Kinship Care in Colorado:  
A Descriptive Study of 12 Counties

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Executive Summary

This report presents a descriptive study of kinship care conducted by the Social Work Research Center on behalf of the Applied Research in Child Welfare (ARCh) Project, which is a consortium of 12 Colorado counties including Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Broomfield, Denver, Douglas, El Paso, Jefferson, Larimer, Mesa, Pueblo, and Weld. The purpose of the study was to identify emergent trends to serve as points of emphasis for counties and the state of Colorado in developing policy and practice for kinship care. The study also was designed to inform an outcome study that will employ a matched case approach to analyze child welfare data from these 12 counties.

The sample for this study included all children from the 12 counties whose out-of-home placement started or ended at some time between January 1, 2002 and December 31, 2004. This represents roughly 90% of the kinship care and foster care population in Colorado during this time frame. Data were collected from case records entered into Trails, which is an online data management platform with analysis and reporting capabilities. Descriptive statistics were generated from the data and visual analyses of the results were interpreted and reported.

Overall, the findings were in alignment with past research on kinship care and the experiences of child welfare professionals in Colorado. There was a distinct trend toward Program Area 5 (PA5) and Program Area 6 (PA6) children being placed more in kinship care and less in foster care from 2002-2004 in the 12 counties. Furthermore, there was an increase in first placements in kinship care but no change in first placements in foster care for PA5 and PA6 children over the past three years. However, there was a sharp
decline in the number of paid kinship care placements in the 12 counties during the same time frame. Although the gender and ethnicity demographics were remarkably similar for all children in out-of-home care regardless of placement type or program area designation, children in kinship care were placed at a younger average age than were children in foster care.

There was a strong trend toward a shorter out-of-home length of stay for PA5 and Program Area 4 (PA4) children first placed in kinship care. There also was a trend toward a shorter per placement length of stay for all children in kinship care. However, PA5 and PA4 children first placed in kinship care experienced longer out-of-home length of stays than did PA5 and PA4 children first placed in foster care. Furthermore, children placed in kinship care experienced longer per placement length of stays than did children placed in foster care for all program areas. Finally, PA5 and PA6 children whose first placement was in kinship care had fewer total placements than did PA5 and PA6 children whose first placement was in foster care.

Although the implications of this descriptive study depend on how individual counties interpret the results, several recommendations for the policy and practice of kinship care in Colorado did emerge from the research. For Trails to be a more viable and reliable source of data on child welfare outcomes, the efficiency, accuracy, and transparency of data entry should be improved, and all essential data should be mandated for collection. Future research on this topic should utilize multiple data sources, follow children over time, and incorporate qualitative methods to explore the underlying dynamics of kinship care.
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INTRODUCTION

This report presents a descriptive study of kinship care conducted by the Social Work Research Center on behalf of the Applied Research in Child Welfare (ARCh) Project, which is a consortium of 12 Colorado counties including Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Broomfield, Denver, Douglas, El Paso, Jefferson, Larimer, Mesa, Pueblo, and Weld.

Overview

Kinship care is the formal, informal, or private placement of children with relatives rather than traditional foster parents. Formal kinship care is a legal arrangement in which the child welfare agency has custody of a child (Ayala-Quillen, 1998). In Colorado, kinship foster care is the designation given when kin caregivers are certified and kinship care is the designation given when kin caregivers are uncertified. Informal kinship care is when the child welfare agency facilitates the placement of a child but does not seek custody (Geen, 2000). Private kinship care is a voluntary arrangement between biological parents and family members without the involvement of the child welfare agency (Dubowitz, 1994).

Background

During the past 15 years, child welfare professionals have witnessed a rapid increase in the number of children removed from home and placed with relatives (Cuddeback, 2004). According to the most recent estimate from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), there were 121,030 children in the United States foster care system living with kin as of September 2003. The main reasons for the growth of this placement option include an influx of children into out-of-home
care (Berrick, 1998), a persistent shortage in foster care homes (Berrick, 1998), and a shift in federal policy toward treating kin as appropriate caregivers with all of the legal rights and responsibilities of foster parents (Leos-Urbel, Bess, & Geen, 2002).

Most states now look first to relatives (which often is broadly defined to include any adult with close family ties) when placing a child in out-of-home care (Geen, 2000). According to the mission statements from the 12 counties participating in the ARCh Project, kinship care is strongly valued as an out-of-home placement option because children are best served in the least restrictive environment and with family whenever possible. Although policies and practices on diligent search, assessment, certification, and service provision differ among the 12 counties, each county takes the approach that kinship care helps to maintain family relationships and cultural ties while providing children with the opportunity for safety, permanency, and well-being.

