

# **RUNAWAY BEHAVIOR OF CHILDREN IN WASHINGTON STATE DCFS CUSTODY**

**FY 2004**

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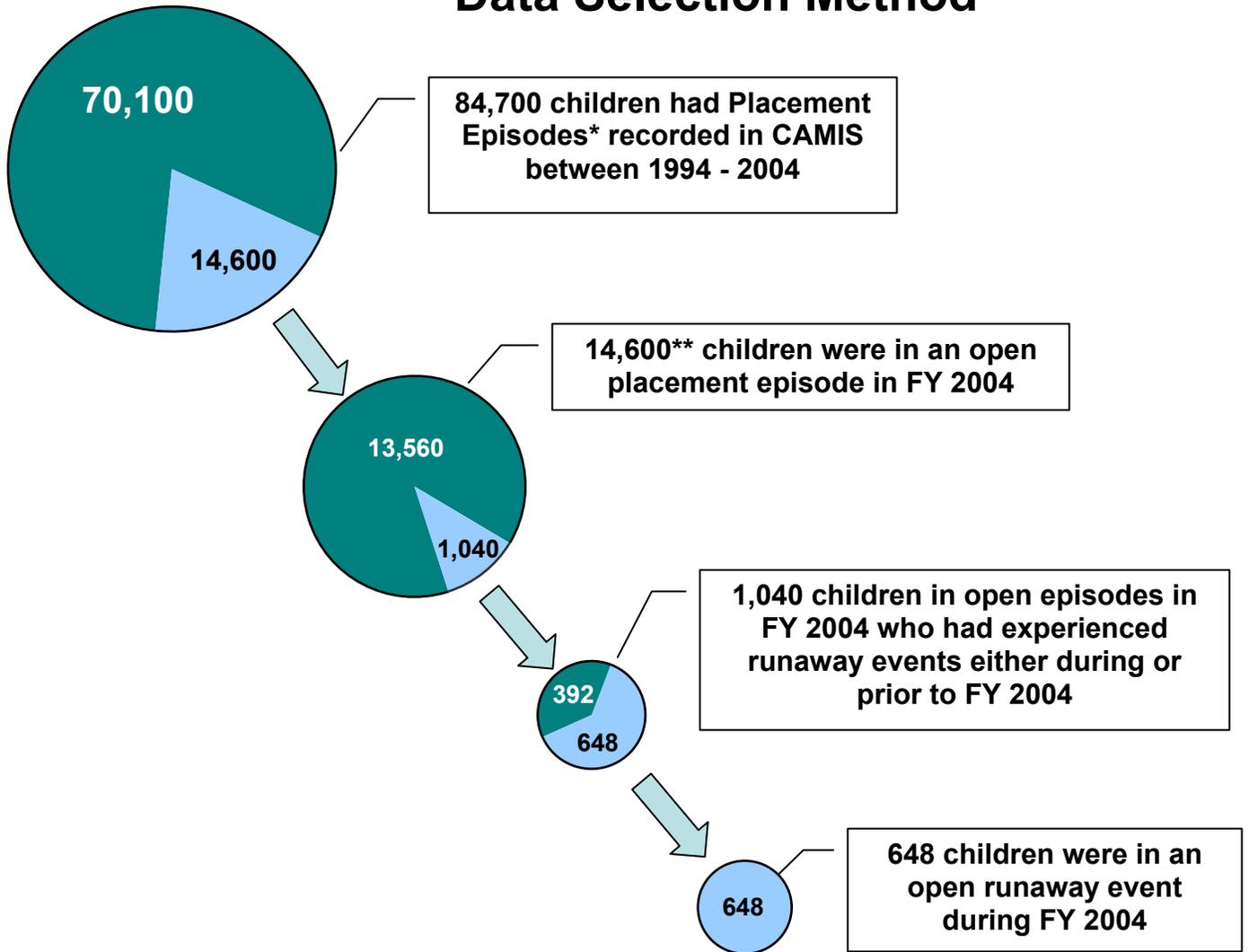
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## Data Selection Method



\* Placement Episode = The time between when a child is removed from home until they go to a permanent placement. During this time, the child could be in more than one placement home or location.

\*\* Only episodes which include at least one Foster Care, Group Care, Crisis Residential Care or Relative placements events are included in this sample.

Episodes that only had In Home Dependency, Hospitalization, Adoption, Detention, Rehabilitation, Assessment or Respite events were excluded.

# ADOLESCENT RUNAWAY BEHAVIOR

## A Summary from Washington State CAMIS Data

This report provides a summary of Washington State placement data on the nature and frequency of adolescent runaway behavior. This analysis was performed on placement data found in the Case and Management Information System (CAMIS) for all children who were reported as “on the run”. The results below stem from analyses of two series of data: 1) a broader series that includes data from 1994 to 2004, and 2) a narrower series that examines data in FY 2004.<sup>1</sup>

### I. HISTORICAL TRENDS FROM 1994 TO 2004

- Trends in runaway behavior have moved from approximately 60 events per month in 1996 to over 130 events per month in 2004.<sup>2</sup>
- Around 15% of events during any given month are multiple runs by the same child.
- 196 children recorded 10 or more runaway events during the 10 year time frame.
- Females account for 55% of the 11,647 runaway events.
- Children aged 13 to 17 account for 89% of all runaway events.
- Children aged 15 appear to run most often, accounting for 23% of all runaway events.

