

CHAPTER 5: WHAT HAVE COUNTIES ACHIEVED? INSIGHTS ON WAIVER EFFECTIVENESS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapters have presented findings on organizational restructuring in local child welfare systems, shifts in county expenditure patterns, variations in agency caseloads, and changes in child and family outcomes. Given this array of activities during the Waiver period, what does it all add up to? The evaluation team has now acquired sufficient knowledge of the 28 study counties to begin to speak to the question of Waiver effectiveness and cost effectiveness. This chapter offers insight into the dynamics of change in two selected demonstration counties, highlighting some of the best results that can thus far be identified. Due to the speculative nature of this discussion, the insights gleaned should be interpreted with caution: because these are essentially two case studies, the conclusions drawn cannot be extrapolated to the full set of ProtectOhio counties. The chapter concludes with discussion of the implications of these individual county “stories of change under the Waiver.”

5.2 COUNTY PROFILES

The evaluation team selected two counties, Lorain and Muskingum, to highlight the interconnections among some of the major study findings. These two counties are not notably divergent from the other demonstration sites, as Table 5.1 suggests. Both are non-metropolitan counties, Lorain a suburb of Cleveland and Muskingum on the outskirts of Columbus but much smaller. Both have child populations similar to the other study sites; Muskingum has a slightly higher proportion of its families living in poverty. However, Muskingum PCSA deals with higher than average child abuse/neglect reports, while Lorain County sees more juvenile crimes and somewhat higher school dropout rates.

In the two profiled counties, the PCSA has made a concerted effort to improve child welfare practice, through changes in services provided, shifts in staff responsibilities, enhancements to internal review and quality assurance processes, and expansion of interagency collaborative efforts. Each profile describes the main initiatives pursued by the PCSA, and highlights the central findings regarding fiscal and participant outcomes. Data are drawn from previous chapters of this report.

It is important to recognize that the causal relationships implied here are highly speculative. They do not prove that the Waiver works or does not work; rather, they suggest connections the study team can examine future data and areas where cost effectiveness may be explored.

Table 5.1: Population Statistics on Profile Counties				
Statistics	Demonstration Counties (n=14)	Comparison Counties (n=14)	Muskingum	Lorain
1996 population	3,659,941	2,837,963	84,325	280,945
1996 % who are children	26.0%	26.0%	27.0%	27.0%
1995 % population in poverty	13.4%	13.8%	17.1%	12.9%
1996 CAN reports/ 1,000 children	32.5	29.2	47.9	17.1
1996 children in out-of-home care/ 1,000 children	6.9	5.2	4.7	4.1
1996 children in PCSA custody/ 1,000 children	6.6	4.9	4.9	4.7
1996 unemployment rate	5.3	5.3	8.0	6.4
1996 juvenile crimes/ 1,000 juveniles	5.7	5.2	3.2	7.2
1996 dropout rate	4.4	4.6	3.5	5.6
1996 teen births/ 1,000 female teens	25.4	26.1	29.5	27.3

5.2.1 Profile of Lorain County PCSA

Lorain County Waiver Activities

In Lorain County Children’s Services (LCCS), the primary focus for Waiver activity has been a systematic organizational development effort, which began before the Waiver but would not have occurred to the extent it did without the fiscal flexibility afforded by the Waiver.

Accreditation

In 1996, LCCS embarked on a strategic planning process, with extensive involvement of representatives from other agencies and community groups, as well as from all levels of staff within LCCS. One of the goals identified was to become an accredited member of the Council on Accreditation for Services to Children and Families (COA). In 1998, LCCS began the process of obtaining COA accreditation. The impetus of this process led LCCS to intensify its focus on generating data on service utilization, quality and costs, and on using this information in management team meetings to collaboratively make management

decisions. A Quality Assurance unit was formed and expanded. All of this established a strong foundation for subsequent reform activities.

