Introduction

The abuse and neglect of children is a serious problem in California as well as in the nation as a whole. In 1994, there were over 664,000 reports of child abuse/neglect and about 90,000 children in foster care in California. Between 1987-88 and 1994-95, the number of children served by the Child Welfare Services (CWS) system, after controlling for changes in population, increased 27 percent.

This report presents a variety of information on the subject of child abuse and neglect. It is designed to serve both as a reference document and as a vehicle for stimulating further discussion and policy development on these issues.

Chapter 1 defines child abuse and neglect and describes the child welfare services system. In Chapter 2, we present trends and characteristics regarding child abuse and neglect in California. Chapter 3 provides information on the state's CWS Program. Chapter 4 displays cost data related to child abuse and neglect. Chapter 5 provides data to assess the CWS system. Finally, in Chapter 6 we provide an assessment of the CWS Program and discuss policy implications suggested by the information provided in the preceding chapters.

What Is Child Abuse and Neglect?

Definitions and Types of Child Abuse/Neglect

State law defines child abuse as (1) physical injury inflicted on a child by another person, (2) sexual abuse, or (3) emotional abuse. Child neglect is defined as negligent treatment which threatens the child's health or welfare. The different types of child abuse/neglect can be categorized as follows:

- Sexual abuse is the victimization of a child by sexual activities, including molestation, indecent exposure, fondling, rape, and incest.
- Physical abuse is bodily injury inflicted by other than accidental means on a child, including willful cruelty, unjustifiable punishment, or corporal punishment.
- Emotional abuse is nonphysical mistreatment, resulting in disturbed behavior by the child, such as severe withdrawal or hyperactivity. Emotional abuse includes willfully causing any child to suffer, inflicting mental suffering, or endangering a child's emotional well-being.
- General neglect is the negligent failure of a parent/guardian or caretaker to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, or supervision where no physical injury to the child has occurred.
- Severe neglect refers to those situations of neglect where the child's health is endangered, including severe malnutrition.
- Exploitation means forcing or coercing a child into performing activities that are beyond the child's capabilities or which are illegal or degrading, including sexual exploitation.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THERE IS A REPORT OF CHILD ABUSE/NEGLECT?

Once a report of child abuse/neglect has been made, there are various steps that are taken as part of the resolution process. These steps generally involve California's CWS system and the juvenile dependency process.

Child Welfare Services System

The CWS system is run by the county welfare departments, which investigate allegations of child abuse/neglect and provide case management and support services to the children and their families. The state's CWS Program consists of four main components:

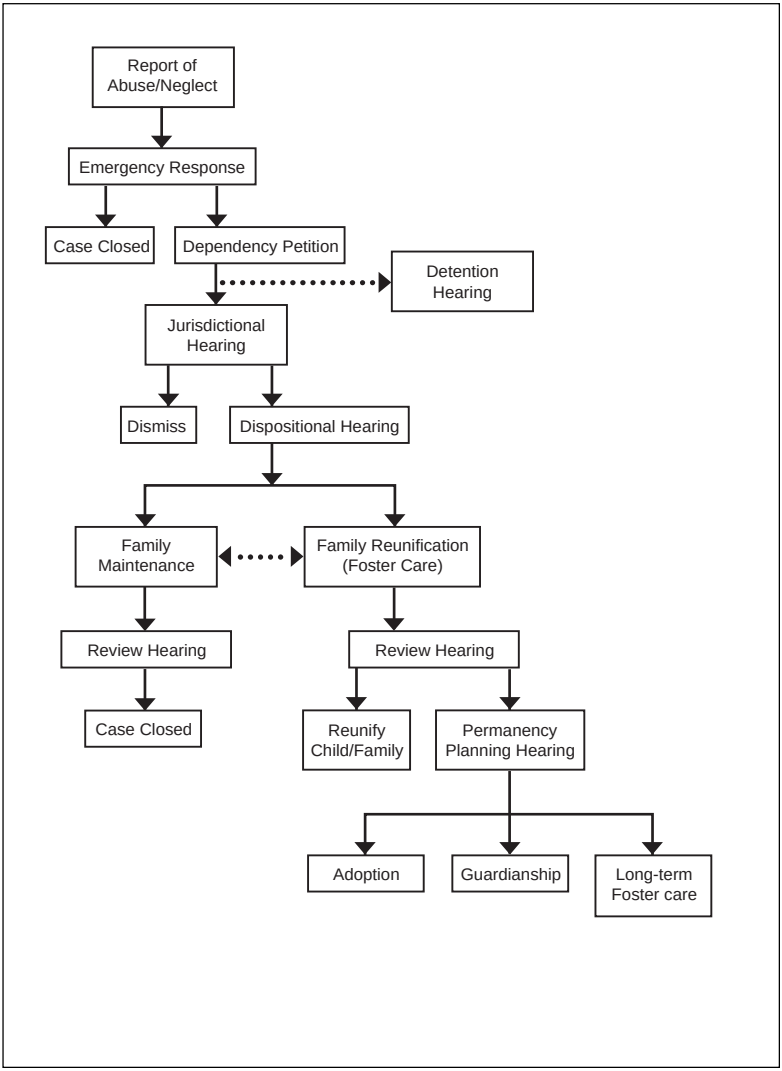
- **Emergency Response** is the initial intake point for the program. Social workers are required to respond to reports of child abuse/neglect and determine whether an in-person investigation is necessary.
- **Family Maintenance** provides support services to prevent abuse/neglect while the child remains in his or her home. Generally, these services include counseling, parent training, respite care, and temporary in-home care.
- **Family Reunification** provides support services to the family while the child is in temporary foster care. Typically, these services include counseling, emergency shelter care, parent training, and teaching homemaking skills.
- **Permanent Placement** provides management and placement services to children in foster care who cannot be returned to their families.

Juvenile Dependency Process

Children who are served by the CWS system generally come under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court, which may decide that the child should be made a dependent of the court. The juvenile dependency process involves a series of hearings and case reviews and may result in several outcomes such as foster care placement or adoption. County welfare departments may offer services to children and their families without involving the juvenile dependency process when there is a voluntary agreement for such services between the family and the county welfare department.

The chart on the following pages shows the flow of a report of child abuse/neglect through the child welfare system.

What Happens When There Is A Report of Child Abuse/Neglect?



- ***Reports of child abuse/neglect*** are received by county welfare departments through the Emergency Response component of the CWS Program. In some cases, the county social worker may determine that the child should be placed in temporary foster care.

- A ***dependency petition*** is filed for each Emergency Response case that is not closed immediately, requesting that the child be declared a dependent of the court.

- A ***detention hearing*** is held to approve the temporary removal of the child from his or her home.

- At the ***jurisdictional hearing,*** the court determines whether or not abuse/neglect has occurred as stated in the petition.

- If abuse/neglect was found, ***a dispositional hearing*** is conducted to determine a remedy—generally, the court may order *family maintenance* or *family reunification* services.

- ***Review hearings*** are held, generally every six months, to review family maintenance and family reunification efforts.

- If family reunification efforts fail, a ***permanency planning*** hearing is held to determine the long-term plan for the child. The plan must include one of the following goals: long-term foster care placement, guardianship, or adoption.

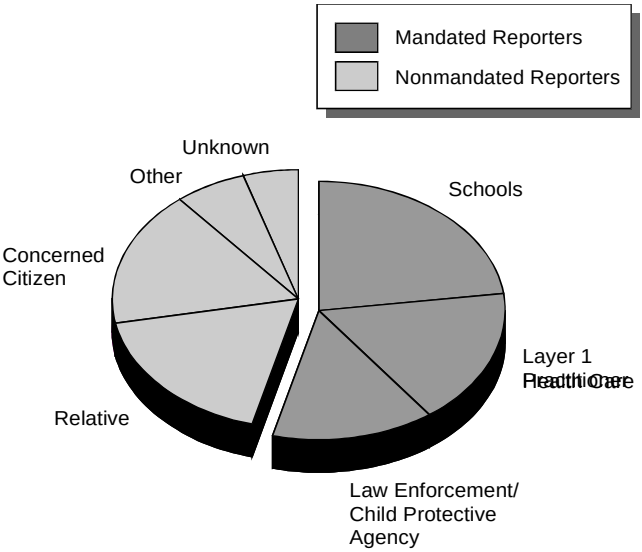
Trends and Characteristics of Child Abuse and Neglect in California

The state collects information regarding the incidence of child abuse/neglect through reports made by county welfare departments. It is difficult, however, to measure the actual incidence of child abuse/neglect for several reasons. First, the definitions and guidelines used for determining child abuse/neglect are not precise. Second, some people may be reluctant to report child abuse or neglect because they do not want to become involved. Finally, it may be difficult for government agencies to substantiate a report, even though abuse or neglect has occurred.

In California, the number of child abuse/neglect reports per 1,000 children increased 76 percent between 1985 and 1994. While this suggests that child abuse/neglect has increased significantly, data are not available on the number of reports that were actually substantiated (that is, where it was determined that abuse or neglect had occurred).

