The Child Welfare System and Foster Care in Wisconsin

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Wisconsin’s Child Welfare System: Desired Outcomes

- Children are cared for in safe, permanent, and nurturing families who have the necessary skills and resources to provide for their physical and mental health as well as their behavioral and educational needs.

- Through effective intervention, parents, caregivers, and families improve their ability to develop and maintain a safe, stable environment for their children.

- Children are safely maintained in their own home, families, and communities with connections, culture, and relationships preserved and established. When it is necessary to place children in out-of-home care, it is a safe, short, and stable experience.
Wisconsin’s Child Welfare System: Organizational Structure

- State-supervised
  - WI Department of Children and Families
- County-administered, except Milwaukee
  - Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare (BMCW)
- Federal, state, tribal requirements and practice standards
  - Trauma-informed principles
- Many actions require review and approval of court system
- Training (initial and ongoing) for foster parents required
Entry into the Child Welfare System and Out-of-Home Care

Referral for alleged child maltreatment

“Screened in” for further investigation N=27,037

Is child safe?

“Was there maltreatment?”

Safety Plan Out-of-home care?

Substantiated N=5,466

Unsubstantiated

“Screened out”

*Alternative Response
Substantiated Allegations of Child Abuse and Neglect (2013)

Total: 5,466

- Physical Abuse: 982 (18%)
- Sexual Abuse: 1,226 (22%)
- Emotional Abuse: 39 (1%)
- Neglect: 3,219 (59%)
Total Number of Children in Out-of-Home Care on December 31

![Line graph showing the total number of children in out-of-home care from 2005 to 2013. The numbers represent the count of children in out-of-home care for each year as follows:

- 2005: 7,624
- 2006: 7,283
- 2007: 7,324
- 2008: 6,568
- 2009: 6,509
- 2010: 6,435
- 2011: 6,255
- 2012: 6,516

The graph indicates a general trend of decreasing numbers of children in out-of-home care over the years.]
Setting Distribution of Children in Out-of-Home Care

- 34% with relatives (N = 2,201)
- 66% with non-relatives (N = 4,315)
- Median length of stay = 11.5 months
- Average # of placements = 2.5

Total: 6,516
December 31, 2013
Geographic Distribution of Children in Out-of-Home Care

Total=6,516
December 31, 2013

- Special Needs Adoption Program: 314 (5%)
- Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare: 2,185 (33%)
- Balance of the State: 4,017 (62%)
Age Distribution of Children in Out-of-Home Care

- 0-4 yrs: 2,209 (34%)
- 5-10 yrs: 1,771 (27%)
- 11-16 yrs: 2,032 (31%)
- 17-19 yrs: 504 (8%)

Total: 6,516
December 31, 2013
Racial and Ethnic Distribution of Children in Out-of-Home Care

Race:
- African American: 2,390 (37%)
- Caucasian: 3,506 (54%)
- American Indian: 384 (6%)
- Asian/Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander: 80 (1%)
- Unable to determine: 156 (2%)

Total: 6,516
December 31, 2013

Ethnicity:
- Not Latino/Hispanic: 5,223 (80%)
- Latino/Hispanic: 729 (11%)
- Unable to determine: 554 (9%)
Outcomes for Children in Out-of-Home Care (2013)

- In WI, approximately 20% of children re-enter out-of-home care within 12 months of reunification
Number of Youth Aging Out of Foster Care

- Eligibility ends at 18 or 19, depending on high school graduation
- Individualized Education Plan (IEP) may extend eligibility to age 21