National Capital Region

Annual Report on Foster Care
2012

METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON
Council of Governments

ABOUT THE REPORT

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) is a regional organization of Washington area local governments. COG is composed of 22 local governments surrounding our nation's capital, plus area members of the Maryland and Virginia legislatures, the U.S. Senate, and the U.S. House of Representatives.

Each year COG surveys child welfare systems in the National Capital Region. The purpose of the annual survey and report is to educate the media, general public, and other important stakeholders, of recent trends occurring in the region's foster care systems.

The members of COG that participate in this regional survey and report are the District of Columbia, Frederick, Montgomery, Prince George's and Charles Counties in Maryland, and Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun, Prince William Counties, and the City of Alexandria in Virginia. Foster care data on the following independent cities, who are also members of COG, are included in the report within their county's data: the Cities of Bowie, College Park, Gaithersburg, Greenbelt, and Takoma Park in Maryland, and the Cities of Fairfax, Falls Church, Manassas and Manassas Park in Virginia.

This report is intended as an educational tool to inform those who may be unfamiliar with the foster care system, and update those who are. The desired outcome is that readers of this report will become more involved in the foster care system as advocates for vulnerable children and families in our communities.

The 2012 survey focused on the following aspects of child welfare/foster care in the region:
- Family Preservation and Diversion
- Child Protective Services
- Children in Foster Care, Entries and Point in Time
- Placements
- Permanency
- National Youth in Transition Data

The regional findings of the 2012 survey included:
- Over 1,300 children were diverted from entering foster care.
- The number of kids in foster care declined 28%, as compared to 4 years ago.
- Half of the children in foster care were placed in family foster homes.
- Child protective services investigated 21,819 hotline calls.
- More children entered foster care than exited the system during 2012[1].
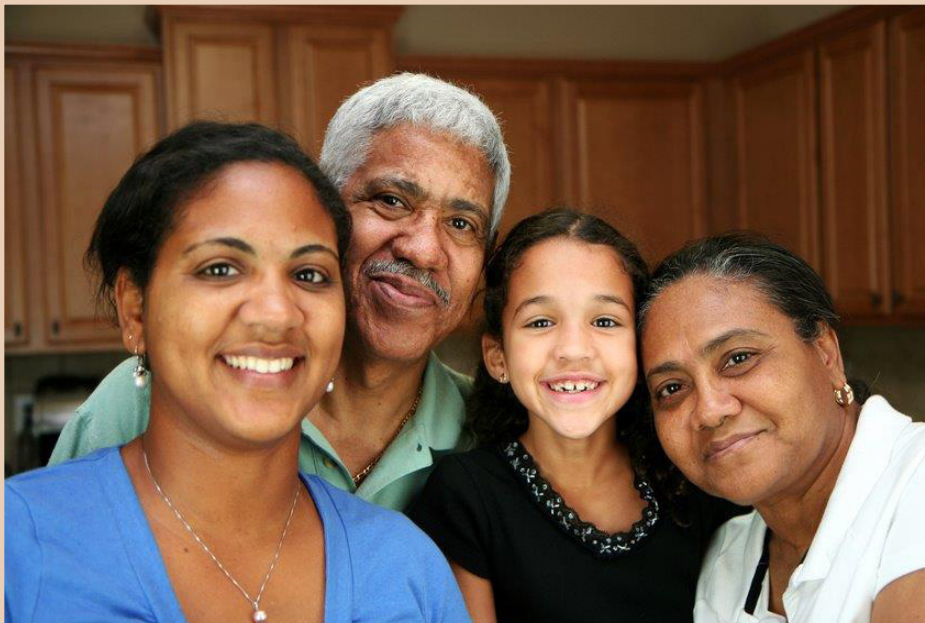- Nineteen children, age 16 or older, were adopted in 2012.

[1] Entries can include re-entries into the system and exits refer to children who find permanent homes (reunification, guardianship, or adoption) not those who age out of the system.

FAMILY PRESERVATION AND DIVERSION
Goal: Sustaining family connections whenever safe, appropriate, and possible

Families come to the attention of the foster care system when child abuse or neglect is suspected. In the course of an assessment or investigation, child welfare agencies may decide they must remove a child to keep him or her safe.

Sometimes reports of suspected child abuse and neglect may be unsubstantiated completely, or if there is some concern of safety or risk, the family may receive support services while the child remains in the birth home. This practice is called Family Preservation.

The national US Health and Human Services definition of Family Preservation states that "(preservation) services are short-term, family-based services designed to assist families in crisis by improving parenting and family functioning while keeping children safe (and in the birth home)."[2] Preservation services may be directly provided by the foster care system, but more often services are offered by private providers in the community.

In the National Capital Region a number of Family Preservation Services are provided to families in crisis. These services include, but are not limited to: shelter care, food assistance, transportation and day care vouchers, mental health assessments and therapy, workforce training, and parenting classes.

When low-risk cases come to the attention of social services, there are many fiscal benefits to sustaining a family connection through Family Preservation services. Savings in foster care placements, and case management are significant, but it is also important to note that the emotional and psychological toll of removing a child from their birth home is avoided.

