

Michigan Department of Human Services
Division of Continuous Quality Improvement

Shelter Use Analysis

Data Analysis

Period under Review
July 2013 - April 2014

Case File Review

Period under Review
January - March 2014

Shelter Review

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INTRODUCTION

The Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS) completed a targeted review on the use of shelter care to determine current practice, with a focus on exploring reasons for initial and repeat placement into shelter care, barriers to timely transition from shelter to a permanent placement and systemic issues that continue to the use of shelter placement. The results of this review are being used to make recommendations that prioritize the placement of children in settings that support their safety, well-being and permanence.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The use of shelter care is declining statewide; however, shelter care continues to be an identified service need when other placement options are not available.

This report includes the following information:

- Data collected from July 2013 to April 2014 regarding foster children in shelter placements.
- Case file review information for 41 children who had a shelter placement between January 1 - March 31, 2014.
- Interviews with shelter staff and children residing in shelter care in July 2014.
- Focus groups of child welfare professionals in Kent, Oakland and Wayne Counties.

The information gathered from these four sources supports similar trends statewide regarding the use of shelter care.

Based on the findings of the review, the following strengths were identified:

- Shelter care use is significantly declining across the state.
- From July 2013 to April 2014, shelter entries represented less than 1% of the total foster care population each month.
- Length of stay for the majority of children is 20 days or less with over half of those children staying 5 days or less.
- Shelters can provide a structured, safe environment for children in transition as they await a placement match that will best meet their ongoing needs going forward.
- If a placement is not immediately identified at the time of removal, placement in shelter allows the county time to assess the child and ensure the best possible placement match.

- Kent County no longer allows children to be initially placed in shelters without county director or program manager approval which has led to a significant decrease in shelter placements. This change occurred after the data was queried for this analysis and is not reflected in this report.

Opportunities for improved practice include the following:

- Continue development of more placement options for children, especially placements that are willing to accept children with behavior and mental health concerns.
- Review policy regarding the placement exception process as delays impact timely placement.
- Evaluate placement of children of young children in shelter and determine if age restrictions should be established.

METHODOLOGY

Data Analysis

The Data Management Unit (DMU) developed the “Monthly MSA Emergency Shelter Report” which lists each child placed in shelter care during an identified time period. DCQI analyzed the reports covering the period of July 1, 2013 to April 23, 2014 to examine demographics of children entering shelter care within this time frame. The two reports that were combined for this data included:

- Period of 7-1-13 to 12-31-13. MSA 5 Report Run date: 2-6-14.
- Period of 1-1-14 to 4-23-14. MSA 6 Report Run date 5-14-14.

Because the report progressively includes past shelter placements within 12 months of the most recent shelter placement, all duplicate children were removed from the combined report. The entries deleted were from the report run on 2-6-14 as the report run on 5-14-14 incorporates this data. The combined report included 486 unique children.

The queries include all children in shelter placement during the period of the run, for analysis purposes, the children that entered shelter placement prior to 7-1-13 were excluded. There were 37 children whose most recent shelter entry were prior to 7-1-13, but remained in shelter as of 7-1-13. Additionally, it should be noted that 12 children listed in the data reports did not experience a shelter placement, but were placed in a hospital, juvenile detention, or foster/relative home. These cases were removed from the report.

With the exclusion of children entering shelter care prior to 7-1-13 and the children not actually in a shelter placement, there were 437 children that experienced at least one entry into emergency shelter placement between 7-1-13 and 4-23-14. The information for these children was analyzed as it relates to age, race, county of jurisdiction, number of entries per month, length of stay, number of prior emergency shelter placements, time between emergency shelter placements, and combinations of these demographic factors.

Case File Review

Based on the data queried, it was determined that the highest population of children in shelter placements is in Kent, Oakland, and Wayne Counties. A random sample of 41 foster children placed in shelter care during the period of January 1, 2014 to March 31, 2014 was selected for review, which DCQI analysts conducted onsite. A total of 41 case files were reviewed:

- 15 from Kent County
- 12 from Oakland County
- 14 from Wayne County

The Kent County children were all placed for a period of time at Kids First Shelter operated by D.A. Blodgett. Oakland County children were placed at Children's Village which is operated by the County of Oakland. Wayne County children resided at either Davenport Shelter (operated by Spectrum Human Services) or Wolverine Center (operated by Wolverine Human Services). Analysts reviewed the case files and responded to a series of questions using Survey Monkey as the format for data collection.

