CHAPTER 3: WHAT HAS CHANGED FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES? FINDINGS FROM THE PARTICIPANT OUTCOME STUDY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the findings of the Participant Outcomes Analysis (POA) through Year 4 of the Waiver. The POA component of the Waiver evaluation compares outcomes for children in the 14 demonstration counties to those in the 14 comparison counties. It also compares pre-Waiver outcomes to outcomes after the Waiver was implemented. After adjusting for case mix and child characteristics in demonstration and comparison counties, significant differences are attributed to the effects of the Waiver, but the study team acknowledges that these differences could be due to other unmeasured factors.

As part of the overall evaluation, the study team originally identified 22 outcome domains. Eleven of these domains, composed of 24 specific outcome measures, constitute the primary outcomes for the evaluation, based on the priorities identified by the demonstration counties. (See Table 1.1 in Chapter 1). To date, the POA has focused on four of these domains, covering seven priority outcomes:

- *Permanency*:
  Increase in permanency of children in foster care
  Reduction in length of stay in foster care
  Decrease in time from removal to permanency
- *Placement Stability*:
  Reduction in number of placements
  Increase in use of less restrictive placements
- *Child Safety*:
  Reduction in recurrence of child abuse and/or neglect
- *Relative Care*:
  Use of placement with relatives

The cost neutrality of ProtectOhio hinges on reducing the number of placement days, lowering the cost of placement days, or both. If counties reduce the number of days children are in placement or the cost of placements and, via the IV-E Waiver agreement with ODJFS and DHHS, maintain the same level of reimbursement, then they can reinvest the savings to fund other services and systemic changes. As reported in previous evaluation reports, and further discussed in Chapter 4 of this report, most counties have not been successful at reducing placement days or foster care expenditures. Unless this can be done, there are no additional resources to expend on services aimed at improving outcomes.

In order to understand why demonstration counties have not been able to reduce placement days, as well as why some caseloads increased even where abuse and neglect

incidents decreased, ODJFS and county staff require further analysis of placement day usage. To address this task, the study team elected to focus on length of stay, a priority outcome in the permanency domain. Specifically, for this interim report, the POA focuses on length of stay of first placements. Participant outcome analyses relating to the other outcome domains will be presented in the final report in 2003.

The following six sections of this chapter describe:

- The methodology used for the findings reported in this chapter;
- Changes in the caseload from before the Waiver through the fourth year of the Waiver;
- Changes in the patterns of first placement into out-of-home care;
- Changes in destination for children leaving their first placement episode;
- Changes in length of time it takes children to exit from care to different destinations; and
- Possible interpretations of some of the findings.

3.2 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The methodology for the POA in this report builds on previous reports' analyses of child-level administrative data. The POA uses two main sources of data – secondary administrative data and primary data collected in early 2002 from caseworkers in paper and pencil interviews – although this report presents only the findings of the analyses of the administrative data. The final evaluation report in 2003 will present the findings from the caseworker survey.

ODJFS's Family and Child Information System (FACSIS) is the source of the administrative data. FACSIS collects information on children and families receiving services in the State of Ohio. FACSIS is supported by information submitted directly from counties, either from their own electronic data systems or from their local subsystems of FACSIS (called "micro-FACSIS"). Data for micro-FACSIS are collected by counties and entered into their micro-FACSIS systems, then the information is sent electronically to the state's FACSIS system.

Most counties in Ohio have their own micro-FACSIS software. However, six counties in this evaluation (three demonstration counties – Franklin, Hamilton, and Lorain – and three comparison counties – Allen, Montgomery, and Summit) have their own unique data management systems separate from micro-FACSIS. Three of these counties (Allen, Hamilton, and Lorain) use both FACSIS and their own systems. Information from the other three counties (Franklin, Montgomery, and Summit) is sent to the state electronically and converted into FACSIS data by the state through the same process used for other county data.

The study team created its files from 27 Child Protection Oversight and Evaluation (CPOE) files extracted from the FACSIS database, using data from 1990 through February 2002. The files contain FACSIS variables on:

- Demographic profiles of clients served;
- Abuse and neglect incidents, victims, perpetrators, and caretakers;
- Case openings and closures for ongoing services;
- Out-of-home placements, goals, long-term care, adoption, placement resources and facility licensing; and
- Court-related activity such as custody, custody appeals, adjudication, dispositional, shelter care hearings, reasonable efforts, and protective supervision.

The FACSIS identification number "cnref" was used as the unique identifier for each child. Preparatory steps in constructing a useable record for each child included deriving 78 variables from 65 raw FACSIS files in order to create the analysis files. Child-level data were then aggregated to the county level, and counties were grouped into either the demonstration or the comparison group. In this chapter, the unit of analysis is the county group. County-level data can be found in Appendix II. The indicators presented are based on those developed in the first year evaluation report,[1] with changes noted, if required.

3.3 CASELOAD TRENDS

Summary: The number of reported abuse and neglect incidents has decreased during the Waiver period for both demonstration and comparison counties. No changes were evident in the percentage of cases served in-home. In general, the demonstration counties' caseloads have increased during the Waiver period, while the caseloads in comparison counties have decreased.

A core strategy for identifying changes due to the Waiver is analyzing FACSIS data on cases, clients, and children served, comparing (1) pre-Waiver data to post-implementation data and (2) the demonstration county group to the comparison county group. Section 3.3 presents data on caseload trends from baseline (two years prior to the beginning of the Waiver, FFY1995-FFY1996) through the first four fiscal years of the Waiver (October 1, 1997, through September 30, 2001). Later sections of this chapter include all available FACSIS data, 1990 through February 2002. The trends are compared for the demonstration county group and the comparison county group.

[1] First Annual Report: Evaluation of Ohio's Title IV-E Waiver Demonstration Project "ProtectOhio", Salem, OR: HSRI contract report, June 1999.

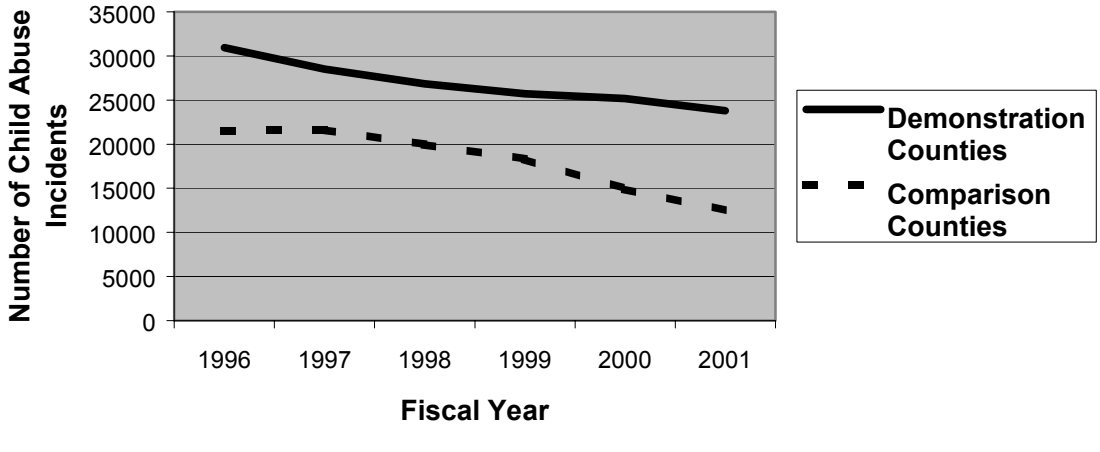
A first step is to monitor the caseload sizes in each county, from the baseline period through the first 4 years of the Waiver period. Caseload counts are useful in identifying differences in PCSAs' use of FACSIS, the relative size of PCSA caseloads, and changes in the volume of children served by each PCSA. While changes in caseload indicators do not offer insight into why caseload volume has changed, it is nonetheless a familiar statistic for PCSA staff and indicative of some external or internal systemic change. This section describes changes from baseline through 2001 in the number of abuse and neglect incidents, the use of in-home vs. placement services, and the number of children served.