Mandated Reporters Account for Over Half The Reports of Abuse/Neglect

January 1993



- The California Child Abuse Reporting Law requires certain professionals to report known or suspected child abuse. Legally mandated reporters include certain employees of schools (such as teachers) or day care facilities, health practitioners (physicians, nurses, clinical social workers), child protective agencies (county welfare, probation, police departments), and commercial film and photographic print processors.

- Based on data from January 1993, 54 percent of the reports came from legally mandated reporters. The single largest source of all reports—about one-fifth of the total—were made by schools.

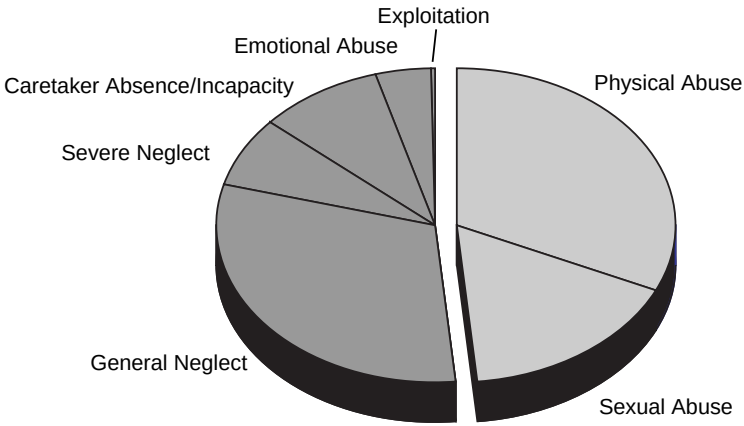
Who are the Victims and Perpetrators Of Child Abuse/Neglect?

January 1993

	VICTIMS	PERPETRATORS
Age:	Average age is 7 years. About 41% of the children are 5 years or younger.	Average age is 31 years.
Gender:	58% Female 42% Male	63% Female 37% Male
Ethnicity:		
	VICTIMS / POPULATION [a]	ABUSER / POPULATION [b]
	White 44% 46%	White 40% 60%
	Hispanic 35% 37%	Hispanic 33% 24%
	Black 18% 7%	Black 19% 6%
	Other 3% 10%	Other 3% 10%
Other:	**Disability Status** 26% of the children have a mental, physical, and/or behavioral disability.	**Relationship to Child** 80% natural parent 7% other relative 5% step-parent 8% other non-relative

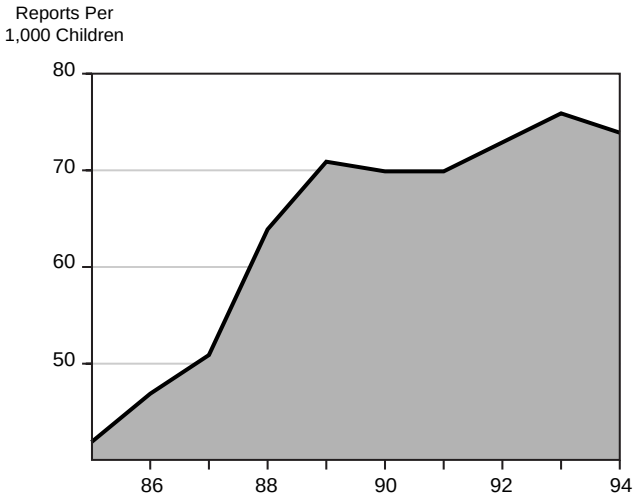
[a] Population of children age 0-17 in California, 1993.
[b] Adult population in California, 1993.

Physical or Sexual Abuse Account for Half the Reports of Abuse/Neglect
1994



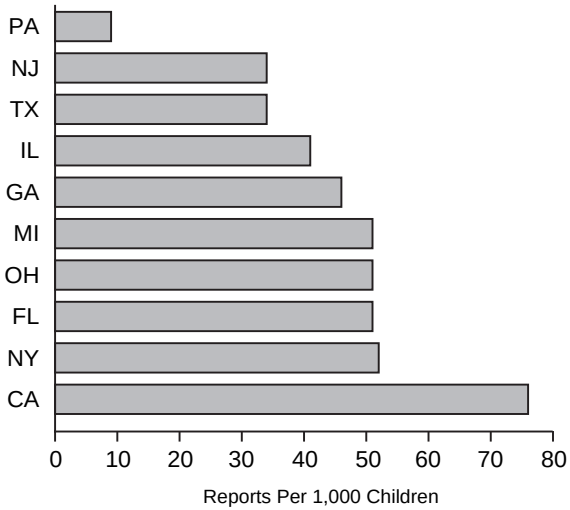
- In 1994, about half of the reports of abuse/neglect were due to physical abuse (32 percent) or sexual abuse (17 percent).
- About one-third of the reports were due to general neglect, such as regularly leaving a young child in the home without supervision.
- This distribution of the types of reported abuse/neglect has remained generally constant over the last ten years.

Reports of Abuse/Neglect Increased Significantly During the Late 1980s



- Between 1985 and 1989, the number of reports of abuse/neglect increased 70 percent, from 42 to 71 per 1,000 children. Since 1989, however, the rate has increased more slowly.
- The sharp increase in the late 1980s may have been partly due to an increase in the number of children born with drug-exposure problems. These cases were generally reported to CWS until 1990, when legislation was enacted which restricted conditions for reporting. The increase in reporting rates over this entire period is due to: (1) increased incidents of child abuse/neglect as a result of increased economic pressures on families, (2) increased use of illegal drugs, and (3) greater public awareness of child abuse/neglect.
- In total, there were about 296,000 reports of child abuse/neglect in 1985, compared to about 664,000 in 1994. This represents a 124 percent increase over the period, or an average annual rate of almost 10 percent.

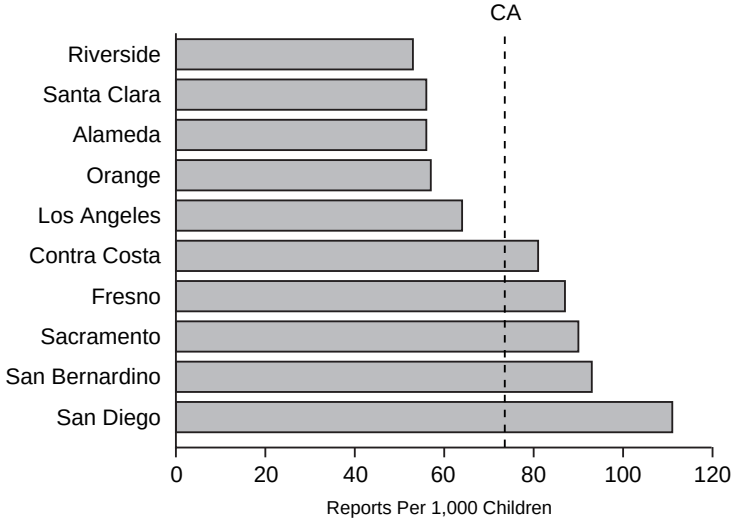
California Has the Highest Rate of Reported Abuse/Neglect Among the Ten Largest States
1993



- In 1993, California had the highest rate of reported abuse/neglect among the ten largest states—76 per 1,000 children.

- The variation among the states is partly due to differences in reporting laws, data collection systems, and definitions of child abuse/neglect. For example, Pennsylvania does not include "general neglect" in its definition of child abuse/neglect.

Rate of Reported Abuse/Neglect Varies Among Counties
1994



- Of the ten largest counties, San Diego County had the highest rate of reported abuse/neglect in 1994—50 percent higher than the statewide average. (In 1991, the county's reporting rate was almost 90 percent higher than the statewide average.)

- Riverside County had the lowest reporting rate in 1994, which was 40 percent below the statewide average.

- Some variation may be due to differences in demographics (for example, incidence of poverty) or differences in methods of data collection; however, these two factors do not appear to explain all of the variation.

Law Enforcement Involvement In Child Abuse Cases

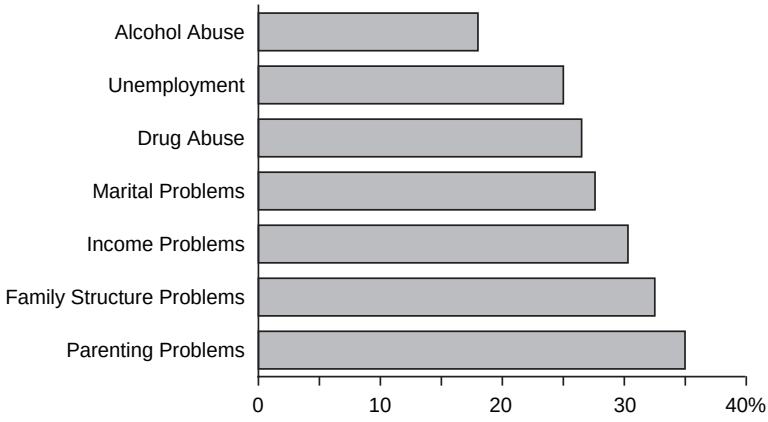
REPORTS
In 1994, county welfare departments responded to about 664,000 reports of child abuse/neglect.