**Rationale**

Kinship care is a very complex topic that offers both opportunities and challenges for child welfare professionals and social work researchers (Cuddeback, 2004). Thus, this descriptive study is only the first step toward developing a better understanding and appreciation for the kinship care phenomenon in Colorado. With this research initiative, Colorado joins the “nationwide effort to examine the current status of kinship care to make recommendations to strengthen the policy and practice framework for this social work intervention” (Beeman, Wattenberg, Boisen, & Bullerdick, 1996, p. ii). The purpose of the study was to identify emergent trends to serve as points of emphasis for counties and the state of Colorado in developing policy and practice for kinship care.
METHODOLOGY

This descriptive study is intended to provide a cross-sectional snapshot of kinship care placements in the 12 participating Colorado counties from January 2002 to December 2004. This research also is designed to inform an outcome-based study that will employ a matched case approach to analyze child welfare data from these same counties.

Sample

The theoretical population for the study is all children placed in kinship or foster care in the United States. The accessible population is all children placed in kinship or foster care in Colorado. The selected sample is all children placed in kinship or foster care from the participating 12 Colorado counties. The actual sample consists of all children in these counties whose out-of-home placement ended or started at some time between January 1, 2002 and December 31, 2004.

The actual sample includes children with Program Area 4 (PA4) designations (i.e., children and youth who are beyond the control of their parents or guardians), Program Area 5 (PA5) designations (i.e., children whose physical, mental, or emotional well-being has been threatened or harmed due to abuse or neglect), and Program Area 6 (PA6) designations (i.e., children whose special needs are a barrier to their adoption). Appendix A of the report contains more detail on these different program areas. Although most of these children had founded allegations of abuse or neglect, this was not a requirement for inclusion in the sample. Overall, this sample represents roughly 90% of the kinship care and foster care population in Colorado during the time frame.
Data Collection

Data for this study were collected from case records entered into Trails, which is an online data management platform with analysis and reporting capabilities. The appropriate search terms and filters were used to obtain the actual sample and the corresponding out-of-home placement data. Appendix B of the report contains the definitions that guided the data collection for each descriptive outcome.

Data Analysis

To compare the placement characteristics of children in kinship care and foster care from 2002-2004 in the 12 counties, descriptive statistics and visual inspection of data were employed rather than tests of statistical significance. Specifically, percentages, medians, and means were used to compare children from different placement types and program areas on the selected outcomes. The results from each analysis were formatted into tables using Crystal Reports.
FINDINGS

Kinship Care Placement Summary

Program Areas 5 & 6

There was a distinct trend toward a greater percentage of PA5/PA6 children being placed in kinship care in the 12 counties between 2002-2004. As displayed in Figure 1, the percentage of PA5/PA6 children placed in kinship care increased from 26% in 2002 to 30% in 2003 to 33% in 2004 (Note: all figures display data for the 12 participating Colorado counties for the specified time frame). This trend also was seen in the statewide data, as the total percentage of PA5/PA6 children placed in kinship care increased from 25% to 32% during the same time frame. This finding was supported by a similar trend in the number of placements in kinship care over the past three years. For this outcome, children may be counted more than once if they were placed in an out-of-home care setting multiple times within the specified time frame. The percentage of total placements in kinship care for PA5/PA6 children increased from 18% in 2002 to 20% in 2003 to 23% in 2004. This trend also was seen in the statewide data, as the percentage of total placements in kinship care increased from 17% to 22% during the same time frame.

Figure 1

Percentage of PA5/PA6 and PA4 Children Placed in Kinship Care from 2002-2004
Another distinct trend for PA5/PA6 children in kinship care was the sharp decline in paid placements. As displayed in Figure 2, the percentage of paid kinship placements declined from 48% in 2002 to 32% in 2003 to 26% in 2004. This trend also was seen in the statewide data, as the percentage of paid kinship care placements declined from 50% to 30% during the same time frame.

**Figure 2**

*Percentage of Paid Kinship Care Placements for PA5/PA6 and PA4 Children from 2002-2004*

*Program Area 4*

As displayed in Figure 1, the percentage of PA4 children placed in kinship care in the 12 counties at any time between 2002-2004 remained constant at between 4% and 5%. This finding was supported by the lack of variability in the total number of placements in kinship care over the past three years. The percentage of total placements in kinship care for PA4 children was 2% in 2002, 3% in 2003, and 3% in 2004. Similar to the findings for the PA5/PA6 children, there was a sharp decrease in paid kinship placements for PA4 children over the past three years. As displayed in Figure 2, the percentage of paid kinship placements decreased from 53% in 2002 to 32% in 2003 to 28% in 2004.
Foster Care Placement Summary

Program Areas 5 & 6

There was a slight trend toward a smaller percentage of PA5/PA6 children being placed in foster care in the 12 counties between 2002-2004. As displayed in Figure 3, the percentage of children placed in foster care declined from 65% in 2002 to 64% in 2003 to 63% in 2004. This trend was not seen in the statewide data, as the total percentage of PA5/PA6 children placed in foster care remained stable between 65% and 66% during the same time frame. There was no trend in the total number of placements, as the percentage of total placements in foster care for PA5/PA6 children was 52% in 2002, 53% in 2003, and 51% in 2004. This consistency also was seen in the statewide data, as the percentage of total placements in foster care ranged between 53% and 54% over the past three years.