3.3.1 Number of Reported Abuse and Neglect Incidents

Reported cases of child abuse and neglect are the primary entryway to the foster care system for many children. Typically, the referrals received by PCSAs in Ohio are organized into two categories: reports of child abuse and neglect (incidents) and other requests for service. Most of the other requests for services come from the courts for dependent, delinquent, or unruly children, but concerned families or community members may also make some of these requests. As discussed later in Section 3.4, three-quarters of children who enter foster care placement for the first time have been identified as victims prior to or at the time of placement. As a caseload measure, the number of incidents indicates the number of workers a PCSA will need to handle investigations and the size of the pool of children who might require foster care placement.

Figure 3.1 (derived from Table II.1 in Appendix II) shows that the number of abuse and neglect incidents decreased during the Waiver period for both demonstration and comparison county groups. The decrease was steeper in the comparison county group.

Figure 3.1: Number of Child Abuse Incidents By Federal Fiscal Year



The reduction in the number of incidents may have been affected by county initiatives such as efforts to increase the "screening out" of cases – when a hotline call is screened out, it is not entered as a documented incident in FACSIS. In addition, data collection procedures may have changed; for example, a large drop in incidents may be due to changes in a county's reporting system that improved the accuracy of the data.

3.3.2 Use of In-Home vs. Placement Services

The premise of the Waiver's cost-neutrality is that counties can reduce placements and reinvest the savings in other services. Thus, a decrease in the number of children placed in foster care, a major objective of the project, would translate into an increase in the number of cases receiving in-home services.

However, overall the balance between in-home and placement services remained stable across the baseline and the Waiver periods: 75-77 percent of clients were served in home and 23-25 percent were served in placement in both demonstration and comparison groups. (Refer to Table II.2 in Appendix II for county-level data.) Clients were counted as receiving placement services if they were in out-of-home placement at any time during the year. They were classified as receiving in-home services if they had no placement during the year.

The issue of why counties did not appear to reduce placements is further discussed in Chapter 4, and will be the focus of further analyses. The above findings do not control for types of incidents; future analyses will investigate whether there might have been significant shifts in categories of incidents, even if there were no changes in the overall proportions of in-home and placement services.

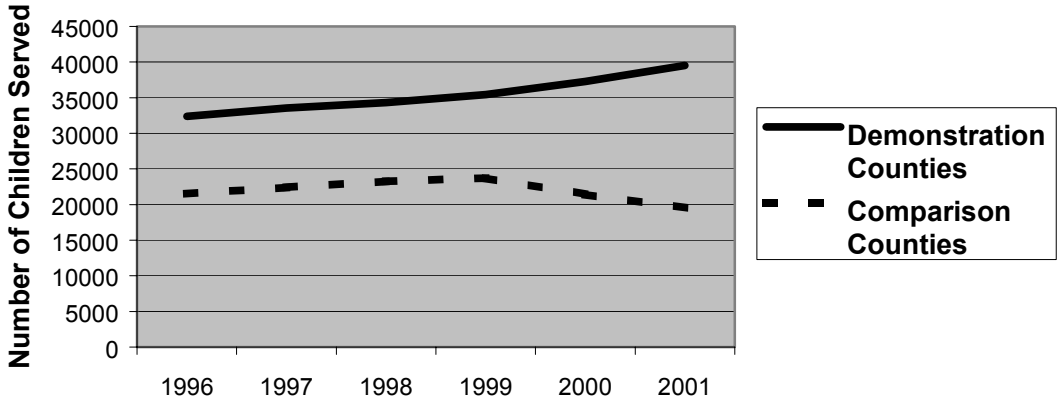
3.3.3 Number of Children in Ongoing Cases

In addition to the number of incidents, the number of children in each PCSA's caseload is an important statistic. The larger the caseload, the greater the workforce needed to handle service delivery and case management. Some counties are able to respond to increased agency caseloads by adding workers; many others simply absorb the added workload among existing workers, with potential negative effects on casework quality and documentation.

It might be expected that if abuse and neglect incidents decrease, caseloads will also decrease. However, that is not necessarily the case. Figure 3.2 shows that for the years prior to the Waiver, the demonstration and comparison counties both had fairly stable ongoing caseloads. During the Waiver period, however, the demonstration and comparison county groups experienced contrasting trends in the number of children in ongoing cases: caseloads in the demonstration county group increased, while caseloads in the comparison county group decreased. Point-in-time caseloads follow the same trend, as shown in Table II.3 in Appendix II that presents the active caseload on the last day of each federal fiscal year. Thus, although the number of abuse and neglect reports declined in demonstration counties, case managers have nonetheless seen increased workload pressures from higher caseloads. This puzzling finding led the study team to focus on

placement length as one possible explanation; Section 3.5 presents findings on duration of first placements using survival analysis methodology. In addition, future analyses will investigate pre-placement effects on caseloads and placement length.

Figure 3.2: Number of Children Served During Federal Fiscal Year



3.4 FIRST PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN INTO FOSTER CARE

Previous research on foster care has focused on first placements to highlight changes in foster care dynamics.[2] The study team has also chosen this approach for this year of the evaluation, since the majority of placements are first placements and their outcomes are not complicated by previous placement history.

The analyses that examined first placements focused initially on the volume and characteristics of children entering these placements and then on the duration of the placements. Section 3.4.1 compares demonstration and comparison counties on the time trends concerning the number of children. Then Section 3.4.2 explores the case-mix of children in first placements. Section 3.5 examines placement duration.

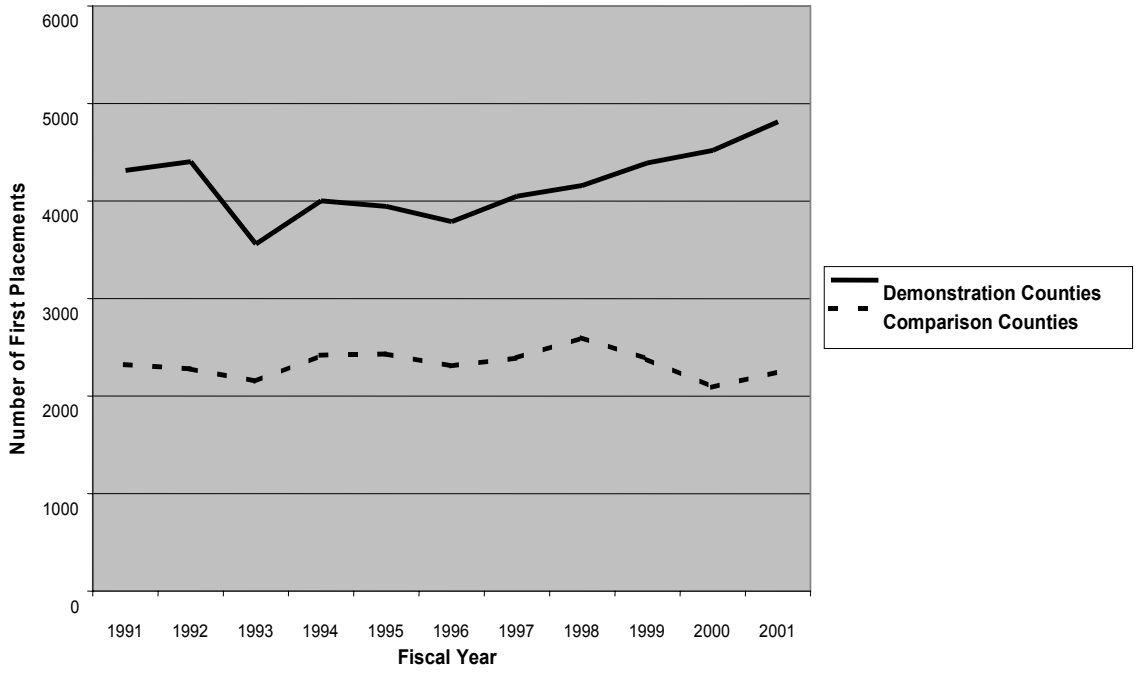
3.4.1 Volume of Children

Summary: During the first 4 years of the Waiver, the volume of children entering their first placements in the demonstration counties has steadily increased while there was a net decrease in the comparison counties. The increase in the demonstration counties was driven by an increase in the large counties (Franklin and Hamilton).