In addition to family preservation, the technique of diversion is another practice to place children with qualified relatives or fictive kin, rather than foster care. In contrast to family preservation cases, diverted cases are severe enough to constitute removal, but instead of removing a child from his/her birth home, some other major intervention or placement arrangement is secured, usually with a relative or fictive kin. In the National Capital Region during 2012, over 1,300 children were diverted from entering the system.

> *Over* **1,300** children were diverted from **entering** *foster care.*

[2] US department of Health and Human Services, Administration of Children and Families, Child Welfare Information Gateway website: https://www.childwelfare.gov/supporting/preservation/

Here is an example of an actual diversion success story from Fairfax County, VA:

"A mother with three young boys became involved with the department due to concerns stemming from untreated mental health and substance abuse issues. Because of unsafe conditions in the home, a Family Partnership Meeting was convened to determine the best arrangement for the children and to avoid placement into foster care. The biological father was initially identified as a placement option, but due to his being stationed overseas, an alternative care arrangement had to be identified. At this point, the maternal grandmother decided that she would provide care for the boys, with the goal of returning them to their mother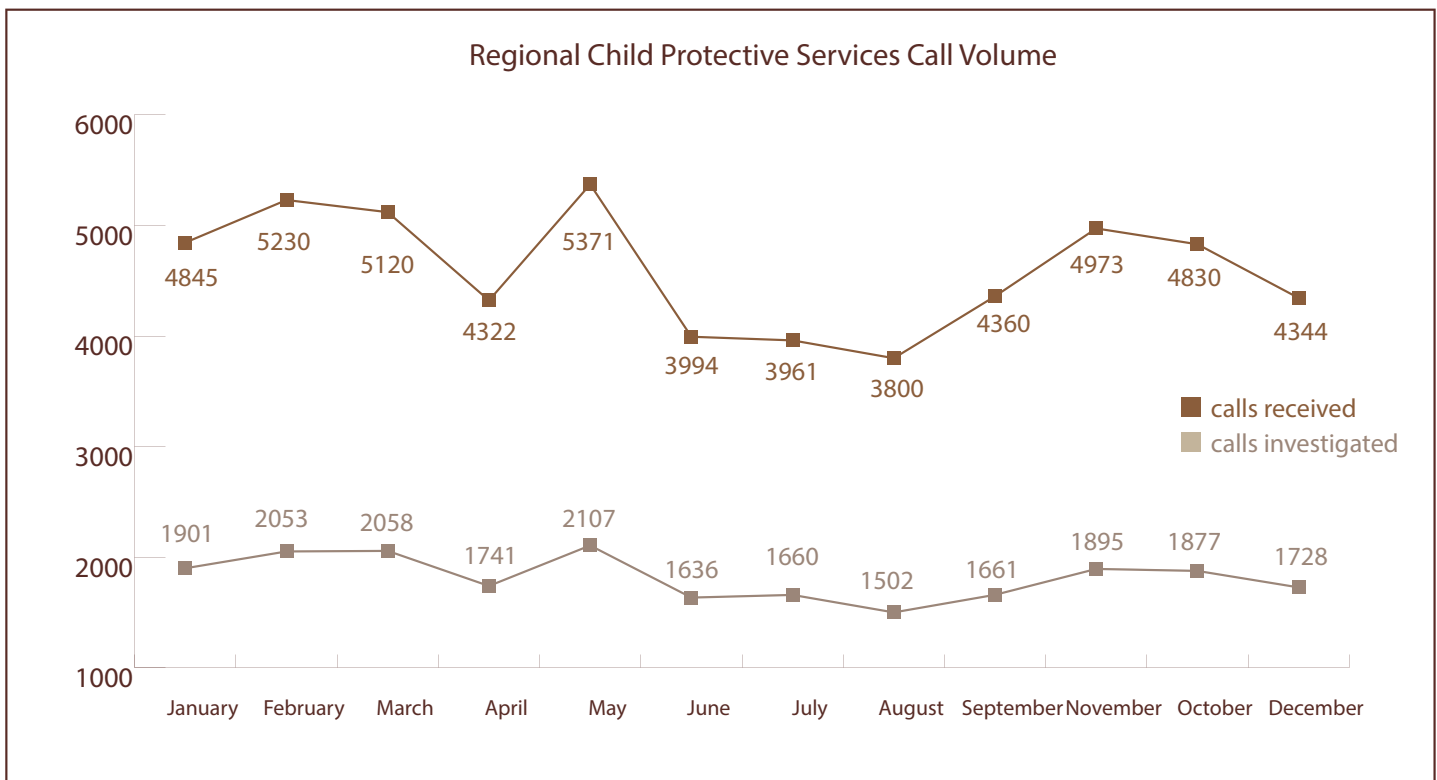. Supportive services were put in place to help manage the needs of the children. While the boys lived with the grandmother, the mother's progress in addressing her issues slowed. While it was difficult for the grandmother to accept the long-term reality of her daughter's condition, eventually the grandmother decided that petitioning the court for legal custody of the children was the best way to provide the stability the children needed. The court awarded the grandmother legal custody. The boys now enjoy visits with the father when he comes from overseas. Today, the active boys are enrolled in school and enjoy activities such as swimming and martial arts."