LAW ENFORCEMENT
Based on survey data, about 40 percent of the reports received through the Emergency Response component involved law enforcement Ñ about 266,000 reports in 1994.

ARRESTS
In 1994, there were 11,974 reported arrests for child abuse.

Most Common Stress Factors In Abusive Households

January 1993



- Research suggests that risk factors for child abuse/neglect include poverty, unemployment, alcohol/drug abuse, history of child abuse/neglect or violence in the family, limited support systems (such as family and friends), low self-esteem, and poor health of parent.

- Based on a survey of CWS cases in January 1993, the most common stress factors present in households experiencing child abuse were the inability to cope with parenting (35 percent of the cases) and disruption of family structure, such as divorce (33 percent).

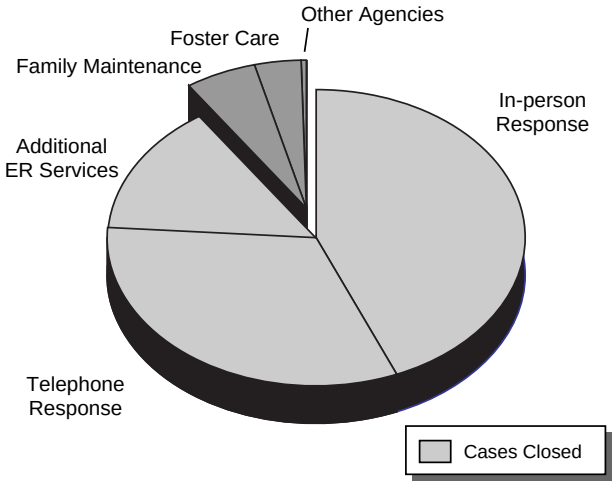
The Child Welfare Services System

Spurred by the failure of the CWS system to address the needs of abused and neglected children, the federal government enacted the Adoptions Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980. This act required states to enact specific reforms as a condition for receiving federal funds. In 1982, California incorporated various reforms into state law through the enactment of Chapter 978, Statutes of 1982 (SB 14, Presley). The major goals of Chapter 978 were to (1) reduce unnecessary foster care placements by providing treatment services to families, (2) safely reunify foster care children with their families, (3) increase the stability of foster care placements, and (4) place more foster care children into adoptions when appropriate.

County welfare departments administer the CWS Program under statutes and regulations established by the state. Nevertheless, there is some variation among the counties in how they operate their CWS Programs. This variation may be partly due to differences in demographics, administrative structure, or the child welfare philosophy of the county.

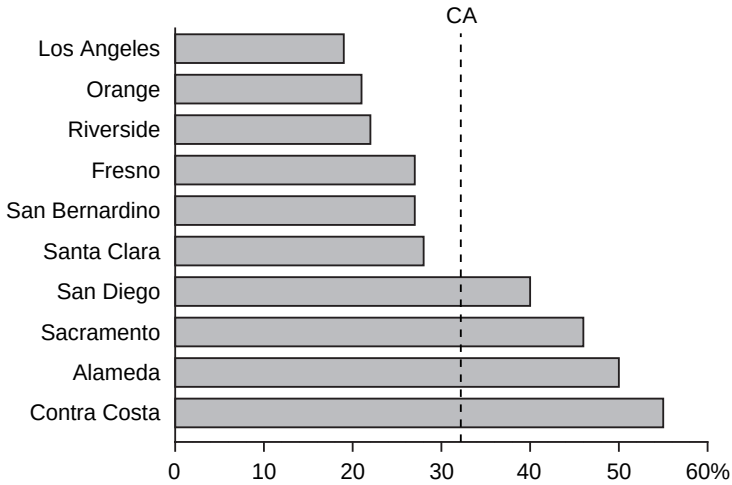
Currently, much data about the CWS cases are unavailable on a statewide basis. However, state law requires the implementation of a single statewide CWS case management system. This system—scheduled for completion in October 1997—is designed to provide a statewide data base, case management tool, and reporting system for the program.

Most Child Abuse/Neglect Cases Are Closed After Initial Intake
1994



- In 1994, 664,294 children were served by the Emergency Response (ER) component of the CWS Program.
- Of those ER cases, 90 percent were closed after initial intake services were provided. These cases were closed out because the social worker determined that either: (1) an in-person investigation was unnecessary after conducting a telephone assessment ("screened out") (32 percent), (2) services were unnecessary after conducting an in-person investigation (44 percent), or (3) the case could be closed after additional ER services (crisis intervention, counseling) had been provided (14 percent).
- Those cases that were not closed out were continued as ongoing cases or transferred to other agencies. The ongoing cases consist of those transferred to the Family Maintenance component of the CWS Program or to foster care.

Proportion of Abuse/Neglect Reports "Screened Out" Varies Among Counties
1994



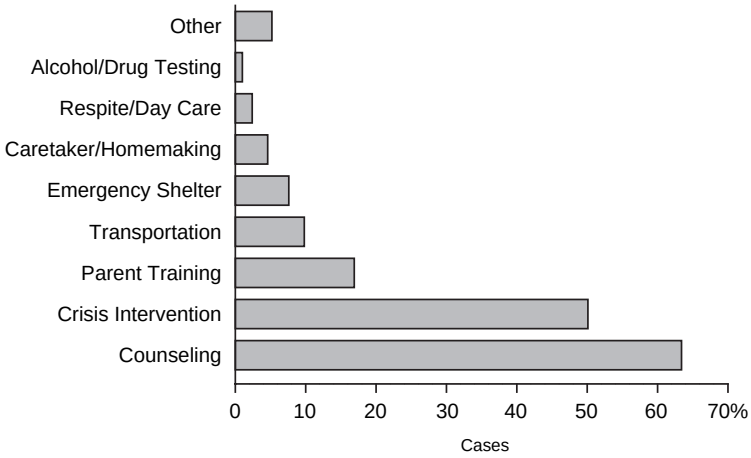
- As part of the Emergency Response component, counties are required to screen—by use of telephone assessments—reports of child abuse/neglect to determine whether an in-person investigation is necessary. A statewide guideline for screening reports exists in order to assist the counties and facilitate uniformity.

- The percentage of reports "screened out" varies substantially among the counties. In 1994, for example, Los Angeles County "screened out" about 19 percent of reports, compared to 55 percent in Contra Costa County. Some of the variation among counties may be due to a lack of specificity in the state guideline, thereby allowing counties to adopt different screening policies.

- Overall, the proportion of reports that are "screened out" statewide has increased from 24 percent in 1990 to 32 percent in 1994.

Counseling and Crisis Intervention Are the Most Common Services

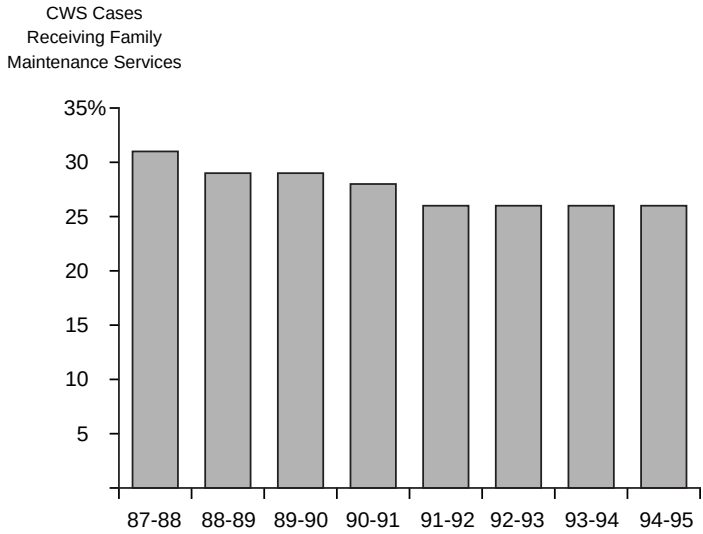
January 1993



- Children and families in the CWS Program receive a broad array of services including crisis intervention, counseling, parent training, transportation, and substance abuse testing.

- In January 1993, the most common support services provided through the Emergency Response and Family Maintenance components were counseling (63 percent of cases) and crisis intervention (50 percent of cases). Counseling includes activities such as psychiatric services; crisis intervention includes such services as assistance to families in need of housing.