### II. RUN VS NO RUN BEHAVIOR IN FY 2004

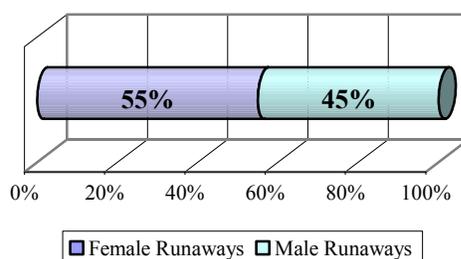
- In FY 2004, 14,653 children were in foster care, group care, crisis residential centers, and relative placement.
- 1040 (7%) of the children in this placement cohort ran away either during or prior to FY 2004.
- Similarly, 648 (4.4%) children in this cohort recorded a runaway event in FY 2004.

#### 1) Demographics

##### a) Gender

- Of those who ran in FY 2004, female youth ran more frequently than male youth, with females running at a rate of 5% and males running at rate of 4%.
- Out of all those with a history of running, females represented 55% of runaway events and males represented 45% of runaway events.

Figure 1: Gender and Runaway Behavior



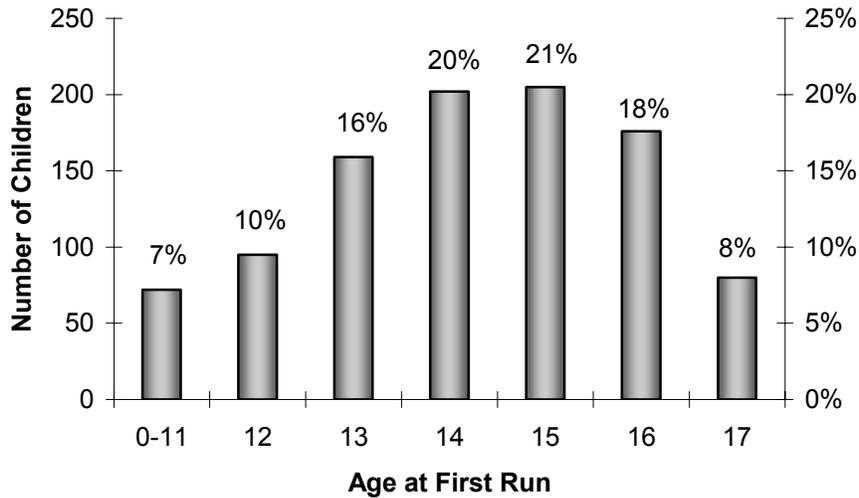
<sup>1</sup>Please see Appendix for a full explanation of the data sources and data quality.

<sup>2</sup> These results are partially influenced by changes in documentation across time.

**b) Age**

- For those with a history of running away in FY2004, children aged 13-16 were more likely to run than other aged children, accounting for over 75% of all run events.
- Children less than 12 years of age ran the least often, accounting for less than 7% of all runaway events.

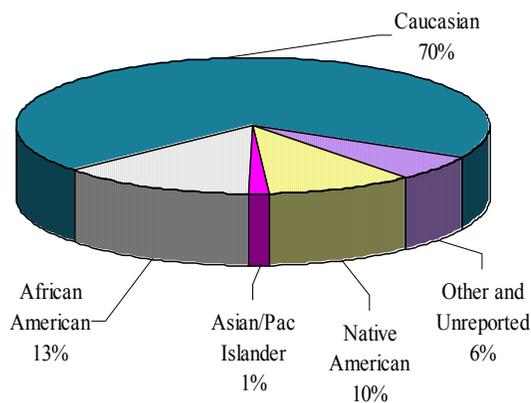
**Figure 2: Age at First Run (N=1040)**



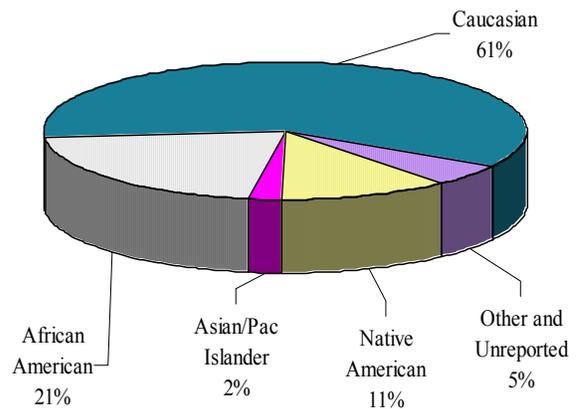
**c) Race and Ethnicity**

- 61% of children in care in FY 2004 with a history of running away were Caucasians. African Americans comprised 21% of those who ran, followed by Native Americans at 11%, and then Asian and Pacific Islanders at 2%. Although African American children represent 21% of youth who ran away, they represent only 13% of the children in placement during FY04. Conversely, Caucasians represent 61% of the children who ran and 70% of children in placement.
- Children identified as Hispanic\* represent 13% of those with a history of runaway behavior.