[2] See Goerge, R., Wulczyn, F., and Harden, A. 1996. "New Comparative Insights into State and Their Foster Children," *Public Welfare*, vol. 54, no. 3.

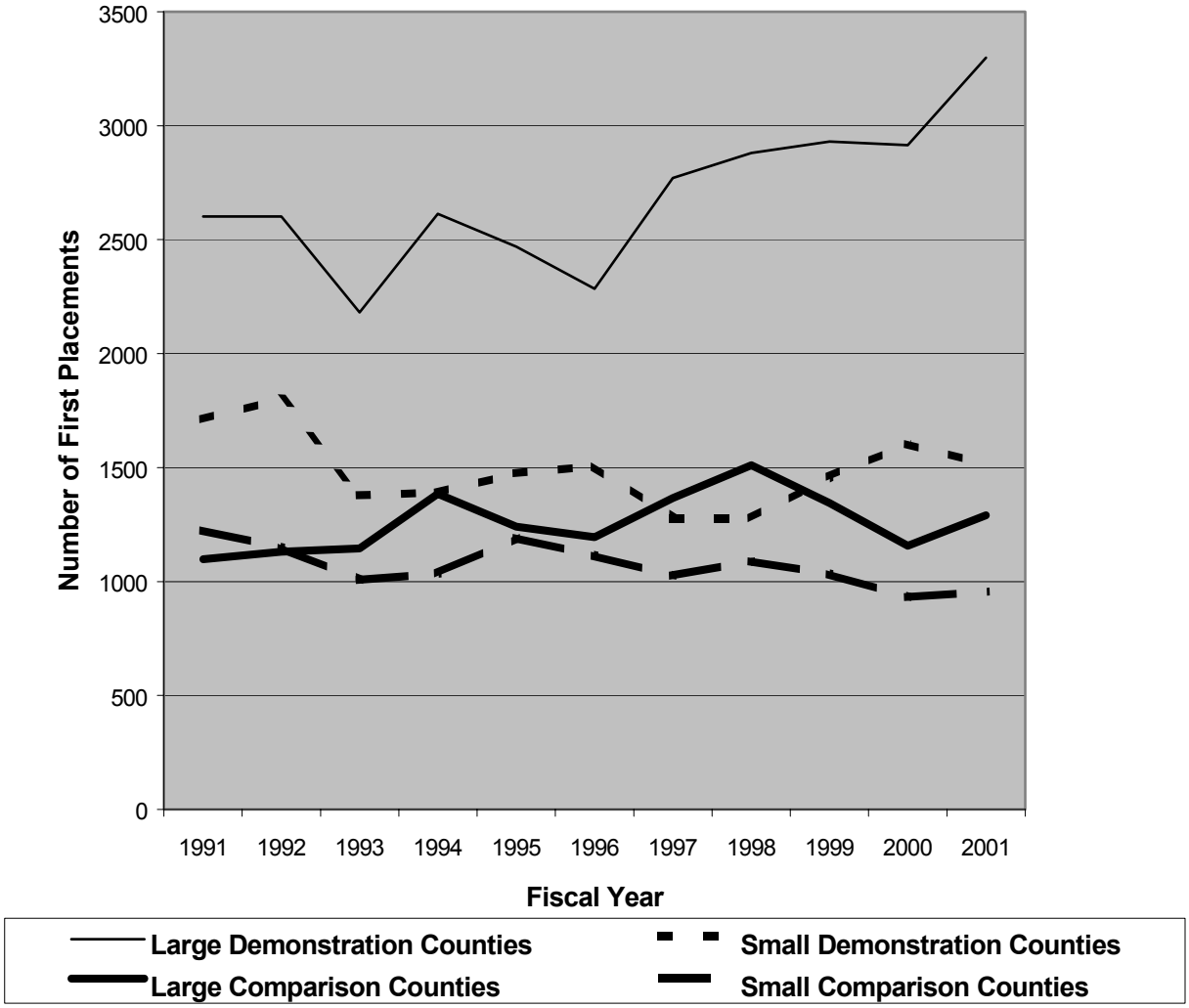
The difference in the number of first placements between demonstration and comparison counties is evident from Figure 3.3. Consistent with having a higher proportion of the child population, demonstration counties had over 60 percent more children entering first placements in 1997 compared to comparison counties and over 100 percent more children in 2001. During the first 4 years of the Waiver period, FFY1997-2001, the volume of children has steadily increased in demonstration counties, while the number in comparison counties has varied from year to year with a net decrease.

Figure 3.3: First Placement by Fiscal Year, 1991-2001



Further investigation revealed that the increased volume for demonstration counties in the Waiver period was mostly in the large demonstration counties (Franklin and Hamilton), as can be seen in Figure 3.4. (Detailed data are presented in Appendix II, Tables II.4 and II.5.)

Figure 3.4: First Placement by County Size and Fiscal Year, 1991-2001



3.4.2 Case Mix of Children

The study team next explored differences in the characteristics of the children entering placement for the first time. The case-mixture of children in first placements differed for demonstration and comparison counties and for pre- and post-Waiver periods, as shown in Tables 3.1-3.4. The statistically significant changes are shaded in the tables, and only statistically significant changes are discussed. The pre-Waiver period for Tables 3.1-3.4 includes all first placements during the calendar years of 1991 through 1997. The complete combined table with standard errors is provided in Appendix II, Table II.6, and calculation of the standard error (SE) is described in Appendix III, section III.3.4.

Summary: The case-mix in demonstration counties has changed during the Waiver. To a greater extent than the comparison counties, demonstration counties have experienced statistically significant increases in the percentages of boys and of children ages 14-17. This coincides with an increase in the use of residential centers and group homes for first placements. The comparison counties' case-mix has changed somewhat differently; although they also experienced an increase in the percentage of boys, the age group experiencing an increase was in younger children (ages 5-13). In the comparison counties, the use of residential centers has decreased, while the use of relatives has increased for first placements. Both study groups experienced statistically significant increases in the percentage of children entering first placements in large urban counties. In addition, both groups (but particularly the demonstration counties) experienced decreases in the percentages of children in first placements who were sexually abused, had cognitive disabilities, or had physical disabilities.

Demographics

Differences in the demographics of children entering care are seen in Table 3.1. Both county groups experienced statistically significant increases in the percentage of male children and White children entering during the Waiver. However, the increase in percentage of male children was greater in the demonstration counties (a 4-point increase), while the increase in the percentage of White children was greater in the comparison counties (a nearly 3-point increase). On the other hand, there were opposite patterns with respect to Black children. Whereas demonstration counties have had an increase in the percentage of Black children in first placements, comparison counties have seen a decrease.

The age of the child entering first placement has also changed during the Waiver period. Demonstration counties have had a 4-point increase in the number of children ages 14-17 in first placements. Comparison counties have had a 2-point increase in the number of children in first placements between the ages of 5 and 13.