Figure 3

Percentage of PA5/PA6 and PA4 Children Placed in Foster Care from 2002-2004

Program Area 4

As displayed in Figure 3, the percentage of PA4 children placed in foster care in the 12 counties at any time between 2002-2004 held constant at between 26% and 27%. This finding was supported by the lack of variability in the total number of placements in
foster care over the past three years. The percentage of total placements in foster care for PA4 children was 21% in 2002, 21% in 2003, and 20% in 2004.

**Kinship Care Demographics Summary**

**Program Areas 5 & 6**

For all PA5/PA6 children in kinship care placements in the 12 counties at any time between 2002-2004, the percentage of females and males remained constant. Females comprised 51% of the kinship care population in 2002, 51% in 2003, and 52% in 2004. As displayed in Figure 4, there were subtle trends for the ethnicity of PA5/PA6 children placed in kinship care over the past three years. The percentage of African-American children in kinship care decreased from 18% in 2002 to 16% in 2003 to 15% in 2004. The percentage of Caucasian children in kinship care increased from 45% in 2002 to 46% in 2003 to 50% in 2004. The percentage of Hispanic, Asian, and American Indian children in kinship care was relatively stable during the same time frame.

**Figure 4**

*Percentage of PA5/PA6 Children Placed in Kinship Care from 2002-2004 by Ethnicity*

As displayed in Figure 5, there was a small trend toward PA5/PA6 children being placed in kinship care at a younger age. The average age at placement declined from 6.3 years in 2002 to 6.1 years in 2003 to 6.0 years in 2004. Accordingly, the percentage of
PA5/PA6 children from 0-5 years of age at placement in kinship care increased from 49% in 2002 to 52% in 2003 to 53% in 2004.

Figure 5

Percentage of PA5/PA6 Children Placed in Kinship Care from 2002-2004 by Age at Placement

Program Area 4

Contrary to the findings for the PA5/PA6 children, a small trend for gender emerged for PA4 children in kinship care placements in the 12 counties at any time between 2002-2004. The percentage of males in kinship care increased from 49% in 2002 to 50% in 2003 to 54% in 2004. As displayed in Figure 6, there were several distinct trends for the ethnicity of PA4 children placed in kinship care over the past three years. The percentage of Hispanic children in kinship care increased from 30% in 2002 to 50% in 2003 to 55% in 2004, while the percentage of Caucasian children in kinship care decreased from 54% in 2002 to 34% in 2003 to 32% in 2004. The percentage of African-American, Asian, and American Indian children in kinship care was relatively stable during the same time frame.
As displayed in Figure 7, there was a small trend toward PA4 children being placed in kinship care at an older age. Contrary to the findings for PA5/PA6 children, the average age at placement increased from 13.7 years in 2002 to 14.5 years in 2003 to 14.8 years in 2004. Accordingly, the percentage of PA4 children from 11-15 years of age at placement in kinship care increased from 57% in 2002 to 62% in 2003 to 67% in 2004.
Foster Care Demographics Summary

Program Areas 5 & 6

A small trend for gender emerged for all PA5/PA6 children in foster care placements in the 12 counties at any time between 2002-2004. The percentage of males increased from 49% in 2002 to 50% in 2003 to 51% in 2004. As displayed in Figure 8, there were subtle trends for the ethnicity of PA5/PA6 children placed in foster care over the past three years. The percentage of African-American children in foster care decreased from 19% in 2002 to 17% in 2003 to 16% in 2004, while the percentage of Hispanic children in foster care increased from 35% in 2002 to 37% in 2003 to 38% in 2004. The percentage of Caucasian, Asian, and American Indian children was relatively stable during the same time frame.

Figure 8

Percentage of PA5/PA6 Children Placed in Foster Care from 2002-2004 by Ethnicity

Similar to the findings for children in kinship care, there was a small trend toward PA5/PA6 children being placed in foster care at a younger age. The average age at placement declined from 7.1 years in 2002 to 7.0 years in 2003 to 6.8 years in 2004. As displayed in Figure 9, the percentage of children from 0-5 years of age placed in foster care increased from 45% in 2002 to 46% in 2003 to 47% in 2004.
Program Area 4

For all PA4 children in foster care placements in the 12 counties at any time between 2002-2004, the percentage of females and males remained constant. The percentage of females was 43% in 2002, 45% in 2003, and 43% in 2004. As displayed in Figure 10, there were subtle trends for the ethnicity of PA4 children placed in foster care over the past three years. The percentage of African-American children in foster care increased from 14% in 2002 to 20% in 2004, while the percentage of Caucasian children decreased from 56% in 2002 to 51% in 2004. The percentage of Hispanic, Asian, and American Indian children was relatively stable during the same time frame.

