

## CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Children who are maltreated often experience disrupted growth and development, including adverse effects on their physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development. For some children, maltreatment may be fatal. Psychological problems are common among children who have been maltreated. Physically abused children tend to be aggressive towards others and are less able to be empathetic towards others. Young children who are maltreated may fail to develop the social skills needed to form healthy relationships with peers and adults. As they get older, children who have been abused and neglected are more likely to perform poorly in school and to commit crimes against persons. They more often experience emotional problems, depression, suicidal thoughts, sexual problems, and alcohol/drug abuse.<sup>1</sup> However, for any given child, the consequences of abuse and neglect will depend on the intensity, duration, and type of abuse; the presence of supportive adults; and the age of the child at the time of the abuse.

Risk factors for child abuse and neglect include alcohol/drug abuse, psychological impairment, and a history of child abuse or domestic violence in parents or caregivers. Although child abuse and neglect occur in families of all income brackets, cases of child maltreatment occur disproportionately among lower-income families.<sup>2</sup> While most poor people do not mistreat their children, the stress and frustration of living in poverty combined with other risk factors such as lack of parenting skills, depression, social isolation, drug/alcohol abuse, and exposure to violence increase the likelihood of maltreatment.

Younger children, girls, and premature infants are more vulnerable to abuse and neglect. Other than sexual abuse, which occurs more frequently among girls, other types of maltreatment affect both sexes about equally.<sup>3</sup> In addition, it should be noted that accusations against the families of poor children, especially those with infants and young children, are more likely to be pursued than cases against children in wealthier families and neighborhoods.<sup>4</sup>

### Data Source

The exact number of children who were abused or neglected is unknown, since these incidents may or may not have been reported to child protective services agencies that are charged with collecting and responding to reports of child maltreatment.<sup>5</sup> In the absence of prevalence data on child abuse and neglect, this section of the report presents data on children whose abuse or neglect was reported to local child protective service agencies, the San Francisco Department of Human Services in San Francisco, in order to provide some indication of the extent and patterns of child abuse and neglect in the City.

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<sup>1</sup> Starr, R.J., Jr., MacLean, D.J., and Keating, E.P. "Life-Span Developmental Outcomes of Child Maltreatment." In The Effects of Child Abuse and Neglect: Issues and Research, R.H. Starr, Jr., and D.A. Wolfe, eds. New York: The Guilford Press, 1991; Sedney, M.A., and Brooks, B. "Factors Associated With a History of Childhood Sexual Experience in a Nonclinical Female Population," Journal of American Academy of Child Psychiatry, 12, 1: 215-218, 1984

<sup>2</sup> Gelles, R.J. "Poverty and Violence Toward Children," American Behavioral Scientist, 35, 3:258-74, 1992

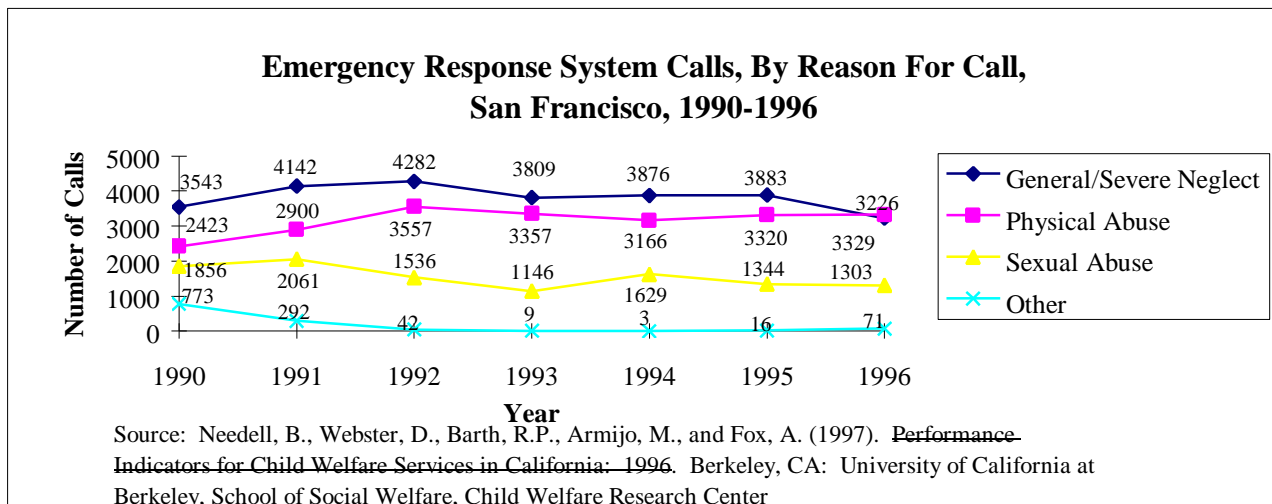
<sup>3</sup> Sedlak, A.J., and Broadhurst, D.D. The Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect. D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1996