Table 3.1: Percentage of Children in First Placement, Demographics, by Study Group and Time Period									
	Demonstration Counties			Comparison Counties			Difference Between Demonstration and Comparison Counties		
Child Characteristic	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change
Sex									
Male	50.85	54.98	4.13	49.40	50.73	1.33	1.45	4.25	2.80
Age									
Under 1	15.64	14.99	-0.65	18.96	18.70	-0.26	-3.32	-3.71	-0.39
1-4	23.13	20.28	-2.85	26.14	24.68	-1.46	-3.01	-4.41	-1.39
5-13	35.71	35.18	-0.53	36.53	38.18	1.65	-0.82	-3.00	-2.18
14-17	25.53	29.55	4.02	18.38	18.44	0.06	7.15	11.11	3.96
Race									
White	52.40	53.25	0.85	58.51	61.39	2.87	-6.12	-8.14	-2.02
Black	41.60	43.12	1.52	39.54	37.17	-2.37	2.06	5.96	3.90
Other	6.00	3.63	-2.38	1.95	1.45	-0.50	4.06	2.18	-1.87

Venue of First Placement

Table 3.2 shows that in demonstration counties, the percentage of first placements in residential treatment centers, detention facilities or hospitals, and group homes increased during the Waiver period, while the percentage of first placements in foster and relative homes decreased. Conversely, in comparison counties, percentages of first placements in residential treatment centers and detention facilities or hospitals decreased during the Waiver, while those in relative homes increased. It is important to realize that the case characteristics that determine where a child is first placed may not be evident on the FACSIS data, so there may be hidden changes in the case mixes in demonstration and comparison counties that have given rise to these differences in the venue of first placements.

Table 3.2: Percentage of Children in First Placement, Where First Placed, by Study Group and Time Period									
	Demonstration Counties			Comparison Counties			Difference Between Demonstration and Comparison Counties		
Child's First Placement	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change
Residential Treatment Center	11.85	13.20	1.35	6.82	5.94	-0.88	5.04	7.26	2.22
Group Home	5.79	9.95	4.15	5.24	5.10	-0.14	0.56	4.85	4.29
Foster Home	43.41	42.36	-1.05	62.07	60.74	-1.33	-18.66	-18.39	0.28
Nonlicensed Nonrelative[3]	4.03	3.95	-0.08	1.40	2.34	0.94	2.62	1.60	-1.02
Relative	30.82	25.93	-4.90	19.16	22.41	3.26	11.67	3.51	-8.16
Independent Living	0.05	0.04	-0.01	0.11	0.05	-0.05	-0.06	-0.01	0.04
Detention Facility or Hospital	4.00	4.53	0.53	5.19	3.39	-1.80	-1.19	1.14	2.33
Adoptive Home	0.04	0.05	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.00	0.03	0.03	0.01

County Size/Urbanicity

Both study groups had a statistically significant increase in the percentage of children entering first placements in large urban counties. (See Table 3.3.) Conversely, in both groups the percentage of children entering first placements in small urban counties decreased during the Waiver period, with the largest decrease in the demonstration group. Also, in both groups the percentage of first placements in small rural counties decreased during the Waiver period, but the largest decrease was in the comparison counties.

Table 3.3: Percentage of Children in First Placement, County Size/Urbanicity, by Study Group and Time Period									
	Demonstration Counties			Comparison Counties			Difference Between Demonstration and Comparison Counties		
County Size/ Urbanicity	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change
Large Urban	62.68	67.02	4.34	52.86	56.48	3.62	9.82	10.54	0.73
Small Urban	27.76	24.06	-3.69	30.93	29.37	-1.56	-3.17	-5.31	-2.14
Small Rural	9.57	8.91	-0.65	16.21	14.15	-2.06	-6.64	-5.24	1.41

Abuse/Neglect and Disabilities

Table 3.4 shows that both demonstration and comparison counties have seen decreases during the Waiver period in the percentages of children in first placements who were sexually abused, had cognitive disabilities, or had physical disabilities. These decreases

[3] "Nonlicensed nonrelative" includes family friends, godparents, etc. In Ohio, county staff refer to this as "kinship placement." "Nonlicensed nonrelative" was chosen to distinguish this category from nonlicensed relative and the modern connotation of kinship.

are larger in the demonstration counties, especially the decrease in children who were sexually abused.

Table 3.4: Percentage of Children in First Placement, Abuse/Neglect and Disabilities, by Study Group and Time Period

	Demonstration Counties			Comparison Counties			Difference Between Demonstration and Comparison Counties		
Abuse/Neglect and Disabilities	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change
Sexually Abused	10.50	7.62	-2.88	5.42	4.09	-1.32	5.08	3.52	-1.55
Alleged Victim of Abuse or Neglect	75.43	75.96	0.53	73.31	73.85	0.54	2.13	2.11	-0.02
Cognitive Disabilities	7.11	4.90	-2.21	5.12	3.20	-1.93	1.99	1.70	-0.29
Physical Disabilities	2.61	1.74	-0.87	1.45	0.97	-0.48	1.16	0.77	-0.39

3.5 DURATION OF FIRST PLACEMENT

Building on last year's analyses, the study team analyzed differences between demonstration and comparison counties and the effects of the Waiver on the length of the first placement episode, with special attention to the various ways in which children might exit from their first placements. Additionally, the team also analyzed re-entry into placement; in that connection, this report will focus only on re-entry into a second placement after the first placement ended with reunification.

Summary: The Waiver has not caused overall changes in the length of stay of children's first placement in foster care, based on comparing the changes observed in the demonstration and comparison counties. However, the Waiver appeared to have caused changes for some groups. Closer analysis revealed the following:

- For large demonstration counties (Franklin and Hamilton), the Waiver has accelerated the discharge rate, especially for children placed in residential settings.
- The Waiver has slowed the rate of reunification in both small and large demonstration counties, but especially in the large counties.
- The Waiver has accelerated the rate at which custody was transferred to a relative, especially for cases without abuse or neglect.
- There was no strong evidence for a uniform effect of the Waiver on length of placement until adoption. The only significant effect of the Waiver was to slow the adoption rate for children initially placed with nonlicensed nonrelatives.
- The Waiver greatly accelerated the runaway rate.

3.5.1 Overview of Analysis

Ohio DJFS provided data files with records for the 14 demonstration and 14 comparison counties on all placements that had started or were continuing in 1991 through February 28, 2002, along with disposition information. The study team examined the administrative data for changes in duration patterns and reasons for removal that might be associated with the Waiver. The Waiver period was defined as beginning on January 1, 1998. The analyses focused on the length of the first placement for several different outcomes including reunification, transfer of the child's custody to a relative, the child's adoption, and the child running away from the placement. Additionally, for those children whose first placement ended with reunification, the team examined re-entry into a second placement.

It is important to recognize a key challenge of analyzing data on length of stay in placement. About 10 percent of first placements that started in 1991 or later were still ongoing at the end of the study period. That is, it is not yet known how long these children will ultimately stay in their first placements – their data are "censored" with respect to the ultimate outcome information. At the same time, they do provide some information for the analysis, since they have already spent a certain amount of time in their placements. Survival analysis was used because it avoids the bias due to the missing data (the still ongoing cases) that would otherwise affect the findings. Appendix III offers full details of the survival analysis methodology.

The length of the first placement was defined by its start and stop dates. The information about where the child went when he or she exited the first placement (i.e., the outcome of the placement) had to be derived from different data items in the FACSIS database. For this purpose, the team integrated the information from the placement removal reason and the custody termination reason. Additionally, the analyses were designed to take into account a number of other child and case factors that could potentially influence the length of placement and placement outcome. These included age, sex, race, medical conditions and disabilities, type of placement, allegations of abuse or neglect, and whether the child had been sexually abused. These variables were extracted from the administrative database. In addition, counties were classified as small rural, small urban or large urban. Further details about the variables used are provided in Appendix III, Tables III.2 and III.9. The resulting survival models are also provided in Appendix III.

After fitting the multivariate survival models to the data, the team used the model information to impute ending dates for the continuing placements. By using the model to complete the censored data in this manner, it was possible to compute unbiased values for the tables presented in the following sections. Further details on the imputation process are given in Appendix III, section III.3.4.