> " The court awarded the **grandmother** legal custody. "

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CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES
Goal: Recognizing the need for community intervention

Many calls alleging child abuse and neglect in our region are made by mandated reporters, especially school officials and daycare providers.   This is why there is a spike in calls and investigations during the school year, and lower call volume during the summer months. It is important to note that there is a tendency for school officials to increase reporting prior to summer break. Anecdotally, the May surge has been attributed to school officials' understanding that some of their students, those of particular concern during the school year, may not be monitored as closely in the summer.

In aggregate, Child Protective Services (CPS) in the National Capital Region received a total of 55,1501[3] calls alleging child abuse or neglect in 2012, and 21,819 of these calls were validated for further investigation. Calls that did not meet the CPS threshold or state or local policy were referred to other appropriate resources.

Regional Child Protective Services Call Volume

Calls received: January 4845, February 5230, March 5120, April 4322, May 5371, June 3994, July 3961, August 3800, September 4360, November 4973, October 4830, December 4344

Calls investigated: January 1901, February 2053, March 2058, April 1741, May 2107, June 1636, July 1660, August 1502, September 1661, November 1895, October 1877, December 1728
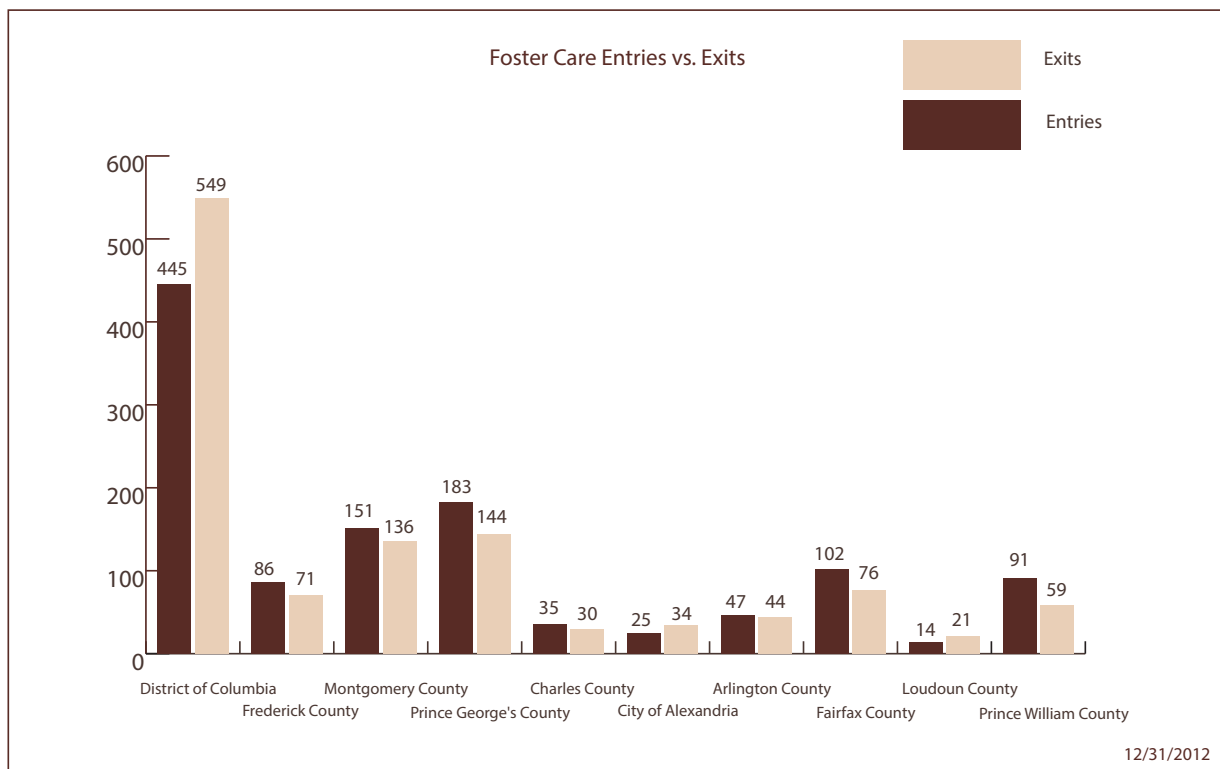
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[3] For the number of calls received, multiple calls on the same case are each counted. Double counting does occur.

CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE - ENTRIES

Goal: Providing a temporary safe haven to victims of child abuse, neglect or abandonment

Children enter the foster care system when child welfare decides the risk is too high to leave a child at home and a court agrees with that decision. While a child is temporarily in foster care, enormous efforts are made to identify a permanent placement for the child as expeditiously and safely as possible. The practice of concurrent planning, attempting to reunify a child, while working on alternative permanency options, like adoption or guardianship with a relative or fictive kin[4], have been utilized by jurisdictions in the region. Although concurrent planning is not federally mandated, but rather encouraged in the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 and financially incentivized (via guardianship) in the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, the technique is embraced by all jurisdictions in the region.