Figure 10

Percentage of PA4 Children Placed in Foster Care from 2002-2004 by Ethnicity
There was no trend for PA4 children in foster care in regard to age at placement. The average age at placement was 14.8 years in 2002, 14.8 years in 2003, and 14.9 years in 2004. As displayed in Figure 11, there was little change for any age group of PA4 children in foster care over the past three years.

Figure 11

*Percentage of PA4 Children Placed in Foster Care from 2002-2004 by Age at Placement*

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**Out-of-Home Length of Stay Analysis – Kinship Care**

For all PA5 and PA4 children first placed in kinship care and whose case closed between 2002-2004 in the 12 counties, there was a distinct trend toward a shorter out-of-home length of stay. As displayed in Figure 12, the mean out-of-home length of stay for PA5 children declined from 332 days in 2002 to 318 days in 2003 to 291 days in 2004. For PA4 children, the mean out-of-home length of stay declined from 903 days in 2002 to 704 days in 2003 to 399 days in 2004. However, this trend did not hold for PA6 children whose mean out-of-home length of stay increased from 861 days in 2002 to 900 days in 2003 to 950 days in 2004. Overall, PA6 children had the longest mean out-of-home length of stay with 900 days, followed by PA4 children with 609 days, and PA5 children with 309 days.
Out-of-Home Length of Stay Analysis – Foster Care

For all PA5 children first placed in foster care and whose case closed between 2002-2004 in the 12 counties, there was a slight trend toward a shorter out-of-home length of stay. As displayed in Figure 13, the mean out-of-home length of stay for PA5 children decreased from 245 days in 2002 to 222 days in 2004. However, this trend did not hold for PA4 and PA6 children. The mean out-of-home length of stay for PA4 children increased from 343 days in 2002 to 449 days in 2004, while the mean out-of-home length of stay for PA6 children increased from 973 days in 2002 to 1008 days in 2004. Similar to the findings for children first placed in kinship care, PA6 children first placed in foster care had the longest mean out-of-home length of stay with 949 days, followed by PA4 children with 396 days, and PA5 children with 227 days. Overall, children first placed in foster care had shorter out-of-home length of stays than did children first placed in kinship care.
Placement Length of Stay Analysis – Kinship Care

There was a strong trend toward a shorter per placement length of stay for all children in kinship care whose placement closed between 2002-2004 in the 12 counties. The median and mean length of stay were calculated for this outcome, with the median being more useful because of the positively skewed distribution. As displayed in Figure 14, the median per placement length of stay for PA5 children declined from 128 days in 2002 to 119 days in 2003 to 113 days in 2004. The median per placement length of stay for PA6 children declined from 266 days in 2002 to 261 days in 2004. The median per placement length of stay for PA4 children declined from 104 days in 2002 to 90 days in 2003 to 78 days in 2004.

The mean per placement length of stay for PA5 children in kinship care declined from 225 days in 2002 to 190 days in 2003 to 181 days in 2004. The mean per placement length of stay for PA6 children declined from 478 days in 2002 to 409 days in 2003 to 394 days in 2004. The mean per placement length of stay for PA4 children declined from 219 days in 2002 to 195 days in 2003 to 151 days in 2004.
Placement Length of Stay Analysis – Foster Care

There was no trend in per placement length of stay for all children in foster care whose placement closed between 2002-2004 in the 12 counties. As displayed in Figure 15, the median per placement length of stay for PA5 children decreased from 51 days in 2002 to 40 days in 2003, but increased to 51 days in 2004. The median per placement length of stay for PA4 children increased from 57 days in 2002 to 65 days in 2003, but decreased to 55 days in 2004. The median per placement length of stay for PA6 children decreased from 199 days in 2002 to 192 days in 2003, but increased to 265 days in 2004.