<sup>4</sup> Pelton, L.H. "The Role of Material Factors in Child Abuse and Neglect." In Protecting Children From Abuse and Neglect: Foundations for a New National Strategy. G.B. Melton and F.D. Barry, eds. New York: Guilford Press, 1994.

<sup>5</sup> National Research Council. Understanding Child Abuse and Neglect. D.C.: National Academy Press, 1993

## Emergency Response Calls

In 1996, the San Francisco Department of Human Service's (SFDHS) Emergency Response system received 7,929 calls, or an average of 22 calls per day, reporting possible abuse, neglect, exploitation, or abandonment of children and youth in San Francisco.<sup>6</sup> The number of calls decreased by 7% since



1990, compared to a 28% increase statewide. Most calls in 1996 were for physical abuse (42%) or general neglect (41%). Sixteen percent were for sexual abuse and 1% were for “other” reasons such as exploitation, child’s disability or handicap, relinquishment, disrupted adopted placement, and voluntary placement. These proportions were similar to those for the state as a whole.<sup>7</sup>

## Removal From Home

Under supervision of the juvenile court, children and youth up to 18 years of age are removed from the home and placed in foster care with a relative, foster or group home when it is determined that they cannot safely remain at home due to abuse or neglect or that leaving the child or youth at home poses a continued risk. The San Francisco Department of Human Services is the public agency responsible for children in foster care.<sup>8</sup> Foster care is defined as out-of-home placement for a child under the supervision of the juvenile court and does not include children under the supervision of probation or other agencies.

From 1996 to 1997, the number of children who were removed from the home for the first time into emergency shelters dropped 15% (from 591 to 504). This decrease in the number of first time emergency shelter placements was attributed, at least in part, to the agency’s recent increased efforts to preserve families by keeping children with their families or with relatives willing to care for them.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The Emergency Response system is also referred to as the San Francisco Child Abuse Hotline. Reports to the system may include multiple reports per child.

<sup>7</sup> Needell, B., Webster, D., Barth, R.P., Armijo, M., and Fox, A. (1997). Performance Indicators for Child Welfare Services in California: 1996. Berkeley, CA: University of California at Berkeley, School of Social Welfare, Child Welfare Research Center

<sup>8</sup> The Family and Children’s Services (FCS) Division of the San Francisco Department of Human Services is the local public agency responsible for protecting children when a threat of abuse or neglect, presents a danger to the child’s safety. Every child under age 18 in San Francisco may potentially utilize the services of FCS.

<sup>9</sup> San Francisco Department of Human Services, Child Protection Center, Emergency Shelter Care Annual Report 1997