Concurrent planning can be controversial because it recruits several permanent placement options for the child at once. It places the emotional onus on the adults in the foster child's life to provide a safe haven for an unspecified amount of time[5]. The adult placement providers must grow to understand that reunification, guardianship or adoption may occur at any time. The chart below shows a contrast of entries, and exits of children in foster care in 2012. Collectively there were 1,179 entries into foster care, and 1,164 exits from foster care.[6] The number of exits include all permanency categories: 647 Reunifications (56%), 260 Guardianships[7] (22%), and 257 Adoptions (22%).

Foster Care Entries vs. Exits — Exits, Entries

Jurisdiction	Entries	Exits
District of Columbia	445	549
Frederick County	86	71
Montgomery County	151	136
Prince George's County	183	144
Charles County	35	30
City of Alexandria	25	34
Arlington County	47	44
Fairfax County	102	76
Loudoun County	14	21
Prince William County	91	59

12/31/2012

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[4] Fictive kin are family friends or adult acquaintances of the child that are not related to the family.

[5] The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 requires that children who have been in foster care for 15 of the most recent twenty two months, the state must file a petition to terminate parental rights unless certain exceptions apply. A legal adoption cannot occur unless a termination of parental rights is granted.

[6] Entries can include re-entries into the system and exits refer to children who find permanent homes (reunification, guardianship, or adoption) not those who age out of the system.

[7] Virginia does not offer subsidized guardianship.
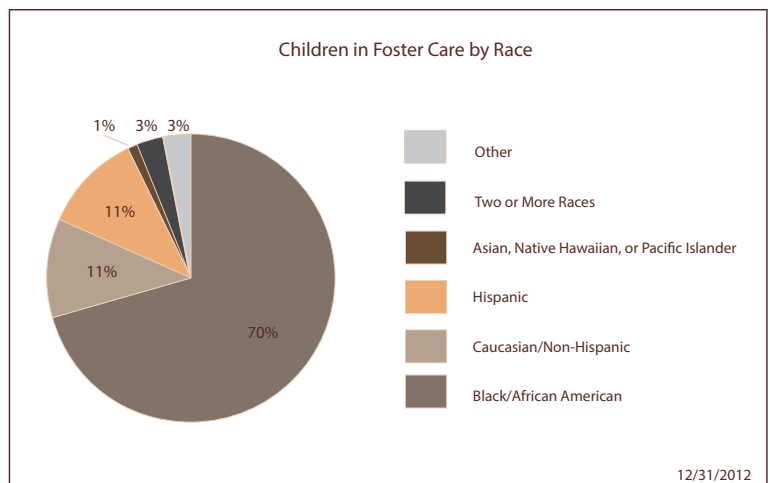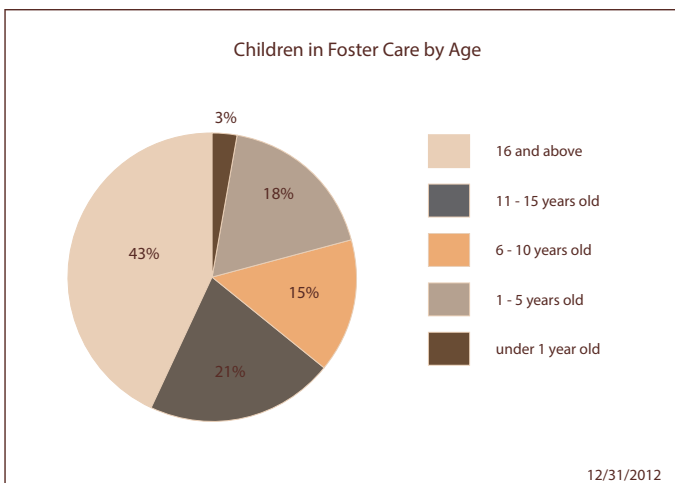
CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE – POINT IN TIME

Goal: Providing a temporary safe haven to victims of child abuse, neglect or abandonment

CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE (12/31)	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
District of Columbia	2264	2103	2007	1744	1430
Frederick County	140	175	157	142	148
Montgomery County	575	546	516	498	433
Prince George's County	608	599	592	595	593
Charles County	106	113	110	105	95
City of Alexandria	181	167	126	126	97
Arlington County	147	133	115	101	87
Fairfax County	394	370	337	326	289
Loudoun County	87	97	83	64	51
Prince William County	99	91	110	115	126
Total	**4601**	**4394**	**4153**	**3816**	**3349**

Across the country, the number of children in foster care is declining. As a region, 1,252 fewer children were in foster care on the last day of the year in 2012 than in 2008; this is a 28% decline in children served in foster care as compared to 4 years ago.

The demographics of children in foster care closely resemble national data findings. More than half (64%) of all children in foster care in our region are at least eleven years old, and almost all are children of color (84%), African-American, Hispanic or Biracial.