Interviews

DCQI analysts interviewed clinical shelter care staff members who are responsible for accepting placements and case management services in Kent, Oakland, and Wayne Counties. These interviews did not include child-specific information, but rather information was gathered regarding shelter operations such as:

- Intake and discharge processes,
- Factors that contribute to the use of shelter placement,
- Services provided by the shelter,
- Benefits and challenges of using emergency shelter placement,
- Barriers to discharging children from shelter care, and
- Opportunities to improve availability of appropriate placement options.

Individual interviews were also conducted with age-appropriate children placed in shelter care at the time of the review. Questions asked were specific to the child's placement history, shelter care experience, length of stay at the shelter, services provided to the child while in care, child's involvement in their own case planning, family/sibling contact, and daily routine at the shelter facility.

- Kent County interviews were conducted on July 30, 2014 at Kids First Shelter and included two case managers and one child.
- Oakland County interviews were conducted on July 9, 2014 at Children's Village and included one case coordinator and five children.
- Wayne County interviews were conducted on July 7, 2014 and July 11, 2014 at Davenport Shelter and Wolverine Center and included:
 - From Davenport Shelter: one program director, one case manager, and five children.
 - From Wolverine Center: one case manager and four children.

Focus Groups

DCQI held focus groups with child welfare staff in Kent, Oakland, and Wayne Counties. Participants included: placement resource specialists, children's protective services (CPS) specialists, foster care specialists, private agency foster care (PAFC) staff - Kent County only¹, foster care and CPS supervisors, and program managers. The focus groups did not address child-specific information, but the following topics were discussed:

- The emergency shelter care placement process.
- Factors that contribute to the use of shelter placement.
- Benefits and challenges of using emergency shelter placement.
- Opportunities to improve availability of appropriate placement options for foster care children.

Two focus groups were held on July 30, 2014 in Kent County. One focus group consisted of CPS specialists and supervisors, and a second group was comprised of foster care specialists and supervisors from both DHS and private agencies.

Three focus groups were facilitated in Oakland County on July 8, 2014. One group consisted of a placement resource specialist, foster care supervisor and two program managers. A second group consisted of foster care specialists, foster care supervisors and foster care program

¹ It should be noted that Kent County has privatized their foster care intake and placement process.

managers. The third group consisted of CPS specialists, a CPS supervisor and a CPS program manager.

Two focus groups were facilitated in Wayne County on July 28, 2014. One focus group consisted of placement resource specialists and a program manager. The second group consisted of CPS specialists, foster care specialists, a foster care supervisor and a program manager.

FINDINGS

Data Analysis - Statewide

The number of shelter entries statewide per month is decreasing steadily. There was a spike in October 2013, and then levels decreased again. Graph 1 depicts placement trends. There were a total of 520 shelter entries between July 2013 and April 2014. Of the 520 shelter entries, 437 unique foster care children were placed in shelter during the same time period. Shelter entries represented less than 1% of the total foster care population each month. Table 1 includes entries per month, the total foster care population and the percent of shelter placements per month based on the population.

Graph 1: Shelter Entries per Month (including re-entries)

