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Prevention of Out-of-Home Placement for Children

In education, health, safety, juvenile justice, and economic well-being, rankings on child well-being consistently place the Commonwealth among the bottom ten in the nation. Responding to a challenge from legislators, children's advocacy groups from across the state formed a broad based coalition to develop a clear and workable agenda to move Kentucky forward. The result is the Blueprint for Kentucky's Children.

This issue brief series serves as a tool to share the latest statistics, research, best practices, and the group's recommendations for action in the 2010 legislative session. This brief focuses on prevention of out-of-home placement for children who have been abused by ensuring that family preservation services and family reunification services are available.

Background

All children need a safe environment and caring adults to thrive. Children who have been abused or neglected often experience negative short and long-term consequences. Without timely and supportive interventions, these children are more likely to become involved in the juvenile justice system; suffer from mental health problems; become homeless; or lag behind in school or experience school failure.¹ These poor outcomes oftentimes follow children into adulthood where long-term costs like unemployment, poor health, drug addiction, homelessness, incarceration and the continued cycle of child abuse are likely to occur.

Kentucky Children in Out-of-Home Placement

In some cases, a child may not be able to remain in his or her home safely and must be moved to another setting. Removal from one's home is a traumatic event, but out-of-home care placements and social services can help ease the transition for children. Ideally, a child can be placed with relatives; however, in a case where that is not possible or appropriate, the child is placed in foster care. Some children with extensive treatment needs may be placed in a residential facility and older youth may be placed in an independent living setting to develop life skills for adulthood.

To learn more about the Blueprint for Kentucky's Children and current legislative priorities, visit www.blueprintky.org

The number of children served in foster care nationwide declined steadily from 800,000 in federal fiscal year 2002 to 783,000 in federal fiscal year 2007.² During that time, the number of children awaiting adoption fell from 134,000 to 130,000, while the number of children in families where parental rights were terminated increased, from 77,000 to 84,000.³ The number of Kentucky children in foster care increased from 11,387 in 2003 to 12,397 in 2008. The rate of children placed in out-of-home care increased 9 percent between 2003 and 2008. Most of the children in out-of-home care in 2008 were ages 6-18 (64 percent), 29 percent were under age 6, and 7 percent were ages 18-21.⁴

The proportion of children in foster care increased from 2003 to 2008 by 2.6 percentage points to 70 percent, while the proportion of children in relative care and residential private care placements decreased slightly (to 12 percent and 18 percent, respectively). The average length of stay in out-of-home care in Kentucky was 25.3 months in 2008, one month less than in 2003.⁵ Of the 5,294 Kentucky children who exited out-of-home care in 2008, less than half were reunited with a parent or primary care taker.

More than half of Kentucky's counties saw an increase in the rate of children placed in out-of-home care between 2003 and 2008. Rates of out-of-home care placement increased the most in Grayson, Greenup, Magoffin, and Martin Counties. Casey and Harrison Counties saw a 60 percent drop in their rates of out-of-home care. Twenty-nine counties experienced rate increases of more than 50 percent during this time; 14 of those counties had rate increases of 100 percent or more.

State and national data indicate that even when other variables are held constant, children of color are more likely to be placed in foster care than white children. While the number of children in out-of-home placements increased for all racial groups in Kentucky between 2003 and 2008, children of color represented a larger portion of the population in

2008, growing from 22 to 25 percent of the total out-of-home placement population. African American children represented more than one third of all children in out-of-home placements in Fayette, Jefferson, and McCracken Counties in 2008.⁶

Reducing the Use of Out-of-Home Placement

Being removed from one's home is traumatic, even when it is in the best interest of the child. Out-of-home placements should help children during the transition, yet many children currently or previously in out-of-home placements suffer from poor physical and mental health. Some children are moved repeatedly from one setting to another, making continuity of health care a serious issue for children in foster care. Similarly, academic progress can be hampered by repeated changes in schools.⁷

Though foster care removes children from the abusive situation, many children in foster care suffer negative long-term consequences. A recent study found that children who had one or more placements in foster care were more likely to have lower earnings, become teen parents or become involved with the juvenile justice system.⁸ Given the traumatic nature of out-of-home placement, as well as the high cost of these placements to the state, child welfare practitioners frequently work to either prevent out-of-home placement or to reunify families as quickly as is safely possible.