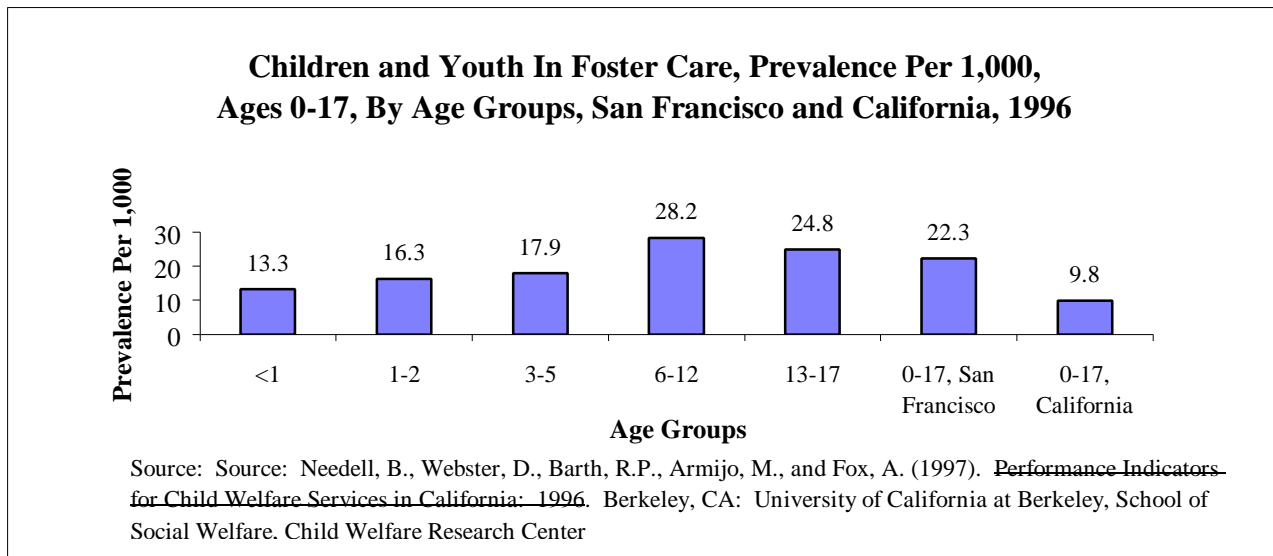
In San Francisco, children and youth can also be placed out-of-home by public institutions through two additional mechanisms:

- *Juvenile Probation Placement:* When the child or youth has committed a crime, San Francisco Juvenile Probation may place the child in a group home for rehabilitation and for the safety of others. (Data on Juvenile Probation placements is not covered in this report.)
- *AB 3632 Special Education Placement:* When the child or youth is seriously emotionally disturbed (SED) and requires out-of-home placement, the parent(s), San Francisco Unified School District, and Community Mental Health Services (within the San Francisco Department of Public Health) jointly determine the need for placement. CMHS then places the child in an appropriate group home or therapeutic foster home setting. (Refer to the “Mental Health” section of this report for a review of children and youth in AB 3632 placement.)

From January to mid-September 1998, SFDPH filed a total of 301 petitions with the court to consider removing the child from the home compared to 951 petitions filed in 1995. The significant decline in the number of petitions filed is considered to be an indication of the agency’s recent efforts to preserve families and prevent or avoid removal whenever possible.

**Foster Care**

In 1996, there were 3,058 San Francisco children and youth ages 0 to 17 in foster care.<sup>10</sup> San Francisco’s rate of foster care placement, 22.3 per 1,000 population, is the highest rate per capita in the



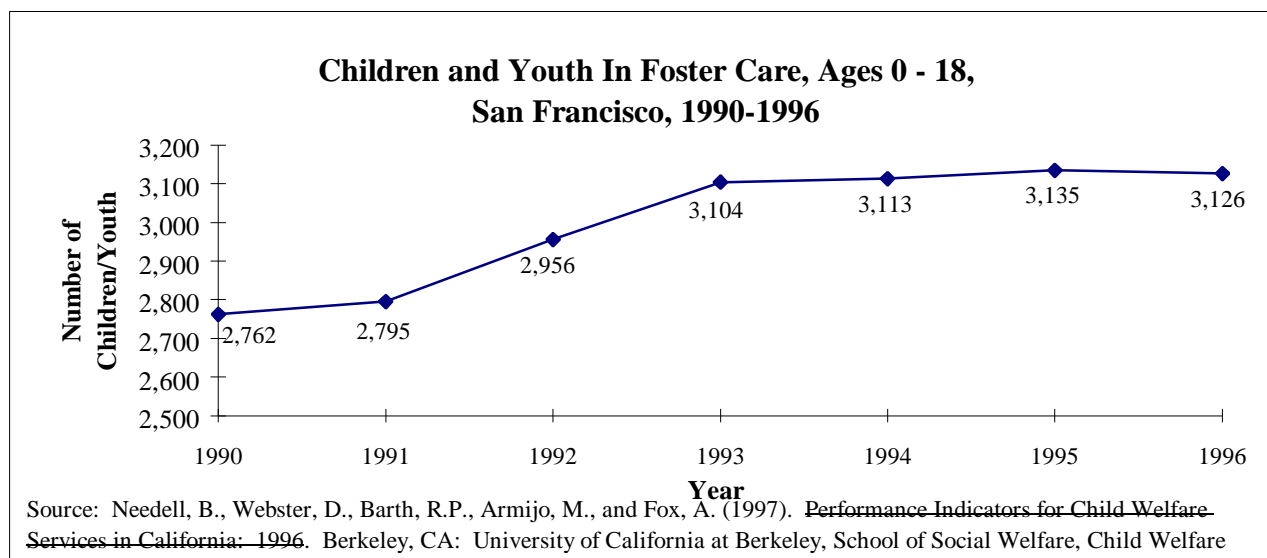
state, and significantly higher than the statewide rate of 9.6.<sup>11</sup> San Francisco’s rate is high, in part, because about 50% of children needing foster care are placed with relatives who often need the financial support available as a result of designating the child with foster care status. San Francisco’s