The following sections present simplified tables in which the time in placement was examined by quartiles (e.g., the point in time when 25 percent, 50 percent, and 75 percent of the children had left placement). The difference in placement length between the time period before the Waiver and the Waiver period was determined separately for

demonstration and comparison counties. Then the change in these differences was calculated by subtracting the calculated comparison county difference from the calculated demonstration county difference. All statistically significant results are shaded; statistical significance was determined using standard errors. Explanations of this, along with the full tables, are included in Appendix III. It is important to note that the values in the tables do not take into account case mix patterns and child characteristics, which could influence the findings. Following the tables we present analyses based on models that do adjust for case and child characteristics, and we characterize these findings as "Waiver effects," although (as noted at the beginning of this chapter) they could also have been influenced by other unmeasured factors.

3.5.2 Duration of First Placement for Children Exiting Foster Care

Overall

ProtectOhio counties identified reducing length of stay in foster care as a primary objective of the Waiver. Have the demonstration counties been more successful in accelerating the discharge of children from their first placement? To answer this, the length of stay for all first placements in the study counties (i.e., across all cases and considering length of stay to an exit of any type) is presented in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5 Time in First Foster Care Placement Episode to Overall Exits by Study Group and Time Period

	Time (in months)								
	Demonstration Counties			Comparison Counties			Difference Between Demonstration and Comparison Counties		
Percentage of Children	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change
25	0.99	0.85	-0.13	0.73	0.97	0.24	0.26	-0.12	-0.38
50	4.64	4.52	-0.12	4.73	6.34	1.62	-0.09	-1.82	-1.74
75	15.92	15.14	-0.78	16.82	16.97	0.15	-0.90	-1.83	-0.93

There were significant differences between demonstration and comparison counties concerning the rate at which children left their first foster care placement. The median first placement duration in demonstration counties, that is, the time it took 50 percent of the children to exit from their first foster care stay, was about 4.6 months before the Waiver and remained essentially the same (4.5 months) during the Waiver itself. On the other hand, the median duration in comparison counties increased significantly by 1.6 months, from 4.7 months before the Waiver to 6.3 months during the Waiver period. Those differences are summarized in the last column of the table, which shows that there was a significant difference between the demonstration and comparison counties on the median length of stay in foster care. The median length of placement decreased by 1.7 months.

County size modified the pattern described above regarding demonstration-comparison differences in length of stay. The shift in median length of placement was most striking in

large counties. (See Table 3.6.) The median duration of first placements in large demonstration counties remained just under 3 months both before and during the Waiver period (2.9 months both before the Waiver and during the Waiver), while the median duration in large comparison sites jumped significantly from 4.4 months before the Waiver to 7.1 months during the Waiver period. The resulting shift is a decrease in the length of placement by almost 3 months.

Table 3.6: Time in First Foster Care Placement Episode to Overall Exits for Large Counties by Study Group and Time Period

	Time (in months)								
	Demonstration Counties			Comparison Counties			Difference Between Demonstration and Comparison Counties		
Percentage of Children	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change
25	0.87	0.45	-0.43	0.27	1.17	0.91	0.60	-0.73	-1.33
50	2.92	2.87	-0.05	4.36	7.11	2.75	-1.45	-4.24	-2.79
75	14.15	13.44	-0.71	16.72	17.79	1.07	-2.57	-4.35	-1.78

Intriguing shifts are also evident when looking at the first quartile, that is, the time it takes for 25 percent of the children to discharge from their first placement. Before the Waiver, the first quartile of children in the large demonstration counties exited in 26 days (.87 months), while in large comparison counties it took only 8 days (.27 months). This pattern may indicate preexisting differences in the caseload mix in demonstration and comparison counties, perhaps with comparison counties making greater use of shelter care (considering the extremely short time in care for these children). It certainly indicates that comparison counties were providing limited time for treatment of any kind for this sector of children. However, during the Waiver period, the demonstration and comparison counties moved in opposite directions on this measure—length of stay for the first quartile of first placements in the large demonstration counties dropped to 14 days (.45 months), while it increased to 35 days (1.17 months) in the large comparison counties. The shift was a decrease of 1.3 months at the point in time where 25 percent of the children had exited from first placement.

The underlying dynamics of length of stay can be further understood by looking at the duration for children whose first placements were in residential placement in large counties. It appears that length of stay decreased for these children. (See Table 3.7.) Again, the differences between the comparison and demonstration counties were significant in all quartiles. The contrast is most emphatic in the third quartile, that is, the time it takes for 75 percent of the children to discharge from out-of-home care. Before the Waiver, almost all children in the demonstration counties who were in residential placement as their first placement setting were discharged after nearly 10 months, while for the comparison counties the length of stay was greater than 12 months. During the Waiver period, the time to discharge for the third quartile of children in large

demonstration counties dropped precipitously to 54 days (1.81 months), while the time in comparison counties increased to over 14 months. The difference between the demonstration and comparison counties increased dramatically over the course of the Waiver, from slightly more than two months to nearly 12-1/2 months (more than a year).

Table 3.7: Time in First Foster Care Placement Episode to Overall Exits for Residential Placement in Large Counties by Study Group and Time Period

	Time (in months)								
	Demonstration Counties			Comparison Counties			Difference Between Demonstration and Comparison Counties		
Percentage of Children	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change
25	0.54	0.38	-0.16	0.05	0.03	-0.01	0.49	0.35	-0.14
50	1.94	0.43	-1.51	1.87	3.27	1.40	0.07	-2.84	-2.91
75	9.87	1.81	-8.06	12.21	14.29	2.08	-2.34	-12.48	-10.14

The tables above show the overall changes in the counties based on their respective case mix patterns. As mentioned above, important differences in the types of children served may underlie these patterns. Certainly demonstration and comparison counties are known to have differed significantly in the types of children they served in out-of-home care, including ages, first settings, gender, and volume. (See Section 3.4.) Additionally, comparing children in placement before and after the Waiver began shows that the type of children served by the counties also varied over time (also discussed in Section 3.4).

Overall Model

As described earlier (Section 3.5.1), the study team used survival analysis modeling to compare changes in duration of first placements for children while taking into account the case and child characteristics that might also affect this duration. By using this strategy, the changes that are ascribed to the Waiver cannot be attributed to any changes in case-mix, such as an increase in the admissions of babies (more likely to be adopted) or teenagers (more prone to run away). The models for placement duration are presented in Appendix III, Section III.3.2.

While the Waiver effect is not significant overall (i.e., across all cases and considering length of stay to an exit of any type), it was significant in specific circumstances—in large counties and for children whose placement was a residential treatment center. Specifically, the Waiver slightly accelerated the rate of discharge (to any destination) for children in large counties whose first setting is something other than residential. These children exited care 7 percent faster than they would have without the Waiver. However, the discharge rate for children who were first placed in a residential treatment center in a large county is 80 percent greater than it would have been without the Waiver. The study team did not identify any other case characteristics to be useful in explaining these differences.

3.5.3 Destinations of Children Exiting From First Placement

To provide a more fine-tuned evaluation of the Waiver effects on length of first placements, the study team focused on the different types of exits possible for these children. Separate survival models were constructed to assess the Waiver's impact on rates of exit to reunification, to relative custody, to adoption, and to runaway status.[4] The definitions for each of these outcomes are listed in Appendix III, Table III.1.

Table 3.8 charts the percentages of children who exited to the different destinations before and during the Waiver in the demonstration and comparison counties. As noted above (Section 3.5.1), this table includes imputed exits for those placements that were still open at the end of February 2002.

Table 3.8: Destination of Children Exiting From First Placement Episode by Study Group and Time Period

	Percent								
	Demonstration Counties			Comparison Counties			Difference Between Demonstration and Comparison Counties		
Exit Destination	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change
	n=29029	n=18498		n=16940	n=9476				
Reunification	52.55	44.94	-7.61	45.27	48.86	3.60	7.29	-3.92	-11.21
Custody to Relatives	19.45	18.01	-1.45	24.58	22.42	-2.15	-5.12	-4.42	0.71
Adoption	8.28	9.30	1.02	9.14	10.31	1.17	-0.86	-1.01	-0.15
Runaway	1.55	1.04	-0.52	1.06	0.32	-0.74	0.49	0.72	0.23
Other	18.16	26.71	8.55	19.96	18.09	-1.87	-1.80	8.63	10.42

The predominant exit type for both the demonstration and the comparison groups was reunification. In demonstration counties, prior to the Waiver, over half the children leaving their first placement were reunited with their parents or guardians (52.55 percent). During the Waiver, this percentage decreased to 45 percent. By contrast, in comparison counties, the percentage of placements ending in reunification increased from 45 percent prior to the Waiver to 49 percent during the Waiver. The shift from reunification to other exits is discussed further below.

