



# Foster Care Review Office September 2022 Annual Report

Nebraska Children's  
Commission Presentation  
November 1, 2022

# FCRO MISSION AND VISION

The Foster Care Review Office (FCRO) is the independent state agency responsible for overseeing the safety, permanency, and well-being of children in out-of-home care in Nebraska.

Through a process that includes case reviews, data collection and analysis, and accountability, we are the authoritative voice for all children and youth in out-of-home care.

Ultimately, *our mission* is for the recommendations we make to result in meaningful change, great outcomes, and hopeful futures for children and families.

*Our Vision:* For every child and family to flourish.

# Statutory Duties of FCRO

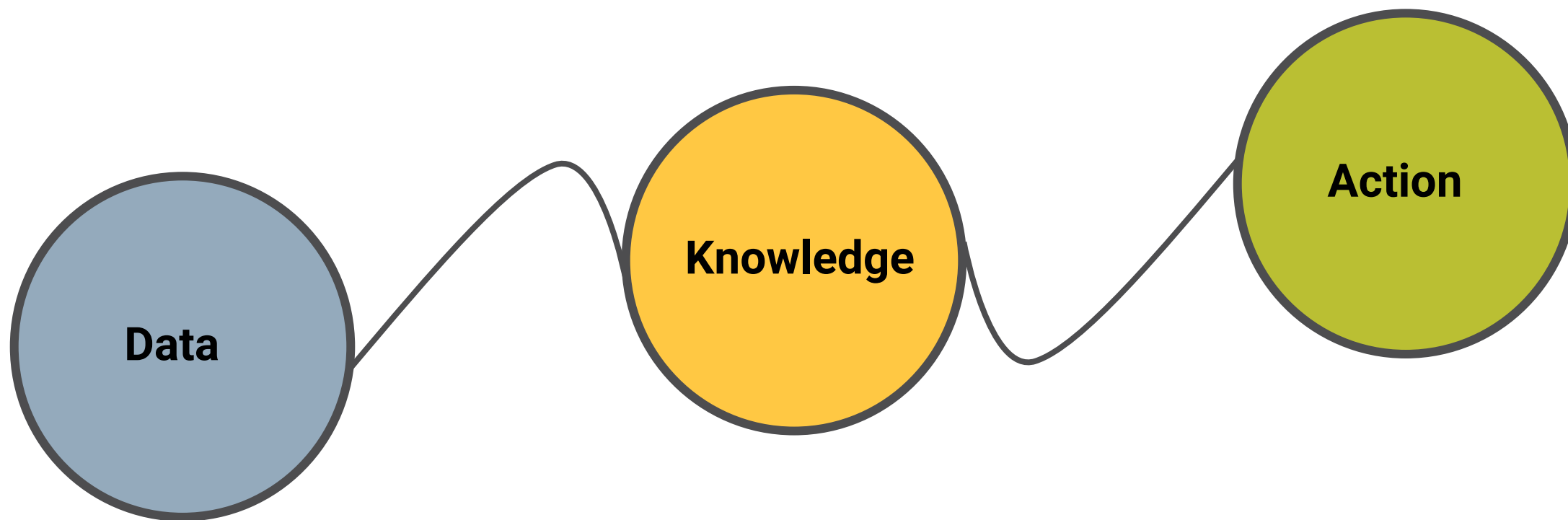
Purpose of FCRO (Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-1302)

- Tracking children in foster care
- Oversight of foster care system
- Reviewing cases of children in foster care
- Reporting to courts, DHHS, Legislature
- Advocacy on the case level and the system level

# Dedication

The 2022 Annual Report is dedicated to:

- The 300+ Foster Care Review Office local board members on 53 boards across the state that meet each month to review children's cases.
- The 28 FCRO staff members that are dedicated to the mission and vision of our agency, 18 of which directly facilitate the citizen review boards and all of whom enable the collection of data described in this report and promote children's best interests, and
- Everyone in the child welfare system who works each day to improve conditions for children in out-of-home care.



Connecting It All Together...  
**Across Nebraska's Communities**

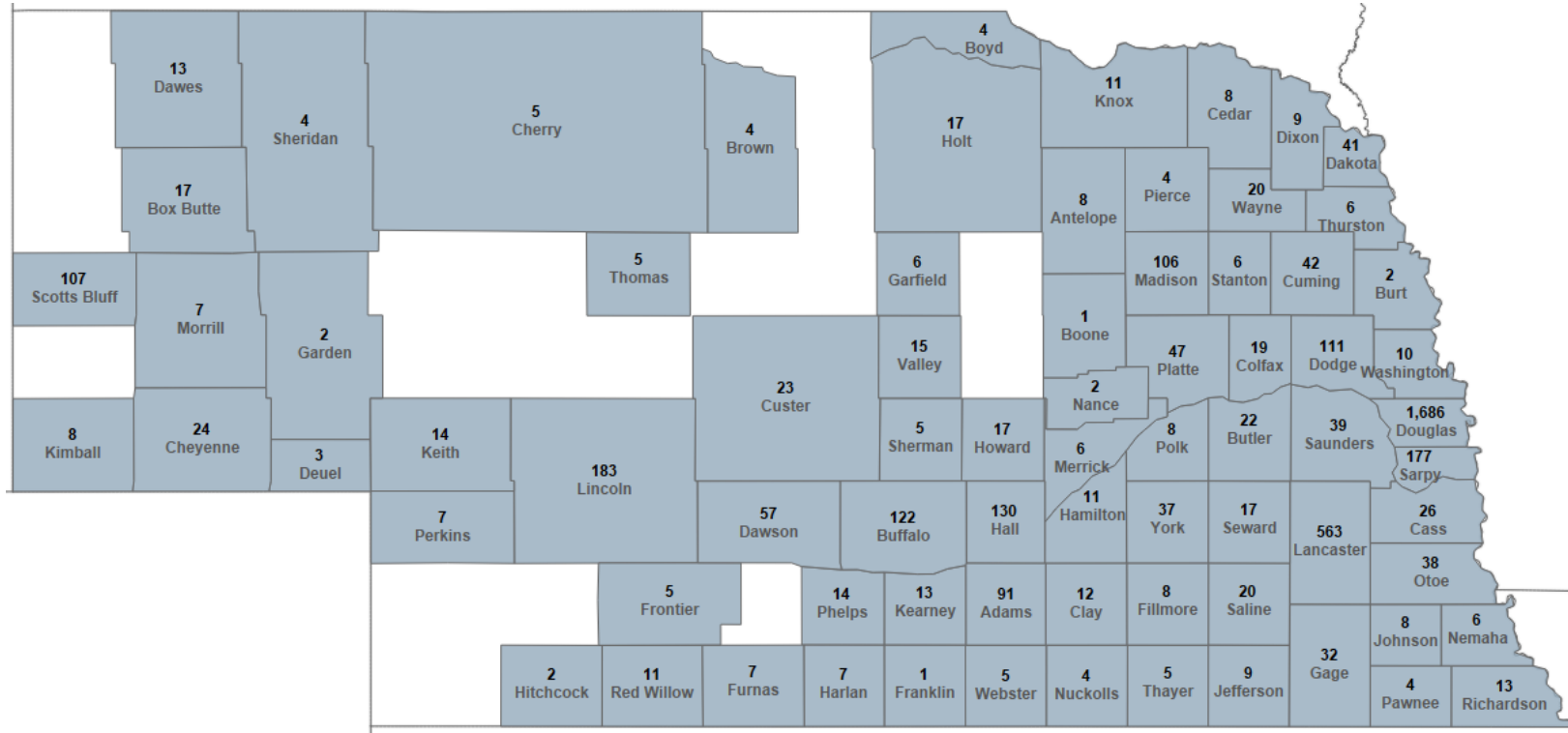
# Recommendations to:

- Legislature
- Multiple Agencies
- DHHS
- Probation
- Court System

The FCRO, as an independent oversight entity, makes recommendations that reflect a comprehensive, statewide perspective based on the following:

- Annual completion of nearly 4,500 individual case file reviews on children in out-of-home care by 53 multi-disciplinary local citizen review boards located statewide and staffed by FCRO System Oversight Specialists; and
- The FCRO's research, collection, and analysis of critical data on children in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

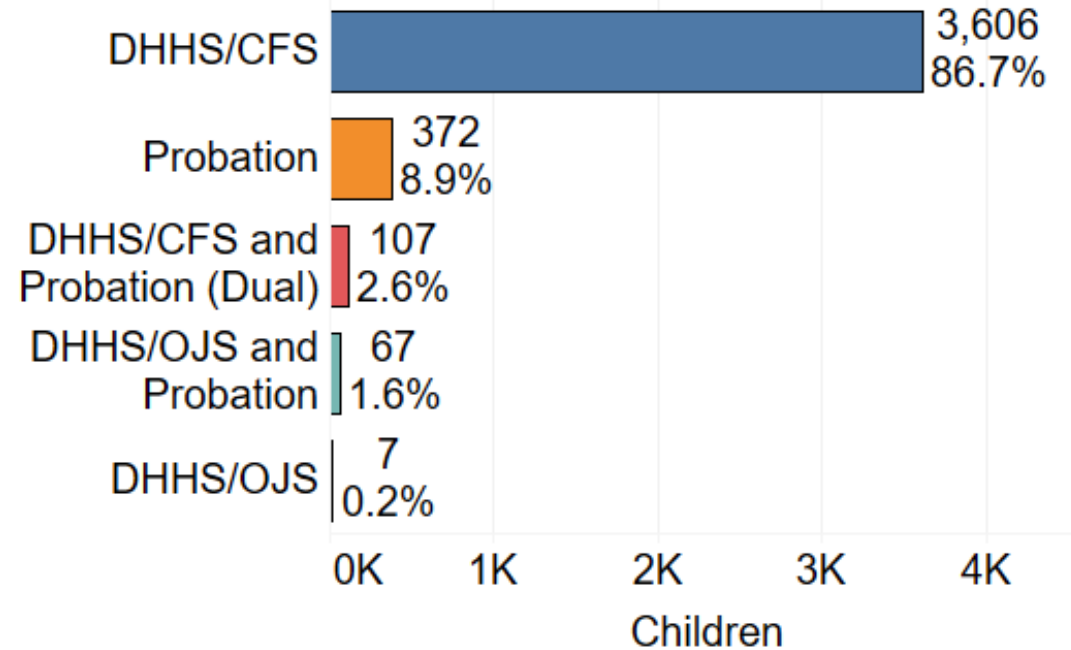
# Number of Nebraska Children in Out-of-Home or Trial Home Visit Placements by County of Court Involvement on 6/30/2022, n=4,159\*



The 4,159 shown above is a 1.1% increase compared to 6/30/2021 when 4,115 court-involved children were in out-of-home care.