<sup>10</sup> These only include children and youth placed out-of-home in foster care under the San Francisco Department of Human Services. These do not include children in out-of-home placement under Juvenile Probation or AB 3632 Special Education as described in the section above. Note that these are the number of children and youth ages 0 to 17 in foster care. Data throughout most of this section of the report refers to children and youth ages 0 to 18 in foster care.

<sup>11</sup> Needell, B., Webster, D., Barth, R.P., Armijo, M., and Fox, A. (1997). Performance Indicators for Child Welfare Services in California: 1996. Berkeley, CA: University of California at Berkeley, School of Social Welfare, Child Welfare Research Center. Alpine (22.1) and Los Angeles (16.2) counties were second and third ranking in the state.

high cost of living makes it more critical for caregivers of children needing foster care to receive adequate financial support to raise the children. The only other option for financial support for a relative caregiver is Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), which provides a lower payment amount to relative caregivers compared to non-relative caregivers of foster care children. (State legislation has recently been introduced to increase the level of TANF payments to relative caregivers to the same level as non-relative caregivers.) In addition, the foster care system provides support services for children with special needs that are not available to non-foster children, which may serve as an incentive to some caregivers. Providing the same level of TANF payments to relative and non-relative caregivers would allow for the dismissal of many San Francisco foster care cases.<sup>12</sup>

The number of San Francisco children and youth ages 0 to 18 in foster care increased dramatically between 1991 and 1993 (from 2,795 to 3,104), but remained relatively stable from 1993 through 1996.



**Placement Type.** In 1996, nearly all San Francisco children and youth in foster care resided in foster homes or foster family agencies (49%), or were placed with relatives (45%). The remaining children and youth (7%) were in group homes or other settings. These proportions by placement type are similar to statewide patterns.<sup>13</sup>

**Reasons for Removal.** In FY 1996/97, 84% of children and youth from San Francisco in foster care (2,684) had been removed from home because of neglect. Eight percent (251) were removed due to physical abuse, 4% (126) because of sexual abuse, and 4% for other reasons.<sup>14</sup> In 1996, nearly equal numbers of male and female children were removed from the home. However, a greater proportion