Placements ending with custody to a relative comprised 18-25 percent of exits. Placements ending with the child running away were less than 2 percent of all exits. The percentage of both of these exit types declined during the Waiver period for both demonstration and comparison counties.

[4] All other outcomes were not modeled separately this year, although they were included in the overall model that encompassed all types of exits. These other exits include, but are not limited to, emancipation, death, jail or juvenile detention, and transfer to other institutional care.

Placements ending with adoption are becoming slightly more common for both demonstration and comparison counties, with an increase of approximately 1 percent during the Waiver period. This may reflect the increasing attention to permanency in response to the Adoption and Safe Families Act limitations on the time a case can remain in temporary custody.

The "other exits" category shows results opposite those for reunification. In fact, most of the differences seen in reunification are balanced by opposite changes in the "other exits" category. For demonstration counties, other exits increased by 9 percent during the Waiver period, while comparison counties decreased by 2 percent. As noted above, reunification decreased by a similar percentage for the demonstration counties.

3.5.4 Waiver Effects by Type of Exit

Reunification

Children who are reunified with parents represent approximately 45-53 percent of the children who leave first placements. (See Table 3.8.) This is by far the most common exit type. As detailed in Appendix III, the study team imputed endings for placements still open at the end of February 2002, allowing the team to include in the duration analysis all children in first placement episodes. The length of first placement was analyzed to determine the impact of the Waiver on the time a child spends in placement before reunification is achieved.

Table 3.9 shows that, in both demonstration and comparison counties, the length of placement for children returned to their parents was longer if the child entered care during the Waiver compared to those who entered before the Waiver began. The largest difference appears in the 50th percentile, where the length of placement was approximately 8 days longer (+.27 months) in the demonstration counties and 36 days longer (+1.19 months) in the comparison counties. This means that the increase in the median length of placement for children in demonstration counties who exit to parents is 28 days less (-.92 months) than the increase in placement duration for these children in comparison counties.

Table 3.9: Time in First Foster Care Placement Episode until Exit to Reunification by Study Group and Time Period

	Time (in months)								
	Demonstration Counties			Comparison Counties			Difference Between Demonstration and Comparison Counties		
Percentage of Children	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change
25	0.82	0.93	0.11	0.29	0.36	0.07	0.53	0.58	0.04
50	2.72	2.99	0.27	2.94	4.13	1.19	-0.22	-1.14	-0.92
75	10.28	10.61	0.34	10.66	11.54	0.88	-0.39	-0.92	-0.54

This difference between the demonstration and comparison counties in the change in length of stay is further magnified, to 33 days (-1.08 months), when large demonstration and comparison counties are compared, as shown in Table 3.10. The results shown in these tables do not adjust for group differences and changes over time in case-mix.

Table 3.10: Time in First Foster Care Placement Episode in Large Counties until Exit to Reunification by Study Group and Time Period

	Time (in months)								
	Demonstration Counties			Comparison Counties			Difference Between Demonstration and Comparison Counties		
Percentage of Children	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change
25	0.55	0.77	0.21	0.08	0.10	0.02	0.48	0.67	0.19
50	2.06	2.58	0.52	2.61	4.21	1.60	-0.55	-1.63	-1.08
75	8.85	9.66	0.81	10.94	11.51	0.58	-2.09	-1.85	0.23

The survival model for length of stay to reunification (detailed in Appendix III, Section II.3.2 and Table III.10) took into account a number of child and case characteristics that interact with and affect the length a child's first placement episode (presented in Appendix III, Table III.9). As a result, the survival model findings do adjust for case mix, to some degree. The survival model showed that one effect of the Waiver was to slow the rate of reunification. This was true in both small and large demonstration counties, and in contrast to the comparison counties. In small demonstration counties, the daily rate of reunification is estimated to be 9 percent slower than it would have been without the Waiver. This effect is even greater for large demonstration counties, where the daily rate of reunification is estimated to be 22 percent slower than it would have been without the Waiver.

Custody to Relative

Another permanency outcome that has been examined for Waiver effects is the permanent placement of a child with a relative. Permanent placement with a relative is defined as the time when a child leaves placement and is no longer in the custody of the PCSA and the court grants custody of the child to a relative. This permanency outcome represents approximately 18-25 percent of the children exiting care after first placement episodes.

Both before and after the Waiver, the length of placement for children whose custody was eventually granted to a relative was longer in the demonstration counties than in the comparison counties. (See Table 3.11.) The length of first placement for children with this outcome was slightly longer during the Waiver period than prior to the Waiver in both demonstration and comparison counties.

Table 3.11: Time in First Foster Care Placement Episode until Exit to Custody with Relative by Study Group and Time Period									
	Time (in months)								
	Demonstration Counties			Comparison Counties			Difference Between Demonstration and Comparison Counties		
Percentage of Children	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change
25	1.57	1.97	0.40	0.30	0.83	0.53	1.27	1.15	-0.12
50	5.07	6.47	1.40	2.61	3.71	1.10	2.46	2.77	0.31
75	12.93	13.35	0.42	10.39	11.15	0.77	2.55	2.20	-0.35

For demonstration counties, the median length of placement was 42 days longer (+1.4 months) during the Waiver than before the Waiver began. For comparison counties, this difference was 33 days (+1.1 months). There were no significant Waiver effects between the demonstration and comparison counties.

Table 3.12 demonstrates that this difference was significant for children without allegations of abuse or neglect. For these children, the increase in the length of placement at the 25th percentile during the Waiver compared to before the Waiver was approximately 21 days less in the demonstration counties than the comparison counties (-.69 months). The study team will explore possible interpretations of these results with ODJFS and PCSA staff.

Table 3.12: Time in First Foster Care Placement Episode until Exit to Custody with Relatives for Cases Without Alleged Abuse/Neglect by Study Group and Time Period									
	Time (in months)								
	Demonstration Counties			Comparison Counties			Difference Between Demonstration and Comparison Counties		
Percentage of Children	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change
25	1.73	1.82	0.10	0.22	1.01	0.79	1.50	0.81	-0.69
50	3.63	5.54	1.91	2.28	4.23	1.95	1.36	1.31	-0.04
75	11.95	12.40	0.45	9.55	11.70	1.73	2.36	0.44	-1.93

Again, the survival model was able to take some account of case mix factors when examining the effect of the Waiver on children's length of placement until their custody is given to relatives. (See Appendix III, Table III.11.) After adjusting for these extraneous effects, the model shows that, for those children who are not alleged victims of abuse or neglect, the Waiver significantly accelerated their daily rate of exit to relative custody by 64 percent. For children who are alleged to be victims of abuse or neglect, the effect is smaller but still significant. The daily rate of transfer of custody to a relative for

abused/neglected children is 20 percent faster than it would have been without the Waiver.

Adoption

Another permanency outcome that has been examined for Waiver effects is adoption. The study team analyzed data only on children under 12 years of age at the time of placement, as there were so few older children. Adoption represents approximately 8-11 percent of all children exiting care after first placement episodes, but 13.4 percent of children under 12. As described in Appendix III, the study team developed a survival model estimating the length of time in care for all children in first placement episodes. The length of first placement episodes is analyzed here to determine if the Waiver has affected the time a child spends in placement before adoption is achieved.[5]

Since the latter part of the 1990's, counties statewide have been under pressure by ODJFS and national initiatives, including ASFA and Adoption2000, to expedite the adoption process. As shown in Table 3.13, the length of placement for children adopted is shorter in the demonstration counties than in the comparison counties, both before and after the Waiver (represented by the negative numbers in columns 7 and 8 of the table). However, the waiting time has been cut in both sets of counties by similar amounts (represented by the negative numbers in columns 3 and 6). The median duration for the demonstration counties is 26 months in the period before the Waiver and 24 months during the Waiver period. For comparison counties it was almost 29 months before the Waiver and a little over 27 months during the Waiver. However, the difference between the demonstration and comparison counties did not change significantly after the Waiver began (last column in the table).