**Figure 3: Total Children in Placement by Race FY 2004 (N=14,653)**



**Figure 4: Children With a History of Running by Race in FY 2004 (N=1040)**

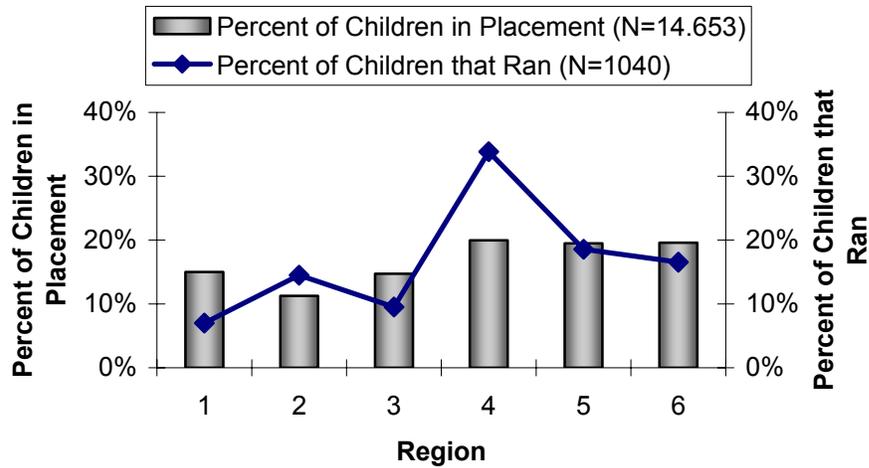


\*CAMIS collects Hispanic data separately from other race categories. Youth who are identified as Hispanic are also counted in one of the primary race categories, or in the “other” category.

**d) Runaway Children by Region**

- Region 4 accounted for close to 34% of all children in placement in FY 2004 who ran either during or prior to that year, even though Region 4 accounted for 20% of children in placement.
- Region 1 had the smallest proportion of runaway children, accounting for 7% of all children who ran even though region 1 accounted for 15% of children in placement.

**Figure 5: Runaway Children by Region**



**2) Placement Characteristics**

**a) Reason for Placement**

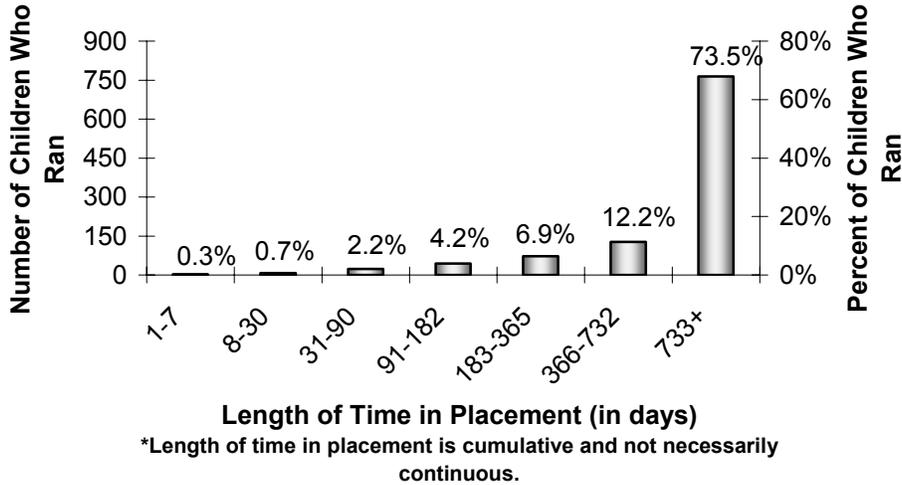
- Children placed for child behavioral issues were more likely to exhibit runaway behavior compared to those not placed for behavioral issues, with 46% of those who ran having behavioral issues as a reason for placement.
- Children who ran were more likely to have sexual abuse, physical abuse, child alcohol and drug abuse, and parental alcohol abuse as a reason for placement than children who did not run.
- Children who *did not run* were more likely to have neglect and parental drug abuse as a reason for placement.

**b) Placement History**

**i) Length of Placement**

- Longer lengths of time in placement increase the chance of running away.
- Nearly three quarters of youth exhibiting runaway behavior had spent two or more years in placement.

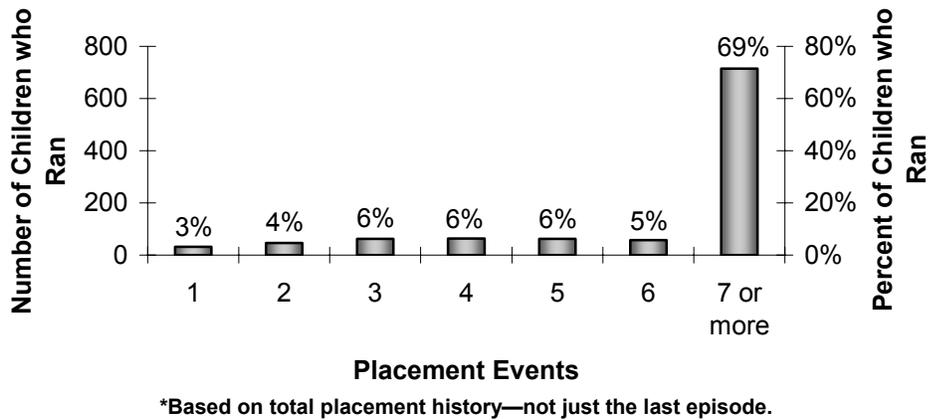
**Figure 6: Length of Time in Placement through FY 2004  
Youth who Ran Away (N=1040)\***



**ii) Number of Placement Events**

- Runaway behavior is associated with multiple placement events.
- Children with 7 or more placement events account for close to 70% of all children who ran away.

