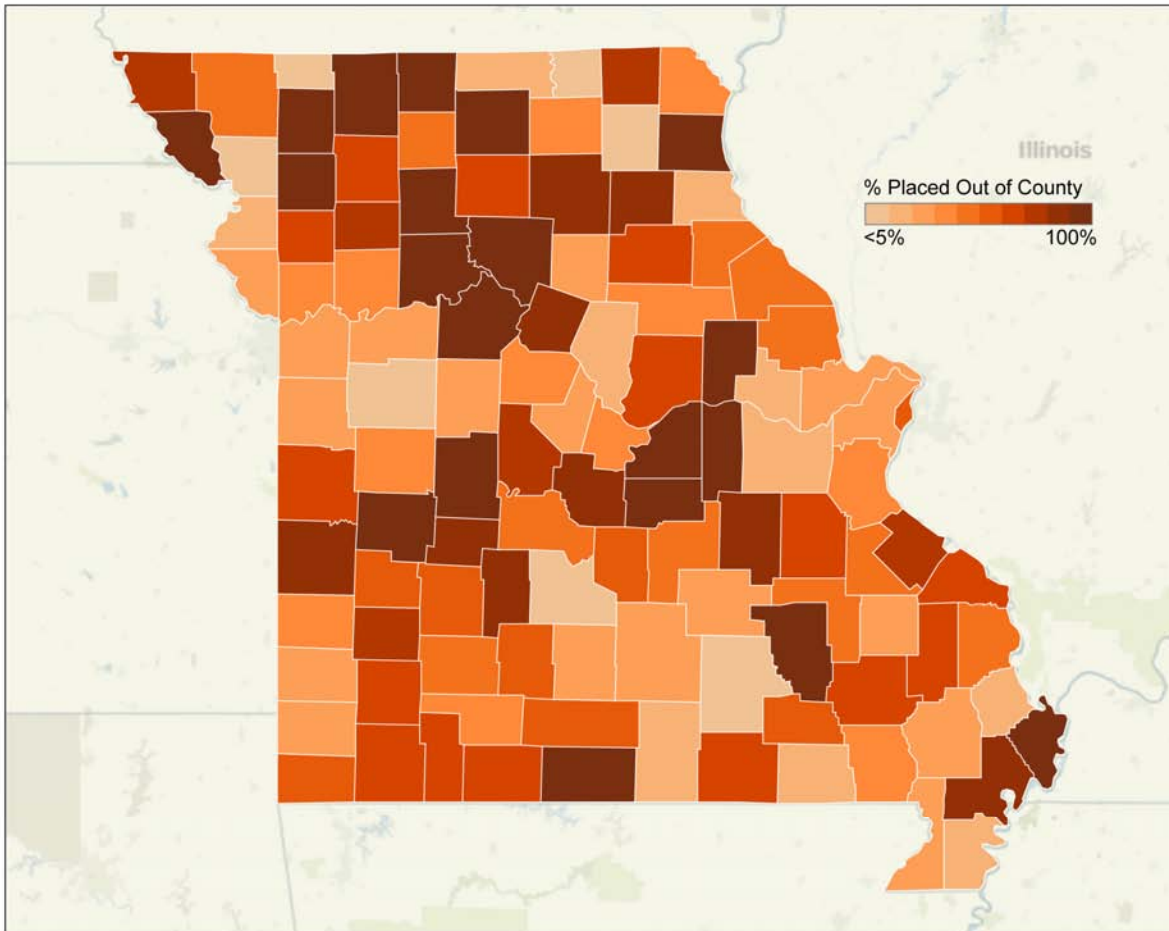
Figure 9

Placements In County
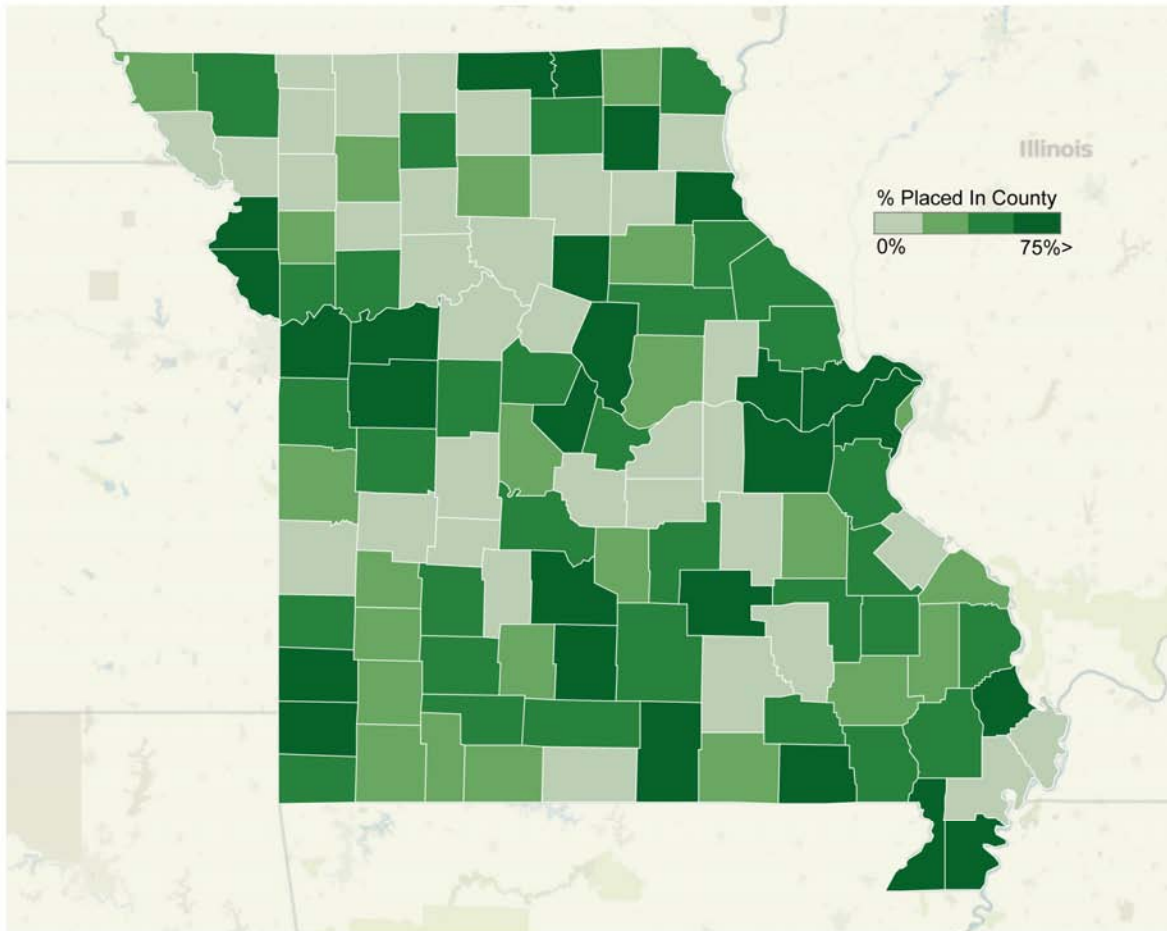
Source: Children's Division, Missouri Dept. of Social Services. Maps shows foster care placements that remain in the county of the case origin. Darkest colors indicate 75% or more of cases placed in county. Data as of 8/3/11.

Figure 10

Placements Out of County

Source: Children's Division, Missouri Dept. of Social Services. Maps shows foster care placements that leave the county of the case origin. Darkest colors indicate 100% of cases placed out of county. Data as of 8/3/11.