Since the 1970's, social service providers have increasingly used the principles of family support to inform their practice. Family support programs

Family preservation programs have three desired outcomes:

- 1) **Safety** – Children safely remain in their homes when possible and appropriate.
- 2) **Permanency** – Children experience a sense of permanency and stability in their living situations.
- 3) **Well-Being** – Families improve their skills in providing for their children.

foster resilience in children by focusing on nurturing the family as a whole and increasing their capacity to provide a healthy environment for their children.⁹ One of the most significant results of the family support movement has been the development of child abuse and neglect prevention programs that focus on providing needed financial, emotional, and practical supports to families at risk. This movement includes family preservation programs within child welfare systems.¹⁰

Family Preservation Programs

Family preservation is defined as “planned efforts to provide the knowledge, resources, supports, health care, relationship skills, and structures that help families stay intact and maintain their mutual roles and responsibilities.”¹¹ Family preservation programs were developed to help keep families from losing their children, especially due to foster placement, abandonment, running away, and juvenile incarceration.¹² Family preservation programs teach families life-skills, promote and model positive parenting, and connect families with community services.

Like preservation programs, family reunification programs work to support families in caring effectively for their children, but are focused exclusively on helping the family prepare for reuniting and address the issues that will enable the child to safely return to and remain in the home.¹³ In this brief, both types of services will be referred to simply as family preservation.

Research studies that evaluate family preservation programs have been conducted in several states, including Kentucky. While one study determined in 2002 that family preservation services have little effect on child safety and the frequency of out-of-home placements, many other studies found significant gains in child safety, family well-being, decreased frequency of out-of-home placements, increased speed of reunification, and high satisfaction among those served.¹⁴

Kentucky attempts to prevent out-of-home placements and/or reunify families that have been separated, while keeping the ultimate focus on the safety and well-being of the children served.¹⁵ Five of the most successful strategies used by Kentucky's Department of Community Based Services to reduce out-of-home placements include Intensive Family Preservation Services, Family Reunification Services, Family Preservation Services, Families and Children Together Safely and the Diversion Program.¹⁶

Kentucky's family preservation programs were provided by the following agencies in 2007:

Audubon Area Community Services
 Bluegrass Regional MH/MR
 Boys' Haven
 Brighton Center
 Brooklawn Child and Family Services
 Buckhorn Kentucky River FPP
 Buckhorn of Big Sandy
 Buckhorn, Cumberland Valley
 Buckhorn, Lake Cumberland
 Central Kentucky Community Action
 Children's Home of Northern Kentucky
 Community Action of Southern Kentucky
 Croney & Clark
 Home of the Innocents
 Foothills C.A.P.
 Licking Valley C.A.P.
 Pathways, Inc.
 Pennyriple Allied Community Services
 Seven Counties Services

Source: Cabinet for Health and Family Services Family Preservation Program Evaluation, 2008

At least one of these programs is available in every county. They are operated by local nonprofit organizations that contract with the state. Regional Department of Community Based Services offices make the referrals. Family preservation programs are available to families who are at imminent risk of having their children removed and to families whose

children are returning from out-of-home care. The families who participate in the family preservation programs are often at greater risk than other children who have been referred to the child welfare system. These risks include domestic violence and lower incomes. The Cabinet found that more than 2,400 families did not have access to family preservation programs and that reunification services were needed by more than 1,700 children in FY 2006.¹⁷ African American children are particularly underserved by family preservation services at the end of their stay in out-of-home care.¹⁸

The services are initiated within 96 hours of a child abuse or neglect referral, and are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. A range of services are available for families of varying risk levels including participation in school-based meetings, case management, intensive in-home services, accessing community resources, and assistance with necessities such as rent or utilities.¹⁹ Duration of services range from 4 to 27 weeks based on the intensity of treatment and families' needs. The weekly contact also ranges from 3 to 10 hours of direct care which could include parental education and capacity building. Longer service periods have been associated

with better progress and prevention of out-of-home placement.²⁰

Benefits for Kentucky's Families

Family preservation programs significantly reduce entry into out-of-home placements, speed reunification and promote family well-being.²¹ According to a 2008 evaluation of family preservation programs in Kentucky, only 6 percent of all children and families served had a stay in an out-of-home placement that began after the preservation services. This is compared to 33 percent of children with substantiated referrals that did not receive preservation services. Children who received reunification services were significantly more likely to be reunified with their families than those in care who did not receive reunification services (77 percent compared to 54 percent).²²