**Figure 7: Number of Placement Events and Runaway Behavior (N=1040)\***

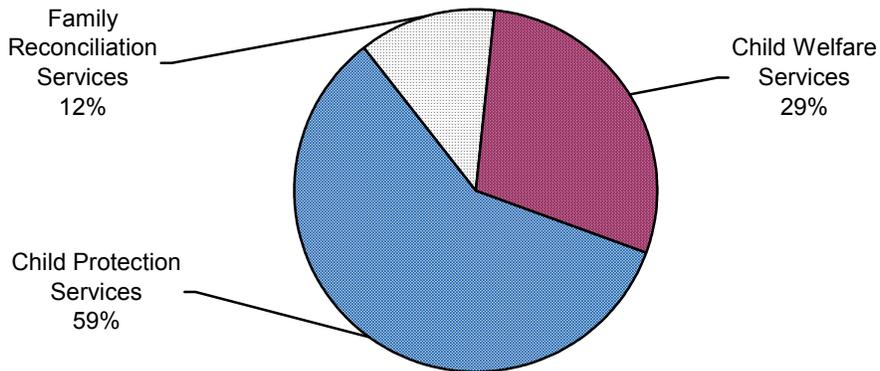


**iii) Type of Program**

- Of all youth with a history of runaway behavior during FY 2004, 59% were placed by Child Protection Services, 29% were placed by Child Welfare Services, and 12% involved placements from Family Reconciliation Services.

**Figure 8: Runaway Behavior by Program Code (N=1040)\***

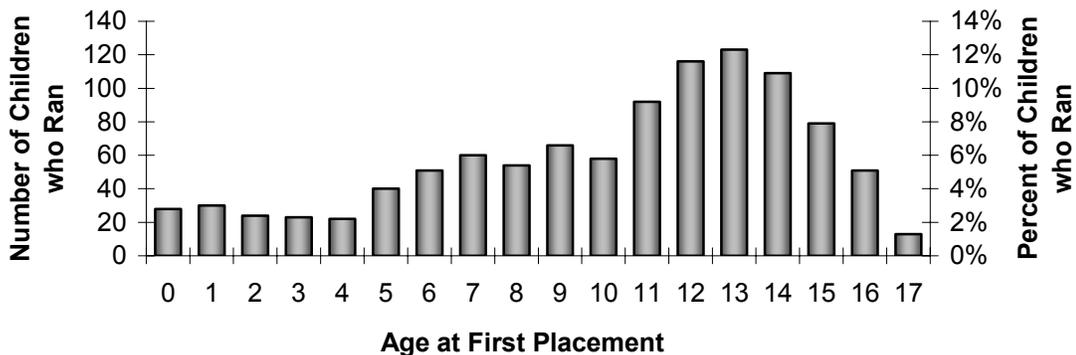
\*Based on last episode



**iv) Age at First Placement**

- Over one half of the children with a history of runaway behavior were first placed at 11 years of age or younger.
- Children initially placed between 12 to 14 years represented 34% of all children with a history of runaway behavior in FY 2004.

**Figure 9: Age at First Placement and Runaway Behavior (N=1040)\***



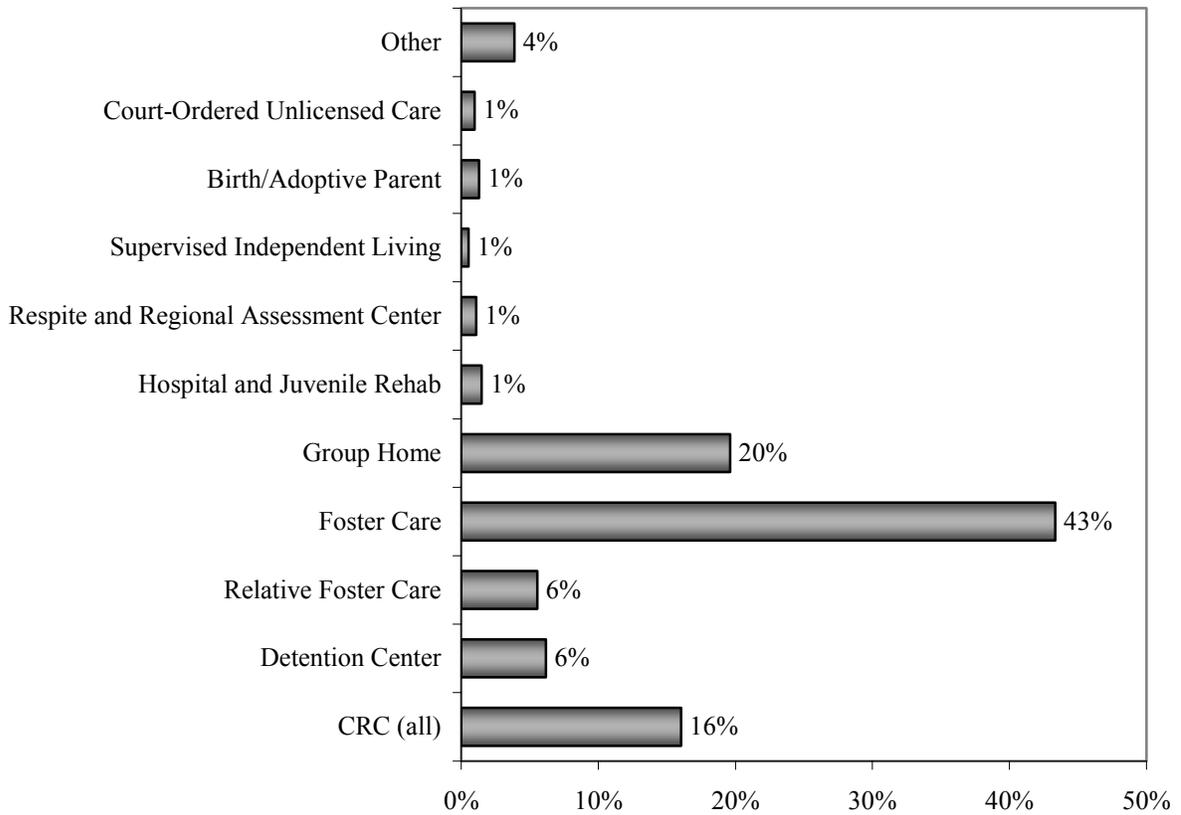
\*Age at first placement--not necessarily this placement episode