\*Excludes Informal Living Arrangements (ILAs)

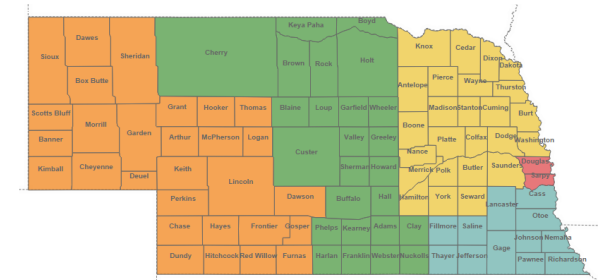
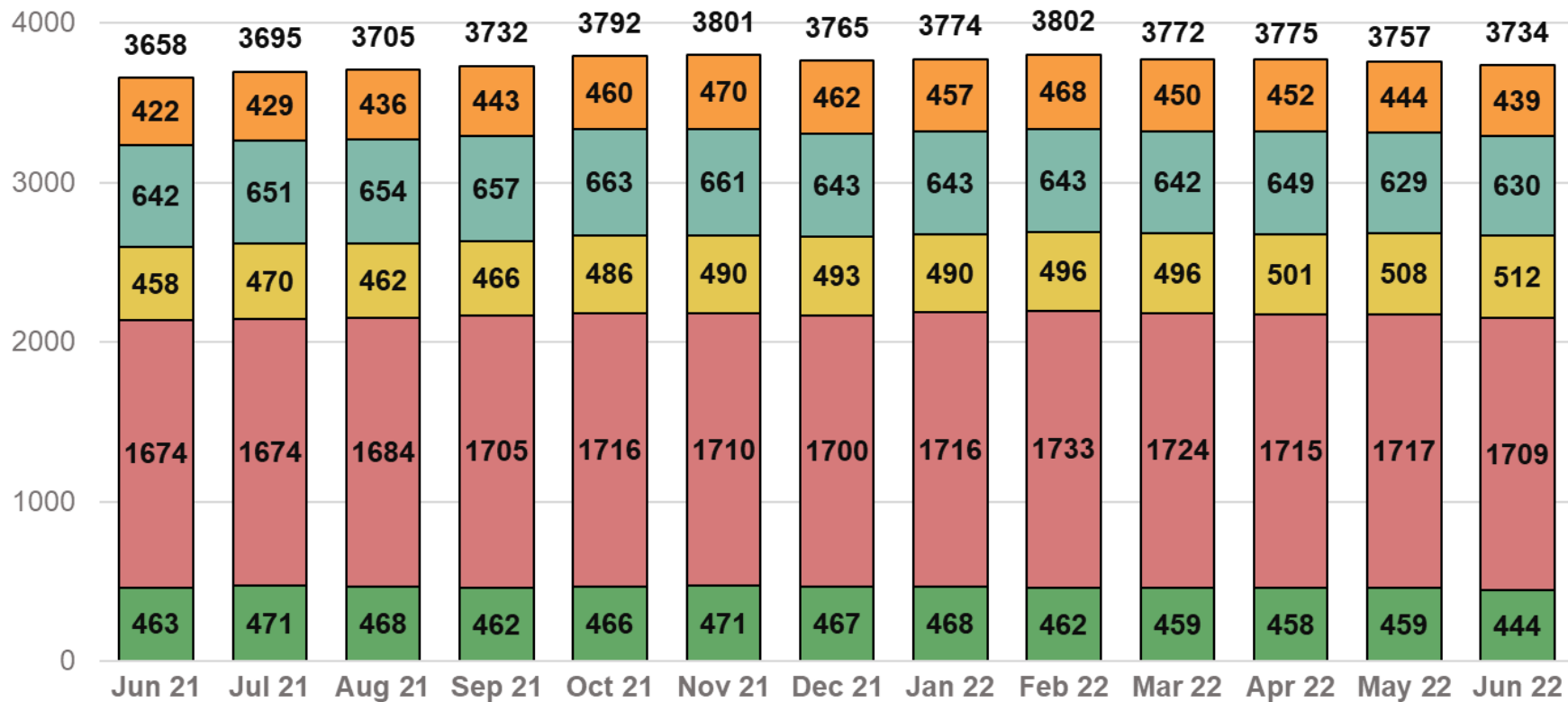
# All Court-Involved Children in Out-of-Home Care or Trial Home Visit by Agency Involved on 6/30/2022, n=4,159



- 3,606 children that were DHHS/CFS wards; a **2% increase** compared to the 3,535 children on 6/30/2021.
- 372 youth that were in out-of-home care while supervised by Probation; a **less than 1% decrease** compared to the 374 such youth on 6/30/2021.
- 107 youth in out-of-home care involved with DHHS/CFS and Probation simultaneously; a **24% decrease** compared to the 141 such youth on 6/30/2021.
- 67 youth in out-of-home care involved with DHHS/OJS and Probation simultaneously; a **6% increase** compared to the 63 such youth on 6/30/2021.
- 7 youth in out-of-home care that was served by DHHS/OJS only; an **increase** from the 2 such children on 6/30/2021.



# Average Daily Population of Children with Any DHHS/CFS Involvement

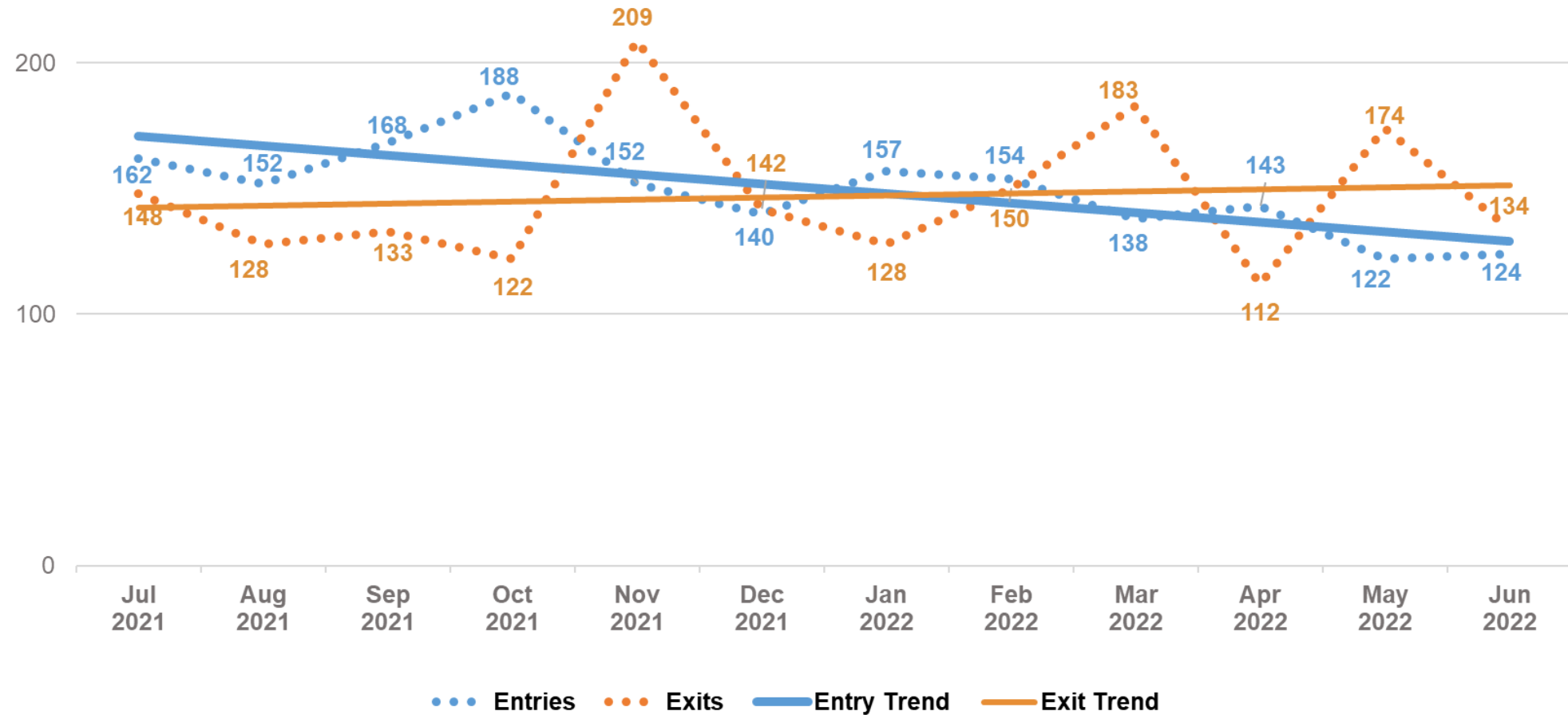


- DHHS Service Area**
- Central SA
  - Eastern SA
  - Northern SA
  - Southeast SA
  - Western SA

# Percent Change in All DHHS/CFS Involved Children in Out-of-Home or Trial Home Visit Placements (includes children with simultaneous involvement with Probation)