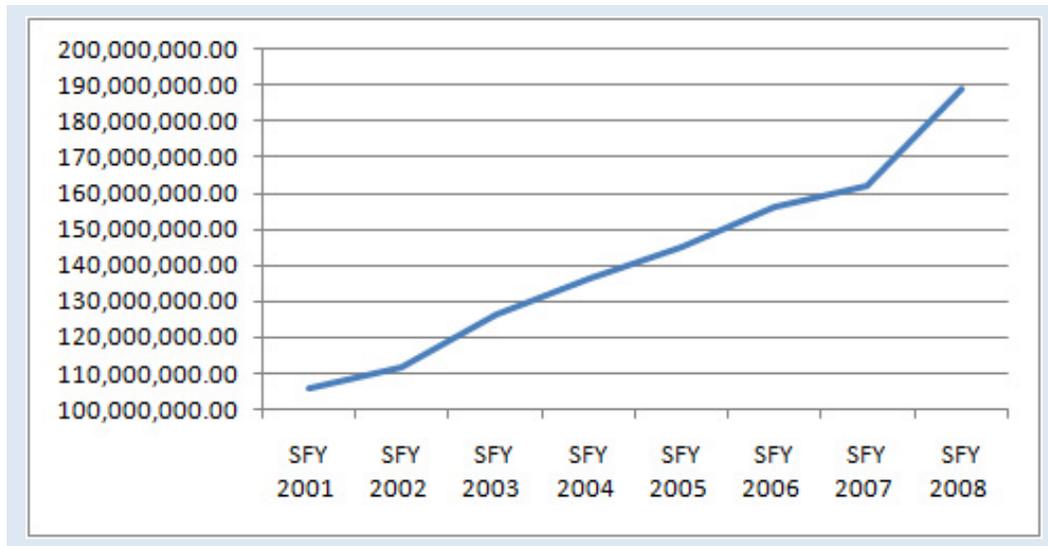
Families reported learning new skills to manage their homes and families and that the services helped their families. The families cited improved family functioning, help with treating drug and alcohol issues, and improved self-esteem. Only 3 percent of families completing family preservation

Kentucky's Family Preservation Programs

Types of Family Preservation Programs	Duration of Services	Intensity	Funding
Intensive Family Preservation Services	Average 4-6 weeks	8-10 hrs per week	State General Funds and Federal
Family Reunification Services	Average 6-17 weeks	3-8 hrs per week	Federal
Family Preservation Services	Average 4-27 weeks	3-8 hrs per week	Federal
Families and Children Together Safely	Average 4-27 weeks	3-8 hrs per week	Social Services Block Grant; 80% State and 20% Federal
Diversion Program	Average 16-24 weeks	5-10 hrs per week	Federal-TANF

Source: Kentucky Department of Community Based Services. 2009. *Diversion Program Evaluation*.

Kentucky's Costs for Out-of-Home Placements Have Increased 78% since 2001



Source: Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services.

services had a subsequent substantiated referral within 6 months of ending services, compared to 7 percent of families not served by a family preservation program.²³

Families also reported satisfaction with the services they received with a great majority stating that their worker treated them with respect. The families also said that they would recommend the service to others and that they would use the skills they learned with their families. Family preservation workers also agreed that more services should be available to families.

Financial Impact on Kentucky

In the United States, the total estimated costs of child abuse and neglect were nearly \$104 billion in 2007.²⁴ Direct costs exceeded \$33 billion for services such as hospitalization and court proceedings; additional indirect costs occur for services such as special education, mental health treatment for adults who were victimized as children, and the criminal justice system.²⁵

The total expense for family preservation services in Kentucky for fiscal year 2007 was \$6,139,414. In 2007, the average cost to provide family preservation services to one family was \$4,564 compared to \$21,282 for one child to be placed in out-of-home care for nine months. Therefore, the program is a cost effective way to both prevent future abuse and to assist families and youth involved with Child Protective Services.

Family preservation services provide a dramatic cost savings to the state over the more traditional method of placing children outside the home. For every dollar spent on family preservation services, up to \$2.85 is saved on out-of-home placement costs. Family preservation programs in 2007 helped Kentucky avoid spending at least \$17.5 million dollars in out-of-care costs such as staff, court hearings, mental health care, and supports to foster care parents. These savings are immediate. Children and families who receive these services are also more likely to maintain employment, avoid welfare, and become productive working adults, thus greatly increasing the long-term return on investment.