Reducing Use of Residential Placements

Beginning in 1995, prior to the Waiver, but increasingly during the early years of the Waiver, LCCS gave special attention to reducing inappropriate and expensive residential placements. Prior to the Waiver, LCCS closed its Children's Home and its Group Home. It then created a funding pool for a small group of the most expensive children in care and urged providers to work toward sending the children home. As a result, the percent of paid placement days attributable to residential care decreased from ten percent in 1995 to four percent in 2000 and 2001. This successful effort reduced LCCS residential costs and laid the foundation for the 1998 collaboratively-funded managed care contract with Pressley Ridge to serve multi-system children.

Continuing this trend away from residential placement, LCCS attempted to improve family foster care through several strategies:

- Increasing the family foster care per diem each year of the Waiver, enabling LCCS to recruit and retain more foster parents, thus lessening reliance on network homes;
- Adopting the philosophy of one child-one home in foster care, and emphasizing foster-to-adopt homes and placing the child close to the biological family;
- Offering supportive services for foster parents through Family Care (cf. below); and
- Making a strong commitment to preventive, home-based services early in the case.

Interagency Collaboration

Lorain County has witnessed the increasing effectiveness of the ISP (cluster) pooled fund, where the increased LCCS contribution has led to improved relationships with mental health and juvenile court around shared cases.

Reflective of increased interagency collaboration is the interagency-funded Family Care program, which supports foster parents in dealing with difficult children. It includes a comprehensive assessment of the child at entry into foster care and 24-hour support to foster homes.

Staffing Changes

LCCS has implemented three key changes in staffing: more clearly defined roles of protective and intake workers; increased professionalism; and increased cultural diversity and competence among staff. All existing staff have had the opportunity to attend graduate school to obtain a masters degree, with LCCS paying tuition, and all new staff were required to have the degree or to begin studies at hire. By 2001, nearly all staff had an MSW or were in the process of earning it. Lorain's aggregate expenditures reflect this focus on training—training expenditures increased 100% from 1998 to 2001.

The increased focus on cultural diversity and cultural competency includes targeted recruitment of staff whose first language is Spanish and frequent scheduled events for staff to expose them to different cultures in Lorain County. These may be formal training events or simply cultural events in neighborhoods. These efforts, combined with increased staffing levels and lower caseloads, have allowed more intensive interaction with families.

Internal Changes in Unit Structure and Case Flow

LCCS has given increased attention to managing the front door of child welfare, with more careful screening and more complete use of family risk assessment to get a comprehensive look at families and thus make better decisions about which cases to open.

In response to waiting lists and inappropriate service modalities in substance abuse and mental health treatment programs, LCCS created a new division of Behavioral Services, including in-house assessment units for substance abuse and mental health issues. These units also serve as the centralized point for referrals to treatment providers, allowing LCCS to only use those providers that meet its standards of quality and access. This process is beginning to create competition among community providers and to lead to more prompt services and better quality reports on child progress.

Lorain County System Outcomes

In examining county scores on several indices of system reform, Lorain County emerges as among the highest performers. It has one of the three highest scores on the use of managed care overall, reflective of its particularly strong efforts in the areas of service array, competition, utilization review, and quality assurance (see Table 5.2).

Table 5.2: System Outcomes for Lorain County			
	Lorain	Average Demonstration	Average Comparison
Managed care index	59 (Highest demo)	43	35
Leadership index	21 = very strong (4 th highest demo)	20	16
Interagency collaboration index	33 = very strong (2 nd highest demo)	27	26

Lorain County also scored in the highest group on the leadership index, as shown by the systematic attention given to organizational development and collaborative management activities in LCCS.

On interagency collaboration, Lorain County is one of the highest among the study counties, as evidenced by the active participation of other child-serving agencies in ISP (cluster) and the abundance of collaborative service ventures in the county.