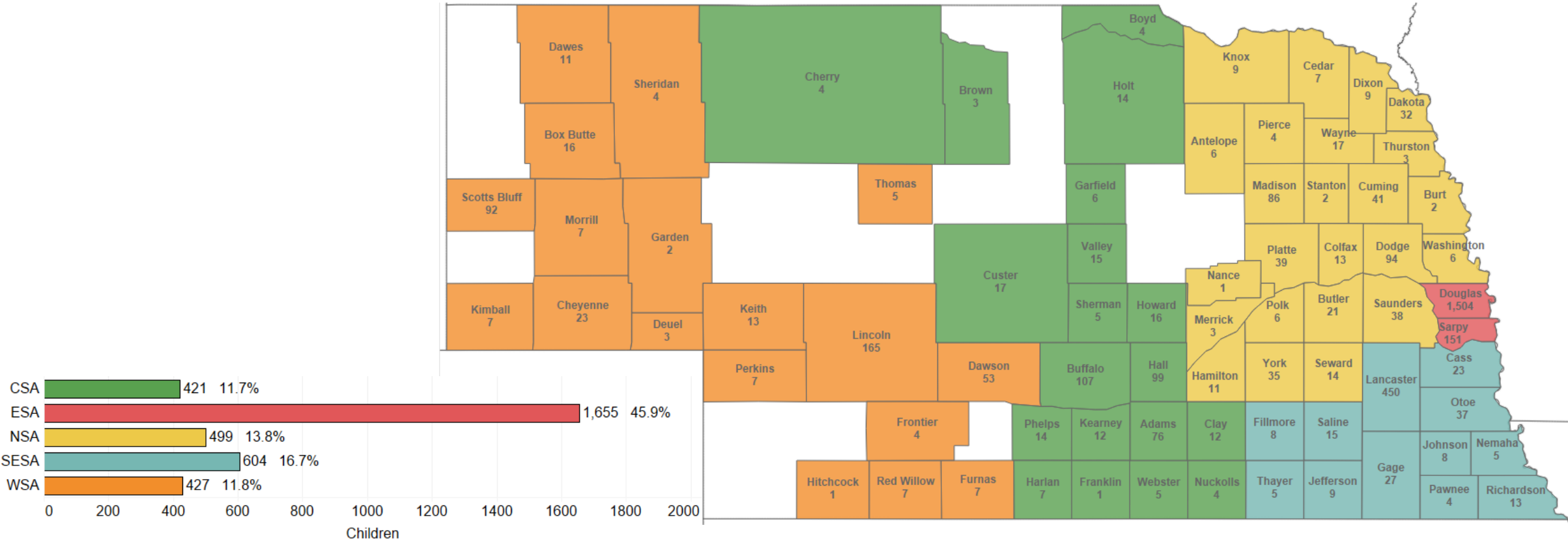
	Jun-21	Jun-22	% Change
<b>Central SA</b>	463	444	-4.1%
<b>Eastern SA</b>	1,674	1,709	2.1%
<b>Northern SA</b>	458	512	11.9%
<b>Southeast SA</b>	642	630	-1.8%
<b>Western SA</b>	422	439	4.1%
<b>State</b>	3,658	3,734	2.1%

# Statewide Entries and Exits of DHHS/CFS Involved Children



# DHHS/CFS Wards in Out-of-Home or Trial Home Visit Placement by County of Court Involvement and Service Area on 6/30/2022, n=3,606

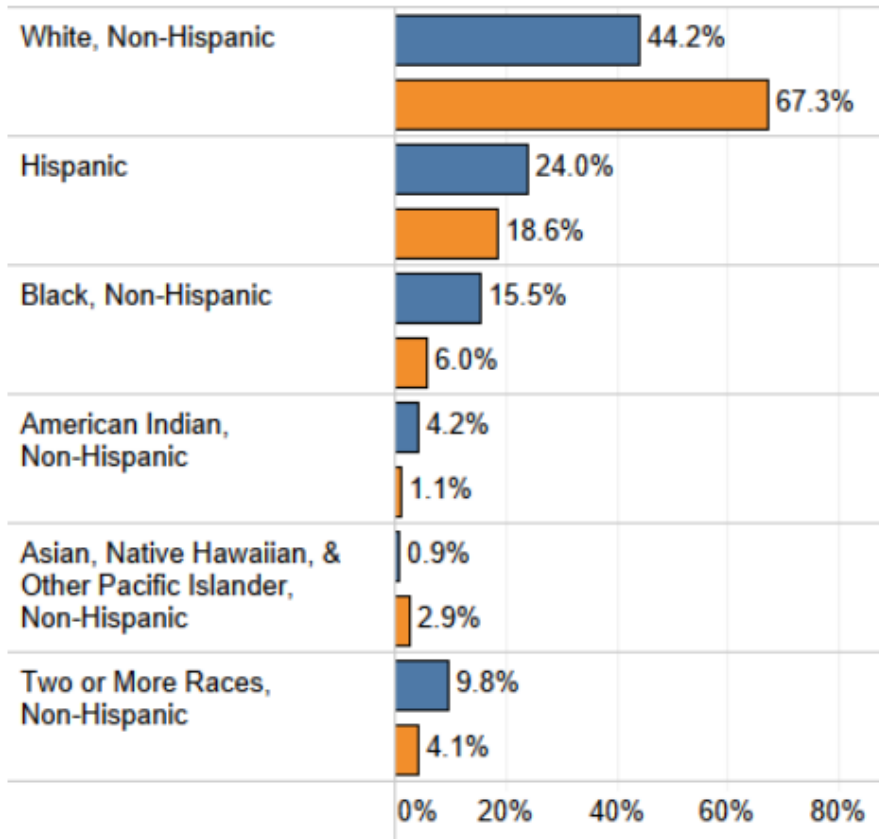
Counties with the most children in care included Douglas (1,504), Lancaster (450), Lincoln (165), and Sarpy (151).



## Top 10 Counties by Rate of NDHHS Wards in Care on 6/30/2022

County	Children in Care	Total Age 0-19	Rate per 1,000 children
Thomas	5	172	29.07
Lincoln	165	8,770	18.81
Cuming	41	2,432	16.86
Garfield	6	376	15.96
Valley	15	1,037	14.46
Boyd	4	375	10.67
Harlan	7	723	9.68
Butler	21	2,211	9.50
Cheyenne	23	2,429	9.47
Perkins	7	741	9.45