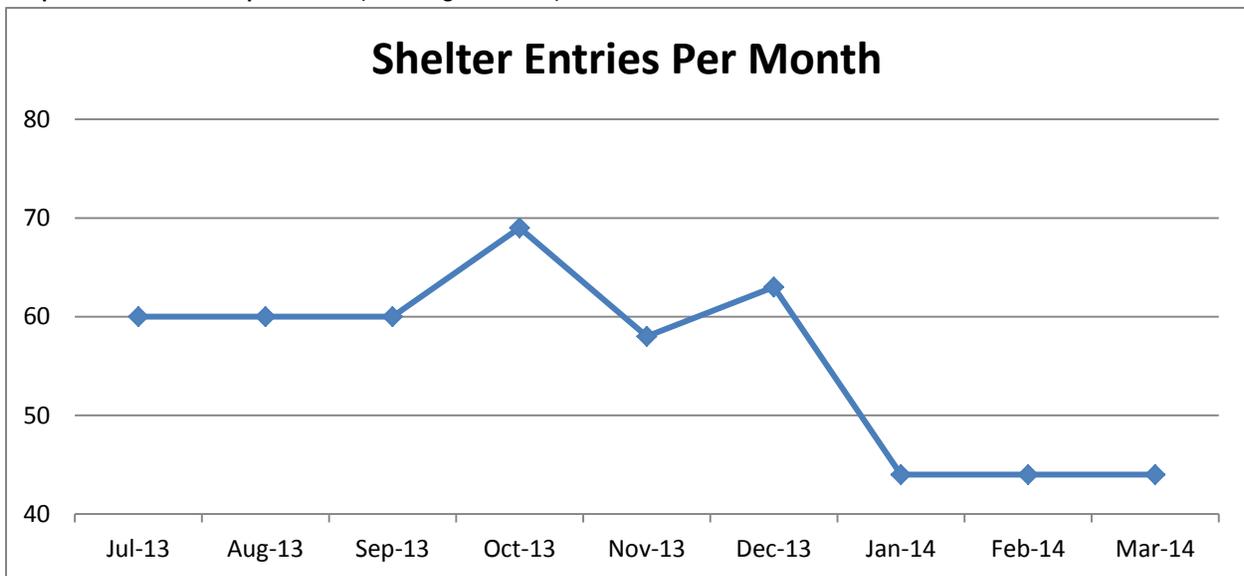


Table 1: Shelter Entries per Month (including re-entries)

Month of Entry	Total Shelter Entries	Total Children in Foster Care²	% of Shelter per population
July 2013	60	13,320	0.45%
August 2013	60	13,319	0.45%
September 2013	60	13,402	0.46%
October 2013	69	13,292	0.52%
November 2013	58	13,280	0.44%
December 2013	63	13,164	0.48%
January 2014	44	13,131	0.34%
February 2014	44	13,095	0.34%
March 2014	44	13,063	0.34%
<i>April 2014*</i>	18	12,964	<i>0.14%</i>

**Partial Month*

The 437 children were placed by 18 individual counties. The highest representation of children is from Kent, Oakland, and Wayne Counties which is where the three shelters in Michigan are located. DCQI chose to review cases and conduct focus groups from these three counties to gain a better understanding of the use of shelter care as a placement option. See Table 2 for a county breakout.

Table 2: Children in Shelter Care at Least Once Between July 1, 2013 and April 24, 2014 (by county of jurisdiction)

County/District	Number of Children	Percentage of Total
BERRIEN	3	0.7%
GENESEE	13	3.0%
GOGEBIC	1	0.2%
INGHAM	7	1.6%
IONIA	2	0.5%
JACKSON	10	2.3%
KALAMAZOO	3	0.7%
KENT	113	25.9%
LIVINGSTON	4	0.9%
MACOMB	25	5.7%
MONTCALM	3	0.7%
MUSKEGON	6	1.4%
OAKLAND	86	19.7%

² Children's Services Administration – Monthly Fact Sheet

County/District	Number of Children	Percentage of Total
OTTAWA	3	0.7%
SAGINAW	1	0.2%
ST CLAIR	3	0.7%
WASHTENAW	5	1.1%
WAYNE	149	34.1%
<i>District 26</i>	<i>59</i>	<i>13.5%</i>
<i>District 27</i>	<i>62</i>	<i>14.2%</i>
<i>District 29</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>6.4%</i>
Total	437	100.0%

The children in shelter placement are predominately teenagers, 12-15 years old. The second most common group is 16-18 year olds. See Table 3 for a more detailed breakout by age and length of stay. This appears disproportionately high compared to the number of teens in the total foster care population.

Table 3: Length of Stay by Age Group

Length of Time in Shelter	0-3 years old	4-7 years old	8-11 years old	12-15 years old	16-18 years old	19+ years old	Total
0 days	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
1-5 days	9	26	16	25	28	1	105
6-10 days	1	3	6	24	19	0	53
11-15 days	0	1	6	17	14	0	38
16-20 days	0	1	5	15	9	0	30
21-25 days	0	1	2	13	17	0	33
26-30 days	0	2	2	15	13	0	32
31-45 days	0	2	5	30	24	1	62
46-60 days	0	0	6	16	15	0	37
61-75 days	0	1	4	6	4	0	15
76-90 days	0	0	0	5	3	0	8
91-120 days	0	1	3	8	1	0	13
121-150 days	0	0	4	1	1	0	6
151-180 days	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
181-210 days	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total	10	38	60	177	150	2	437

Data indicates that African American children are the highest representation of the shelter population. This appears to be disproportionately high when compared to the number of African American children in foster care statewide. Table 4 below outlines a breakdown by race.