Lorain County Fiscal Outcomes

The expenditure data indicate that LCCS has moved in a desired direction on several measures of fiscal performance (see Table 5.3). Specifically:

- LCCS has experienced a slight decrease in placement days (-3%) since the Waiver began, in contrast to the comparison sites (+13%). This pattern reflects the agency's systematic efforts to reduce the use of out-of-home care overall, especially residential treatment. However, Lorain's placement day utilization rose in 2001 by 11%, in part due to increases in admissions to care starting in 2000.
- The particular attention given to reducing residential placements may have succeeded. LCCS shows a slight decline (-3%) in the proportion of placement days in residential facilities, compared to the general pattern in all other study sites (+1%).

This trend is further reinforced by the length of stay findings (see Table 5.4 on page 177). Since the Waiver began, Lorain children whose first placement was in residential care tended to exit out-of-home care more quickly than similar children in the comparison sites.

- LCCS has steadily increased foster care per diem rates (+16%), although at a slower rate than other counties in the study. Keeping pace with rates in neighboring counties has been an explicit strategy to maintain agency foster homes.
- In each of the first three years of the Waiver, LCCS has had a faster growth (+63%) in all other child welfare services (excluding foster care board and maintenance) compared to comparison sites and most demonstration sites (see Table 5.3). This primarily reflects Lorain's increased spending on county staff and programs (see Chapter 4). Lorain's expenditures on county staff and associated costs doubled since the beginning of the Waiver, increasing from about \$4.2 million in 1996 and 1997 to \$8.5 million in 2001. The per diem cost of foster care case management by the county also doubled during the Waiver period, from about \$20.00 to \$40.00 a day per child. Both of these increases were the second highest among demonstration and comparison counties.
- When the growth in all other child welfare expenditures is viewed in the context of the county's total foster care expenditures, Lorain appears to have greater growth than other study counties, eight percent compared to four percent. However, it is important to note that this additional growth was financed by Waiver "savings". About half of the increased spending (\$1,866,000) came from increased Waiver revenues, and half (\$1,979,000) came from other revenue sources, making Lorain's use of non-Waiver revenues sources the same level as comparison counties' (four percent of total foster care expenditures).

Table 5.3 Fiscal Outcomes for Lorain County			
	Lorain	All Demonstration Counties (n=14)	All Comparison Counties (n=14)
Number of placement days purchased in 1997	87,880	2,013,009	1,344,292
Number of placement days purchased in 2001	85,407	2,260,195	1,433,494
% Change 1997-2001*	-3 %	+2 %	+13 %
% Paid placement days that were residential in 1997	7 %	9 %	9 %
% Paid placement days that were residential in 2001	4 %	10 %	10 %
Change in % residential days	- 3 %	+ 1 %	+ 1 %
Foster care per diem cost in 1998	\$39.72	\$46.20	\$40.03
Foster care per diem cost in 2001	\$45.97	\$58.88	\$50.46
% Change 1998-2001*	+ 16 %	+ 27 %	+ 26 %
Foster care board & maintenance expenditures in 1998 \$(000)	\$3,193		
Foster care board & maintenance expenditures in 2001 \$(000)	\$3,926		
% Change 1998-2001*	+ 23 %	+ 26 %	+ 26 %
All other child welfare expenditures in 1998 \$(000)	\$6,051		
All other child welfare expenditures in 2001 \$(000)	\$9,896		
% Change 1998-2001*	+ 63 %	+ 49 %	+ 39 %
Total increase in all other child welfare expenditures as % of total foster care expenditures in 2001	8%	6%	4%

*Demonstration and comparison county figures show the average of each available county's change in the measure.

Table 5.4: Length of Stay Findings for Lorain County	
Significant Findings on Children Who Have Left First Out-of-Home Placement During the Waiver	Significant Results from Survival Analysis
Children exiting out-of-home care whose first setting was in residential	Shorter time in care
Children going to adoption	Shorter time in care

Lorain County Participant Outcomes

LCCS shows positive results on many of the participant outcomes central to ProtectOhio, appearing to do better than the average demonstration or comparison site (see Table 5.5).