# Demographics of NDHHS Wards in Care on 6/30/2022

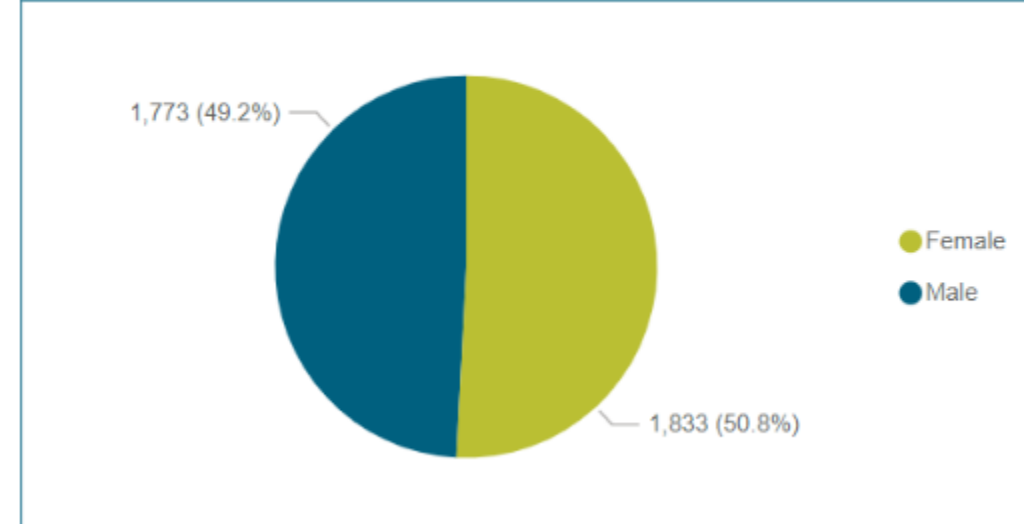


■ NDHHS Wards  
■ Nebraska Children

## Age Groups

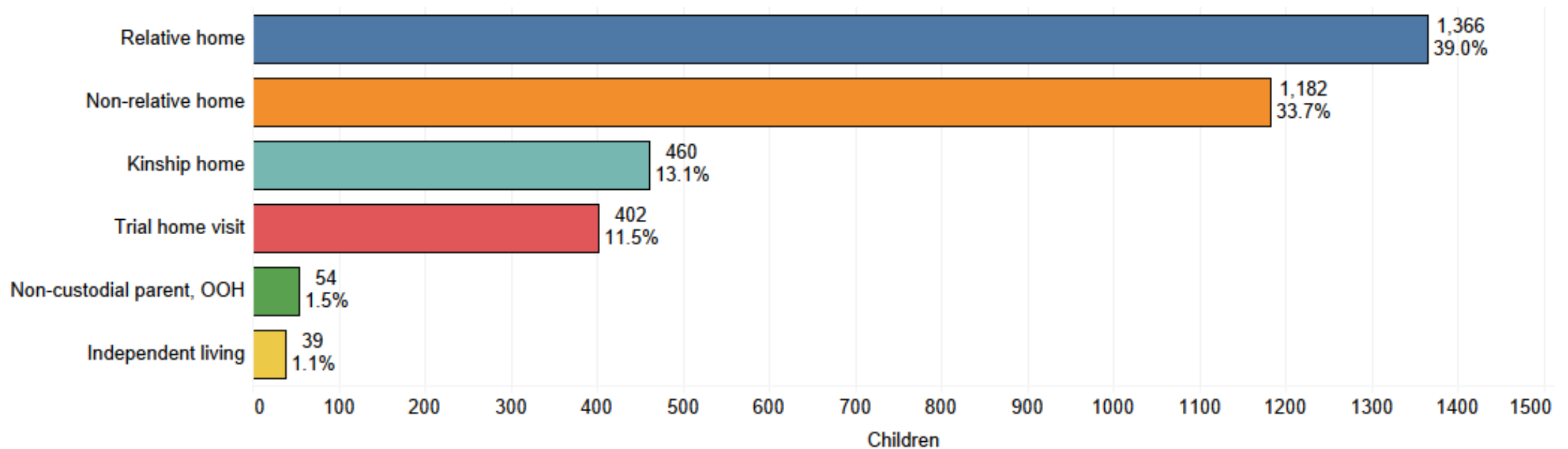


## Gender

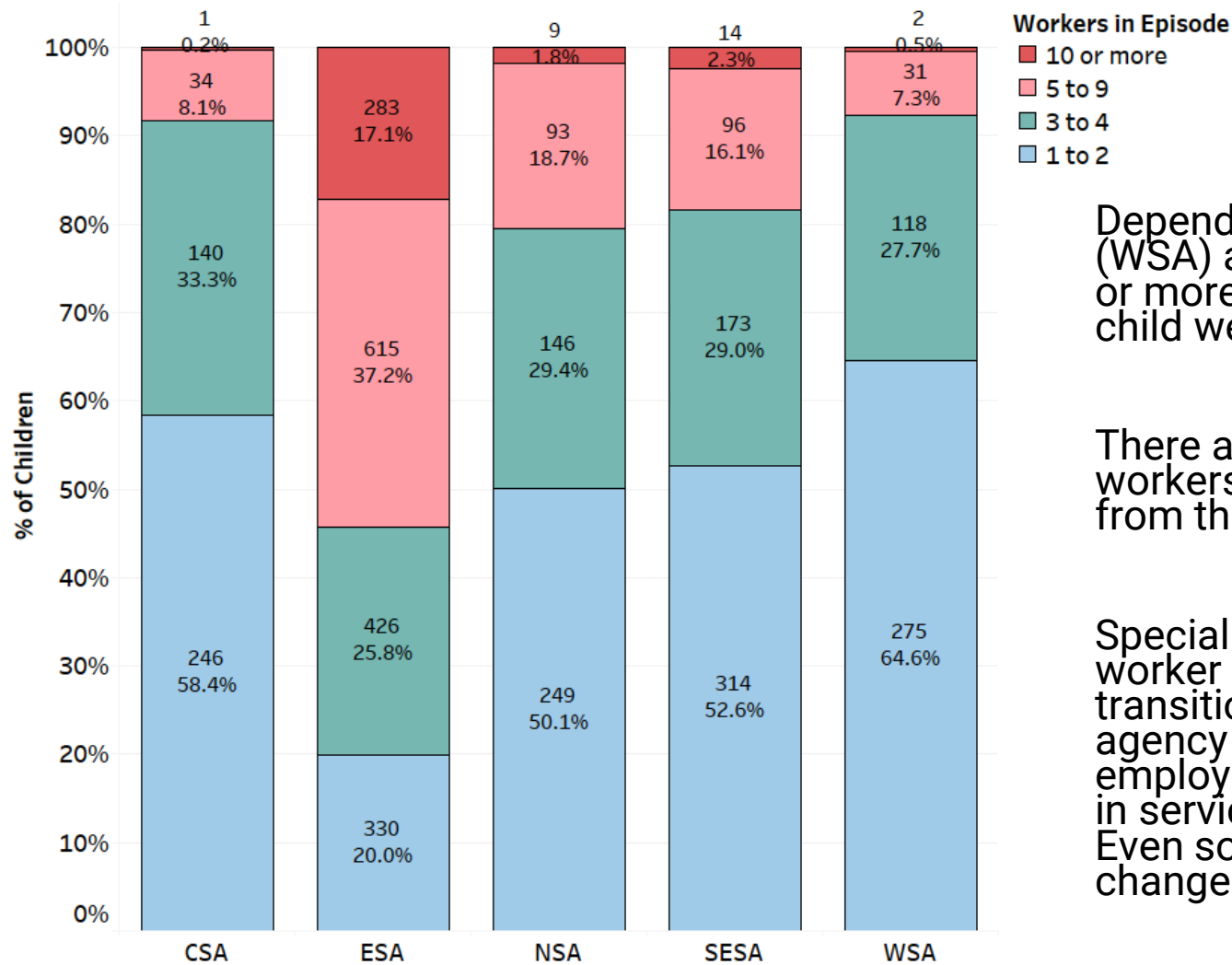


# Least Restrictive Placement Type for NDHHS Wards in Out-of-Home Care or Trial Home Visit on 6/30/2022, n=3,503

- The vast majority (97.0%) of NDHHS/CFS state wards in care on 6/30/2022 were placed in the least restrictive placement, well above the national average of 90%. This is a continuing trend.
- Of the children placed in family-like settings (not including Trial Home Visits), 58.9% were in a relative or kinship placement.



# Number of Workers for DHHS/CFS Wards 6/30/2022 in Current Episode, n=3,606



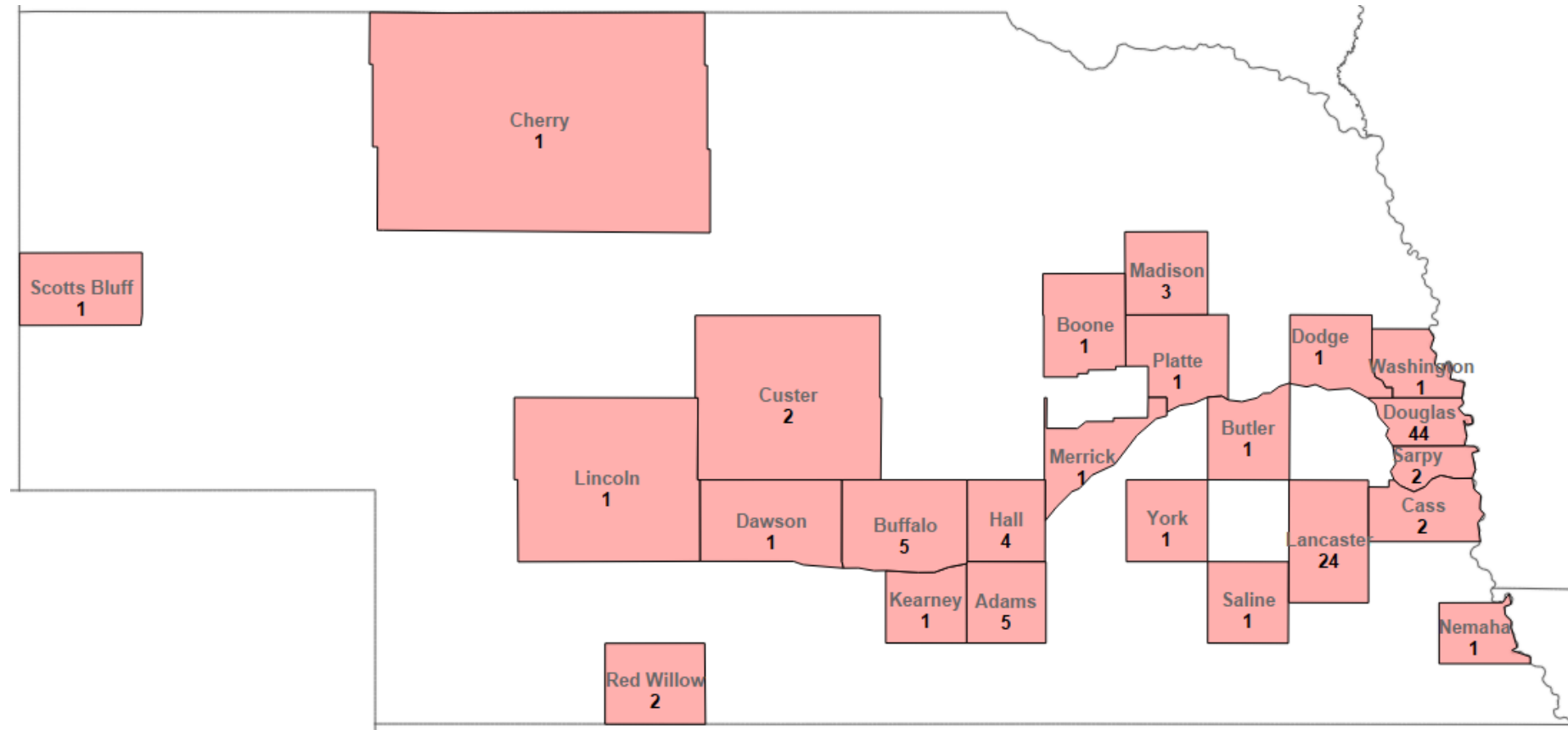
Depending on the geographic area, between 7.8% (WSA) and 54.3% (ESA) of the children have had five or more workers since most recently entering the child welfare system.

There are 309 children statewide with 10 or more workers in that timeframe, most of whom (283) are from the Eastern Service Area (ESA).