Fewer Children in the CWS Program Are Receiving Family Maintenance Services



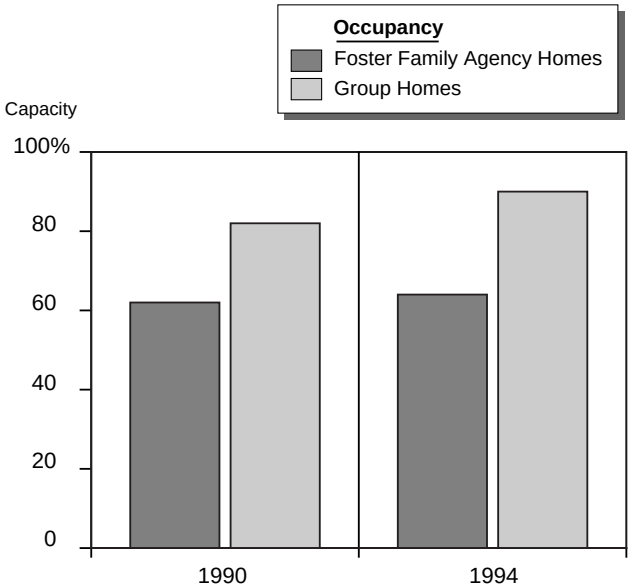
- Fewer children in the CWS Program are receiving services in the home. Specifically, in 1987-88, 31 percent of children who were in the CWS Program received family maintenance services, compared to 26 percent in 1994-95. This means that a higher proportion of children are receiving services outside of their homes through the use of foster care placements.

- This trend is probably due to several factors. We noted in our 1992 report on child abuse, for example, that social workers reported a lack of external support services such as drug treatment, which limited the number of children who could be served effectively by the Family Maintenance program. Another potential factor is that a higher proportion of children with more severe problems may be entering the CWS Program.

Types of Foster Care Placements

Placement Type	Description	Reported Licensed Capacity (1994)	Monthly Grant Per Child (1995-96)
Foster Family Homes	¥ Residential facility that serves no more than six foster children. ¥ Provides 24-hour care and supervision in a licensee's home. ¥ Foster care grant may be supplemented for care of children with special needs.	21,891	$345-$484
Foster Family Agency Homes	¥ Homes operating under nonprofit foster family agencies which provide professional support. ¥ These placements are required by law to serve as an alternative to group home placement.	14,409	$1,283-$1,515
Group Homes	¥ A facility of any capacity that provides 24-hour non-medical care, supervision, and services to children. ¥ Generally, serve children with higher emotional or behavioral problems who require a more restrictive environment. ¥ May vary from small, family-like homes to larger institutional facilities.	11,624	$1,183-$5,013

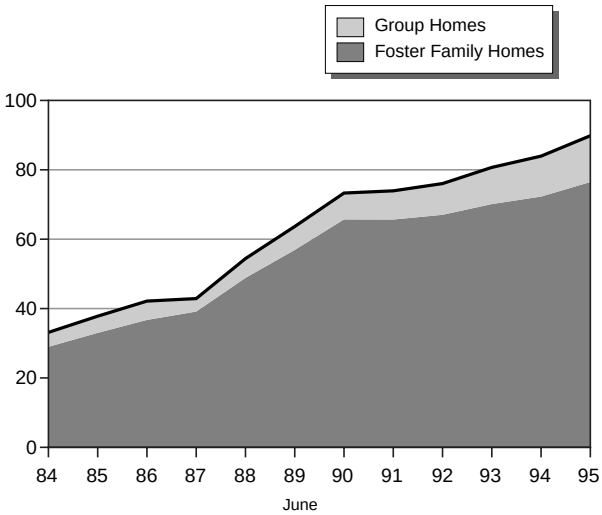
Foster Care Occupancy Rates Are Below Capacity



- Between December 1990 and December 1994, the occupancy rate for foster family agency homes increased slightly, from about 62 percent to 64 percent, while the group home occupancy rate increased from 82 percent to 90 percent.

- While the data suggest that there is still unused placement capacity statewide, individual counties may still lack appropriate homes for foster care children because the availability of different placement options varies among the counties.

Foster Care Caseloads Increasing
In Thousands

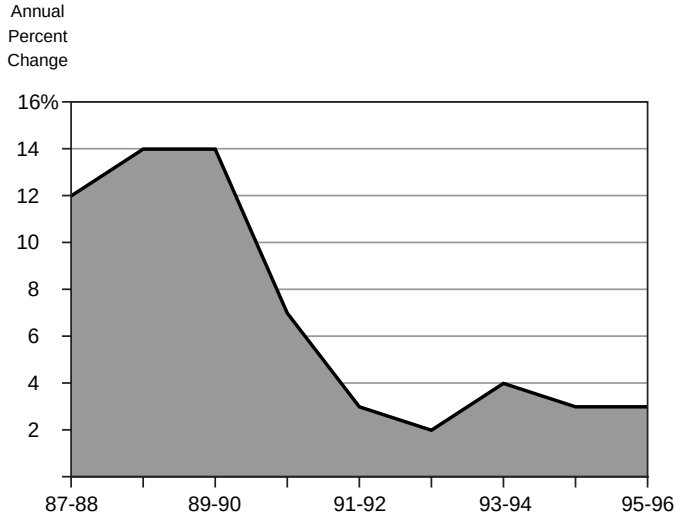


- Foster care caseloads have increased from about 33,000 in June 1984 to 90,000 in June 1995, representing a 170 percent increase. The average annual increase was 10 percent.

- The sharp increase during the late 1980s and the slowdown since 1991 corresponds to trends in the number of reports of child abuse/neglect received during the same period (see page 13). The slower growth since 1991 may be partly due to an increase in the counties' share of AFDC-Foster Care costs, which gave counties a greater incentive to contain expenditures (see page 27).

- The proportion of children placed in group homes increased from about 12 percent in June 1984 to 14 percent in June 1995.

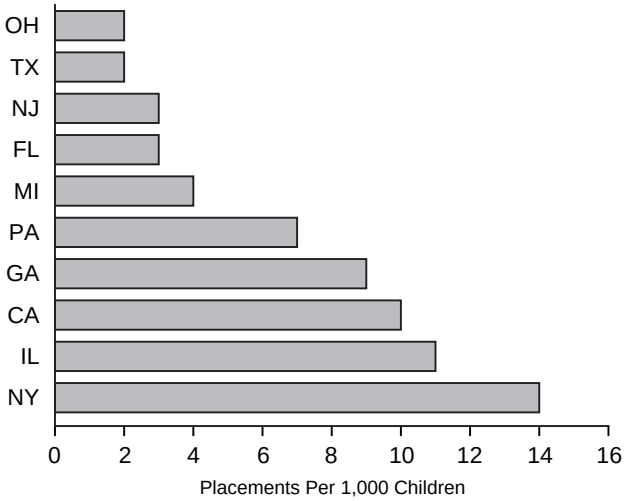
Foster Care Caseload Growth Slowing Significantly



- During the late 1980's, the annual growth rate in the AFDC-Foster Care caseload reached as high as 14 percent. Since 1991-92, however, the growth rate has decreased to about 3 percent.

- The reduced growth rate may be due in part to the following: (1) in 1991-92, the counties' share of costs for the AFDC Foster Care Program was increased substantially (from 5 percent to 60 percent), giving counties a substantial incentive to contain expenditures, and (2) family preservation programs have expanded throughout the state. These preservation programs are designed to provide more intensive services to help families remain together and avoid foster care placements.

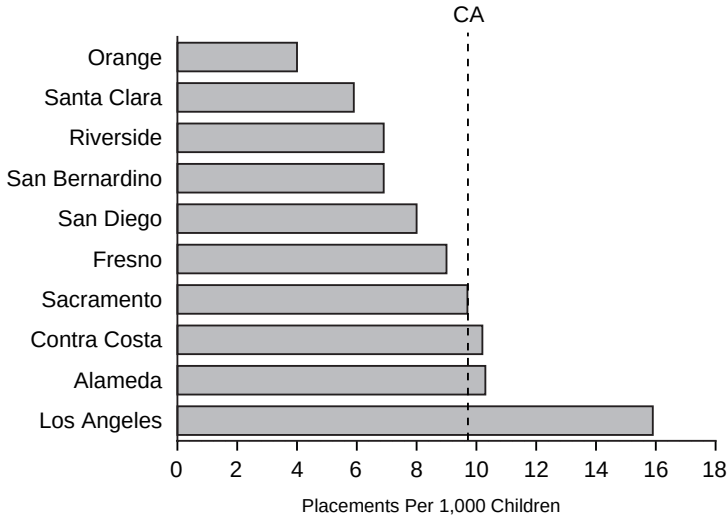
Foster Care Placements Vary Among Largest States
1993



- In 1993, California's foster care placement rate was 10 per 1,000 children. This is lower than in New York and Illinois, but higher than in other large states.

- Some of the variation in placement rates among states is due to differences in demographic and socio-economic factors (for example, incidence of poverty), state policies and practices, and state data collection procedures.