- The decrease in child abuse incidents (-35%) between 1997 and 2001 may reflect the agency’s systematic efforts to educate community reporters, as well as the clarification of screening criteria early in the Waiver. However, year-to-year changes are quite variable, suggesting caution in inferring any trend.
- Consistent with decreased incidents of child abuse and neglect, LCCS took fewer children into custody in 2000 than in 1997 (-10%), perhaps because the agency is referring to a wider array of community services and is getting quicker access to substance abuse and mental health services during the intake phase.
- Between 1997 and 2000, LCCS experienced significantly greater than average growth in the number of children eligible for adoption subsidy (55%, compared to 40% for all demonstration sites and 32% for all comparison sites), perhaps reflecting concerted efforts find more adoptive homes, especially for older children. This trend is reinforced by length of stay findings (see Table 5.4) that show Lorain County children who are adopted spend less time in their first out-of-home care stay than do adopted children in the comparison sites.
- Looking beyond the adoption rates, LCCS differs notably from other demonstration and comparison sites in two measures of permanency: growth in the number of children in permanent commitment (+7%) is much smaller than the change in demonstration and comparison counties overall (35% and 28%, respectively); and the decline in PPLA is much sharper (-76%), contrasting with growth in all demonstration and comparison sites. These figures may reflect LCCS attention to moving PPLA youth into permanent situations.
- The shift toward serving more families in home rather than in placement is stronger in Lorain County (+7%) than in other demonstration sites (+2%) and is the reverse of the pattern in comparison sites (-2%). Again, this may reflect LCCS’s focus on preventive services.

Table 5.5: Participant Outcomes for Lorain County			
	Lorain	All Demonstration Counties (n=14)	All Comparison Counties (n=14)
Child abuse incidents: 1997 number	943	28,503	21,620
Percent change '97-'01	-35%	-17%	-42%
Children in custody at year end: 1997 number	253	6,387	4,102
Percent change '97-'00	-10%	+10%	+13%
New children available for adoption subsidy: 1997 number	31	565	296
Percent change '97-'00	+55%	+40%	+32%
Children in permanent commitment at year end: 1997 number	58	1227	853
Percent change '97-'00	+7%	+35%	+28%
Children in PPLA at year end: 1997 number	72	1013	535
Percent change '97-'00	-76%	+4%	+28%
Percent children served in-home (versus in placement): percent 1997	+48	+43	+47
Change in percent '97-'01	+7	+2	-2
Percent cases that are abuse/ neglect (versus non-abuse/neglect): percent 1997	+73	+80	+75
Change in percent '97-'00	+3	-5	-5
Percent foster care cases eligible for IV-E: Percent 1997	+81	+79	+78
Change in percent '97-'00	+8	+1	0
Percent adoption assistance cases eligible for Title IV-E: percent 1997	+96	+94	+90
Change in percent '97-'00	+1	+1	+3

Overall, during the course of the Waiver, Lorain County has made considerable progress in improving outcomes for children and families. The systemic changes the agency has made in daily operations appear to be consistent with this pattern.

5.2.2 Profile of Muskingum County PCSA

Muskingum County Waiver Activities

The Title IV-E Waiver has provided Muskingum County Children Services (MCCS) with considerable flexibility, enabling the agency to creatively decrease use of expensive placement settings and reconfigure the way that services are provided. Since the implementation of the Waiver, MCCS has focused on (1) preventing inappropriate cases from coming through the front door, (2) enhancing internal services to serve PCSA families more effectively, and (3) increasing the availability of less expensive and more permanent placement options. Collaborative efforts with other child-serving agencies in the community have also enhanced these MCCS efforts.

Prevention/Front End Focus

MCCS has developed a number of services that are provided prior to the opening of a PCSA case. In particular, the Enhanced Services Unit provides the following “preventive” services: home-based therapist program for families with mental health and substance abuse issues, homemaker services, a parent educator, and a worker who goes to court with information gathered through a psychological assessment to provide recommendations that may divert the case from entering MCCS. All of these interventions are intended for cases where MCCS involvement is not immediately required to diminish the need for future PCSA involvement.