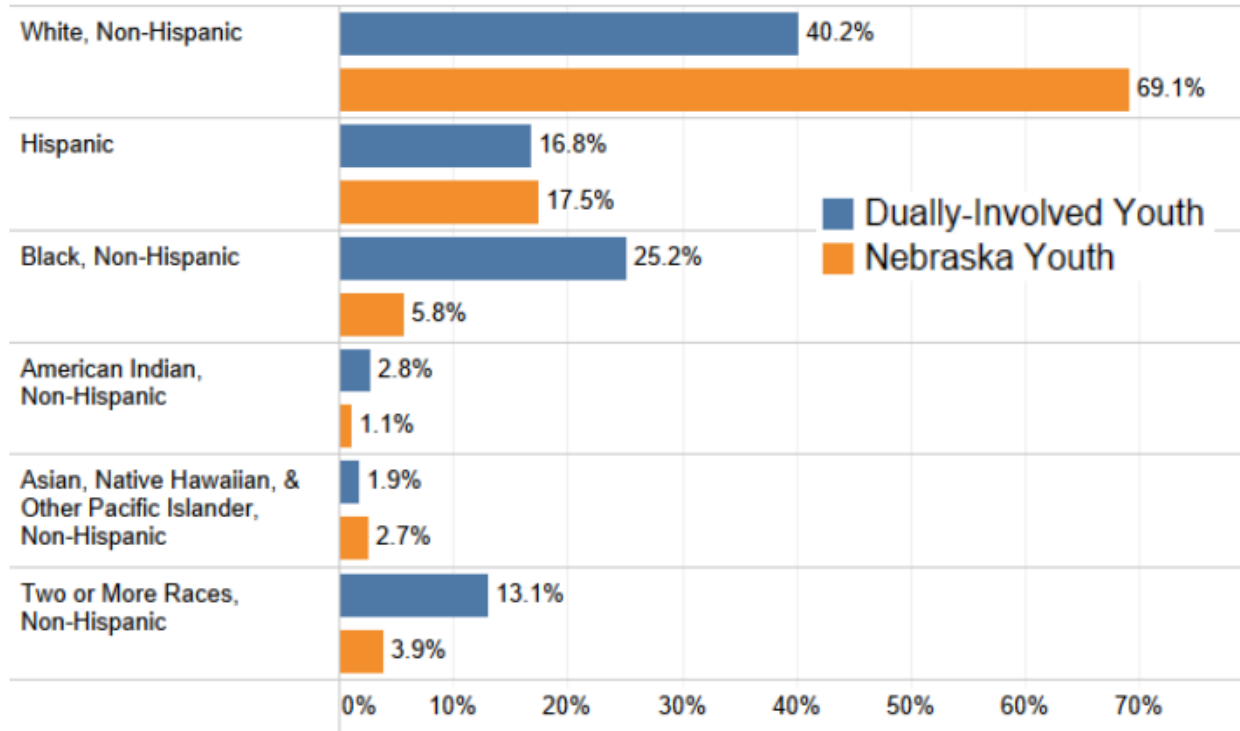
Special efforts were made to avoid duplication of worker counts in the ESA during each of the transitions between lead agencies and from lead agency to DHHS. If the same worker changed employer but the child/family experienced no break in service, then that worker was not counted twice. Even so, ESA has the greatest amount of worker changes.



# Dually-Involved Youth in Out-of-Home or Trial Home Visit Placement by County of Court Involvement on 6/30/2022, n=107

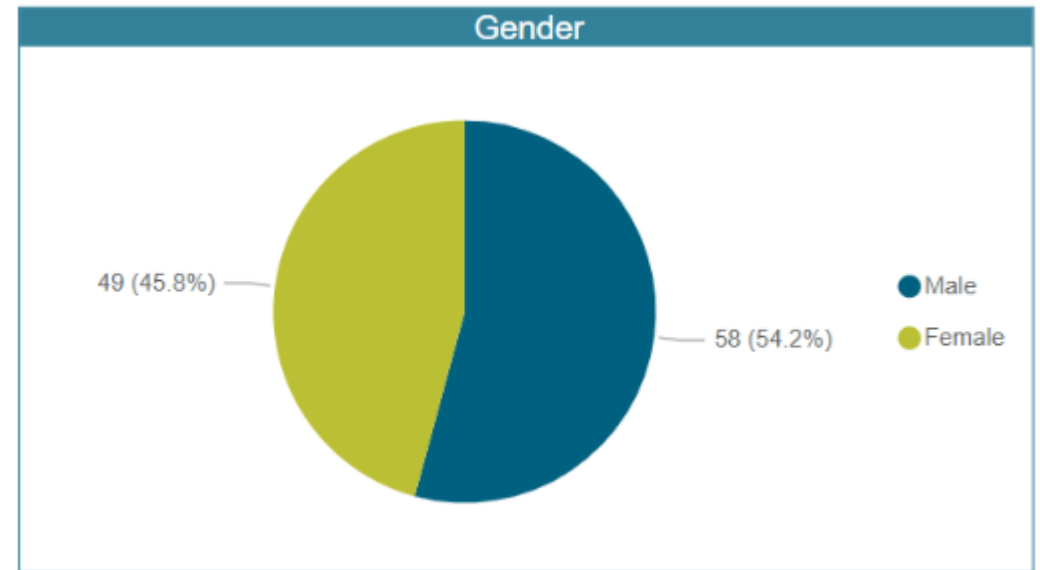


# Demographics of Dually-Involved Youth in Care on 6/30/2022

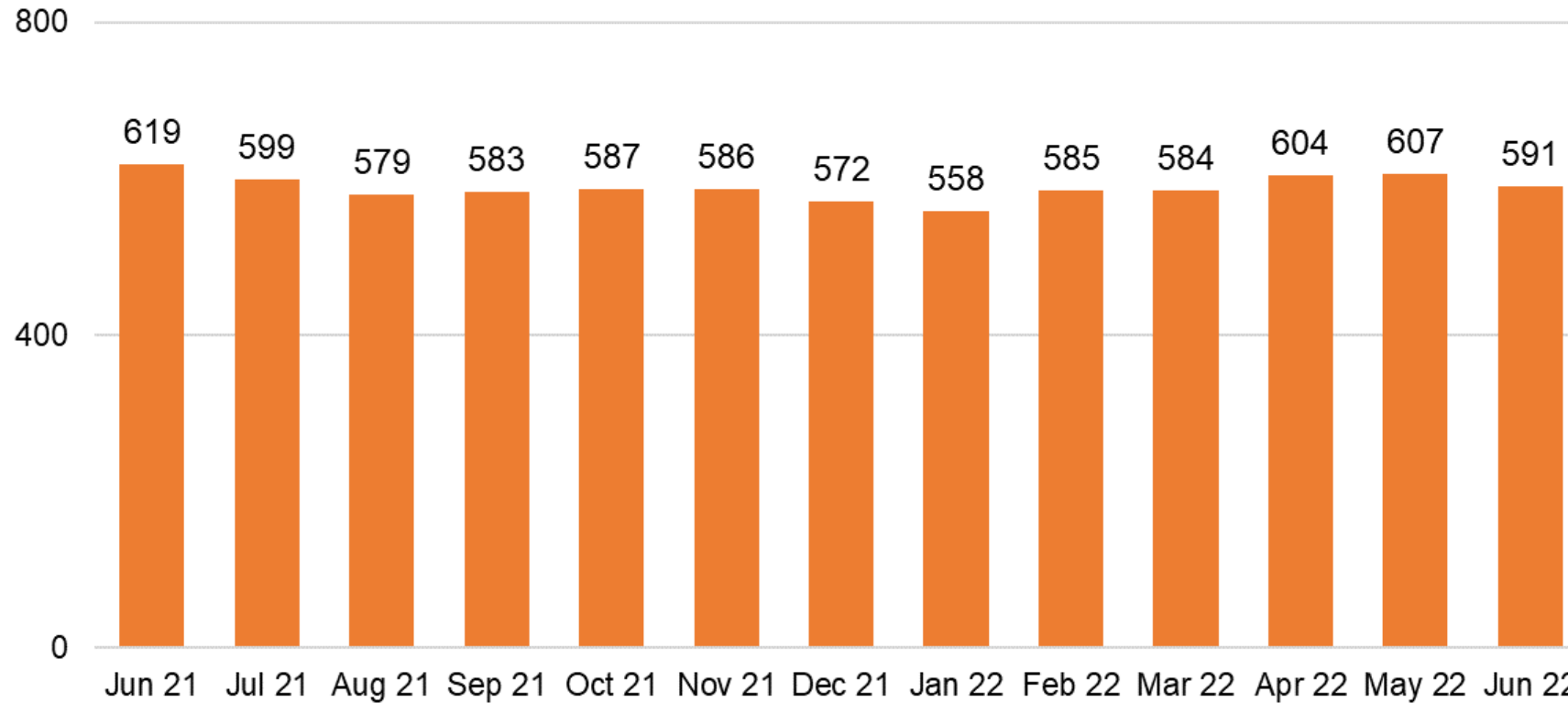


The median age for dually-involved youth is 16 (both boys and girls).

- 2 (1.9%) are age 11-12.
- 18 (16.8%) are age 13-14.
- 45 (42.1%) are age 15-16.
- 42 (39.3%) are age 17-18.

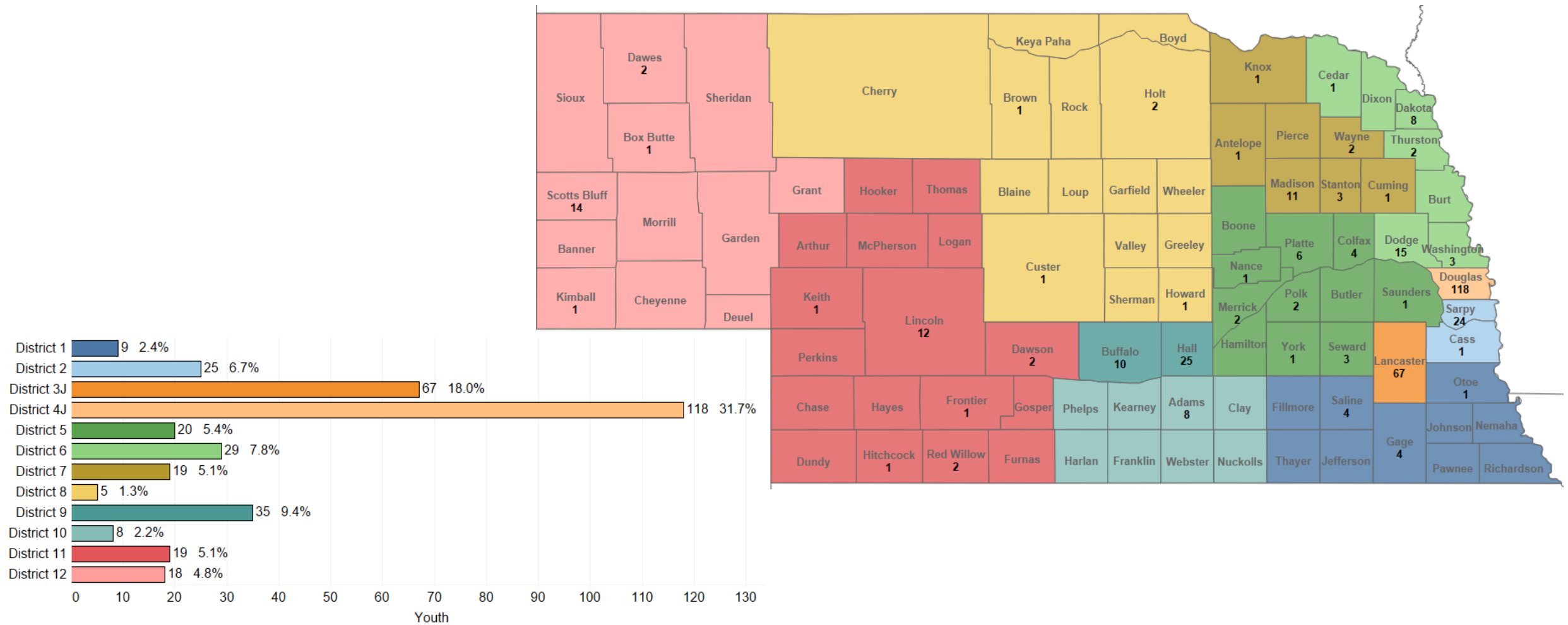


# Average Daily Population of Youth in Out-of-Home Care Supervised by Probation (includes youth with simultaneous involvement with DHHS/CFS and DHHS/OJS)