The mean per placement length of stay for PA5 children in foster care decreased from 127 days in 2002 to 109 days in 2003, but increased to 131 days in 2004. The mean per placement length of stay for PA4 children increased from 122 days in 2002 to 145 days in 2003, but decreased to 138 days in 2004. The mean per placement length of stay for PA6 children decreased from 330 days in 2002 to 314 days in 2003, but increased to 407 days in 2004. Overall, children placed in foster care experienced shorter per placement length of stays than did children placed in kinship care for all program areas.
First Placement Analysis

Program Areas 5 & 6

There were several distinct trends for first placement type for all PA5/PA6 children whose first placement was between 2002-2004 in the 12 counties. As displayed in Figure 16, the percentage of children first placed in kinship care increased from 16% in 2002 to 20% in 2003 to 24% in 2004. The percentage of children first placed in residential treatment centers decreased from 19% in 2002 to 12% in 2003 to 9% in 2004. The percentage of children first placed in foster care or receiving homes was relatively stable during the same time frame. There were several trends for length of stay in the first placement type for PA5/PA6 children. As displayed in Figure 17, the mean length of stay for first placements in kinship care decreased from 188 days in 2002 to 164 days in 2003 to 98 days in 2004. The mean length of stay for first placements in foster care decreased from 112 days in 2002 to 91 days in 2003 to 49 days in 2004. The mean length of stay for first placements in receiving homes or residential treatment centers was relatively stable over the past three years.
Program Area 4

For all PA4 children whose first placement was between 2002-2004 in the 12 counties, there was one distinct trend for first placement type. As displayed in Figure 18, the percentage of children first placed in residential treatment centers increased from 58% in 2002 to 61% in 2003 to 65% in 2004. The percentage of children first placed in kinship care, foster care, or receiving homes was relatively stable during the same time frame.
Similar to the findings for PA5/PA6 children, there were several trends for length of stay in the first placement type for PA4 children. As displayed in Figure 19, the mean length of stay for first placements in kinship care declined from 157 days in 2002 to 125 days in 2003 to 72 days in 2004. The mean length of stay for first placements in foster care also declined from 68 days in 2002 to 64 days in 2003 to 48 days in 2004. The mean length of stay for first placements in receiving homes or residential treatment centers also declined somewhat over the past three years.

Figure 19

*Mean Length of Stay for PA4 Children in First Placement Type from 2002-2004*
Number of Placements Analysis – Kinship Care

There was a distinct trend toward a fewer number of placements for all PA5 and PA4 children whose first ever placement was in kinship care and whose case closed between 2002-2004 in the 12 counties. As displayed in Figure 20, the mean number of placements for PA5 children decreased from 1.8 in 2002 to 1.7 in 2003 to 1.5 in 2004. The mean number of placements for PA4 children decreased from 5.1 in 2002 to 4.0 in 2003 to 3.4 in 2004. This trend did not hold for PA6 children, as the mean number of placements increased from 2.1 in 2002 to 2.2 in 2003 to 2.6 in 2004. Overall, PA4 children had the highest mean number of placements with 4.00, as compared with 2.31 for PA6 children and 1.61 for PA5 children.

Figure 20

Mean Number of Placements for Children First Placed in Kinship Care whose Case Closed between 2002-2004

Number of Placements Analysis – Foster Care

There was a small trend toward a fewer number of placements for all PA5 and PA6 children whose first ever placement was in foster care and whose case closed between 2002-2004 in the 12 counties. As displayed in Figure 21, the mean number of placements for PA5 children decreased from 2.2 in 2002 to 2.1 in 2003 to 2.0 in 2004. The mean number of placements for PA6 children decreased from 3.4 in 2002 to 3.3 in
2004. This trend did not hold for PA4 children, as the mean number of placements increased from 3.5 in 2002 to 3.7 in 2004. Similar to the findings for children in kinship care, PA4 children had the highest mean number of placements with 3.68, as compared with 3.27 for PA6 children and 2.05 for PA5 children.

Figure 21

_Mean Number of Placements for Children First Placed in Foster Care whose Case Closed between 2002-2004_

Adoptive Placements Summary

There was a small trend for adoptive placements from kinship care and non-kinship care for all children in out-of-home placements in the 12 counties from 2002-2004. For this outcome, children in the non-kinship care group were placed primarily but not exclusively in foster care. As displayed in Figure 22, the percentage of adoptive placements from kinship care decreased from 29% in 2002 to 27% in 2003 to 26% in 2004, while the percentage of adoptive placements from non-kinship care increased from 71% in 2002 to 73% in 2003 to 74% in 2004. Overall, there was a trend toward fewer total adoptive placements from kinship care and non-kinship care in the 12 counties over the past three years. The number of adoptive placements from kinship care declined from 309 in 2002 to 239 in 2004. The number of adoptive placements from non-kinship care also declined from 745 in 2002 to 682 in 2004.
Institutional Abuse Summary

For all institutional referrals with a provider attached between 2002-2004 in the 12 counties, there was no difference between the percentage of founded abuse allegations for children in kinship care and children in foster care. As displayed in Figure 23, 18% of institutional abuse allegations were founded for children placed in kinship care, while 16% of institutional abuse allegations were founded for children placed in foster care. However, there was a small difference between the percentage of investigated referrals, as 48.8% of referrals were investigated for children in kinship care and 43.4% of referrals were investigated for children in foster care.
DISCUSSION

The following discussion concisely represents the findings from the descriptive study while laying the groundwork for future theoretical and applied research in kinship care. The conclusions, limitations, and recommendations should be interpreted in light of the exploratory nature of this study.