**3) Run Characteristics**

**a) Placement Type Prior to Runaway Event**

- There were more runaway events from foster care than from any other type of placement, accounting for 43% (n=1,461) of runaway events for the children in care in FY 2004 (this includes running events prior to FY04 for these children).
- Group care accounted for 20% (n=661) of all runaway events and Crisis Residential Centers accounted for 16% (n=541) of all runaway events for children in care in FY 2004.

**Figure 10: Placement Type Prior to Runaway Event (N=3371)\***

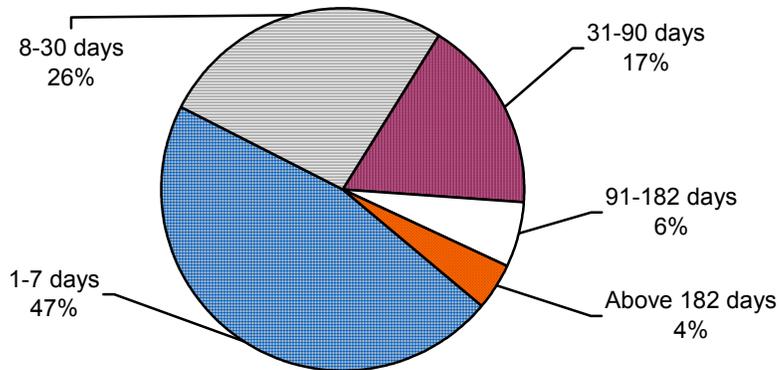


\* Children may have more than one run event.

**b) Length of Run Event in FY 2004**

- Almost half of all runaway events that occurred in FY 2004 lasted between 1-7 days.
- Approximately 10% of all runaway events lasted for 3 months or more.

**Figure 11: Length of Run Event FY 2004 (N=2687)\***

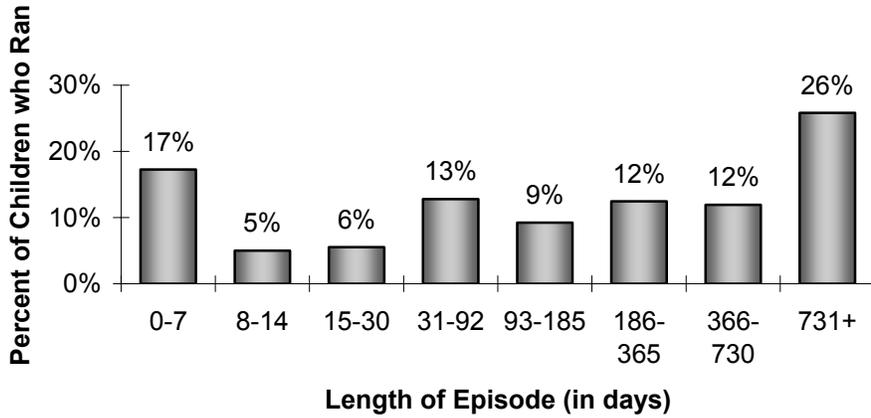


\*Children may have more than one run event.

**c) Length of Episode<sup>3</sup> Prior to First Runaway Event (before or during FY 2004)**

- 17% of the children who ran were in placement 0-7 days before their first run event.
- 26% of the children who ran were in placement 2 or more years before running for the first time.

**Figure 12: Length of Episode Prior to First Runaway Event (N=648)\***



\*Begin date for run event may be before or during FY 2004

**III. MULTIPLE RUNS VS. SINGLE RUNS IN FY 2004<sup>4</sup>**

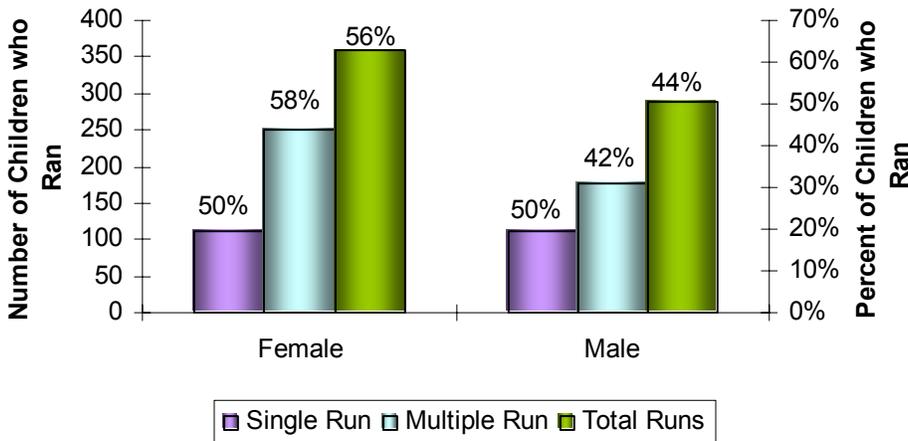
- 648 (4.4%) of the children in placement during FY 2004 had a run event in FY 2004.
- One third (34%) of the children who ran, ran only once and two-thirds ran multiple times.