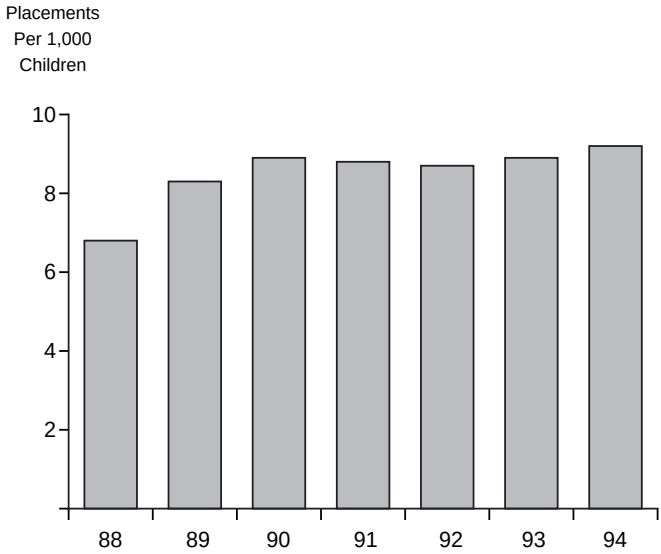
Foster Care Placements Vary Among Largest Counties
1994



- In June, 1994 the foster care placement rate varied from 4 per 1,000 children in Orange County to 16 per 1,000 children in Los Angeles County.

- The variation may be partly due to differences in demographic factors, such as poverty, or in efforts to prevent out-of-home placements.

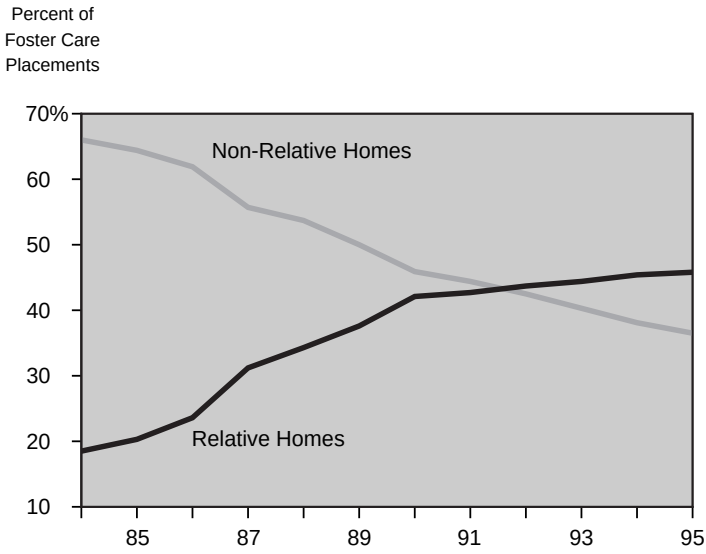
Foster Care Placement Rates Are Increasing



- The number of children placed in foster care per 1,000 children increased from 6.8 in 1988 to 8.9 in 1990. The rate increased to 9.2 in 1994.

- The increase in placement rates is probably partly explained by the increase in the rate of reports of child abuse and neglect during the same period (see page 13).

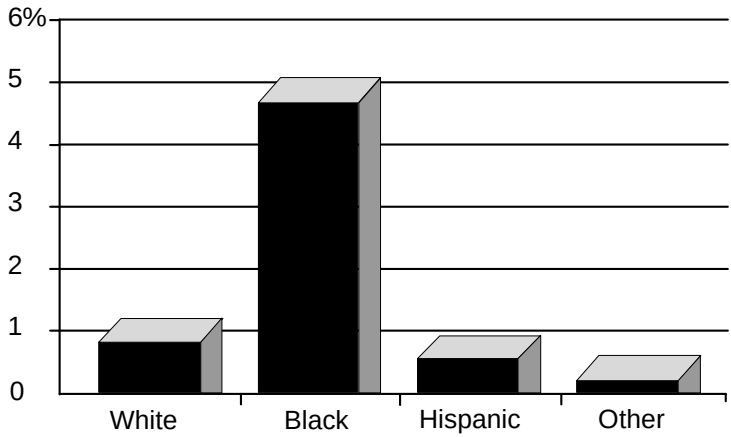
More Foster Care Children Being Placed with Relatives



- An increasing proportion of foster care children are being placed with relatives. In June 1984, children placed with relatives accounted for 19 percent of the foster care caseload, compared to 46 percent in June 1995.

- This increasing trend probably results from ongoing efforts to give preference to relative placements over other types of placements.

Percent of Ethnic Group Population in Foster Care
June 1995



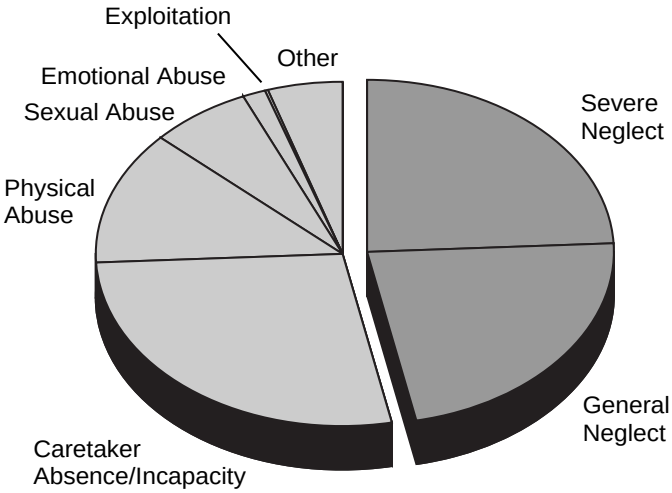
- In June 1995, 37 percent of the foster care population was black, 36 percent was white, and 25 percent was Hispanic. (Not shown in chart.)

- The number of black children in foster care represented about 4.8 percent of the total population of black children in California. Hispanic children in foster care represented 0.6 percent of the total Hispanic children population.

- The reasons for the variation in ethnic group representation are unknown. The relatively high percentage of black children in foster care, however, may be due partly to the relationship between relatively low family incomes and problems leading to child abuse/neglect.

About Half of the Foster Care Children Are There Due to Neglect

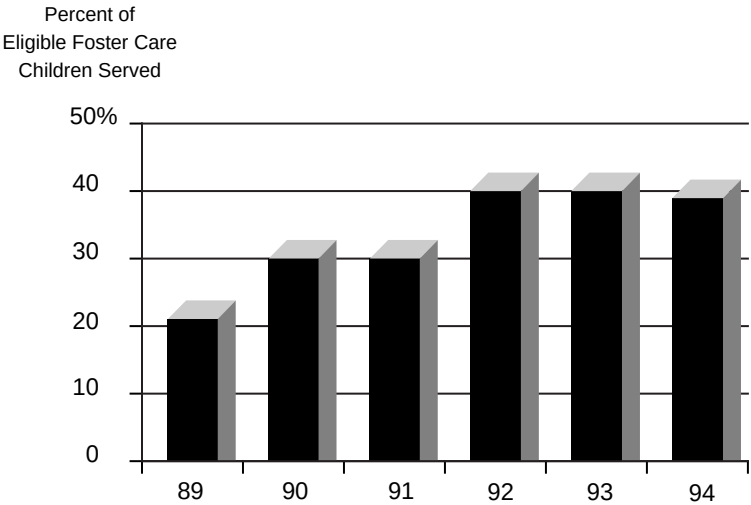
1994-95



- In 1994-95, about one-half of the children in foster care had been removed from their homes due to general or severe neglect.

- While physical and sexual abuse comprise nearly half of the types of child abuse/neglect reports received, less than a quarter of the children placed in foster care are there due to these reasons.

Independent Living Program Expanding, But Not Serving All Eligibles



- The Independent Living Program (ILP) provides services (such as job seeking skills) that will help a child transition from foster care to independent living.

- Although the percent of eligible foster care children served by the ILP has increased from 21 percent in 1989 to 39 percent in 1994, less than half of the eligible population is being served.

Costs of Child Abuse/Neglect

It is difficult to measure the real costs and consequences of child abuse and neglect. The consequences can be quite varied and long-term in nature; and expenditure data understates the full costs because many incidents of child abuse/neglect go unreported or undetected.

With this caveat, we provide data on the direct costs to government. In 1995-96, California is estimated to spend about $1.7 billion, all funds (state, local, and federal), to provide foster care services to children and to fund the CWS Program.

Total Expenditures (In Millions)

	1993-94	1994-95	1995-96 (est.)
CWS	$568	$617	$652
Foster Care	874	915	1,004
Total	$1,442	$1,532	$1,656

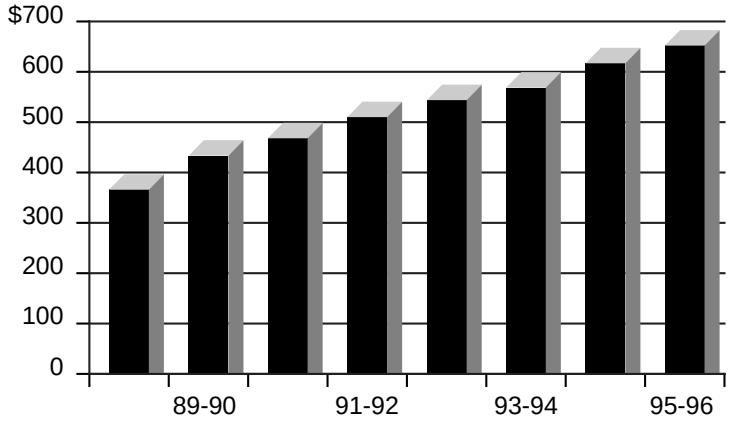
This does not include related costs such as expenditures for the juvenile courts, prevention, health care, and adoptions programs. Also excluded are government costs resulting from the potential indirect effects of child abuse and neglect, such as the costs to the criminal justice system due to increased criminal behavior.