Conclusions

Overall, there was a trend toward PA5/PA6 children being placed more in kinship care and less in foster care from 2002-2004 in the 12 counties. There was little variability in the percentage of PA4 children placed in kinship or foster care over the past three years. However, there was a sharp decline in the number of paid kinship care placements for PA5/PA6 and PA4 children during the same time frame. The gender and ethnicity demographics were remarkably similar for all children in out-of-home care regardless of placement type or program area designation. However, children in kinship care were placed at a younger average age than were children placed in foster care.

There was a strong trend toward a shorter out-of-home length of stay for PA5 and PA4 children in kinship care. There also was a trend toward a shorter per placement length of stay for all children in kinship care. As for foster care, there was a slight trend toward a shorter out-of-home length of stay for PA5 children. There was no trend for per placement length of stay for all children in foster care. Overall, PA5 and PA4 children placed in kinship care experienced longer out-of-home length of stays than did PA5 and PA4 children placed in foster care. Furthermore, children placed in kinship care experienced longer per placement length of stays than did children placed in foster care for all program areas.
There was an increase in first placements in kinship care for PA5/PA6 children but no change in first placements in foster care over the past three years. For PA4 children, there was an increase in first placements in residential treatment centers and no change in first placements in kinship care or foster care. There was a trend toward a fewer number of placements for PA5 and PA4 children whose first placement was in kinship care, but the trend did not hold for PA6 children whose average number of placements increased from 2002 to 2004. There was a trend toward a fewer number of placements for PA5/PA6 children whose first placement was in foster care, but the trend did not hold for PA4 children whose average number of placements increased from 2002 to 2004. Overall, PA5/PA6 children whose first placement was in kinship care had fewer total placements than did PA5/PA6 children whose first placement was in foster care.

There was a trend toward less adoptive placements from kinship care and more adoptive placements from non-kinship care for all children in the 12 counties from 2002-2004. However, there also was a small trend toward fewer total adoptive placements from both kinship care and non-kinship care during the same time frame. There was no difference between the percentage of founded abuse allegations for children in kinship care or foster care from 2002-2004 in the 12 counties. However, a slightly greater percentage of referrals were investigated for children in kinship care as compared with children in foster care.

Limitations

This descriptive study labored under several methodological limitations. First and foremost, the study employed a cross-sectional design. Although there was a longitudinal analysis of placement data for the 12 counties from 2002-2004, a cohort approach was
not used. Thus, the findings are somewhat confounded by the duration effect, as children with longer lengths of stay in out-of-home care may be overrepresented in the sample.

Second, there was an inadequate sample size of PA4 children for most outcomes. As a result, comparisons between these children and PA5/PA6 children are tenuous at best. There also were very few cases for certain analyses including adoptive placements and institutional abuse. Thus, small changes in raw numbers may result in large percentage swings that could potentially undermine observed trends.

Third, there were inconsistencies in *Trails* data collection both within and between counties. Some of the inconsistency stemmed from varying policies regarding kinship care. For example, some counties predominantly utilize informal placements supported by TANF, Child Care, and other community resources, which results in an underestimation of their kinship care population as defined in *Trails*. Furthermore, potentially valuable information was lost because these informal kinship care arrangements were not analyzed in the study. Other discrepancies were the result of changeable data entry requirements in *Trails*. Some outcomes (e.g., institutional abuse) had missing data that were not imputed or accounted for in the descriptive analyses.

Fourth, the aggregation of data across all 12 counties presupposes that policies and practices for kinship care were consistent between each county. If this is not the case, then the results from this study may obscure differential effects of kinship care based on county implementation.

**Recommendations**

Although the implications of this descriptive study depend on how individual counties interpret the results, several recommendations for the policy and practice of
kinship care in Colorado did emerge from the research. The efficiency and accuracy of data entry in *Trails* should be improved while ensuring that all essential data are mandated for collection. For example, if institutional abuse allegations were required to have a provider attached, the data for this important safety outcome would be more reliable. New predictor and outcome variables should be included in *Trails* to facilitate richer analyses of kinship care and other social work interventions. Specifically, an electronic version of the “Health Passport” would allow for the investigation of educational and health related outcomes for children in kinship care.

County departments of social services and child welfare agencies should reexamine their policies and practices around kinship care to better maximize this out-of-home placement option. For example, the increase in children placed in kinship care coupled with the decline of paid kinship placements raises questions about how the current budgetary climate in Colorado is impacting the placement of children in out-of-home care. The trend toward fewer African-American children being placed in kinship care should be explored to assist child welfare professionals in pursuing appropriate placement options.