> " The **number** of **kids** in *foster care* **declined** **28%**, as compared to **4** yrs ago "

Children in Foster Care by Age

- 16 and above — 43%
- 11 - 15 years old — 18%
- 6 - 10 years old — 15%
- 1 - 5 years old — 21%
- under 1 year old — 3%

12/31/2012

Children in Foster Care by Race

- Other — 3%
- Two or More Races — 3%
- Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander — 1%
- Hispanic — 11%
- Caucasian/Non-Hispanic — 11%
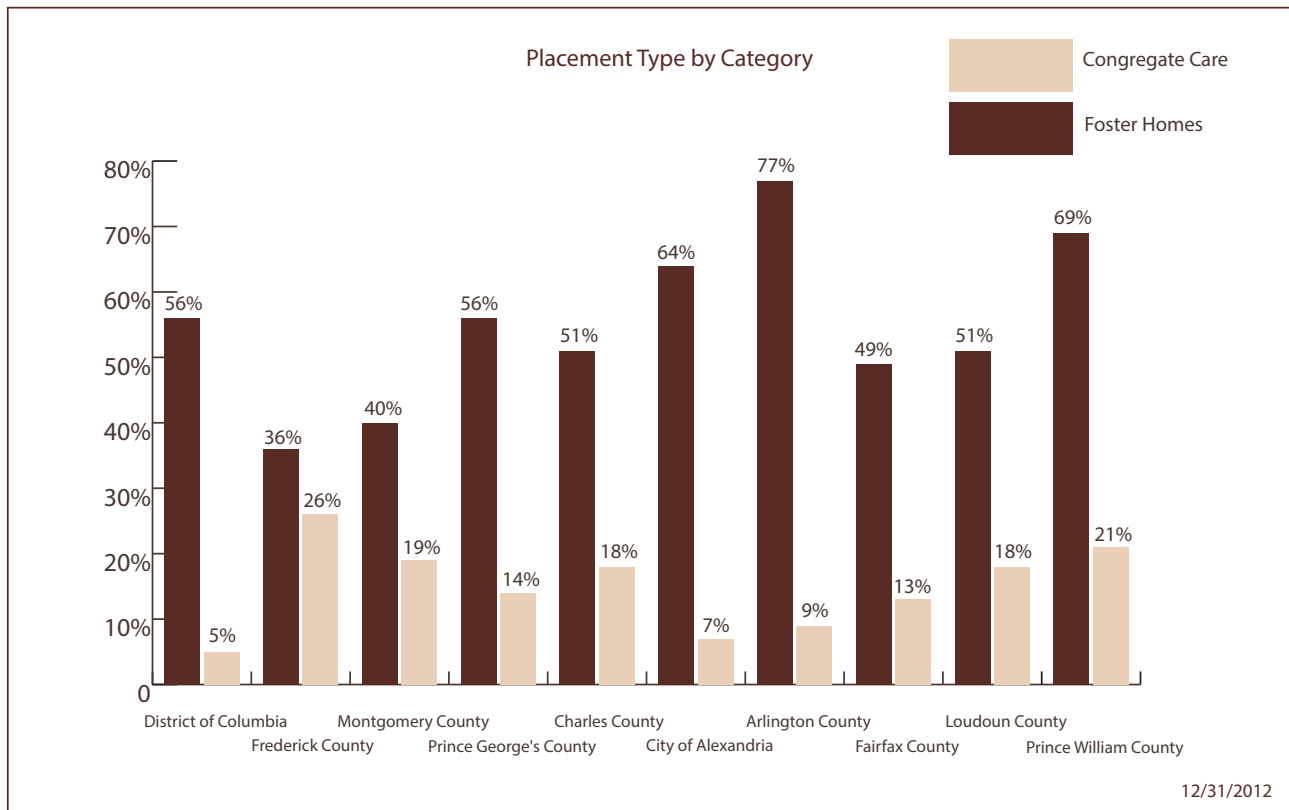- Black/African American — 70%

12/31/2012

PLACEMENTS
Goal: Recruiting and retaining safe homes to receive children at a moment's notice.

On December 31, 2012, 3,349 children were in foster care. Children in foster care who have experienced major trauma, and those with special needs, are often living in therapeutic settings. Many jurisdictions in the region contract with private providers to recruit, retain, and supervise the placement of children needing a more therapeutic setting such as: a group home or residential treatment center. However, the ideal is for all children to eventually be placed in family foster homes rather than congregate care settings.

Agencies in the region continue to strive to decrease the number of children placed in congregate care. On average, half of the children in foster care were living in foster homes[8], while 1 in 10 children were living in congregate care settings on 12/31/2012.

Placement Type by Category — Congregate Care / Foster Homes

District of Columbia: 56%, 5%; Frederick County: 36%, 26%; Montgomery County: 40%, 19%; Prince George's County: 56%, 14%; Charles County: 51%, 18%; City of Alexandria: 64%, 7%; Arlington County: 77%, 9%; Fairfax County: 49%, 13%; Loudoun County: 51%, 18%; Prince William County: 69%, 21%

12/31/2012

Many children in foster care are placed outside of their neighborhoods of origin. There are many rational reasons for this. For instance, the child may be placed with a relative who lives in another county or in a pre-adoptive placement. It is also true that some children are placed in residential centers or group homes several hours away in places such as: Richmond or Baltimore.