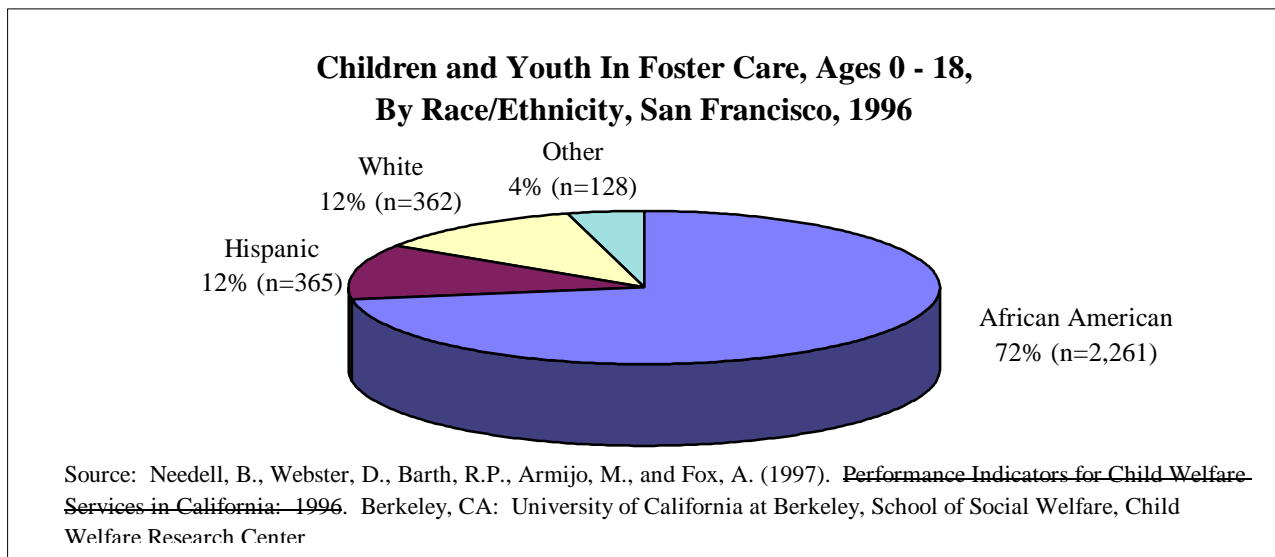
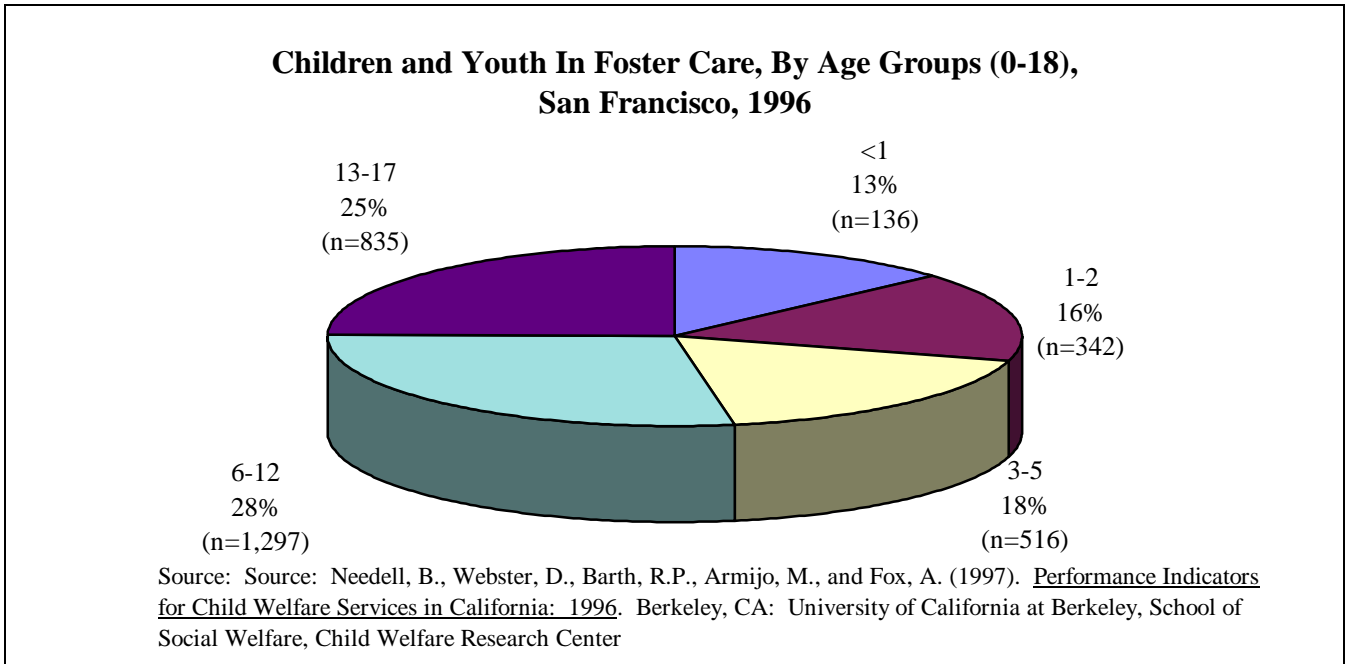
<sup>12</sup> San Francisco Department of Human Services, Family and Children's Services Division

<sup>13</sup> "Foster homes" are placements with nonrelative nonguardians or nonrelative guardians. "Foster family agency homes" are licensed agencies. Needell, B., Webster, D., Barth, R.P., Armijo, M., and Fox, A. (1997). Performance Indicators for Child Welfare Services in California: 1996. Berkeley, CA: University of California at Berkeley, School of Social Welfare, Child Welfare Research Center.