Table 4: Race of Children in Shelter Placement

Race	Number of Children	Percentage of Total
African American	261	59.7%
White	173	39.6%
Asian	1	0.2%
Unable to Determine	2	0.5%
Total	437	100.0%

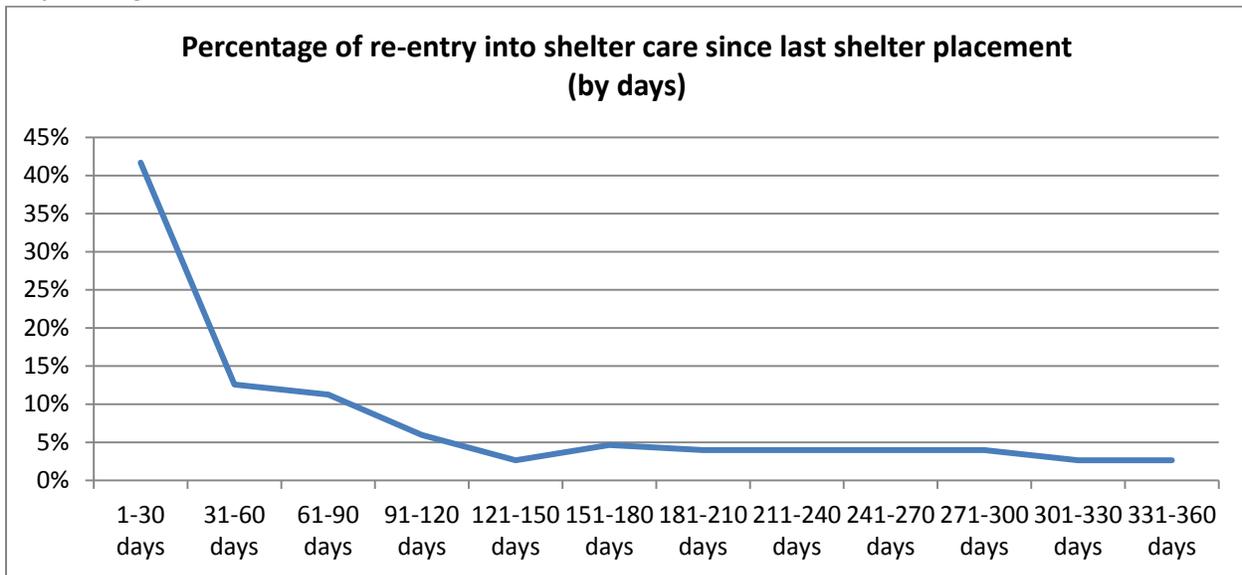
Of the 437 children with at least one shelter stay on or after July 1, 2013 there were 103 children (24%) that had experienced at least one prior stay in a shelter. Thus, this data indicates that 76% of the children experiencing a shelter placement within the referenced time frame had one shelter stay and did not experience a repeated shelter placement. The children in shelter placements continue to be predominantly children who are under court jurisdiction in Kent, Oakland, and Wayne Counties. Table 5 outlines the children with more than one shelter placement by county of jurisdiction.

Table 5: Children in Shelter Care with 1+ Prior Shelter Placement

County/District	Number of Children	Percentage of Total
JACKSON	2	1.9%
KENT	40	38.8%
MUSKEGON	1	1.0%
OAKLAND	10	9.7%
OTTAWA	1	1.0%
ST CLAIR	1	1.0%
WAYNE	48	46.6%
<i>District 26</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>13.6%</i>
<i>District 27</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>27.2%</i>
<i>District 29</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>5.8%</i>
Total	103	100.0%

The age of children experiencing more than one shelter placement is predominantly 16 and 17 year olds (38.8% or 40 of the 103 children). For children experiencing a re-entry into shelter care, 41.7% of the re-entries occur within one month of the prior shelter placement. Graph 2 shows the number of days between shelter placements for those experiencing re-entry.

Graph 2: Length of Time between Shelter Placements



Data Analysis – Wayne, Oakland and Kent

The highest portion of the children in shelter care are children who are under the jurisdiction of Kent, Oakland, and Wayne Counties, and further data analysis of these children was conducted to determine if trends are statewide or unique to each county. Wayne County’s data is separated by district.

The age groups were compared for the children in these counties to determine if there are differences between how the three counties are utilizing shelters for children of different age groups. It was found that all of the younger children in shelter care, under 7 years old, are from Kent or Oakland County. Wayne County is more likely to use shelters for older children, ages 12 and up, than Kent and Oakland. Table 6 illustrates this information.