The 2012 survey found that the changing demographic in some counties in the region due to gentrification has also contributed to the distant placement of children in foster care. Additional multi-family units, like condominiums and efficiency-style housing, being built in areas

> 1/2 of the **children** in *foster care* were placed in **family foster** homes.

[8] "Foster Homes" calculations combine point in time percentages of agency foster homes and private foster homes, and then take the average of these data points. This calculation excludes children placed in relative homes or pre-adoptive homes on the last day of the year.

that were once dominated by single-family housing has created a local recruitment conundrum. Identifying prospective parents in a certain geographic area with (a) bedroom space for a child, and (b) the skills and desire to parent the older population of children in foster care has become a challenge.

| | Geographic Placement of Children in Foster Care (12/31/12) | | | |
| | Inside Jurisdiction | | Outside Jurisdiction | |
JURISDICTION	**With Relative**	**Without Relative**	**With Relative**	**Without Relative**
District of Columbia	9%	32%	8%	51%
Frederick County	20%	45%	4%	31%
Montgomery County	19%	36%	8%	36%
Prince George's County	12%	58%	2%	28%
Charles County	18%	48%	8%	26%
City of Alexandria	0%	17%	0%	83%
Arlington County	0%	27%	1%	72%
Fairfax County	5%	54%	2%	39%
Loudoun County	12%	45%	2%	41%
Prince William County	0%	94%	6%	0%

Recruiters have used unique tools to counteract this trend. For instance, Arlington County has begun recruiting door to door, literally. Recruiters place door hangers in specific neighborhoods with a message inviting members of that community to consider fostering children from that community. Frederick and Charles Counties in Maryland have targeted certain zip codes in their area with single family homes to send direct mail campaigns through ValPak.

Using these techniques as well as Wednesday's Child, Adopt Us Kids, faith-based outreach, and traditional outreach at large events such as the Adoption Expo have resulted in 1,292 prospective parents taking the first step (attending an information meeting) to become foster parents or adopt in 2012. On the last day of the year, the region had 2,103 licensed agency foster homes[9].

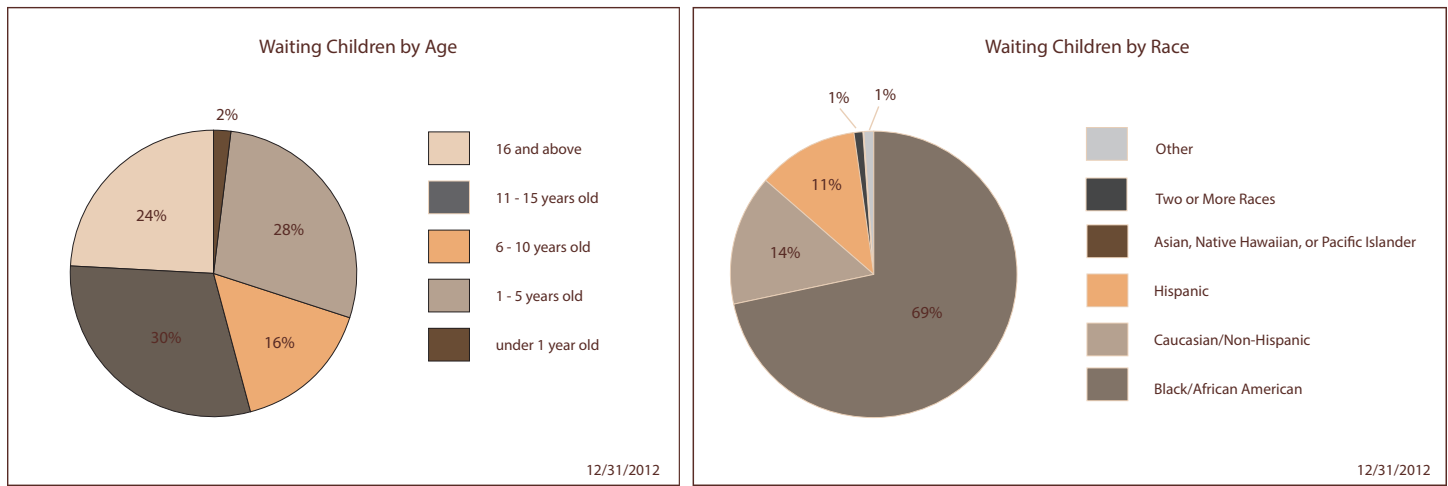| **RESOURCE HOMES**	**Recruited 2012**	**Total Licensed 12/31/2012**
District of Columbia	275	1154
Frederick County	44	77
Montgomery County	142	242
Prince George's County	347	167
Charles County	73	68
City of Alexandria	58	46
Arlington County	12	39
Fairfax County	277	143
Loudoun County	37	80
Prince William County	28	87
Total	**1293**	**2103**

[9] Agency foster homes are homes recruited, trained and licensed by the child welfare agencies – not purchased privately.