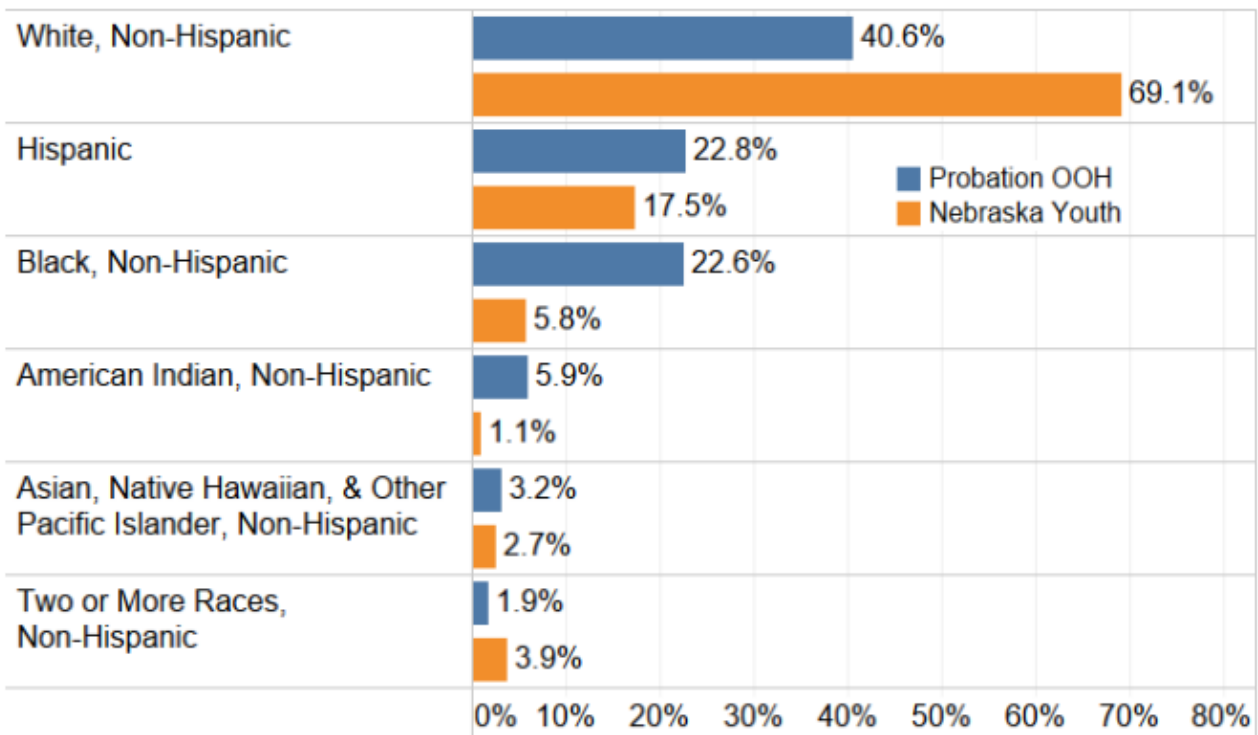


Comparing June 2021 to June 2022 there has been a **4.5% decrease**.

# County of Court for Probation Supervised Youth in Out-of-Home Care by County of Court Involvement on 6/30/2022, n=372

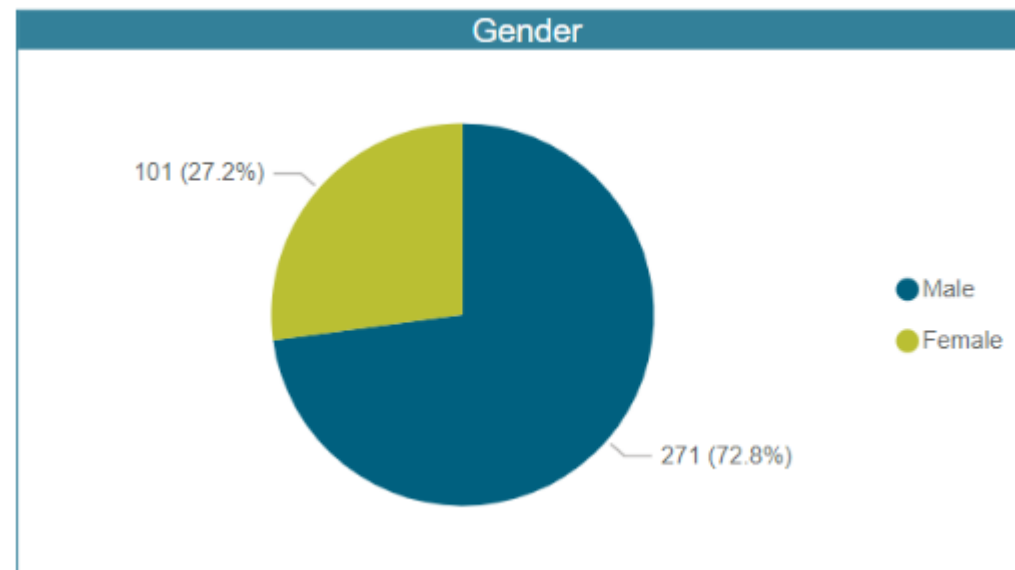


# Demographics of Probation Supervised Youth in Care on 6/30/2022

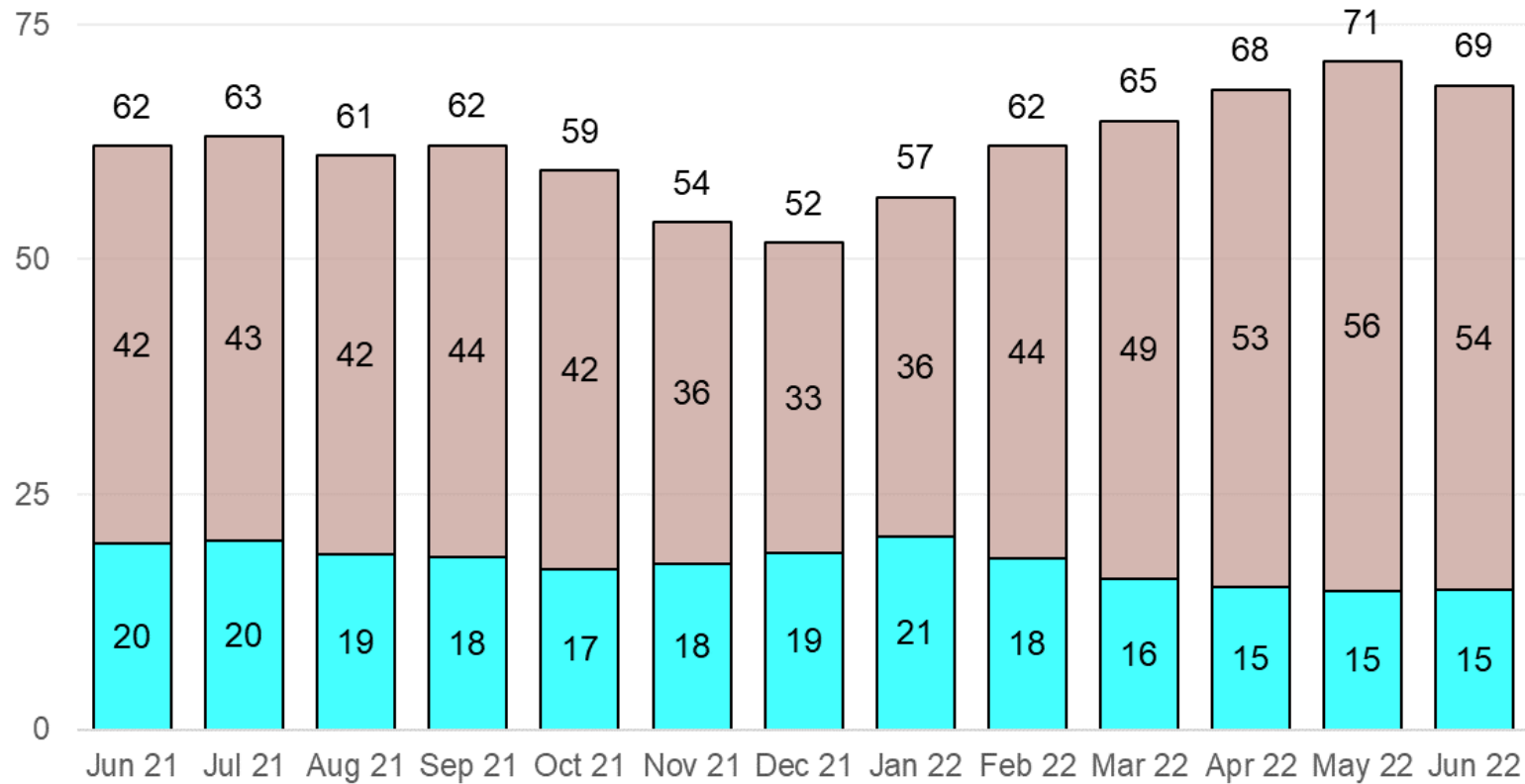


The median age is 16 years for both boys and girls.