Recommendations

Avoid state budget cuts to this cost effective prevention program

State budget shortfalls have led to cuts in family preservation programs.²⁶ Cutting prevention programs like family preservation services often seems a likely place to decrease the overwhelming budget deficit. Although in this instance, as funding to these programs is reduced, out-of-home care expenses increase. For every dollar spent on family preservation services, Kentucky avoids spending \$2.85, which is a significant budgetary saving.

Expand access to all families who are appropriate candidates for the service

Kentucky's 2008 evaluation found significant unmet needs for family preservation services. Given the cost savings associated with these programs, it is recommended that Kentucky expand family

preservation services to additional eligible families. Specific areas in need of program expansion include ensuring that children of color and their families are offered family preservation services as often as their white counterparts; ensuring family preservation services are equally available to all regions of the state; and utilizing family preservation services to stabilize adoptive placements and relative placements.

Offer families preservation services for longer periods of time

While this program has been found to significantly improve child safety and decrease the use of out-of-home placements, 32 percent of families receiving family preservation services still struggled with significant weaknesses at case closure.²⁷ These families would be helped most efficiently by continuing their family preservation services, rather than closing the case and possibly needing to reopen it later during another family crisis.

Endnotes

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County-Level Data on Out-of-Home Care and Family Preservation

County	Number of Children in Out-of-home Care		Percent Change	Number of Children Exiting Out-of-home Care		Number of Children Reunified with Parent or Primary Caretaker		Number of Children in Abuse or Neglect Investigations	Number of Families Served by Family Preservation Services +
	2003	2008		2003-2008	2003	2008	2003		
Kentucky	11,387	12,397	9	5,284	5,294	2,770	2,567	46,447	2,330
Adair	29	27	0	20	4	13	3	158	2
Allen	27	45	67	7	25	6	8	183	2
Anderson	35	57	57	24	26	16	8	187	18
Ballard	12	15	29	4	4	1	2	21	1
Barren	178	114	-37	90	69	44	42	853	34
Bath	21	52	125	10	14	3	7	220	7
Bell	52	55	13	36	20	15	8	488	23
Boone	54	54	0	29	21	10	10	536	27
Bourbon	52	53	9	16	24	8	9	178	4
Boyd	198	357	84	45	155	22	65	1,275	20
Boyle	95	105	13	58	54	37	29	362	9
Bracken	21	23	10	6	14	5	4	112	9
Breathitt	21	16	-17	14	7	6	4	387	10
Breckinridge	39	81	100	18	38	8	18	164	8
Bullitt	90	138	60	65	48	34	32	393	5
Butler	52	43	-6	20	24	11	5	118	15
Caldwell	18	9	-57	15	3	6	2	44	9
Calloway	77	79	0	41	40	17	21	198	8
Campbell	505	464	0	89	159	11	24	463	31
Carlisle	3	7	*	4	4	2	3	72	3
Carroll	16	16	0	2	12	0	8	122	6
Carter	95	99	0	44	25	31	15	664	30
Casey	18	9	-60	12	5	7	5	155	12
Christian	138	121	-17	54	53	23	36	584	12
Clark	77	76	0	43	26	15	8	331	8
Clay	135	208	70	84	100	47	64	645	16
Clinton	67	30	-56	25	16	9	5	183	1
Crittenden	16	12	-25	9	2	6	0	107	3
Cumberland	1	0	*	0	0	0	0	39	5
Daviess	329	339	7	177	172	87	83	1,137	80
Edmonson	29	50	73	18	28	14	11	126	1
Elliott	22	24	23	15	4	12	3	179	14
Estill	84	50	-42	50	13	29	4	191	12
Fayette	833	1,022	14	322	379	135	170	2,619	135
Fleming	55	69	33	22	31	13	11	213	15
Floyd	46	68	40	34	33	22	19	1,171	4
Franklin	144	83	-38	100	41	64	22	392	46
Fulton	39	25	-27	16	15	5	10	70	1
Gallatin	7	16	133	3	8	3	7	59	4
Garrard	25	80	200	15	42	9	19	193	48