**1) Demographics (Multiple vs Single Runs)**

**a) Gender**

- In FY 2004, 111 females and 111 males recorded a single run event.
- Females were heavily represented in the multiple run event category, accounting for close to 58% of all multiple runners compared to 42% for males.

**Figure 13: Gender and Multiple vs Single Runners (N=648)**



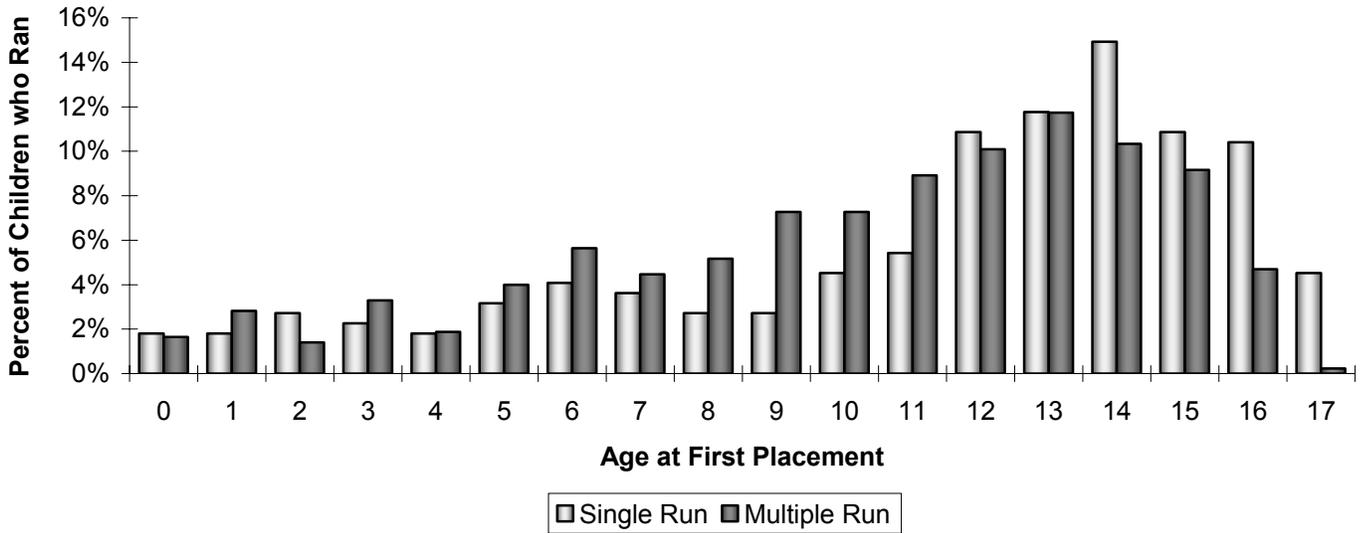
<sup>3</sup> Placement episode = the time between when a child is removed from home until they go to a permanent placement. During this time they could be in more than one placement home or location.

<sup>4</sup> For children recording single run events, the run event occurred in FY 2004. For children recording multiple run events, some events may have occurred prior to FY 2004.

**b) Age at First Placement**

- Children first placed before 11 years of age represent 37% of all children who ran once and 55% of all children with multiple runs.
- Children first placed at age 14 represent the largest proportion of children with single run events, accounting for 15% of children with single run events.
- Children first placed at age 13 represent the largest proportion of children with multiple run events, accounting for 12% of all children with multiple run events.

**Figure 14: Age at First Placement and Runaway Behavior (N=648)\***



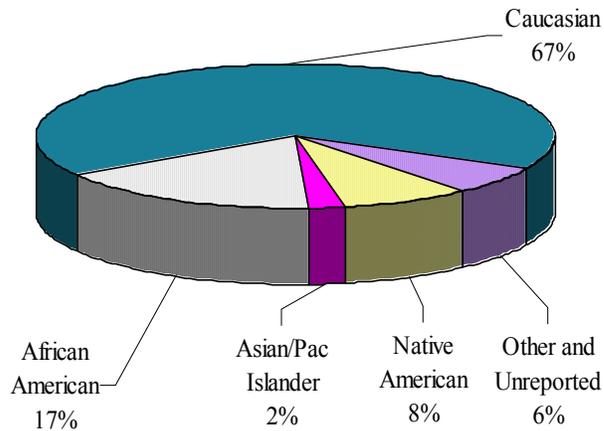
\*For children recording single run events, the run event occurred in FY 2004. For children recording multiple run events, some events may have occurred prior to FY 2004.