MCCS also focuses on determining where the bulk of referrals are coming from and developing services and programs to target these particular areas of greatest need. The agency has collected data to identify particular areas of the county that are generating the most referrals and is now moving staff and resources to these areas of the county. For example, MCCS has developed the Educational Achievement Specialist program which puts social workers into the schools in the highest-need areas of the county and links families with services prior to the need for MCCS intervention.

Increased Capacity to Serve Families Quickly and Effectively

The PCSA has used the Waiver flexibility to develop its internal capacity to serve open MCCS cases better. Since the Waiver began, the agency has increased the overall number of caseworkers and other support workers, increasing its capacity to serve families more quickly. In the last five years, the number of PCSA staff has increased from 64 to 88. Aggregate expenditure information reflects this increase—spending on staff and related administrative expenditures has increased 89% since 1997. Similarly, many of the prevention positions described above enable the agency to efficiently provide needed services not otherwise available in the community. In particular, the lack of mental health and substance abuse services in the community has led to MCCS to develop its own options: the child psychologist (discussed below) and the home-based therapist program are viewed as effective in decreasing the number of children placed in treatment settings outside the county, by providing needed mental health and substance abuse services.

A good example of the development of a new internal PCSA service is the contract with a local clinical psychologist. To gain a more thorough understanding of the needs of a family when it first comes into the MCCA system, the agency has contracted with a local child psychologist to conduct mental health assessments and provide recommendations to assist in developing a case plan. This effort to assess early and often is viewed as a powerful tool in avoiding expensive and lengthy placements, reducing length of stay in foster care and the number of children in custody.

Development of Less Expensive Placement Options and More Permanency Options

MCCA has focused on developing ways to keep children out of placement and to decrease the time children spend in residential placements. For example, the PCSA is now regularly paying for services to children who come through the court but who are not in PCSA custody. The agency believes that by providing this financial assistance up front, it avoids a potentially expensive placement in the future. This unique arrangement would not be possible without the flexibility of the Waiver.

MCCA is also expanding its own family foster care homes, with hopes of decreasing reliance on more expensive out-of-county placements. The agency has made significant increases in its foster care per diem. In the final year of the Waiver, the foster parent recruiter has focused efforts in neighborhoods identified as in need of more family foster care homes. These efforts have been effective: the number of agency family foster homes increased from 17 to 50 between 1996 and 2002.

At the same time, MCCA has intensified its efforts to place children with relatives, most often with the relative taking custody of the child. This has increased the permanency for the child and reducing the case management involvement of MCCA. Supportive services are still available to the kinship home through Kinship Navigator.

Lastly, the agency has made a conscious effort to develop more options for children to be adopted. Due to H.B.484/AFSA and the agency's focus on permanency efforts, the PCSA has recently created an adoption specialist position to develop new options for adoption. Since the Waiver, the agency has increased the subsidy for special needs adoption. Prior, MCCA was rarely able to give an adoption subsidy above the basic \$250/month, creating a disincentive for foster parents of special needs children. The larger subsidy, now permitted as a result of the Waiver has increased the number of foster parents that are willing to adopt. Spending on adoption has increased 25% since 1997.

Muskingum County System Outcomes

On the indices developed for the Process Study, MCCS ranks among the highest on leadership and interagency collaboration, but has made only moderate use of managed care strategies in its internal reform activities (see Table 5.6).

Table 5.6: System Outcomes for Muskingum County			
	Muskingum	Average Demonstration	Average Comparison
Managed care index	39 (6 th among demos)	43	35
Leadership index	24 = very strong (Highest demo)	20	16
Interagency collaboration index	30 = strong (3rd highest demo)	27	26

- MCCS falls in the mid-range of demonstration counties in terms of their use of managed care strategies. It has given less systematic attention to case management and utilization review than have other demonstration counties, but has made good progress in other managed care arenas.
- The very strong MCCS leadership has focused emphatically on moving children to permanency and has been able to motivate staff to embrace new practices.
- MCCS's strong leadership is also credited with fostering an increase in community partnering and collaboration to develop needed services and resources. Muskingum is categorized as strong in its collaborative relationship with other child-serving entities. While relationships with the juvenile court and with mental health have the usual tensions, these relationships have improved since the beginning of the Waiver, and interagency mechanisms such as Families and Children First function particularly well in this community.