Table 6: Child Age in Shelter Care by County

County/ District	0-3 years	4-7 years	8-11 years	12-15 years	16-18 years	19+ years	Total
KENT	5	18	23	43	24	0	113
OAKLAND	5	13	16	28	24	0	86
WAYNE	0	0	6	71	70	2	149
<i>District 26</i>	0	0	3	27	27	2	59
<i>District 27</i>	0	0	3	28	31	0	62
<i>District 29</i>	0	0	0	16	12	0	28
Total	10	31	45	142	118	2	348

In comparing the length of stay by county, a similar trend pattern was identified for all three counties, the largest number of children placed in shelter for 1-5 days. DHS has an opportunity to significantly reduce shelter placements if there is a more extensive examination completed regarding the specific reasons for short stays in shelter. It should be noted that effective March 2014, Kent County discontinued the practice of placing children initially in shelters; placement now requires county director or program manager approval which has led to a significant decrease in shelter placements. This change occurred after the data was pulled for this analysis and therefore the impact of this revised approval process is not reflected in this report. The breakout is shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Length of Stay (in days) by County

County/ District	0	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	31-45	46-60	61-75	76-90	91-120	121-150	151-180	181-210	Total
KENT	0	34	10	7	3	8	4	13	7	9	4	7	4	2	1	113
OAKLAND	0	27	11	8	2	5	3	11	9	1	3	5	1	0	0	86
WAYNE	2	26	14	14	16	13	17	26	16	4	0	1	0	0	0	149
<i>District 26</i>	0	7	3	2	7	4	11	17	7	1	0	0	0	0	0	59
<i>District 27</i>	2	16	6	7	9	4	3	8	6	1	0	0	0	0	0	62
<i>District 29</i>	0	3	5	5	0	5	3	1	3	2	0	1	0	0	0	28
Total	2	87	35	29	21	26	24	50	32	14	7	13	5	2	1	348

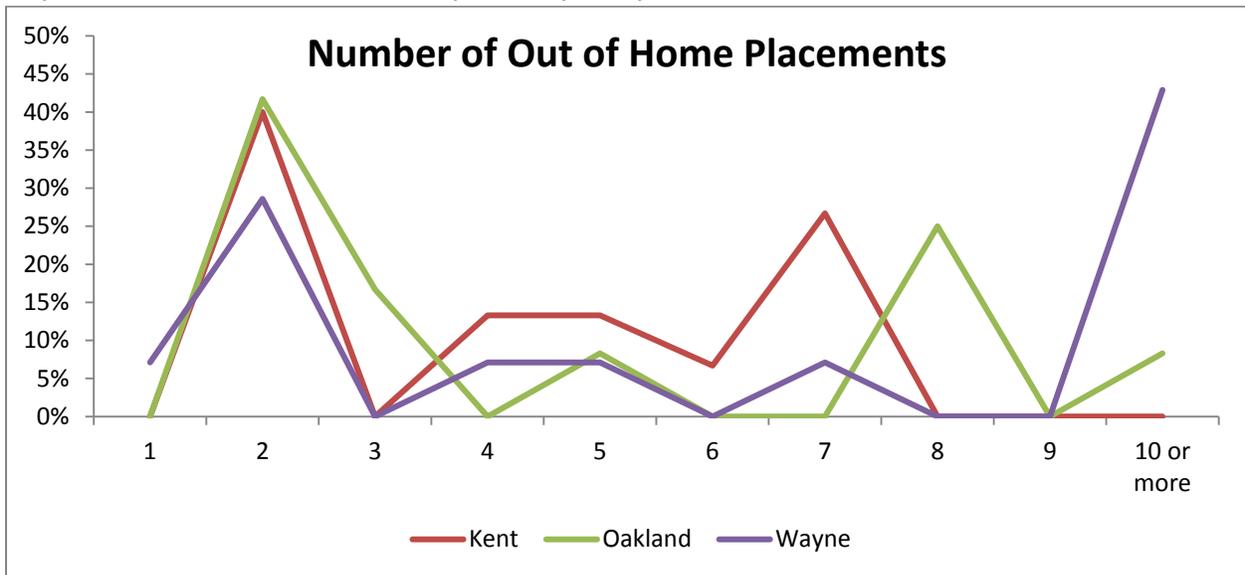
Case File Review

The case file reviews represented 41 children in shelter care between January 1, 2014 and March 31, 2014.