**c) Race and Ethnicity\***

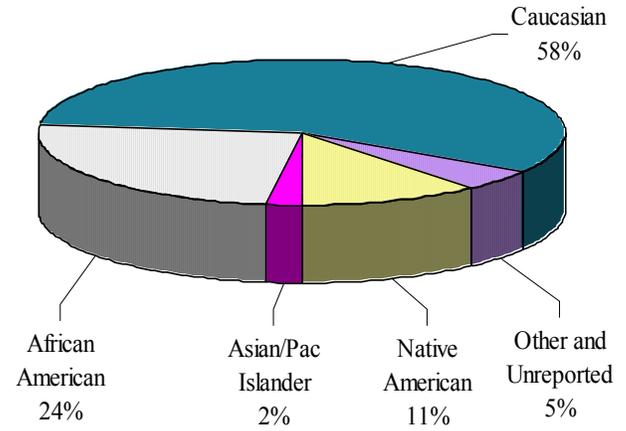
- Native American and African American children were more likely to be multiple runners compared to children who ran once.
- In FY 2004, Caucasians had the highest number of children who ran multiple times.

\*CAMIS collects Hispanic data separately from other race categories. Youth who are identified as Hispanic are also counted in one of the primary race categories, or in the “other” category.

**Figure 15: Single Runners by Race FY 2004 (N=222)**

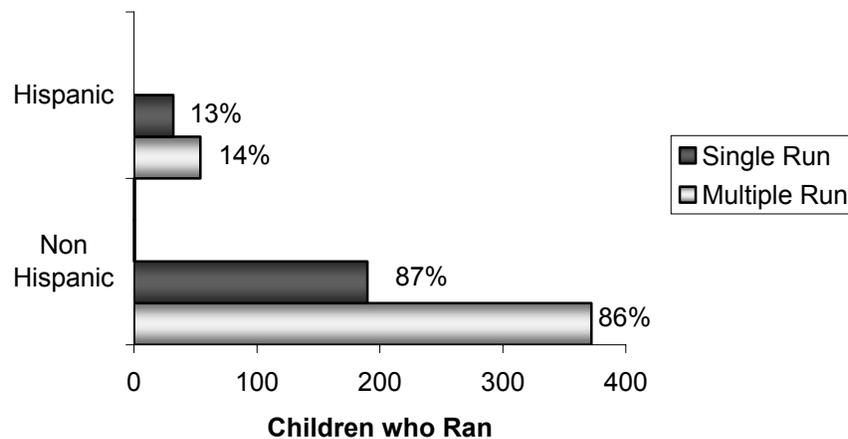


**Figure 16: Multiple Runners by Race FY 2004 (N=426)**



- There were 32 single runners and 54 multiple runners who identified as Hispanic\*.

**Figure 17: Hispanic and Multiple vs Single Runners (N=648)**



## 2) Mental, Emotional, and Familial Risk Factors<sup>5</sup>

### a) CBCL

- Youth who recorded single run events were more likely to score in the borderline/clinical range of the CBCL scale for externalizing behaviors than youth who did not run away.
- Similarly, youth who ran away multiple times were more likely to score in the borderline/clinical range of the CBCL scale for externalizing behaviors than youth who either ran once or did not run away.

<sup>5</sup> This data is reported only for those children 11+ years of age who had scores entered into CHET with CBCL scores administered at time of placement beginning September 2001.

**Table 1: Run Behavior and Children Scoring in the Borderline/Clinical Range on CBCL (N=1175)**

<b>CBCL T Score</b>	<b>No Run</b>	<b>Single Run</b>	<b>Multiple Runs</b>
Internalizing	45% (439)	45% (27)	50% (45)
Externalizing	46% (453)	65% (39)	70% (63)
Total Problem	51% (505)	53% (32)	65% (59)

Children may be in more than one CBCL category.

**b) Birth/Adoptive Caregiver and Family Social Risk Issues**

- There were very few differences in caregiver and family/social issues that were identified at the time of placement.
- Children are less likely to run if caregivers are noted as having Mental-Emotional/Intellectual/Physical Impairment.
- Similarly, children are less likely to run if the child is assessed as being protected by a non-abusive caregiver.

**Table 2: Caregiver/Family Risk Issues Identified at Time of Placement (N=1,277)\***

<b>Caregiver Issue</b>	<b>No Runs N=1097</b>	<b>Run During FY04 N=70</b>	<b>Run FY04 and Prior to FY04 N=110</b>	<b>Sig</b>
Substance Abuse	60%	50%	56%	-
Ment-Emot/Intellectual/Physical Impairment	75%	56%	67%	.004
Parenting Skills/Expectations	88%	90%	90%	-
Empathy/Nurturance/Bonding	73%	79%	73%	-
History of Violence (toward peers and/or children)	55%	49%	58%	-
Protection of Child by Non-abusive Caregiver	61%	50%	52%	.022
Recognition of Problem	81%	74%	82%	-
History of CA/N as Child	34%	23%	31%	-
Level of Cooperation	67%	64%	62%	-
<b>Family/Social Issue</b>				
Stress on Family	95%	89%	94%	-
Social Support for Family	68%	67%	70%	-
Economic Resources of Family	76%	67%	76%	-
Domestic Violence (between intimate partners)	50%	37%	46%	-

\*Families may have more than one risk issue assigned. A small number of children who ran were assessed. This is due to a large number of runaways being placed prior to the implementation of assessment screens in September 2001.