Muskingum County Fiscal Outcomes

MCCS has dramatically decreased its paid placement days and increased its spending on non-foster care services relative to foster care board and maintenance costs. However, Muskingum's foster care costs have risen 34% in the last four years, to the highest per diem foster care cost of any demonstration or comparison county (\$110.68). This increase was probably due to the increasing number of placements in residential care. It may also reflect the growing cost of Muskingum's county group care facility.

Table 5.7 Fiscal Outcomes for Muskingum County			
	Muskingum	All Demonstration Counties (n=14)	All Comparison Counties (n=14)
Number of placement days purchased in 1997	36,061	2,013,009	1,344,292
Number of placement days purchased in 2001	23,247	2,260,195	1,433,494
% Change 1997-2001*	-36 %	+2 %	+13 %
% Paid placement days that were residential in 1997	18 %	9 %	9 %
% Paid placement days that were residential in 2001	28 %	10 %	10 %
Change in % residential days	+10 %	+ 1 %	+ 1 %
Foster care per diem cost in 1997	\$53.44	\$42.54	\$37.54
Foster care per diem cost in 2001	\$110.68	\$58.88	\$50.46
% Change 1997-2001*	+ 107 %	+ 38 %	+ 34 %
Foster care board & maintenance expenditures in 1997 \$(000)	\$1,927		
Foster care board & maintenance expenditures in 2001 \$(000)	\$2,573		
% Change 1997-2001*	+ 34 %	+ 29 %	+ 44 %
All other child welfare expenditures in 1997 \$(000)	\$1,642		
All other child welfare expenditures in 2001 \$(000)	\$3,161		
% Change 1998-2001*	+ 93 %	+ 64 %	+ 35 %
Total increase in all other child welfare expenditures as % of total foster care expenditures in 2001	8 %	4 %	4 %

*Demonstration and comparison county figures show the average of each available county's change in the measure.

Table 5.7 highlights the fiscal findings:

- MCCS stands out as one of the demonstration counties with the largest percentage decrease in placement days since the beginning of the Waiver—36%. With its focus on identifying and providing appropriate services quickly and the development of less expensive placement options and more permanency options, MCCS has substantially decreased the number of children in paid placement since the beginning of the Waiver. This finding is reinforced by length of stay results: since the Waiver began, Muskingum children exiting their first out-of-home care placement (other than residential) have spent less time in care than similar children in the comparison counties (see Table 5.8).

Table 5.8: Length of Stay Findings for Muskingum County	
Significant Findings on Children Who Have Left First Out-of-Home Placement During the Waiver	Significant Results from Survival Analysis
Children going to relative custody	Shorter time in care
Children exiting out-of-home care other than residential	Shorter time in care
Children exiting out-of-home care whose first setting was in residential	Longer time in care
Children going to adoption	Shorter time in care

Another factor that perhaps contributes to the decrease in placement days is MCCS' increased access to ESSA funds. From spending virtually nothing on non-foster care in 1997, MCCS now spends nearly \$200,000 per year, primarily from ESA, enabling case workers to tap home-based services and cash and material support more readily and thus reduce the need for placement.

- MCCS had proportionately higher use of residential placements at the beginning of the Waiver, a trend that appears have to intensified during the Waiver (+10% growth). The children who go to residential placement also appear to stay for longer periods: length of stay analysis shows that Muskingum children whose first placement is in residential care tend to stay in care longer than such children in the comparison counties (see Table 5.8, above). The data suggest that children placed in residential settings have more serious issues; on the other hand, then may also indicate less attention to permanency once a child goes to residential placement.