- 15 from Kent County
- 12 from Oakland County
- 14 from Wayne County

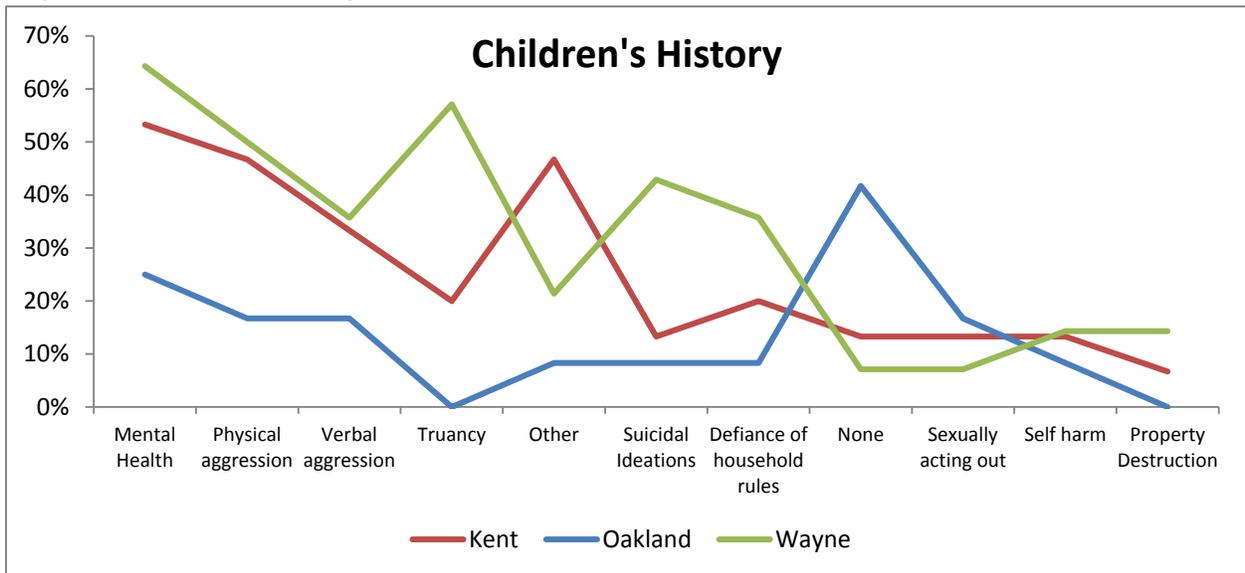
The case file review tracked information on the total number of placements, behaviors, services, and needs of the foster children that experienced a shelter stay. Based on the information collected, most children in Kent and Oakland counties had experienced two placements since entering care. However, the children in Wayne County most commonly had over ten placements since entering care. Graph 3 depicts the trends by county.

Graph 3: Number of Out of Home Placement per Child by County



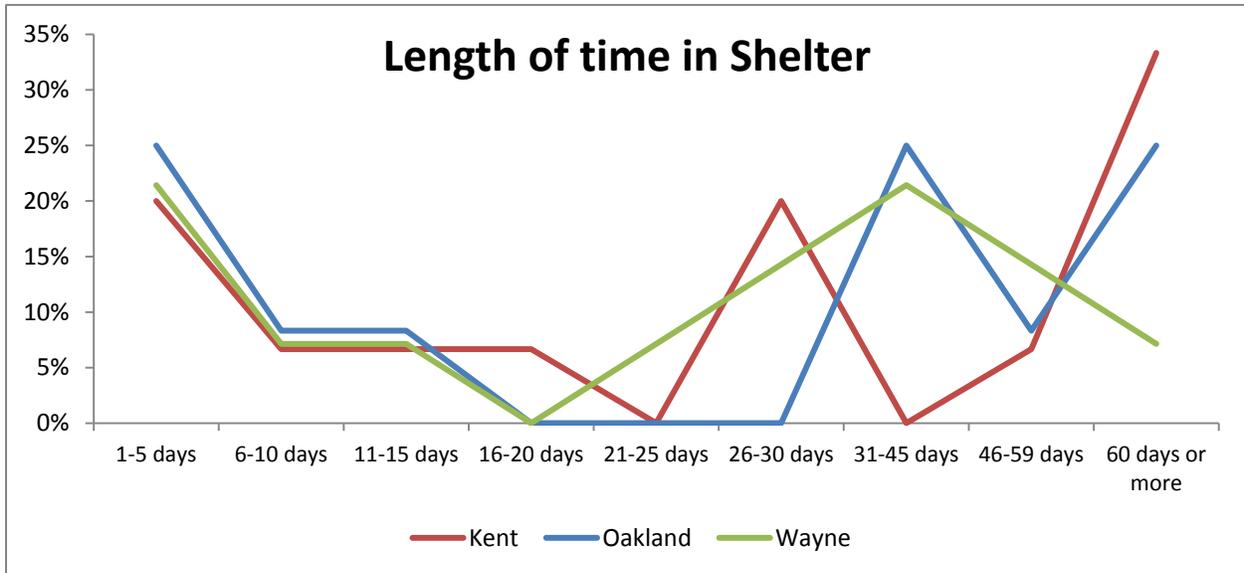
Based on case file information, children who have experienced a shelter placement display a variety of past behavioral concerns. Graph 4 illustrates the types of behaviors that have been documented for these children. The most common concerns are the child’s mental health history and physical aggression. Wayne County shows a high portion of children with past truancy and suicidal ideations. Oakland County has the highest portion of children being placed in the shelter with no documented behavioral concerns noted in the case file.