- 15.3% are age 13-14.
- 47.0% are age 15-16.
- 37.6% are age 17-18

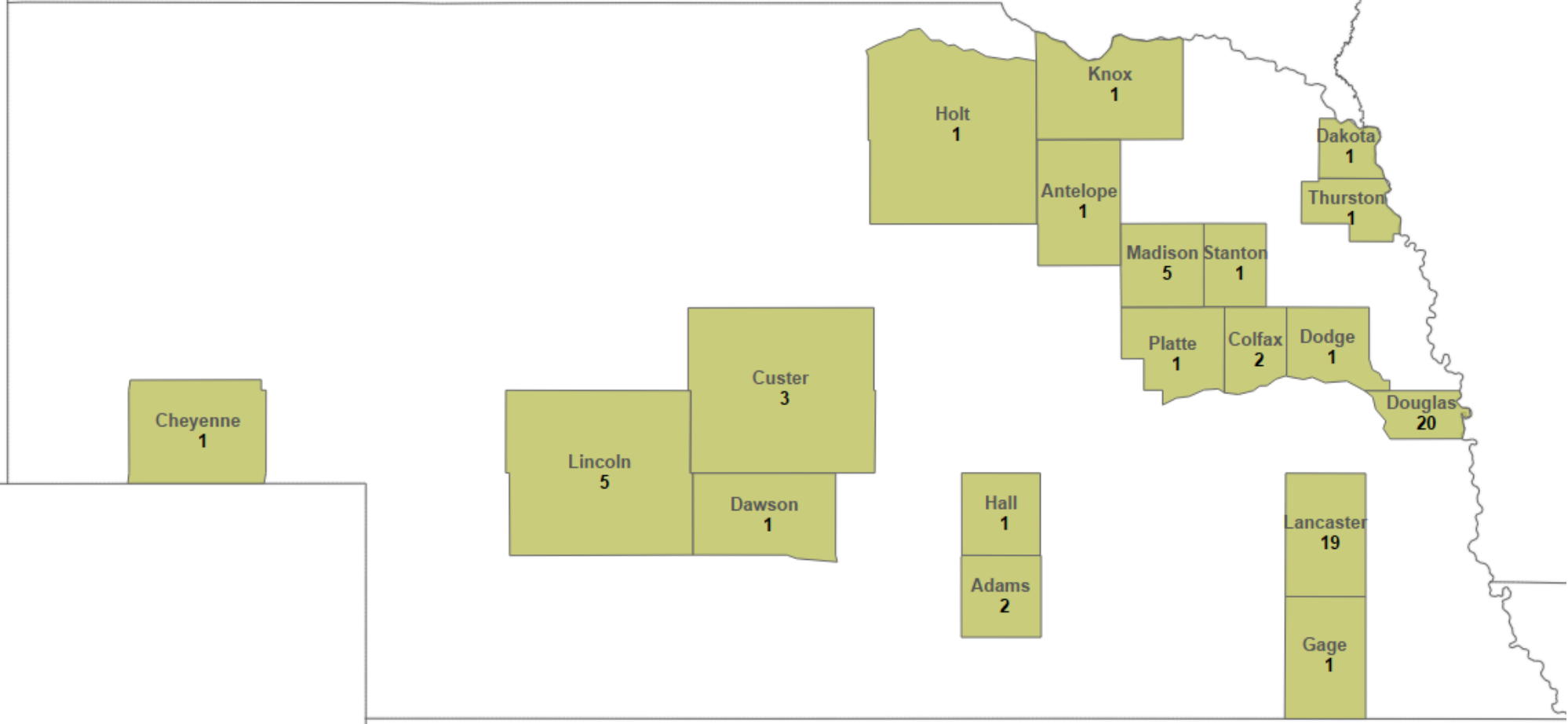


# Average Daily Number of DHHS/OJS Wards Placed at a Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center (YRTC)

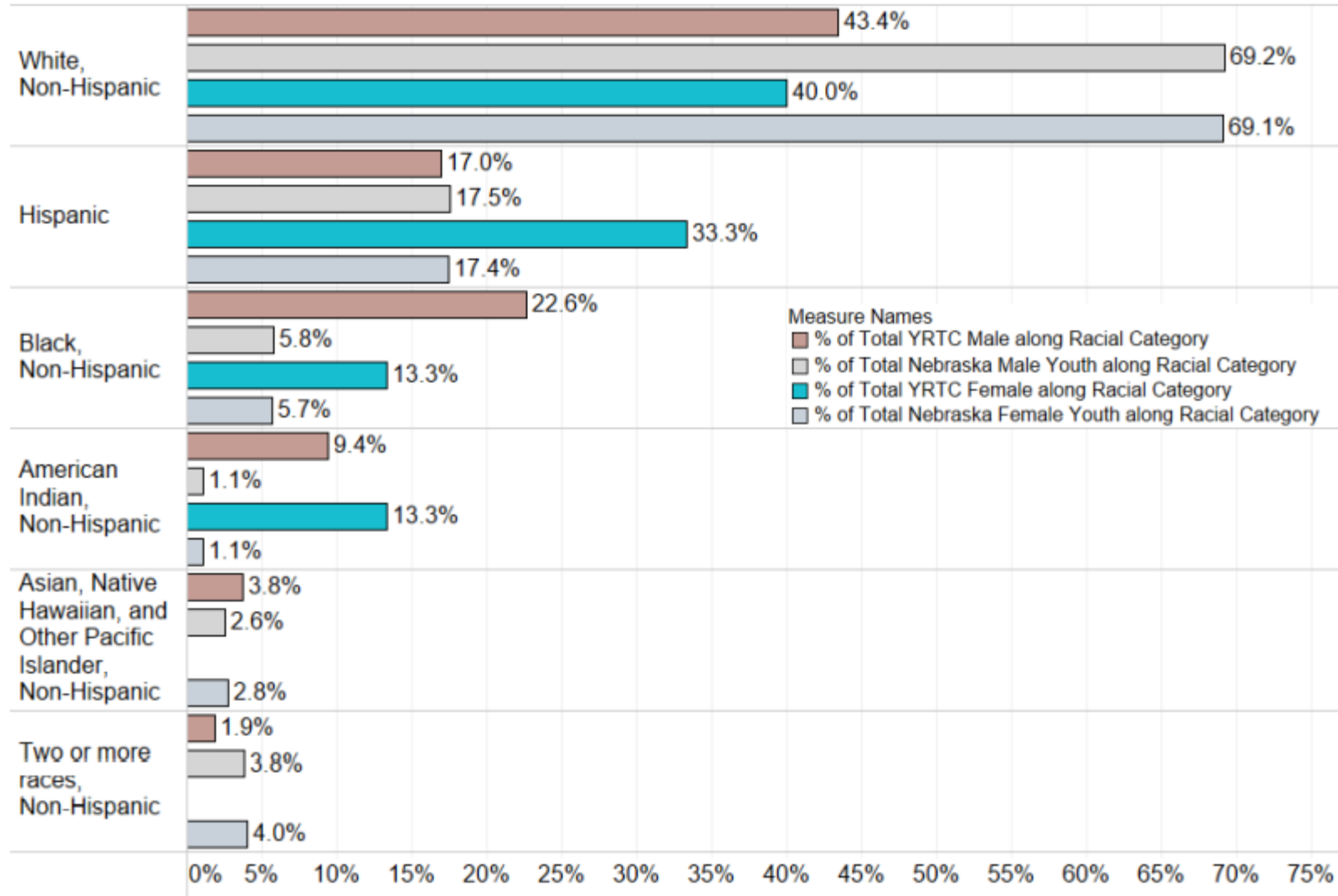


	June 2021	June 2022	% Change
<b>Girls</b>	20	15	-25.1%
<b>Boys</b>	42	54	27.2%
<b>State</b>	62	69	10.5%

# Boys and Girls Placed by a Juvenile Court at a Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center on 6/30/2022, n=68



# Demographics of Youth at a YRTC on 6/30/2022



By law, youth placed at a YRTC range in age from 14 to 18.

On 6/30/2022, the median age of the boys was 16.0 years and the median for girls was 17.0 years.

There were 53 boys and 15 girls placed at a YRTC.



# Recommendations to the Legislature

1. Consider legislation requiring that all **children and youth attend all court hearings** after the adjudication hearing unless the court waives their presence to ensure children's voices are integrated into all legal proceedings.
2. Consider legislation that all youth in the juvenile justice system have **access to court-appointed counsel** unless waived by the youth.
3. Consider legislation that would **expand access to the Bridge to Independence program** to a broader group of young adults, including those who age out of the youth justice system. In addition, consider extending eligibility for Bridge to Independence participants to age 23 or beyond to increase the opportunities for young adults to develop skills necessary for adult living in the 21st century, including but not limited to personal finance, mental and physical health care, and post-secondary education and career planning, to avoid the cliff effect.