<sup>14</sup> "Other" includes exploitation, child's disability or handicap, relinquishment, disrupted adopted placement, and voluntary placement. State of California Health and Welfare Agency, Department of Social Services, Foster Care Information System.

(74%) of sexual abuse cases involved female children, and a greater proportion of cases of status offense violations (73%) involved male children.

By Age. In 1996, more than half (53%) of San Francisco’s children and youth in foster care were age 6 or older, about one third (30%) were birth to 2 years of age and 18% were ages 3 to 5.



By Race/Ethnicity. In 1996, almost three-fourths (72%) of San Francisco children and youth in foster care were African American. White and Hispanic children and youth each represented 12% of those in

foster care. Children and youth of “other” race/ethnicities comprised 4% of the foster care population.<sup>15</sup>

Out of County Foster Care. When foster care within the county cannot be found, children and youth are placed in foster care outside of the county. In 1997, nearly half (46%, 1,487) of San Francisco’s children and youth in foster care resided out-of-county, a large percentage compared to many California counties. Most of these children and youth placed out-of-county were in foster homes (50%) or with relatives (40%), compared to in-county placements which were most commonly with relatives (48%), or in foster homes (36%)<sup>16</sup>

San Francisco’s out-of-county placements are high due to an inadequate number of licensed foster care providers in the City, particularly in communities of color. Generally, many foster care providers and relative caregivers reside out of-county due to San Francisco’s high housing costs. The San Francisco Department of Human Services policy is to limit out-of-county placements to no more than 30 miles, which is less distance than many counties have within their boundaries.

Case Plan Goal. In FY 1996/97, the “case plan goal” was to return 38% of San Francisco’s children and youth in foster care to their parents or guardians. The goals for other children and youth in foster care who could not safely return to their parents and were unlikely ever to return home included long term foster care with relatives or non-relatives (38%), legal guardianship (17%), adoption (7%), and other (1% including independent living).<sup>17</sup> Returning foster care children to parents or guardians was a more common goal among children ages birth to 5 (61%), while the more common goal for children and youth ages 6 and older was long-term foster care or guardianship.<sup>18</sup> From 1996 to 1998, there was a substantial increase in the number of children who reunified with their parents, from only 12 in 1996, 80 in 1997, and 328 January through August 1998.<sup>19</sup> This increase in reunifications is considered to be an indication of the agency’s recent, more concerted efforts towards family preservation.

Case Closures; Length of Stay; Recidivism. Among children whose cases were closed in FY 1996/97, two-thirds (63%) were reunited with their family, and 7% were adopted. Nearly one-third (30%) of

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<sup>15</sup> Needell, B., Webster, D., Barth, R.P., Armijo, M., and Fox, A. (1997). Performance Indicators for Child Welfare Services in California: 1996. Berkeley, CA: University of California at Berkeley, School of Social Welfare, Child Welfare Research Center.

<sup>16</sup> State of California Health and Welfare Agency, Department of Social Services, Foster Care Information System, Ad Hoc Report, May 5, 1997

<sup>17</sup> Regulations require that permanency plans be developed within a hierarchy of choices for foster children for whom family unification will not be possible: adoption, legal guardianship, and long term placement.

<sup>18</sup> State of California Health and Welfare Agency, Department of Social Services, Foster Care Information System, Characteristics of Children By Case Plan Goal, Average Monthly for Trial Year Ended June 1997.

<sup>19</sup> State of California Health and Welfare Agency, Department of Social Services Foster Care Information System. Note: Reunification may not necessarily result in immediate case closure.

cases were closed for “other” reasons such as emancipation, legal and guardianship, inter-county transfers, and foster child who violates the law and is assigned to the Juvenile Probation Department.<sup>20</sup> For the quarter ending December 1995, the average time in foster care for 115 children who were successfully reunified (and whose cases were closed) was 18.4 months.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> State of California Health and Welfare Agency, Department of Social Services, Foster Care Information System, Characteristics of Children in Foster Care Status as of End of Three Consecutive Years (June 1995-1997)

<sup>21</sup> San Francisco Department of Social Services, Family and Children’s Services, Annual Statistical Report, January 1, 1995 Through December 31, 1995 (more recent data was not available)