To address the major limitations of research on kinship care, Berrick and Barth (1994) recommend studies that employ generalizable samples, equivalent groups, and repeated measurements. Future research on this topic also should incorporate qualitative methods to explore the underlying dynamics of kinship care. Finally, data from all counties should be collected and analyzed to capture the full depth and breadth of kinship care in Colorado.
References


Appendix A

Program Area Designations

PROGRAM AREA 4 (PA4) - YOUTH IN CONFLICT

- Children and youth who are beyond the control of their parents or guardians.
- Children and youth whose behavior is such that there is a likelihood they may cause harm to themselves or to others or who have committed acts that could cause them to be adjudicated a delinquent child by the court.

PA4 services are provided to reduce or eliminate conflicts between youth and their family members or the community when those conflicts affect the youth's well-being, the normal functioning of the family, or the well-being of the community. The focus of services shall be on alleviating conflicts, protecting the youth and the community, re-establishing family stability, or assisting the youth to emancipate successfully.

PROGRAM AREA 5 (PA5) - CHILDREN IN NEED OF PROTECTION

- Children whose physical, mental, or emotional well-being has been threatened or harmed due to abuse or neglect.
- Children who are subjected to circumstances in which there is a reasonable likelihood that they are at risk of harm due to abuse or neglect by their parents or caretakers which shall include children who are alleged to be responsible for the abuse or neglect and are under the age of 10.

To protect children whose physical, mental or emotional well-being is threatened by the actions or omissions of parents, legal guardians or custodians, or persons responsible for providing out-of-home care, including a foster parent, an employee of a residential child care facility, and a provider of family child care or center-based child care. The county shall provide services targeted to achieve the following: a) children are secure and protected from harm; b) children have stable permanent and nurturing living environments; and, c) when appropriate, children experience family continuity and community connectedness.

PROGRAM AREA 6 (PA6) - CHILDREN IN NEED OF SPECIALIZED SERVICES

- Children whose special needs are a barrier to their adoption, are legally free for adoption, and are in the custody of a county department of social services.
- Children whose special needs are a barrier to their adoption, meet Title IV-E eligibility requirements, and are in the custody of a non-profit licensed adoption agency or living with a relative.

To provide statutorily authorized services to specified children and families in which the reason for service is not protective services or youth in conflict. These services are limited to children and families in need of subsidized adoption or Medicaid only services, or to children for whom the goal is no longer reunification. The purpose of services in PA6 is to fulfill statutory requirements in the interests of permanency planning for children who meet specific requirements to receive services under this target group.
Appendix B

Kinship Care Data Collection Definitions

Kinship Care and Foster Care Placement Summary Report

Both child and placement counts consider all placements that were open at any time during the specified time frame. The scenarios considered for these reports include children associated with placements that began before the time frame but continued to either end during or after the time frame or remain open. Also counted are placements that began within the specified time frame and either ended during or after the time frame or remain open.

Children in Kinship Care
An unduplicated count of children placed in paid or unpaid kinship care, as designated by the Trails out-of-home service type (KFSTR or KNSHP), at any time during the specified time frame.

Children in Foster Care
An unduplicated count of children placed in family foster home care (FFHC service type only) at any time during the specified time frame.

Total Placed
An unduplicated count of children placed in out-of-home care (OOH category only), excluding adoptions at any time during the specified time frame. The column total may not add up because the clients are not unduplicated between counties. That is, a client may be placed by more than one county within the specified time frame.

Percent Total Placed
Children in the specified provider care type (either FFHC or kinship care) divided by the total children placed per county.

Kinship Care/Foster Care Placement
A count of placements in family foster home care (FFHC service type only) or kinship care (KFSTR or KNSHP service type only) at any time during the year specified. This is not an unduplicated child count. Children may be counted more than once if they were placed in a family foster home care setting more than once within the specified time frame.

Total Placements
A count of all out-of-home placements, excluding adoption, at any point during the specified time frame. This is not an unduplicated count. Children may be counted more than once if they were placed in an out-of-home care setting more than once within the time frame. This count also includes children whose placement may have begun prior to the time frame, but whose placement span fell into that time frame.
**Percent of Total Placements**
Number of individual placements with the specified service type (either FFHC or kinship care) open at any time during the specified time frame divided by total out-of-home placements, excluding adoptions, open at any time during the time frame. These totals of foster and kinship placements will not add up to 100% because it does not include the count of children placed in other types of settings.

**Paid/Not Paid (Kinship Report Only)**
This category counts placements and not unduplicated children. It counts all placements within the specified time frame even if they began before the time frame. A child could be counted more than once if he or she moved from a paid to an unpaid (or vice versa) kinship placement within the time frame.