Table 3.13: Time in First Foster Care Placement Episode until Exit to Adoption by Study Group and Time Period

	Time (in months)								
	Demonstration Counties			Comparison Counties			Difference Between Demonstration and Comparison Counties		
Percentage of Children	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change
25	23.78	22.05	-1.73	26.83	25.59	-1.24	-3.05	-3.54	-0.48
50	26.03	24.05	-1.98	28.91	27.30	-1.60	-2.87	-3.25	-0.38
75	28.30	25.93	-2.37	30.98	28.94	-2.04	-2.67	-3.00	-0.33

The analysis did show a significant shift when looking at a small subset of children first placed with nonlicensed nonrelatives. County staff suggest that these placements are often with godparents or family friends who are available at the time of an emergency

[5] This is an analysis of first placement episodes only. Since PCSAs try first to return children home, it is possible that the Waiver has a different impact on children awaiting adoption in their second or later placement into foster care.

removal. A nonlicensed nonrelative placement is used infrequently across all counties (as shown in Appendix III, Table III.2). In demonstration counties, it was used about 4 percent of the time for first placements of children. In comparison counties, it was modestly used during both periods but increased significantly from 1.4 percent of first placements before the Waiver to 2.3 percent during the Waiver period.

For children placed first with these nonlicensed nonrelatives, the median time to adoption for the demonstration group did not change significantly after the Waiver began. (See Table 3.14.) During the period before the Waiver, median duration in placement for children being adopted in demonstration counties was 24.61 months, and during the Waiver period the comparable figure was 26.86 months. For their counterparts in comparison counties, the median duration dropped significantly from 27.16 months to 20.37 months.

Table 3.14: Time in First Foster Care Placement Episode to Adoption from Initial Placement with Nonlicensed Nonrelative Foster Parents by Study Group and Time Period

	Time (in months)								
	Demonstration Counties			Comparison Counties			Difference Between Demonstration and Comparison Counties		
Percentage of Children	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change
25	22.38	24.43	2.05	25.57	19.14	-6.44	-3.20	5.29	8.49
50	24.61	26.86	2.25	27.16	20.37	-6.80	-2.55	6.49	9.04
75	26.94	29.97	3.03	28.38	21.37	-7.01	-1.45	8.60	10.05

The lack of a drop in the demonstration counties suggests that demonstration counties have under-focused on children in nonlicensed nonrelative placements, compared to comparison counties who show a large reduction in placement length. These results do not adjust for county group differences and changes over time in the case mix. Further research is warranted to try to identify whether there is anything unique about the use of nonlicensed nonrelative placements in the comparison counties that may have resulted in this reduced length of stay for these children.

The Adoption Model

The study team used an adoption model, based on survival analysis methodology, to produce the tables above (further described in Appendix III). Unlike the results in the preceding section, this analysis is able to adjust, to some extent, for changes over time and demonstration/comparison differences in case mix. The results provided no strong evidence for a Waiver effect on adoption. (See Appendix III, Table III.12.) However, supporting the above discussion, a Waiver effect is apparent for children initially placed with nonlicensed nonrelatives. One effect of the Waiver has been to retard the rate of adoption for these children. The daily rate of adoption of this subgroup is estimated to be 75 percent lower in demonstration counties than it would have been without the Waiver.

Runaway

While not a permanency option, running away is a possible method for a child to exit placement, especially older children in group and residential facilities. A child who runs away from a placement and does not return for 30 days is documented in FACSIS as placement that ended through the runaway event. If the child returns to PCSA care after that time, then the FACSIS system would show that a second placement episode had begun. The analysis includes only the children in first placement who were age 10 and older when placed.

Children run away for individual reasons: expressing anger, rebelling, or just trying to get home. Running away is a rare occurrence, representing under 2 percent of all children exiting care after the first placement episode, but 2.9 percent of children 10 or older. And, while rare, from an evaluative perspective it is a definitive failure of a placement; that is, it is clear that the setting did not match the needs of the child. The percentage of runaways is an indicator of the PCSA's capacity to place children in appropriate settings with appropriate services.

As described in Appendix III, the study team developed an estimation of the length of time in care for all children in first placement episodes. The analyses reported here explored whether the time a child spends in placement before running away changed significantly after the Waiver began.

As shown in Table 3.15, the length of placement for children who ran away was shorter in the demonstration counties after the Waiver than before the Waiver. The median duration for the demonstration counties was 12 months in the period before the Waiver and 7 months during the Waiver period. For comparison counties, it was almost 5 months before the Waiver and 6 months after the Waiver began. These results do not adjust for case mix differences. The shift was to a shorter length of placement for children running away by almost 6 months.

Table 3.15: Time in First Foster Care Placement Episode to Runaway by Study Group and Time Period

	Time (in months)								
	Demonstration Counties			Comparison Counties			Difference Between Demonstration and Comparison Counties		
Percentage of Children	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change
25	2.65	2.49	-0.16	0.99	1.11	0.12	1.66	1.37	-0.29
50	11.91	7.05	-4.85	4.66	5.54	0.88	7.25	1.52	-5.75
75	24.75	16.99	-7.76	13.29	12.16	-1.13	11.46	4.84	-6.63

Further examination of court disposition and placing incident might explain this significant difference. Is the higher risk of runaway due to case differences between

children in the demonstration group and comparison group, or are there systemic differences resulting from Waiver activities that might be causing teens to leave on their own more quickly?

The Runaway Model

The study team used a runaway model based on survival analysis methodology to generate the missing values needed to produce the tables above. (See Appendix III, Table III.13.) Once variation in case mix is controlled, strong evidence emerges for a Waiver effect on time to runaway. The daily rate of runaways is 133 percent larger for children age 10 and older in demonstration counties than it would have been without the Waiver.

Not surprisingly, both before the Waiver and during the Waiver, children in urban demonstration counties who were first placed in residential treatment facilities had an extremely high risk of running away.

Models Summary

Table 3.16 summarizes the Waiver effect on the length of first placement for each exit type, based on the models. The findings are for overall effect seen in the demonstration counties compared to the comparison counties.

Table 3.16: Different Exit Types: Length of Stay Findings

Significant Findings on Children Who Have Left Out-of-Home Care During the Waiver	**Overall Effect in Demonstration Counties Compared to Comparison Counties**
Children exiting first placement in out-of-home care for any reason	None
Children reunited with parents or guardians at the end of first placement in out-of-home care	Longer time in care
Children whose custody was transferred to a relative at the end of first placement in out-of-home care	Shorter time in care
Children adopted at the end of first placement in out-of-home care	None
Children who run away from first placement in out-of-home care	Shorter time in care

In summary, the Waiver has different effects on the length of placement, depending on the destination of the child exiting care. The Waiver has slowed the rate at which children are reunified with parents/guardians, an effect that is strongest in the large demonstration counties (which may be driven largely by the findings in one large county, Hamilton). In

contrast, the Waiver accelerated the rate at which custody is transferred to a relative, especially for children who were not abused or neglected.

No strong evidence emerged for a uniform effect of the Waiver on length of placement until adoption. The only significant effect of the Waiver was to slow the adoption rate for children initially placed with nonlicensed nonrelatives. Conversely, the Waiver greatly accelerated the runaway rate.

Children entering foster care with comparable characteristics are staying differing lengths of time in foster care as a result of the Waiver. Is this the result of a deliberate systemic change or a byproduct of altered resources or operational changes in either group of counties? To more fully understand the patterns uncovered here, further research and data collection are needed. Chapter 5 provides some initial speculation about the underlying dynamics that might account for some of these patterns.