PERMANENCY
Goal: Reunification, guardianship or adoption

The ultimate goal of foster care is to secure a safe, permanent home for each child who comes to the attention of child protective services, and ultimately enters foster care. Permanency may mean reunifying with their birth parents, guardianship or adoption.

Of the 3,349 children in foster care, 284 were awaiting adoption on 12/31/2012. It is critical to note that in 2008, 728 children were awaiting adoption; this is a 60% decline in the number of children awaiting adoption in 4 years. However, the demographics of those awaiting adoption has remained consistent over the year; the vast majority are African American children age 11 or older.
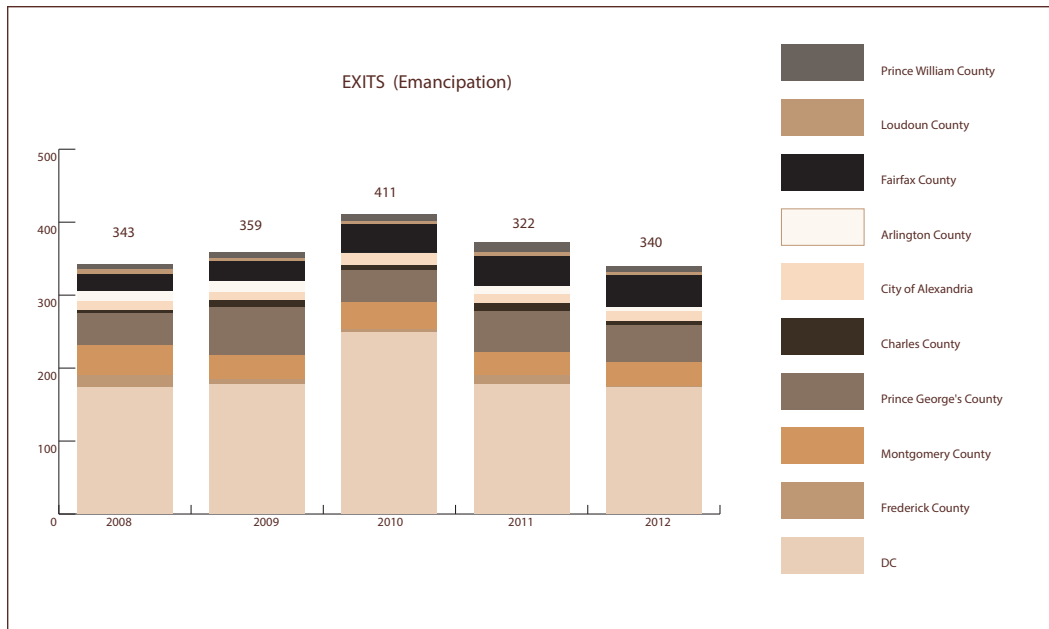

Waiting Children by Age
- 16 and above
- 11 - 15 years old
- 6 - 10 years old
- 1 - 5 years old
- under 1 year old

12/31/2012

Waiting Children by Race
- Other
- Two or More Races
- Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander
- Hispanic
- Caucasian/Non-Hispanic
- Black/African American

12/31/2012

The number of Adoptions has remained steady throughout the last four years with a variance under fifty year to year.

ADOPTIONS	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
District of Columbia	81	115	114	107	114
Frederick County	12	5	13	14	9
Montgomery County	46	51	31	43	23
Prince George's County	22	26	28	9	17
Charles County	10	14	11	21	14
City of Alexandria	29	36	35	9	21
Arlington County	12	9	6	8	14
Fairfax County	48	40	35	24	24
Loudoun County	9	10	21	14	12
Prince William County	4	11	8	6	9
Total	**273**	**317**	**302**	**255**	**257**

Although children awaiting adoption tend to be older and African American, younger children are more likely to be adopted. Over half of all adoptions in 2012 were of children from birth to five years old. Only 19 children, 16 years old or older, were adopted in 2012.

EMANCIPATION

Older teenagers, 16 years old or older, are more likely to land on the trajectory to age-out of foster care in the National Capital Region than to be adopted. Although jurisdictions attempt to identify lifelong connections or connect children with positive role models or relatives, it is common for children, at the age of 18 in Virginia[10] or 21 in DC and Maryland, to leave the foster care system without a permanent home. Over the last two years, we have seen fewer children emancipate from foster care. For those who do, aging out of foster care can adversely impact a young person's quality of life leading to homelessness, incarceration and unplanned pregnancies.