# Recommendations to Multiple Agencies

1. DHHS/CFS, Probation, and the Courts must **do more to address racial and ethnic disparities**, which continue to negatively impact children, families, and communities of color. The FCRO suggests that a task force be formed comprised of mostly people with lived experience or who live in communities heavily impacted by the child protection system to identify the root causes and propose solutions to address the causes of disparities which exist from the time an abuse or neglect report is received for a child through achievement of permanency.
2. **Access to resources and services for children and families** continues to be a challenge, particularly across the rural and frontier regions of the state. DHHS/CFS, Probation, and other state and local government entities, in partnership with the Regional Behavioral Health Authorities, DHHS/Division of Behavioral Health, health care providers, nonprofit, and philanthropic organizations must **fully invest in a capacity-building infrastructure**. Considerations should include incentives for service providers to establish innovative programs and practices in rural communities which support the well-being of local children and families.
3. DHHS, Probation, and system partners explore ways in which the needs of LGBTQ+ youth can be met, and such youth can be supported. **Develop safe and supportive contacts and resources within communities that LGBTQ+ youth can access**. Ideally, this would include LGBTQ+ knowledgeable therapists who are willing to work with the juvenile probation system as well as the child welfare system.
4. The Special Report on Examining Missingness Among Children in Out-of-Home Care indicated the need for stakeholders to **continue discussions recently underway on enhancing protective factors and identifying services, supports, and training to be offered to families and caregivers**, particularly mental health treatment and substance abuse services for youth and strategies for increasing school engagement.
5. Identify and study opportunities for **continued system improvements resulting from changes necessitated by and in response to the COVID-19 pandemic**, such as increased use of telehealth services and virtual conferencing options for meetings in addition to, and not instead of, more traditional meeting formats.

# Recommendations to DHHS/CFS

1. The FCRO has actively supported the transition of cases from Saint Francis Ministries to DHHS/CFS in the ESA during the early months of 2022. Now that the transition of cases is complete, CFS must **continue to address case manager turnover** in the ESA and across the state. The recent pay increases are a good start; however, additional resources are needed in the areas of training, supervision, and support for case managers. Additional supportive supervision is especially needed for newly trained and transitioned staff to address any knowledge or skills gaps.
2. Caseloads assigned remain too high in the Eastern Service Area where (per the July 2022 CFS report) only 36% of case managers met **statutory caseload standards**. Statewide only 68% of case managers' caseloads met standards. This must change. High caseloads lead to turnover, documentation gaps, and delays in permanency, which negatively impact children and families.
3. Collaborate with child placing agencies and system partners to **recruit, train, support, and retain foster family homes able to meet the needs of children and youth with high needs**, especially those with complex mental and/or behavioral health needs so that youth can remain safely in the least restrictive environments in their own communities. Licensed foster family homes are needed in every community across the state.
4. Provide **financial incentives for agencies that license relative or kinship homes**. Recruitment and licensing are resource-heavy processes, so financial compensation is necessary given the investment that goes into training and home studies.
  - a. Similarly, provide a **one-time financial incentive to relative/kin foster homes upon completion of licensure**, a time-consuming but beneficial process for the foster parents.
  - b. The costs of these financial incentives may be partly or wholly covered by a subsequent increase in the federal title IV-E penetration rate. To obtain title IV-E funding for juveniles in foster care, in addition to other requirements, the juvenile must be in a licensed placement; thus, **increasing the number of licensed placements** would likely increase the amount of title IV-E dollars collected.
5. Provide **additional training and in-home supports for foster parents, especially relatives/kin**, whether licensed or not.

## Recommendations to DHHS/CFS Continued

6. Continue with efforts to **improve poor documentation in case files**. Lack of documentation, lack of updated documentation, and poor documentation are often a result of high turnover and high caseloads, and are a contributing factor in poor case management, lack of progress toward permanency, and poor outcomes for children and families.
7. Work with provider organizations to **improve delivery and documentation of independent living skills training and development for youth ages 14 and over**, including financial literacy, preparation for post-secondary education, job skills, and establishing and maintaining permanent connections with extended family or other trusted adults that can be sustained into adulthood.
8. Collaborate with the b2i advisory committee of the Nebraska Children's Commission to **incorporate the committee's recommendations regarding program evaluation and related measurement tools which will allow for ongoing outcome tracking and reporting before, during, and after b2i program participation**. Consider implementing the Youth Thrive framework as part of b2i programming to create a seamless continuum of independent living supports for all youth and young adults ages 14-26, and consider whether additional, specialized training is required for Independence Coordinators related to adolescent development and the needs of emerging adults.
9. **Continue to provide trauma-focused treatment at the YRTC's.**
10. Explore collaborative options with trade unions, workplaces, and community partners for **workforce skill building with youth that are in care, especially older youth (16-18)**, so they experience a greater chance of achieving successful outcomes. This is especially important for youth who are likely to age out of the system instead of returning home.
11. **Consider additional ways youth at the YRTC's can learn independent living skills**. For example, youth at YRTC-Hastings have laundry facilities in their building, so they are learning laundry skills as a part of their program, However, YRTC-Kearney youth do not have this option available.
12. The FCRO acknowledges the improvements made at the YRTC's over the last two years and encourages DHHS to **make program evaluation data and reports easily accessible to the public** to ensure that the outcomes of the new programming are transparent and used to achieve desired results through decision and policy development into the future.

## Recommendations to Probation

1. **Use written transition plans as guides for preparing youth in out-of-home placements to rejoin their communities and increase the availability of these plans for FCRO reviews.** Ensure transition plans are developed within the appropriate timeframes.
2. **Collaborate with the Department of Education and DHHS on ways to better serve youth with learning delays or educational deficits** so that those youth can obtain the best possible outcomes from programs and services that address delinquent behaviors. This includes youth in out-of-home care, youth at the YRTC, and youth who remain in the home but are under Probation supervision.
3. Explore ways to **support and engage parents and families of youth involved with Probation.** Having a relevant transition plan (see recommendation above) can help with that goal.
4. **Create concrete steps that may be taken when parents' issues prevent a youth from returning home.**
5. Explore collaborative options with trade unions, workplaces, and community partners for **workforce skill building with youth that are in care, especially older youth (16-18)**, so they experience a greater chance of achieving successful outcomes. This is especially important for youth who are likely to age out of the system instead of returning home. If not already doing so, consider providing older youth with education around financial literacy, the importance of safe and stable housing, and developing meaningful relationships with supportive adults as youth transition to adulthood.

## Recommendations to the Court System

- 1. Require that guardians ad litem provide the FCRO a copy of their GAL report or allow the FCRO reasonable access to the GAL report in the court's file.**
- 2. Work with the FCRO to develop and implement a single, standardized technology solution for electronic submission of FCRO reports to all courts with juvenile court jurisdiction across the state.**

# FCRO Data Dashboards



- Start Here
- By County
- Demographics
- Placements
- Child Welfare
- Probation

## Children and Youth in Out-of-home Care in Nebraska

Use the filters on the right to narrow your search to specific populations by Agency, Service Area, Probation District, or County.

To reset filters, simply unclick selection(s) or press the refresh arrow.

- Agency
- NDHHS/CFS
  - NDHHS/CFS and Probation
  - NDHHS/OJS and Probation
  - OJS
  - Probation

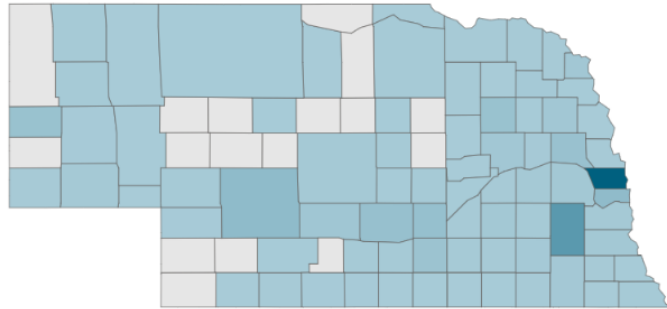
- DHHS Service Area
- Central
  - Eastern
  - Northern
  - Southeast
  - Western

- Probation District
- District 1
  - District 2
  - District 3J
  - District 4J
  - District 5
  - District 6
  - District 7
  - District 8
  - District 9

- County
- Search
- Adams
  - Antelope
  - Boone
  - Box Butte
  - Boyd
  - Brown
  - Buffalo
  - Burt

### Number and Percent of Children by County, DHHS Service Area and Probation District

You can hover over a county to obtain its total children, percent of total, DHHS Service Area and Probation District. Counties shaded in grey have no associated records.



Counties in grey have no associated records for children and youth in out-of-home placements.

# 4,159

in Out-of-home Care or Trial Home Visit

Children in Out-of-home Care on 06/30/2022

**PLEASE NOTE:** Unless filters are in use, this is the total number of children in all out-of-home placements. It includes children who are wards of the Department of Health and Human Services as well as youth who are placed out of their homes under the supervision of Juvenile Probation and the Office of Juvenile Services.

County	DHHS Service Area	Probation District	# of Children	% of Children
Adams	Central	District 10	91	2.19%
Antelope	Northern	District 7	8	0.19%
Boone	Northern	District 5	1	0.02%
Box Butte	Western	District 12	17	0.41%
Boyd	Central	District 8	4	0.10%
Brown	Central	District 8	4	0.10%
Buffalo	Central	District 9	122	2.93%
Burt	Northern	District 6	2	0.05%
Butler	Northern	District 5	22	0.53%
Cass	Southeast	District 2	26	0.63%
Cedar	Northern	District 6	8	0.19%
Cherry	Central	District 8	5	0.12%
Cheyenne	Western	District 12	24	0.58%
Clay	Central	District 10	12	0.29%
Colfax	Northern	District 5	19	0.46%
Cuming	Northern	District 7	42	1.01%
Custer	Central	District 8	23	0.55%
Dakota	Northern	District 6	41	0.99%
Dawes	Western	District 12	13	0.31%
Dawson	Western	District 11	57	1.37%
Deuel	Western	District 12	3	0.07%
Dixon	Northern	District 6	9	0.22%
Dodge	Northern	District 6	111	2.67%
Douglas	Eastern	District 4J	1,686	40.54%
Fillmore	Southeast	District 1	8	0.19%
Franklin	Central	District 10	1	0.02%
Frontier	Western	District 11	5	0.12%
Furnas	Western	District 11	7	0.17%
Gage	Southeast	District 1	32	0.77%
Garden	Western	District 12	2	0.05%
<b>Total</b>			<b>4,159</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Data Source: FCRO's Foster Care Tracking System (FCTS)

The dashboard is available to the public. Access is through the FCRO's website, [https://fcro.nebraska.gov/data\\_dashboards.html#](https://fcro.nebraska.gov/data_dashboards.html#)

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