The trend may also be affected by recent MCCS efforts to use the county residential facility differently than in the past. It is now used as a step-down for out-of-county residential placements. This may lead to a decrease in future years in the overall use of residential placement, as children are moved more quickly out of residential settings into less restrictive placements.

- Consistent with the percentage increase in residential placements, Muskingum's foster care per diem has increased more rapidly (107%) than average in the other study

counties (38% in demonstration counties, 34% in the comparison group). This increase contributes to the growth in overall foster care costs, although the increase is perhaps not as steep as it would have been, due to the reduction in total placement days.

- MCCS has had a higher rate of growth in expenditures for all other child welfare services (+93% between 1998 and 2001), compared to other demonstration sites (+64%) and the comparison sites (+35%). Like other demonstration counties, MCCS increased spending on county staff and operations. Spending on county staff and operations increased from \$1.5 million in the years before the Waiver to \$2.9 million in 2001 (see Chapter 4). The average per day cost of county foster care case management also doubled during this period, from about \$9 a day to \$18 dollars a day per child. Smaller increases in in-home services to families to avoid out-of-home placement also contributed to this increase.
- When the growth in all other child welfare expenditures is viewed in the context of the county's total foster care expenditures, Muskingum appears to have had slightly greater growth than other study counties, eight percent compared to four percent. It is important to note that a portion of this additional growth seems to have been financed with Waiver "savings." Specifically, a quarter of the increased spending (\$456,000) came from increased Waiver revenues, and three-fourths (\$1,529,000) came from other revenue sources. As a result, Muskingum's use of non-Waiver revenues sources has been somewhat higher than comparison counties' use (six percent versus four percent total foster care expenditures for comparison sites).

Muskingum County Participant Outcomes

MCCS stands out from the other demonstration and comparison counties on many of the participant outcome measures, showing substantial progress in improving outcomes for the children and families it serves. (See Table 5.9).

- The sharp decrease in child abuse incidents in MCCS (-22%) is comparable to other demonstration sites but lower than the comparison group (-42%). Many counties are likely engaged in primary prevention and diversion activities; MCCS has developed the Enhanced Services Unit, which puts social workers in schools, and it has a court liaison to divert court cases to more appropriate services.
- The notable decrease in children in custody (-30%), in contrast to their growth in the demonstration and comparison counties, may reflect MCCS arrangements for providing resources for children to avoid taking custody and its efforts to increase adoptions, thereby reducing time in temporary custody. Findings on length of stay in foster care more fully illuminate this pattern. (See Table 5.8). Since the Waiver began, Muskingum children exiting out-of-home care (other than residential) have spent less time in care than similar children in the comparison counties.

Table 5.9: Participant Outcomes for Muskingum County			
	Muskingum	All Demonstration Counties (n=14)	All Comparison Counties (n=14)
Child abuse incidents: 1997 number	870	28,503	21,620
Percent change '97-'01	-22 %	-17 %	-42 %
Children in custody at year end: 1997 number	101	6,387	4,102
Percent change '97-'00	-30 %	+10 %	+13 %
New children available for adoption subsidy: 1997 number	20	565	296
Percent change '97-'00	-20 %	+40 %	+32 %
Children in permanent commitment at year end: 1997 number	22	1227	853
Percent change '97-'00	-18 %	+35 %	+28 %
Children in PPLA at year end: 1997 number	15	1013	535
Percent change '97-'00	-60 %	+4 %	+28 %
Percent cases served in-home (versus in placement): percent 1997	+59 %	+43 %	+47 %
Change in percent '97-'00	+4 %	+3 %	-2 %
Percent cases that are abuse/ neglect (versus non-abuse/neglect): percent 1997	+85 %	+80 %	+75 %
Change in percent '97-'00	-2 %	-5 %	-5 %
Percent foster care cases eligible for IV-E: percent 1997	+95 %	+79 %	+78 %
Change in percent '97-'00	-16 %	+1 %	0 %
Percent adoption assistance cases eligible for IV-E: percent 1997	+94 %	+94 %	+90 %
Change in percent '97-'00	+2 %	+1 %	+3 %

- New children available for adoption subsidy during the Waiver decreased in MCCS by 20% between 1997 and 2000. Although the small numbers of children involved may make this percentage change misleading, the general trend may be influenced by the fact that MCCS substantially increased adoptions in 1997, the first year of the Waiver. MCCS has consciously increased adoption subsidy payments under the Waiver.