**Average Daily Population (ADP)**
This calculation indicates how many children might be in a particular placement type on any given day during the specified time frame. This statistic is calculated by dividing the number of total service days of all children in the time frame by the number of days in the time frame.

**Kinship Care and Foster Care Demographic Summary Report**

**Gender**
An unduplicated count of children in out-of-home placement at any time during the specified time frame. A child placed more than once during that time frame has not been counted more than once in this category.

**Ethnicity**
Ethnicity is an unduplicated count of children in out-of-home placement at any time during the specified time frame for each ethnicity specified. A child placed more than once during that time frame has not been counted more than once in this category. A child can be marked in any or all of these ethnic categories, therefore the sum of the ethnicity breakdowns will total to more than 100%. Hispanic origin is a field that is tracked separately from the aforementioned Trails “race” categories. When a child is marked as Hispanic in Trails, the user must also select one of the four “race” selections (this selection is almost always Caucasian). For the purpose of this report, children who have Hispanic designated in Trails and a race of Caucasian are only counted as Hispanic, so as not to upwardly skew the percentage of actual Caucasian children.

**Age at Placement**
A count of placements by age range for placements that started during the specified time frame. Children may be counted more than once both within and between age groups. For example, if they were placed (at least) twice in the time frame and either remained in the same age category, or if those placements occurred both before and after an age change that would qualify them for different age range categories.
Kinship Care and Foster Care Out-of-home Length of Stay Comparison Report

This report examines total length of stay in days in out-of-home care (regardless of provider type) for children whose first placement was in kinship care versus children whose first placement was in foster care (FFHC only) for cases that closed within the specified time frame. This count is case specific, in that a child might be counted more than once if he or she was a part of two different cases that closed during the time frame.

Kinship Care and Foster Care Placement Length of Stay Comparison Report

Children
An unduplicated count of children whose placement closed within the specified time frame for the indicated service type (either FFHC or kinship care).

Placements
Count of placements that were closed within the specified time frame for the indicated service type (either FFHC or kinship care).

Average Length of Stay
Mean number of days per placement, either kinship or foster care, for placements that closed within the specified time frame.

Median Length of Stay
Median number of days per placement, either kinship or foster care, for placements that closed within the specified time frame.

First Placement Analysis Report

Counts the number of children whose first placement began within the specified time frame by placement type. This is an unduplicated count of placements and not children. A child may be counted more than once if he/she was placed (at least) once in connection with two different cases within the specified time frame.

Average Length of Stay
Average length of time that children are in the specified first placement type. This average is calculated using only closed placement types, whether or not they closed within the specified time frame.

Percent of Total First Placements
Number of first placements by type divided by the total number of first placements by county within the specified time frame. The sum of all the first placements by type may not total 100% because several placement types (e.g., group home, hospital) are not counted in this report.
Average Number of Placement Analysis Report

This report shows the average number of placements per child whose first ever placement was kinship care versus children whose first ever placement was foster care for cases closed within the specified time period.

Kids
Unduplicated count of children whose first ever placement was in the specified service type (either FFHC or kinship care) for the given county and whose case closed in the year specified.

Total Placements
Total number of placements for the children whose first ever placement was in the specified service type (either FFHC or kinship care) for the given county and whose case closed in the year specified.

Average Number of Placements
Total number of placements divided by the total number of kids.

Adoptive Placements from Kinship and Non-Kinship Care Report

These are both counts of the placement types prior to the establishment of an adoptive placement within the specified time frame. While a count of placements is not an unduplicated count, the variance between children and placements should be minimal. A child would be counted twice if an adoptive placement disrupted and the child repeated the process within the time frame.

Adoptive Placements from Kinship Care
A count of children who left kinship care during the specified time frame and directly entered adoptive placement (not finalized adoptions).

Percent of Total Adoptive Placements
Adoptive placements from kinship care divided by adoptive placements from non-kinship care plus adoptive placements from kinship care.

Adoptive Placements from Non-Kinship Care
A count of children who left a non-kinship placement (typically foster care) during the specified time frame and directly entered adoptive placement (not finalized adoptions).
Institutional Abuse Report

This report examines the referrals called into the specified county in which a kinship care or foster care provider was attached to the referral using the “Facility” button in Trails. Since the “Facility” button is not required when an allegation of institutional abuse or neglect is entered in Trails, this functionality is being underutilized.

Referrals
Unduplicated count of referrals called into the specified county that had a kinship care or foster care provider attached using the Trails “Facility” button.

Investigations
Unduplicated count of referrals, accepted for assessment, called into the specified county that had a kinship care or foster care provider attached using the Trails “Facility” button.

Founded
Unduplicated count of referrals, accepted for assessment, called into the specified county that had a kinship care or foster care provider attached using the Trails “Facility” button and whose overall findings were marked as founded.

Percent Founded
Total number of founded investigations divided by the total number of investigations.