What Are the Costs of Child Abuse and Neglect?

Cost to government to operate the CWS system (case management, foster care, courts, etc.).
Cost to victims, such as pain and suffering, including death.
Cost to society resulting from longer term consequences to victims, such as increased tendency towards criminal behavior and violence, abuse of their own children, psychological problems, substance abuse, and poor employment prospects.

CWS Funding Has Increased About 80 Percent Since 1988-89

In Millions



- In 1995-96, total expenditures for the Child Welfare Services Program will be approximately $652 million. This is an 80 percent increase since 1988-89, or an average annual increase of 9 percent.

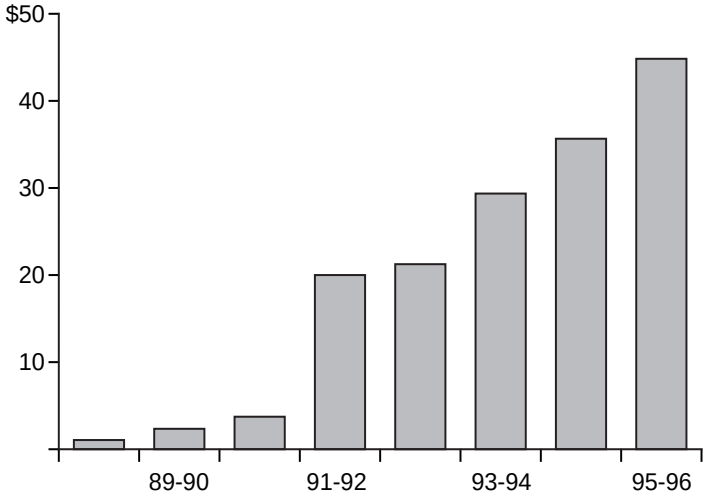
- The increase in expenditures is due to both increased caseloads (35 percent) and an increase in the cost per case (32 percent).

- Caseload increases are partly due to demographic factors, such as increases in the population of children. Other factors include an increase in the rate of reported abuse and neglect (see page 13).

- The increase in cost per case is mainly due to inflationary adjustments on salaries and other operating expenses of county welfare departments.

Family Preservation Funding Has Increased Significantly

In Millions



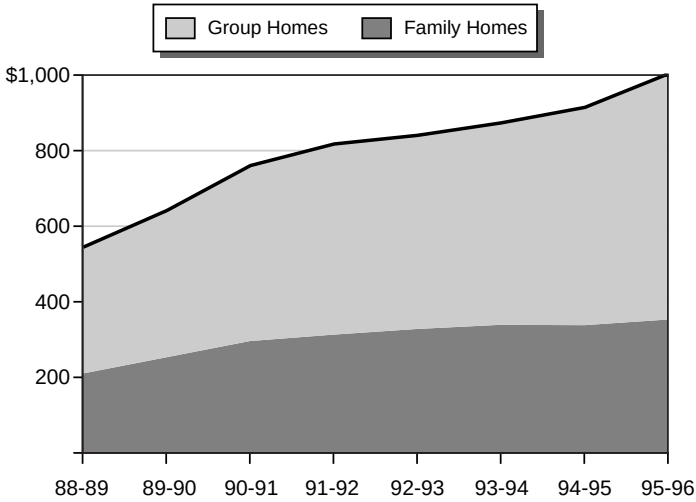
- In 1988-89, the Legislature established the Family Preservation pilot program. The purpose of the program is to provide intensive short-term family maintenance and family reunification services in order to avoid foster care placements or reduce the length of stay of such placements.

- Family preservation funding has increased significantly from $1 million in 1988-89 (three counties), to $45 million in 1995-96 (16 counties).

- The state is currently conducting an independent evaluation of the pilot program; the completion date is unknown.

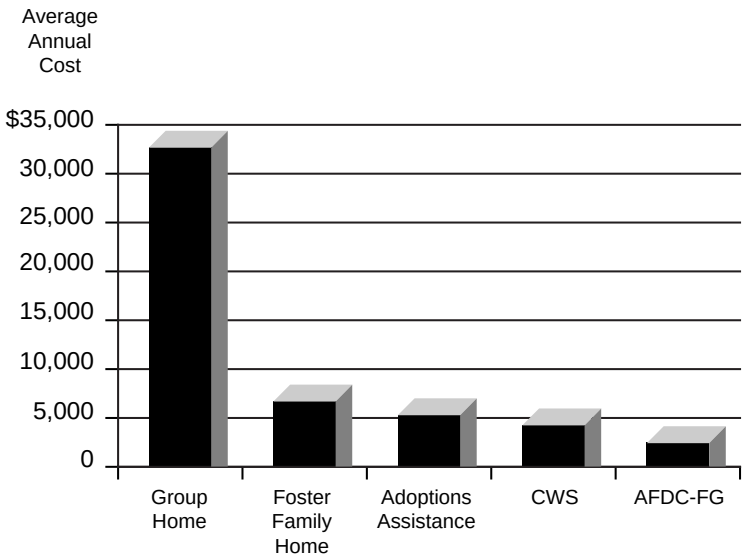
Foster Care Costs Increased 84 Percent Since 1988-89

In Millions



- Total expenditures for the AFDC-Foster Care Program increased 84 percent between 1988-89 and 1995-96, or at an average annual rate of 11 percent. The increase in expenditures is due to both increases in caseload and increases in the average monthly grant amount.
- Foster family home expenditures increased 68 percent and group home expenditures increased 94 percent between 1988-89 and 1995-96. In 1995-96, while group homes comprised about 25 percent of the AFDC-Foster Care caseload, group home expenditures accounted for 65 percent of total foster care expenditures.
- The average monthly foster family home grant increased from $451 in 1988-89 to $559 in 1995-96 (24 percent), while the group home monthly grant increased from $2,463 to $2,891 (17 percent).
- The somewhat slower growth rate in total expenditures since 1991-92 is mainly due to slower caseload growth in the program (see page 27).

Group Homes Have the Highest Cost Per Child
1995-96



- Program costs vary depending on the child's placement, for example, whether the child is kept in his/her own home, placed in foster care, or adopted.

- In 1995-96, it is estimated to cost $32,700 annually for a child in a foster care group home (this does not include related CWS and court costs), compared to $6,700 for a foster family home, $5,300 for adoptions assistance grants (for families who adopt "hard-to-place" children), and $2,500 to provide AFDC and food stamps to a child living with his/her own family (assuming a family of three).

Assessment of the Child Welfare Services System

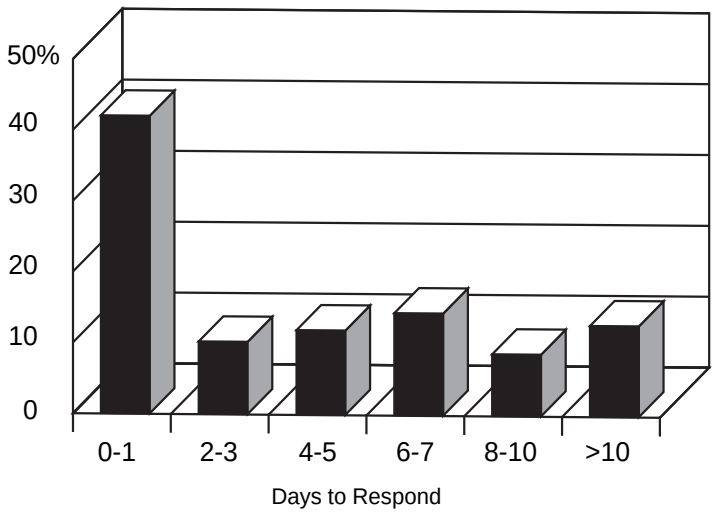
The purposes of the CWS Program are to (1) reduce unnecessary foster care placements, (2) safely reunify foster care children with their families, (3) increase the stability of foster care placements, and (4) place more foster care children into adoptions, when appropriate. Determining the extent to which the CWS system has achieved those goals is somewhat problematic. This is in part because much of the data that is collected in the CWS system relates to "inputs" (such as, the number of social worker visits with the child), rather than outcomes. While these inputs tend to be measurable, they do not provide a good assessment of the success of the program.

Data on outcomes are relatively difficult to develop. Nevertheless, state law requires the development of performance standards and outcome measures for determining the effectiveness and efficiency of the foster care program. The standards, however, do not have to be developed until the statewide CWS case management system is completed in October 1997.

While additional information to assess the performance of the CWS system should be forthcoming from the case management system, some outcome-related data are available currently and are summarized in the following charts.