EXITS (Emancipation)

Year	Total
2008	343
2009	359
2010	411
2011	322
2012	340

Legend:
- Prince William County
- Loudoun County
- Fairfax County
- Arlington County
- City of Alexandria
- Charles County
- Prince George's County
- Montgomery County
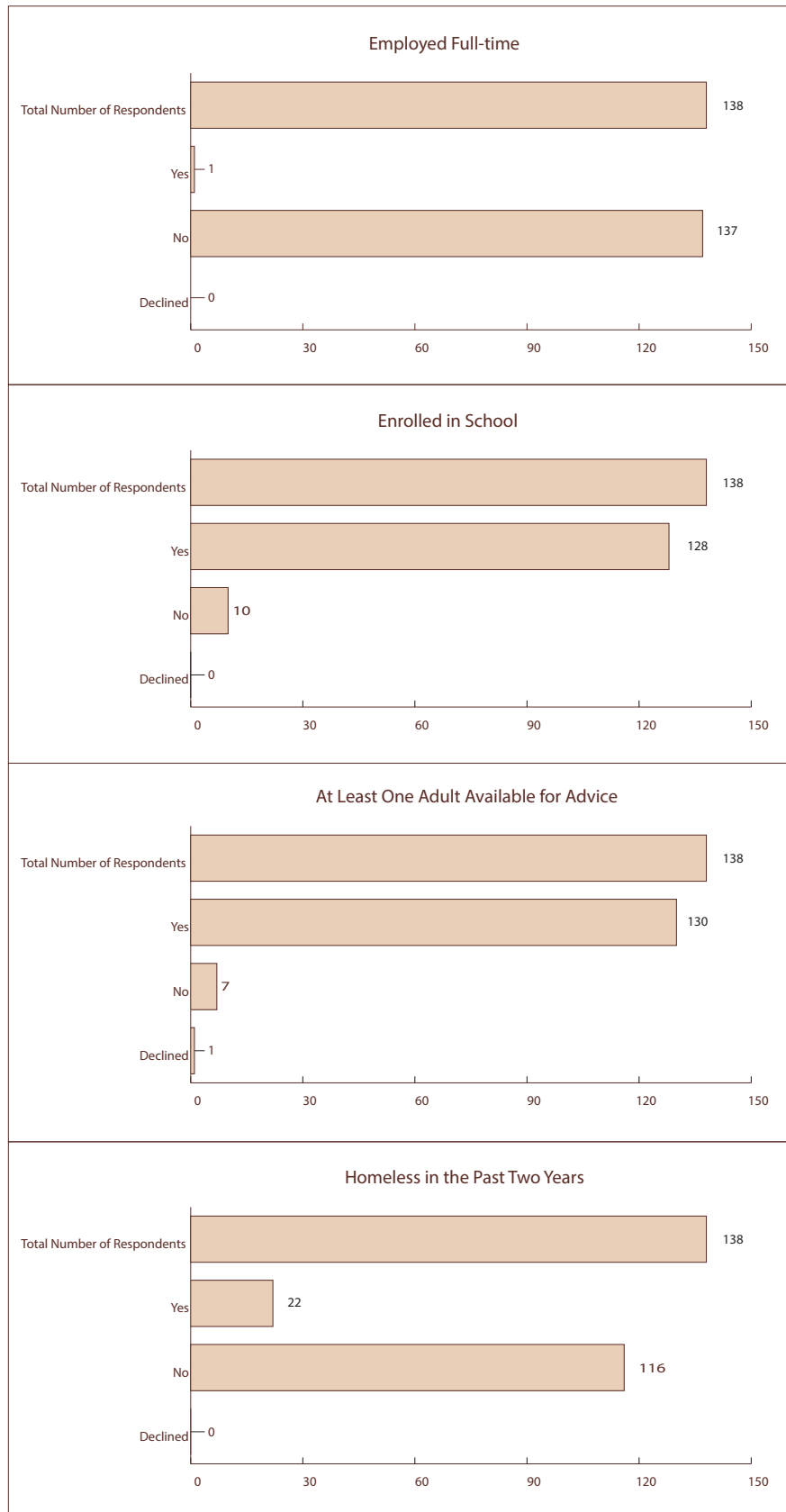- Frederick County
- DC

Tracking individual children once they age-out or emancipate from foster care has been a challenging process for child welfare agencies across the county. In 2008, the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) was established to assist States in data collection activities. NYTD provides a survey tool for states across the country to track independent living services and the educational, economic, and housing impact on youth who exit foster care without permanence.

COG will report on the survey results from the 2011 NYTD survey in this report, the 2012 NYTD survey in the 2013 report, and the 2013 NYTD survey in the 2014 report. Data is derived from the NYTD Survey, and will provide additional information on the outcome of children in the region who may emancipate from foster care.

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[10] Children in foster care in the state of Virginia may opt to exit the system at the age of 18 year old, but services may be provided until the age of 21.

NYTD SURVEY RESPONSES

2011 Submission[11]: Survey Of 17 Year Olds

Employed Full-time

Category	Value
Total Number of Respondents	138
Yes	1
No	137
Declined	0

Enrolled in School

Category	Value
Total Number of Respondents	138
Yes	128
No	10
Declined	0

At Least One Adult Available for Advice

Category	Value
Total Number of Respondents	138
Yes	130
No	7
Declined	1

Homeless in the Past Two Years

Category	Value
Total Number of Respondents	138
Yes	22
No	116
Declined	0

[11] Montgomery County and Charles County were unable to share the NTYD survey results from the 2011 submission.

For more information, please contact:

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