The more complete picture of the adoption effects emerges by examining length of time in foster care: children adopted in Muskingum County spend significantly less time in foster care than do adopted children in the comparison counties (see Table 5.8).

- The drop in the number of children in permanent commitment during the course of the Waiver (-18%) may reflect several outcomes noted above: the increased focus on preventive services, the decrease in children in temporary custody, and the shorter time in foster care.
- MCCS began the Waiver with a larger proportion of its cases served in-home (59% compared to 43% and 47% in all demonstration and comparison sites, respectively). It has continued in this fashion, increasing slightly more than comparison sites. These data may reflect MCCS efforts to adequately assess the needs of each case and then provide the most appropriate services, with emphasis on keeping the child in-home if at all possible.
- MCCS has seen a decline in the proportion of children served in foster care who are Title IV-E eligible, down from 95% at the beginning of the Waiver. With the Waiver, the agency has been able to serve children who otherwise were less likely to be served.

Overall, during the course of the Waiver, Muskingum County appears to have made considerable progress toward desired fiscal outcomes and participant outcomes; these positive changes appear to be related to systemic changes made in the provision of child welfare services.

5.3 IMPLICATIONS OF THE COUNTY PROFILES

County profiles can illustrate how different county contexts affect aggregate costs, caseload trends and outcomes. The two counties presented above, Lorain and Muskingum, seem close to average in terms of demographic characteristics (see Table 5.1), at the beginning of Section 5.3). Nonetheless, their child welfare systems are quite different, both before and since the Waiver began. These differences arise from a variety of political and philosophical factors – the relative influence of the child welfare agency in county government, the belief structure and experiences of individual leaders, etc.—that cannot be easily identified and enumerated. Only after studying many different counties in this fashion can the study team discern the most important threads in the story of the Waiver.

The Lorain and Muskingum PCSAs were deliberately selected for the initial profiles because their story was clearer than that of other demonstration counties. They had a stronger vision of their goal for child welfare reform and identified more specific strategies

to achieve the desired systemic changes. They also are among the most successful—ranking at the high end of many of the study outcomes. From this perspective, they are uncharacteristic of the demonstration counties as a group. At this stage of the evaluation, when many hypotheses are just beginning to be fully tested (e.g., length-of-stay analyses, changes in expenditure patterns), the study team considered it important to illustrate how much can be learned by exploring the interplay of the various components of evaluation data.

The central question, which cannot be fully answered, is: What might have happened in these counties had there been no Waiver? The use of comparison counties offers only a partial answer, since, as noted above, so many factors interconnect to create a particular county experience that the comparison counties are not a truly “matched” sample.

Nonetheless, the county profiles serve at least two important purposes: first, they reveal how the process study findings can be used to understand particular fiscal patterns, caseload trends, or length of stay results, thus setting the stage for future cost-effectiveness analysis. Second, they bring to light specific areas where the study team could focus in future years of the evaluation, to better understand the dynamics of change; for example, Muskingum’s efforts to create a residential step-down program using the county home may in time reduce residential placement days, but currently it may be increasing length of stay in residential settings.

Lorain and Muskingum Counties have both been at the top of the charts in the growth of their total expenditures. They have spent more than most comparison counties, and as much as or more than most demonstration counties. Their total spending has grown well beyond the rate of inflation. In other words, it seems that their improvements have come at quite a cost. Whether that cost is worth the results achieved remains to be seen—due to the systemic changes that have been instituted, benefits may continue to accrue without additional investment, or benefits may fall off despite the infrastructure that has been put in place. Additional years of analysis may answer these questions more fully.