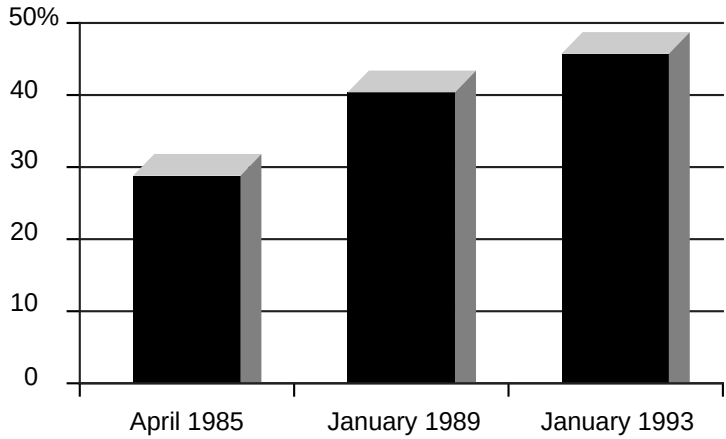
Many Reports of Abuse Are Responded To Within the First Day

January 1993



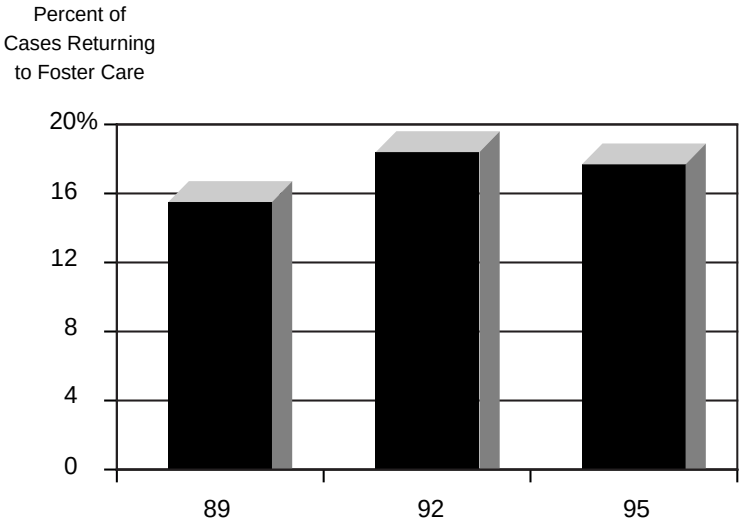
- State law requires that county welfare departments provide an in-person response to reports of child abuse/neglect "immediately" if there is immediate danger to a child or within ten calendar days for all other reports. (Statutes do not define "immediately.") An in-person response is not required if the county welfare department determines that such a response is not appropriate.
- In January 1993, about 40 percent of in-person responses to reports of child abuse/neglect were made within the first day. About 13 percent of the responses were made after 10 days. This may be partly due to inadequate staffing in the emergency response component of the CWS Program. (It should be noted, however, that counties have the flexibility to allocate staff resources among the four CWS components and, therefore, the ability to shift staff to the emergency response program.) In cases where the county is not responding in a timely manner, the Department of Social Services may require the county to develop a corrective action plan.

Percent of Children Previously In the CWS Program Is Increasing
1994-95



- One measure of the success of the CWS Program is the extent to which children previously served by the program do not return to the system. The data show, however, that the percent of children in the emergency response and family maintenance components who were previously in the CWS Program has increased substantially, from 29 percent in April 1985 to 46 percent in January 1993.
- Also, while not shown in this graph, of those children who were previously in the CWS Program, 37 percent of the 1993 cases had been in the system on three or more separate occasions, compared to 27 percent of the 1985 cases.
- The increased recidivism may be partly due to changes in the CWS caseload. For example, there may have been an increase in the number of families who are more difficult to serve effectively (for example, a higher proportion of cases where children have severe behavioral problems or parents have substance abuse problems).

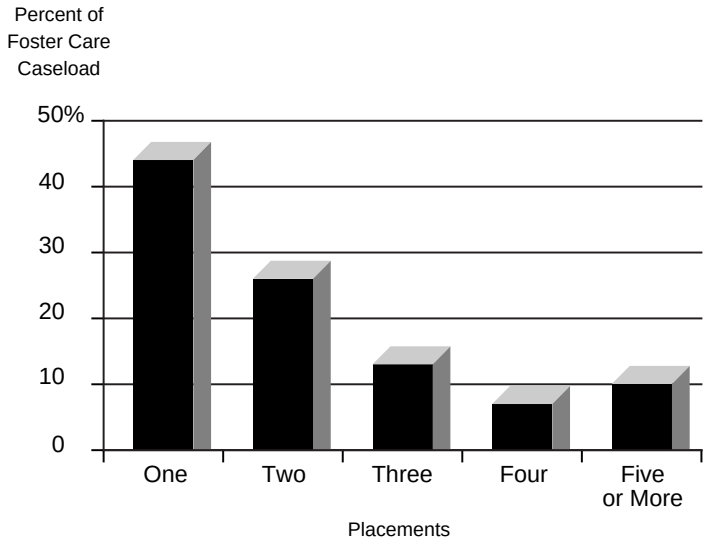
Little Improvement in Foster Care Recidivism



- Another measure of the success of the CWS Program is the extent to which children do not return to the foster care program. Between 1989 and 1995, the percent of cases which returned to foster care remained essentially unchanged, hovering close to 17 percent.

One-Third of Foster Care Children Have Had Three or More Placements

1993-94

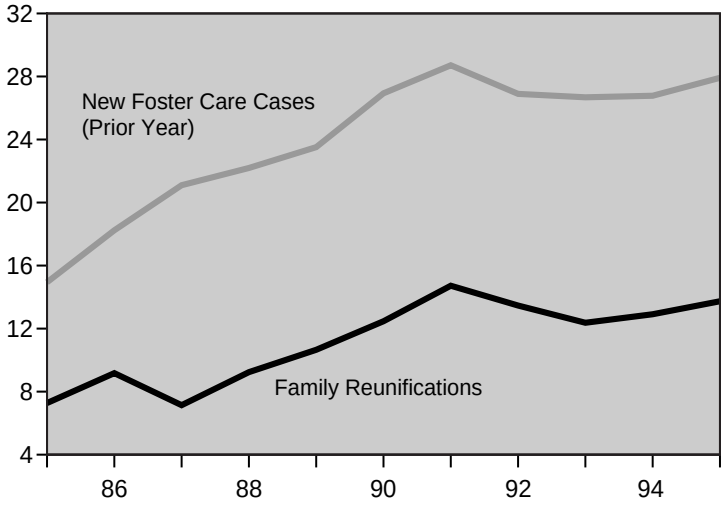


- Another measure of the success of the CWS Program is the extent to which children are not moved from one foster care placement to another. In 1993-94, children in foster care had experienced, on average, two different placements. About 30 percent had experienced three or more placements. This trend has remained steady over the last five years.

- There are a variety of reasons for multiple placements, including behavioral problems of the child, lack of appropriate placement options, and improper matching of the child and placement.

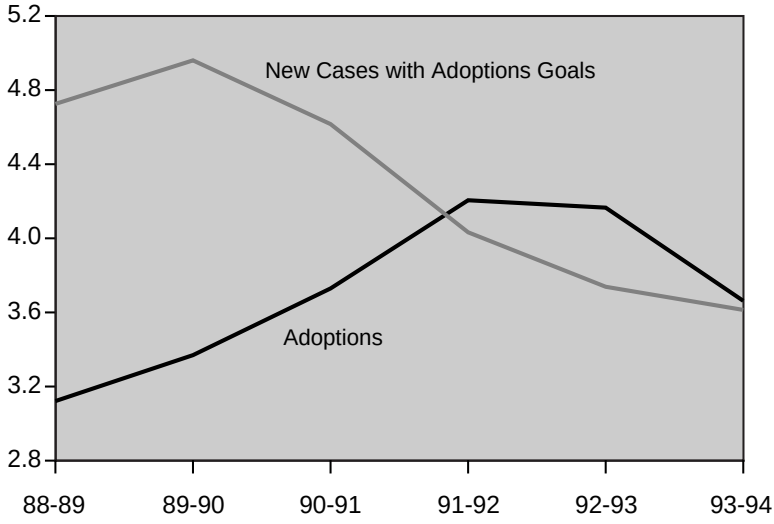
Gap Between Family Reunifications and New Foster Care Cases Remains Unchanged

In Thousands



- Another measure of the success of the CWS Program is the extent to which children in foster care are reunified with their families. Despite efforts of many counties to increase family reunifications, the gap between new foster care cases and family reunifications has remained the same over the last 10 years. Specifically, the number of children who have not been reunified with their families has remained around 51 percent of all new foster care cases.

Adoptions Peaked in 1991-92
In Thousands



- The total number of adoptions peaked in 1991-92 (about 4,200 children), decreased slightly in 1992-93, and dropped sharply in 1993-94.