#### **IV. SUMMARY**

The information in this report describes the characteristics, placement experiences and emotional/behavioral needs of children in out-of-home care in Washington State in FY04 (7/1/03 – 6/30/04) who had a runaway event either during or prior to the report year.

Out of the 14,653 children in placement during FY04, 1,040 (7%) had at least one runaway event either during or before FY 04.

#### **Key Child Factors Associated with Increased Risk of Runaway Behaviors:**

- Placed for behavioral problems
- Longer lengths of stay in care
- Higher numbers of placement events
- Youth aged 13 – 16
- CBCL externalizing score in borderline or clinical range
- Girls more likely to run than boys, especially multiple times
- Proportionally, African Americans were more likely to run compared to other race categories.

Another interesting finding is that more youth who run away tend to do so either in their first week of placement or after three or more years into placement.

National research supports the current Washington State findings regarding gender and age for runaways. Several researchers found that girls were more likely to run than boys (Courtney and Wong, 1996; Fasulo, Cross, Mosley and Leavey, 2002; Kingree, Braithwaite and Woodring, 2001; and Yoder, Whitbeck and Hoyt, 2001). Older children and adolescents were found to be more likely to run than young children (Biehal and Wade 2000; Courtney and Wong, 1996; Fasulo, et al, 2002; Flores, 2002; Kaplan, 2004; Kingree, et al, 2001; and Nesmith, 2002)

Other researchers had mixed results regarding racial/ethnic differences for runaway behavior. For example, researchers Courtney and Wong (1996) found that African American children were at a lower risk of running away. The Washington State data showed that African American children were over represented in the runaway category (i.e., there was a higher percentage of African American children who ran compared to those in care). Nesmith (2002) found a higher risk of running away for Native American youth. Examining the Washington data for run rates (i.e., the percent of youth who ran within each racial group), Asian/Pacific Islander and African American children had the highest run rates at 11.4% and 10.9%.

The Washington State data showed that youth scoring in the borderline/clinical range of the CBCL externalizing behavior scale were more likely to run than other children in care. Nesmith (2002) supported this finding in her research.

# **APPENDIX**

## **Sources of Data and Data Quality CAMIS Placement Episode Table and Placement Event Table**

### **A. Overall CAMIS Placement Data Quality**

The information used to prepare this report came from the Placement Episode and Placement Event tables derived from CAMIS. The data was entered by Social Workers to document children's placements while in the custody of Washington State since 1994.

Data in many of the CAMIS placement fields is highly accurate. Besides documenting details of children's placements for case and legal purposes, placement information generates payments to foster homes, group homes, and other types of placement providers. Inaccurate data entry in the "placement type" field results in no payment. Inaccurate data entry in the "placement begin date" or "placement end date" fields results in over or underpayments. These are almost always noticed and corrected. Other placement information in CAMIS is used to document placements that qualify Washington State for federal funding. Again, inaccurate placement data results in under or over charges that are subject to audit and penalty. Therefore, we expect this placement data to be highly reliable.

To be sure, data fields for which no legal, financial, or compelling case management purpose exists can be significantly less reliable. Also, the policies, procedures, and programming of some placement data entry have changed over time. OCAR has been working with most of the data described in this report for more than 10 years to understand how it can inform us of children's placement histories.

### **B. Data Quality Specific to This Report**

The statistics reported here have different error rates. All error rates are less than 10%. The numbers of episodes, events, and lengths of stays of children in paid placements have a less than 3% error rate. The numbers and lengths of unpaid placements, such as relative placements are less reliable. OCAR's manual review of case files of children in relative care over the years for many research projects provides confidence that while the begin and especially end dates have error rates as high as 10% in some cases, virtually no relative placement events are entered which did not occur and very few relative placement events go unrecorded.

### **C. Quality of Runaway Data**

The numbers of children who ran away and the numbers of their runaway events reported here were calculated from records in the CAMIS placement event table. That is, when a child runs from a DCFS placement the social worker creates a placement event record with type = "runaway" and enters begin and end dates. This is one of the placement event types with the lowest entry reliability. However, we can be sure that social workers are not entering records of runaway events which did not occur.

We believe that the runaway rates reported here are significant undercounts. A manual review of all children's physical locations in November 2002 through "Child Check"<sup>6</sup> found that 89% of the children whose social workers identified them as on-the-run were accurately recorded as on-the-run in the CAMIS placement event table. During our analysis we found that 10% of begin or end dates of runaway events of children who only ran before FY04 were "Out of Range". Less than 2% of the begin or end dates of runaway events of children who had runaway events in FY 2004 had "Out of Range" values.

Clearly, the quality of recent data entry, especially of runaway events, has improved. Due to the unknown error rate of begin and end dates for runaway events, *length of stay* statistics of runaway events may have lower than desired confidence. We estimate the numbers of runaway events reported is an undercount of approximately 10%. Since children who run usually run more than once, the undercount of children who have run away is significantly less.

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Yoder, Kevin A., Whitbeck, Les B., & Hoyt, Dan R. (2001) Event History Analysis of Antecedents to Running Away From Home and Being on the Street. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 45(1):51-65.

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<sup>6</sup> Child Check was initiated by Rosalyn Oreskovich in December 2002 as a part of a growing concern of the existence of "lost" children in state welfare systems. Administrative regions in WA State were required to verify the physical location of every child in placement to ensure their health and safety. A field for children who were 'on the run' was included in this project.