Graph 4: Documented Child History



The 41 cases reviewed have similar lengths of stay in shelter care as compared to the data reviewed for all shelter placements. The majority of shelter stays are less than five days or between 26 and 45 days. The case file review suggests that Kent and Oakland County’s lengths of stay also increase after 60 days. However, data from all shelter placements (see Table 3) does not support this. Graph 5 shows the length of stay based on data collection from the case file reviews.

Graph 5: Length of Stay in Shelter Care (by County)



The recommended next placement for children in shelter differs by county. Kent County was predominantly utilizing the shelter for initial assessments; therefore, the recommended next placement was primarily licensed foster homes. Wayne County was predominantly using shelter for placement of children with behavioral needs and had experienced multiple previous placements; therefore, residential placements were frequently recommended for the child. The next recommended placement for the children from Oakland County included both residential and licensed foster homes. In 75.6% of cases reviewed, the recommended next placement actually became the next placement for the child, with Oakland County having the highest rate of consistency at 83.3%. See Table 8 for more detailed information.

Table 8: Children Placed in Recommended Next Placement

County	Number of Applicable Cases	Number of Children	Percentage
KENT	15	11	73.3%
OAKLAND	12	10	83.3%
WAYNE	14	10	71.4%
TOTAL	41	31	75.6%

A placement exception is required for children in shelter more than 30 days and/or if the child is entering a shelter for any additional stay within 12 months of their first shelter placement. In the files reviewed, required exception requests were completed 53.1% of the time. Compliance by county is outlined within Table 9. Thirty-five percent of exception requests are due to a child having more than one shelter placement in a 12 month period. Sixty-five percent are for a shelter placement lasting more than 30 days. Oakland and Kent’s exception requests were divided between the two types. All of Wayne County’s exception requests were for a shelter stay longer than 30 days. Twelve (29%) of the 41 children whose case file was reviewed, had experienced more than one shelter stay within a 12 month period.

Table 9: Children with Exception Request (when required)

County	Number of Applicable Cases	Number of Children	Percentage
KENT	15	6	40.0%
OAKLAND	7	7	100.0%
WAYNE	10	4	40.0%
TOTAL	32	17	53.1%

Interviews and Focus Groups:

Based on information obtained from staff who participated in the interviews and focus groups, the following placement identification process was identified for each of the three counties:

Kent County Placement Process:

The placement process in Kent County during business or after hours requires the Child Placing Network (CPN) staff to conduct a conference call seeking placement options. The CPN consists of all private agencies that have a contract with DHS to provide foster care services. Each private agency in Kent County has an assigned placement worker(s) to represent their agency on the calls. The call also includes a staff person from the shelter and the referring worker or

supervisor. During this conference call the child's characteristics, needs, and behaviors are discussed in an effort to identify the best placement. If an appropriate placement match cannot be made, the child is placed in emergency shelter care after approval is granted by the Kent County DHS management team. The child remains in the shelter until a placement is identified that meets the needs of the child.

Oakland Placement Process:

The placement process in Oakland County during business hours is the identified placement specialist utilizes the call calendar to contact private agencies regarding the need for placement. The call calendar is a list of private agencies that are contracted with the state willing to provide foster care placement for children in care. The needs, age, and behaviors of the child are discussed to determine the child's best placement. If the initial private agency identified on the call calendar is unable to provide an appropriate placement for the child then information regarding the child is sent to all private agencies via email and phone calls are made to secure placement. The placement specialist also calls residential placement resources if the child is in need of specialized residential treatment care. After business hours, the CPS on-call worker calls the five identified emergency DHS foster homes and if they cannot accept the placement then the private agency on-call worker is contacted to secure placement. If a placement cannot be secured for the child either during or after business hours, the child is placed in emergency shelter care where they remain until a more permanent placement can be secured.