- In addition, there has been a trend toward fewer cases with adoption as a goal. The reduction in the number of new cases with adoption as a goal may be partly due to an increase in the number of children who are considered "difficult to adopt," due to factors such as age, ethnicity, and mental or physical handicaps.

CWS Program Performance and Policy Implications

It is difficult to assess comprehensively the performance of the CWS Program because outcomes are often hard to measure and existing data are limited. Nevertheless, the data that we have presented in this report can be used to draw some conclusions about program performance and the major policy implications that stem from our findings.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Investigating Cases of Abuse/Neglect

One of the functions of the CWS Program is to respond to reports of child abuse and neglect. Ideally, only those reports that do not constitute abuse or neglect are "screened out" in the initial response stage. As shown on page 21, there is significant variation among the counties in the percentage of reports that are "screened out" at the initial contact stage. Among the large counties, it ranges from 19 percent in Los Angeles County to 55 percent in Contra Costa County. One interpretation of the data is that some counties are screening out too many reports of abuse. On the other hand, one might conclude that some counties are not screening out enough reports (in other words, investigating cases where no abuse has occured). We believe this is an area that deserves further research.

Timely In-Person Response

Another outcome measure in the CWS Program is timely in-person response to reports of abuse and neglect. As shown on page 42, about 40 percent of in-person responses were made

within the first day, indicating that a significant number of reports are addressed immediately. We note, however, that 13 percent of the responses were made after the statutory 10-day timeframe. In cases where the county is not responding in a timely manner, the Department of Social Services has the authority to require the county to develop a corrective action plan.

FAMILY MAINTENANCE AND REUNIFICATION

Reducing Recidivism in the CWS Program

As shown on page 43, the percentage of children returning to the CWS Program has increased significantly over the years, from 29 percent in 1985 to 46 percent in 1993. These data suggest that the program has not been effective in preventing reabuse and neglect in a significant and growing number of cases. Currently, however, there is a lack of information identifying those factors which contribute to the success of family maintenance and reunification services, thereby reducing reabuse and neglect. We believe that collecting such performance data could ultimately improve the results of family maintenance and reunification efforts.

Increasing Family Reunifications

While family reunifications have increased, they have not increased relative to the growth in new foster care cases (see page 46). Although there are cases where it is not appropriate to return children to their families, there are many instances where reunification is in the children's best interests. As some child welfare professionals have indicated, more children in long term foster care (those children for whom family reunification had been attempted and failed) could return home if *ongoing* support services, such as counseling, were provided to the affected families.

Currently, very few families receive ongoing services when a child is returned home. It is likely that some children who are in long-term foster care could be reunified with their families if counties had more flexibility to use foster care funds to provide services to the families rather than to pay for foster care placements. Therefore, we recommend that counties be allowed to use state foster care funds to provide these services to children and their families after reunification.

We note that Chapter 105, Statutes of 1988 (AB 558, Hannigan) established a Family Preservation pilot program to provide intensive short-term family maintenance and family reunification services by giving counties more flexibility in the use of foster care funds. Specifically, counties are authorized to use up to 25 percent of the state's share of projected foster care costs to fund family preservation support services. Generally, these services are not targeted to children in long term foster care. Our proposal, however, would focus these services on such children.

Evaluating The Effectiveness of Prevention Programs

In 1982, the Legislature established the Child Abuse Prevention Program to provide prevention and intervention services to children at risk of abuse/neglect. Each year, about $9 million from the General Fund is allocated to counties to fund community-based public and private agencies that provide prevention and intervention services. However, no evaluation exists that can help determine whether these programs and services are effective. Consequently, we suggest that the Legislature require that a portion of the funds allocated to the programs be used to support independent evaluations to determine the effectiveness of these programs.

FOSTER CARE

Minimizing the Use of Foster Care

One of the goals of the CWS Program is to minimize the use of foster care placements in serving abused children and instead maintain or reunify such children with their families when appropriate. The data, however, suggest that the program has not been successful in achieving this goal since: (1) foster care placement rates (relative to the population of children) have increased since 1988, (2) the proportion of children in the CWS system who are being placed in foster care (rather than receiving support services at home) has been increasing, and (3) family reunifications (returning foster care children to their parents) have not increased relative to the growth in foster care cases. (See pages 30, 23, and 46.) These trends are not likely to be reversed until the effectiveness of family maintenance and reunification services is improved.

Providing a Stable Living Environment for Those Children Who Are in Foster Care

Another measure of the success of the CWS Program is the extent to which multiple foster care placements for the same child are minimized. The data show that in 1993-94, about one-third of the children in foster care had experienced three or more different placements and 10 percent had five or more placements (see page 45). This trend has remained steady since 1988-89.

We note, with respect to this issue, that Chapter 1294, Statutes of 1989 (SB 370, Presley) requires the Department of Social Services to develop a Level of Care Assessment tool. The purpose of this tool is to facilitate the assignment of a foster care child to the most appropriate placement, thereby reducing the chances of multiple foster care placements. Although there is no

statutory completion date, the department has not provided the Legislature with a project status report which was due in January 1995. We find no justification for the delay in completing this project.

Increasing the Use of Foster Family Homes, In Lieu of Group Homes

When placing a child in foster care, current law gives priority to more family-like foster care settings and requires placement in foster family homes instead of group homes, when appropriate. As shown on page 26, however, the proportion of children placed in foster family homes has actually decreased slightly over the years, from 88 percent in 1984 to 86 percent in 1995. Although group homes may be the most appropriate placement for some children, some child welfare professionals believe that there are children in group homes who could be placed in foster family homes if support services were provided to the foster parent. This could result in substantial savings to the government because the costs for a group home placement are almost five times the costs for a foster family home placement. We also note that the occupancy rates for foster family agency homes are much lower than for group homes, suggesting that foster parent availability may not be a major obstacle in efforts to move more children out of group homes and into foster family homes. (See pages 40 and 25.)

We note, in this respect, that there is a pilot program designed to accomplish the movement of children from group homes to foster family homes. The program allows certain foster family agencies (FFAs) to receive higher foster care grants than other FFAs in order to provide a higher level of care to children. Evaluations of the pilot program have shown positive results, and Chapter 832, Statutes of 1995 (SB 969, Watson) provides for statewide expansion of the program, at the option of the counties.

Assessing the Need for Independent Living Program Services

Children who are emancipated from the foster care system (generally at age 18) must have a service plan to help them transition to independent living. As the figure on page 34 shows, however, less than half of the eligible children receive services through the state's Independent Living Program (ILP).

In our field visits, child welfare professionals have indicated that additional funds are needed to expand the ILP. We note, however, that data are not sufficient to determine whether the program is effective. Current law requires the Department of Social Services to complete an evaluation of the ILP and develop recommendations on how independent living services could better prepare foster youth for independence. The evaluation was due in January 1995 but has not been completed. This evaluation is important in order to help the Legislature determine the appropriate funding level for the program. We find no justification for the department's delay in providing the report.

ADOPTIONS

Maximizing the Use of Adoptions

Another goal of the CWS Program is to increase adoptions for children who cannot be reunified with their families. The data suggest that the program has been successful in increasing adoptions since 1988-89. However, the number of new cases with adoption as the *goal* has decreased significantly since 1988-89 (page 47), even though foster care caseloads have continued to increase. In response, some counties have increased their efforts to review the case plans of children who were categorized as not being adoptable, in order to explore possibilities of adoption. As a result, some of these children have been recommended, and

subsequently placed, for adoption. We believe that such reviews should be encouraged as a way to help increase adoptions where appropriate.

CONCLUSION

How Well Is the CWS Program Performing?

Our review indicates that the preponderance of available performance-related measures suggest the need for improvement in the state's CWS Program. To summarize:

- There is significant variation among the counties in the percentage of reports of abuse/neglect that are "screened out" at the initial contact stage.
- The percentage of children returning to the CWS Program (recidivism) is increasing.
- Family reunifications are not increasing relative to the growth in new foster care cases.
- Reliance on foster care is increasing (as measured by placement rates and the percentage of the CWS children who are placed in foster care).
- A significant number of foster care children have experienced multiple placements, indicating a lack of stability in their living environments.
- The use of group homes is increasing more than family homes, which is contrary to one of the statutory placement priorities for the Foster Care Program.
- A significant number of foster care children who are eligible for the ILP are not receiving these services.

Reversing these trends will not be an easy task. The provision of additional resources could help; but given the competing demands for such resources it is important that available funding — whether new or existing — be used effectively. In this respect,

there have been some positive developments recently — the new statewide automation system and the expansion of the FFA pilot program, for example. We believe, however, that additional efforts are needed, such as the development of better placement mechanisms, more intensive reviews of case plans to determine if foster children can be adopted, and giving counties more flexibility to use foster care funds for CWS support services in order to prevent the need for foster care placements. Finally, we believe that it is important to evaluate child abuse prevention programs, particularly those efforts designed to address the causal factors related to child abuse and neglect, such as drug abuse.