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	2003	2008		2003-2008	2003	2008	2003		
Grant	50	30	-43	29	7	10	5	180	5
Graves	120	169	46	35	66	13	20	271	7
Grayson	48	226	375	19	54	13	29	202	19
Green	20	17	-13	16	13	9	13	141	8
Greenup	44	132	240	18	61	2	26	421	21
Hancock	16	8	-43	5	2	1	0	62	2
Hardin	322	333	8	99	134	41	75	786	43
Harlan	84	153	100	32	54	11	13	441	8
Harrison	24	9	-60	12	4	3	3	120	19
Hart	29	51	71	16	12	10	8	179	6
Henderson	114	117	0	56	50	24	23	409	32
Henry	10	22	100	1	11	0	7	173	27
Hickman	8	11	57	5	5	2	3	25	4
Hopkins	115	79	-27	53	37	31	26	329	10
Jackson	47	48	7	27	38	17	15	160	6
Jefferson	1,556	1,777	11	764	713	358	308	6,391	354
Jessamine	116	113	-9	64	46	41	29	446	32
Johnson	303	145	-52	107	70	60	17	899	15
Kenton	420	493	9	232	224	128	134	1,478	91
Knott	31	48	63	18	15	10	1	430	17
Knox	86	99	9	56	49	31	31	372	24
Larue	11	34	175	9	17	5	9	230	16
Laurel	278	271	-5	132	156	89	91	846	18
Lawrence	43	65	64	23	28	21	15	282	20
Lee	23	12	-43	12	7	5	6	107	3
Leslie	47	43	6	27	20	20	18	234	15
Letcher	114	85	-19	31	49	8	17	578	16
Lewis	18	27	33	9	7	6	3	159	17
Lincoln	106	64	-35	57	31	42	10	277	24
Livingston	20	10	-50	14	2	7	0	74	5
Logan	65	73	10	39	41	23	22	177	5
Lyon	14	24	82	9	13	6	7	118	0
McCracken	185	207	8	68	86	34	44	465	12
McCreary	119	80	-27	83	29	53	18	245	6
McLean	29	12	-50	17	8	5	1	103	9
Madison	203	234	8	58	85	33	34	787	62
Magoffin	25	92	314	19	32	3	22	363	10
Marion	62	68	7	20	28	13	14	184	19
Marshall	71	72	9	21	22	6	8	174	10
Martin	23	62	214	11	23	9	9	511	22
Mason	39	24	-40	23	12	21	4	252	25

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	2003	2008		2003-2008	2003	2008	2003		
Meade	47	54	33	34	28	27	20	219	14
Menifee	27	29	18	11	20	7	5	125	7
Mercer	78	56	-27	37	40	18	22	221	7
Metcalfe	18	23	43	14	10	6	5	130	7
Monroe	20	32	63	6	8	4	3	114	2
Montgomery	39	48	14	19	27	6	16	439	11
Morgan	36	28	-17	12	13	8	3	187	4
Muhlenberg	59	53	0	52	18	41	11	142	16
Nelson	30	42	33	24	19	15	9	173	28
Nicholas	5	8	*	8	6	5	2	46	0
Ohio	97	88	-11	54	38	20	18	204	5
Oldham	46	67	25	17	30	12	17	251	29
Owen	11	7	-25	5	5	5	3	91	1
Owsley	4	43	*	3	14	2	9	251	0
Pendleton	49	25	-42	32	10	20	4	114	4
Perry	139	179	30	61	66	40	39	804	30
Pike	78	111	60	37	62	19	38	1,251	20
Powell	30	36	22	25	8	18	3	175	15
Pulaski	362	164	-56	170	81	106	55	769	21
Robertson	9	0	*	1	0	1	0	0	4
Rockcastle	110	70	-32	50	27	33	15	214	12
Rowan	74	118	53	42	45	37	31	440	46
Russell	53	28	-50	25	17	14	5	207	3
Scott	80	111	13	36	54	28	32	317	29
Shelby	194	159	-32	87	81	38	27	444	34
Simpson	41	61	50	14	28	8	8	152	4
Spencer	9	27	200	8	16	3	6	80	16
Taylor	72	56	-21	38	36	23	21	305	19
Todd	18	28	50	4	9	2	2	82	2
Trigg	19	20	0	9	8	5	4	62	14
Trimble	14	20	50	8	12	3	2	102	5
Union	13	32	200	8	11	5	5	130	7
Warren	357	477	19	148	183	62	99	819	60
Washington	18	17	-14	15	13	11	8	327	14
Wayne	17	37	167	12	17	9	11	303	33
Webster	20	8	-50	11	1	3	0	104	9
Whitley	217	129	-39	124	75	67	51	586	16
Wolfe	35	29	-20	11	11	5	5	230	0
Woodford	29	47	60	10	28	4	11	164	20

+ Includes duplicate families who received services more than once and 243 families that received assessments only.

* Rates were not calculated for counties with fewer than 6 occurrences.

Source: Cabinet for Health and Family Services, February and August 2009.