Wayne County Placement Process:

The placement process in Wayne County is through the Placement Resource Unit (PRU). The DHS specialist notifies PRU regarding the need of placement for a child. PRU then contacts all private agencies within the placement network via phone or email regarding the child's known needs and behaviors to locate the best placement. If there is a need for placement of a child who is currently supervised by a private agency, it is that agency's responsibility to contact other private agencies within the placement network to secure placement. If the child's placement cannot be secured through this process, the agency would contact PRU for assistance with placement. If a child is in need of placement after business hours the DHS on-call specialist contacts identified DHS foster homes and on-call intake workers from the placement network to locate an appropriate placement. If a placement cannot be secured, the child is taken to one of the two emergency shelters pending their next placement.

Factors Leading to Shelter Placement:

In **Kent** County the leading factors that contribute to the use of shelter placement are as follows:

- Children with behavioral or mental health challenges.
- Lack of foster homes.
- Children that are awaiting residential placement.
- Unplanned placement changes.
- Initial placement after removal from the home.

In **Oakland** County the leading factors that contribute to the use of shelter placement are as follows:

- Limited foster homes willing to accept older children with behavioral challenges or mental health history.
- Children with pending delinquent charges (i.e. status offenses, non-violent offenses) awaiting residential placement.
- Children who have been initially removed from their home and a relative or an appropriate foster care placement could not immediately be identified.

In **Wayne** County the leading factors that contribute to the use of shelter placement are as follows:

- Older children with behavioral or mental health challenges such as physical aggression or a history of running away that cannot be not safely maintained in a foster home or relative home setting.
- Children who have pending delinquent charges but have not been adjudicated.
- Children awaiting residential placement or independent living placements.
- Lack of placements for children who are Absent Without Legal Permission (AWOLP).

Services:

All three counties report the following services in shelter care include:

- Transportation to medical services and sibling/family visitation
- Medication management
- Therapeutic services or referrals to needed services
- Assessments of the child's needs
- Assistance with discharge planning
- On-site educational services
- Transportation to the child's prior school location and extra-curricular activities

Barriers to Discharge:

Kent County identified barriers to discharging children of all ages due to lack of placement resources including relative placements, licensed foster homes, and residential treatment facilities. Oakland and Wayne County identified barriers to discharging older children from shelters due to lack of placement resources for older children with specialized needs including relative placements, treatment foster homes, residential treatment facilities, and services to address AWOLP trends.

Benefits of Shelter Placements:

- Shelter placement allows time for the child's needs to be assessed in order for child welfare workers to identify the best placement match for the child
- The shelter is able to provide immediate services to the child such as medical and dental care, clothing, and therapeutic services or referrals that they may not get as quickly in another placement setting.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Case practice, policy, and service provision are areas where improvements could be made to reduce shelter entries and length of time in shelter care.

Practice

- It is recommended that DHS and private agency foster care providers evaluate the data and characteristics of the shelter population in their community and use this information in the development of their Annual Foster Recruitment and Retention Plan.
- It is recommended that DHS increase targeted foster home recruitment and licensing efforts to increase the availability of a variety of placement options to reduce the use of shelter care when placement is based on the lack of an appropriate foster family.
- It is recommended that the Placement Exception Request process be reviewed to ensure it is not a barrier.

Policy

- It is recommended that policy be revised regarding the use of shelter placements. Consider the following areas to address:
 - Development of placement restrictions in shelter care for younger children, similar to the existing pre-ten waiver policy.

- Family team meetings and/or supervisory case conference requirements should be implemented weekly to ensure reasonable efforts are made to locate a permanent placement for any child in shelter care.

Services

- It is recommended that DHS evaluate the types of contracted residential programs to determine if there is a need for additional contracts, and/or expansion of the number of contracted beds.
- It is recommended that the DHS continue to partner with the Department of Community Health in the development of foster homes that meet the mental health needs of the children in care.
- It is recommended that DHS explore the enhancement of already existing specialized services that support foster children, in an effort to more adequately address and diminish delinquent behaviors, including truancy from placement.