3.6 RE-ENTRY FROM REUNIFICATION

Reunification with family is a permanent and successful outcome, as long as the child successfully remains with the family thereafter. Using FACSIS data, the study team explored what happens after a child is reunified with family. Results show over 36 percent of these children re-entered placement. Questions addressed include: Does the risk of re-entry vary because of child or case characteristics? Does the Waiver have an impact on the re-entry rate?

Summary: Both demonstration and comparison county groups significantly increased the length of time to re-entry following a first placement that ended with reunification with parents/guardians. This improvement appeared greater in the comparison county group. However, when taking into account case mix through the model, the Waiver had no significant effect on the rate of re-entry. Additional research is needed to know if this result is limited to re-entry from reunification. Possibly evaluating re-entry from another placement destination, such as custody to a relative, would demonstrate significant Waiver effects. It is important to note that reduction in re-entry rate is not an objective of the Waiver. Rather, the objective is to ensure that the re-entry rate does not worsen as an effect of the Waiver, and that objective appears to have been met thus far.

Re-entry

Table 3.17 shows the time to re-entry into care for those who had been reunified. For this analysis, the critical date was defined as the date of reunification rather than the date of first placement. Reunified children were classified as having been reunified before the Waiver (on or before December 31, 1997) or during the Waiver (after that date).

Table 3.17: Time to Re-entry after Reunification, by Study Group and Time Period									
	Time (in months)								
	Demonstration Counties			Comparison Counties			Difference Between Demonstration and Comparison Counties		
Percentage of Children	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change	Pre-Waiver	Waiver period	Change
25	3.78	4.64	0.86	4.30	5.76	1.46	-0.52	-1.12	-0.60
50	11.49	13.81	2.32	13.24	18.86	5.61	-1.75	-5.05	-3.30
75	33.71	44.41	10.70	41.17	51.54	10.38	-7.45	-7.13	0.32

For both the demonstration and comparison counties, the time to re-entry was longer if the children were reunified during the Waiver period compared to pre-Waiver. The demonstration counties increased the median re-entry time by 2.3 months from 11.5 months. For comparison counties, median time to reunification increased by 5.6 months, from 13.2 months before the Waiver to 18.9 months during the Waiver period.

Re-entry Model

The re-entry model focused on identifying any effects of the Waiver on the length of time a reunified child remains reunified before re-entering a second foster care placement. In contrast to the previous models that took into account the child and case characteristics at the time of first placement, it was considered that, for re-entry, case characteristics at the time of exit from the first placement would be equally important and should be added to the analysis. The improvement in the comparison counties appears to be larger than that in the demonstration sites, as was seen in Table 3.17, but because of the variability in this measure the difference in changes is not significant – i.e., when taking into account case characteristics through the model, the differences are not statistically significant. Thus the study team did not detect any significant Waiver effect on re-entry after reunification, when case mix features are taken into account. Note that the differences between demonstration and comparison counties shown in Table 3.17 (where case characteristics are not considered) are significant for the 25th and 50th quartiles, but that significance does not appear in the model (where case characteristics are considered).

In exploring the data to develop the strata for this analysis, the study team made some interesting observations about re-entry patterns:

- The children with shorter placements tended to have less successful reunifications. For those with shorter placements, the likelihood of re-entry into care tended to decrease with every month of successful reunion, while for those with longer placements, the likelihood of re-entry tended to grow across the first 3 months of reunion before declining.
- The stratum with the highest likelihood of re-entry during the first month of reunion were infants who did not have cognitive disabilities and had been placed for less than 21 days.

- The group with the most successful reunification was children with placements of at least 81 days (about 11.5 weeks) who had not been sexually abused, had no cognitive disability, and who had last been placed with either relatives or nonlicensed nonrelatives.

3.7 SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Chapter 3 reports results at the aggregate level based on individual child and case records obtained from FACSIS. This approach combines cases within a county and then combines counties into study groups (demonstration and comparison), enabling the study team to measure overall Waiver effects. Four years of the Waiver have been studied; however, additional time is needed to evaluate more of the Waiver effects and better understand the effects that have been identified. Results that were restricted to large counties might be explained by the fact that large counties have more cases; in large counties, small changes affect more cases and have a greater overall impact than the same changes would in a small county. Other county changes unrelated to the Waiver could result in differences in findings, such as the introduction of court custody agreements. Additionally, counties vary both by the timing and selection of initiatives, and these differences are likely to influence the results. To begin to address these issues and relate the aggregate results to the county level, the study team presents profiles of two counties in Chapter 5.

One puzzling finding was that caseloads increased in the demonstration counties despite two patterns that might be expected to exert a dampening effect on caseloads: (1) a decrease in reported abuse and neglect incidents and (2) an increase in the foster care discharge rate. The reasons for this are unclear, but may include factors unrelated to the Waiver. For example, some counties instituted changes in screening and data collection procedures that may have altered the "screening out" of cases and improved the accuracy of the data. In addition, increases in the substantiation rate might result in higher caseloads. Although data are not available on the percentages of reports that were substantiated, the volume of children entering their first placements in demonstration counties steadily increased, driven by an increase in the large demonstration counties. Conversely, there was a decrease in the comparison counties, especially in the small counties. The reasons for this may be independent of the Waiver, and it is possible that independent factors would have made the increase even larger were it not for the Waiver. This finding warrants further study and discussion with PCSA staff.

Foster care caseloads in the demonstration counties showed significant increases in the percentages of boys and of children ages 14-17, as well as an increase in the use of residential centers and group homes for first placements. These counties (as well as the comparison counties) also experienced decreases in the percentages of children in first placements who had been sexually abused or who had cognitive or physical disabilities. These shifts may stem in part from increased court referrals, many initiated by parent requests for help with "difficult teens," which have caused concern among staff in some counties (both demonstration and comparison).

The Waiver appeared to have different effects on the foster care length of stay depending on county size, type of placement, and other characteristics. In large demonstration counties, for example, the Waiver accelerated the foster care discharge rate, especially for children in residential settings. The median first placement duration (i.e., the time it took 50 percent of the children to exit from their first foster care stay) in demonstration counties remained about the same during the Waiver, while it increased significantly in comparison counties. The overall effect of the Waiver was to decrease the median length of placement by 1.7 months (3 months in large counties). Similarly, the Waiver effect was a decrease of 1.3 months at the point in time where a quarter of the children had exited from their first placement. A particularly dramatic effect was found in large counties, where the Waiver appeared to cause a decrease of more than a year in the time it takes for 75 percent of the children to be discharged. This acceleration was particularly strong for children first placed in residential treatment centers.

The predominant exit type for both the demonstration and the comparison groups was reunification. The Waiver appeared to slow the rate of reunification, which decreased in demonstration counties and increased in comparison counties. This effect was strongest in large counties, where the daily rate of reunification was 22 percent slower than it would have been without the Waiver.

In contrast, the Waiver accelerated the rate of exit to relative custody, especially for children who were not alleged victims of abuse or neglect (about a quarter of the caseload). And the "other exits" category shows results opposite those for reunification. In fact, most of the differences seen in reunification are balanced by opposite changes in the "other exits" category. For demonstration counties, other exits increased by 9 percent during the Waiver period, while comparison counties decreased by 2 percent. Reunification decreased by a similar percentage for the demonstration counties. The Waiver also appeared to greatly accelerate the runaway rate and to significantly slow the adoption rate for children initially placed with nonlicensed nonrelatives (both types of exit represent small subsets of children in care).

If the patterns of change persist, placements that end in reunification with parents or guardians in the demonstration counties are forecast to decrease while increasing in comparison counties. Perhaps the declining rate of reunification is a result of the demonstration counties' focus on achieving an important objective of the Waiver: to ensure that the re-entry rate for children reunified with parents/guardians did not worsen. That objective was met – the Waiver had no significant effect on the rate of re-entry following reunification.