

STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Office of the Ombudsman for Foster Care



**Annual Report
May 2001 - May 2002**

**CALIFORNIA FOSTER CARE OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL REPORT
May 2001 - May 2002**

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CALIFORNIA FOSTER CARE OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL REPORT

May 2001 - May 2002

Introduction

This document represents the second annual report of the California Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman (FCO) activities from May 2001 - May 2002. This report presents data on the calls received by the Office and shows the trends and areas of major concern for children and youth in California's foster care system.

The FCO is an autonomous entity located within the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) and acts as an independent forum for the review and resolution of complaints made by or on behalf of children and youth in foster care regarding their care, placement and services.

The FCO was established January 1, 1999 under Welfare and Institutions Code Sections 16160 et. Seq. The program began providing services on May 2, 2000. The FCO is a valuable resource for foster youth and children in resolving complaints and providing information.

As of January 1, 2002, there were 138,380 open child welfare cases in county social services agencies statewide. More than half of the children (53 percent) in these cases were receiving permanent placement services. Children and youth who are involved in California's foster care system face a myriad of challenges as they move through the system toward emancipation.

FOSTER CARE OMBUDSMAN MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Foster Care Ombudsman Office is to provide a voice to speak and act on behalf of foster children and youth regarding the Foster Care system's services, treatment and placement. Senate Bill 933 specifies:

"The Office of the State Foster Care Ombudsman shall be established as an autonomous entity within the Department of Social Services for the purpose of providing children who are placed in foster care, either voluntarily or pursuant to Section 300 and Sections 600 and following, with a means to resolve issues related to their care, placement and services."

THE CALIFORNIA FOSTER CARE OMBUDSMAN PROGRAM

The California FCO Program provides the following services:

- Maintains a statewide toll-free telephone number available to individuals making a complaint or requesting information (1-877-846-1602).
- Conducts objective investigations and attempts to resolve complaints made by or on behalf of children or youth placed in foster care, related to their care, placement or services. The Ombudsman assists in the timely resolution of complaints and decides whether to investigate a complaint or refer complaints to another agency for investigation. The Ombudsman Office is mandated to report child abuse, and will inform all complainants that all allegations of abuse or violations of Community Care Licensing (CCL) regulations will be reported. Complainants will also be informed as to the limits of confidentiality and the limited authority of the Ombudsman Office. The Ombudsman Office considers the concerns of all parties involved while conducting an objective fact-finding inquiry.
- Disseminates information to children and youth in foster care regarding the services provided by the FCO Office, the child welfare system and the juvenile court process. The FCO also provides foster youth and professionals with standardized information (posters and brochures) regarding the rights of children and youth placed in out-of-home care. The Foster Youth Rights must be posted in all facilities licensed to care for six or more children. The FCO Ombudsman assists in educating complainants regarding the child welfare system and the juvenile dependency court process.
- Compiles all data collected on a yearly basis and makes that information available to the Legislature.

AUTHORITY AND LIMITATIONS OF THE CALIFORNIA FOSTER CARE OMBUDSMAN

The authority of the program includes:

- The FCO may meet or communicate with any foster child in his or her placement or elsewhere;
- The FCO can have access to any record of a state or local agency that is necessary to carry out its responsibilities;
- The FCO can investigate any and all complaints received by the Office;
- The FCO is empowered to investigate the acts of state and local administrative agencies and to recommend appropriate changes toward safe-guarding children's rights; and
- The FCO has the responsibility to report all findings to CDSS and the Legislature.

The authority of the program is limited as follows:

- The FCO does not have the authority to challenge court decisions;
- The FCO can recommend case reassessments but is not empowered to change case plans; and
- The FCO does not have authority regarding personnel issues. Complaints regarding discrimination and other personnel actions shall be referred to the appropriate office.

ANNUAL DATA SUMMARY

May 2001 - May 2002

OUTREACH PRESENTATIONS - 154

TOTAL CONTACTS - 8,623

This number includes requests for information, complaints and referrals.

Requests for Information - 7,201

Complaints - 716

During the past twelve months, the staff made 2,824 case-related contacts in completing the investigations and follow-ups. These include telephone and in-person contacts, case conferences, etc.

- **Actions Taken - 716**

- Investigations - 527*

- In these cases, FCO staff conducted fact-finding, data collection and interviews with various parties to explore options and intervene to resolve complainants' concerns.

- Consultation - 164*

- In these cases, staff provided technical assistance and consultation to the callers.

- Case Conferencing - 25*

- The FCO staff facilitated meetings with the complainant and relevant parties and professionals to engage in a dialogue in attempts to resolve the issues and focus on the best interests of the foster youth.

- **Resolution Status on Complaints**

- Closed Cases - 536*

- Approximately 75 percent of the cases were closed and resolved.

- Active Cases - 180*

- An active case will not be closed until the complainant's concerns are addressed or resolved.

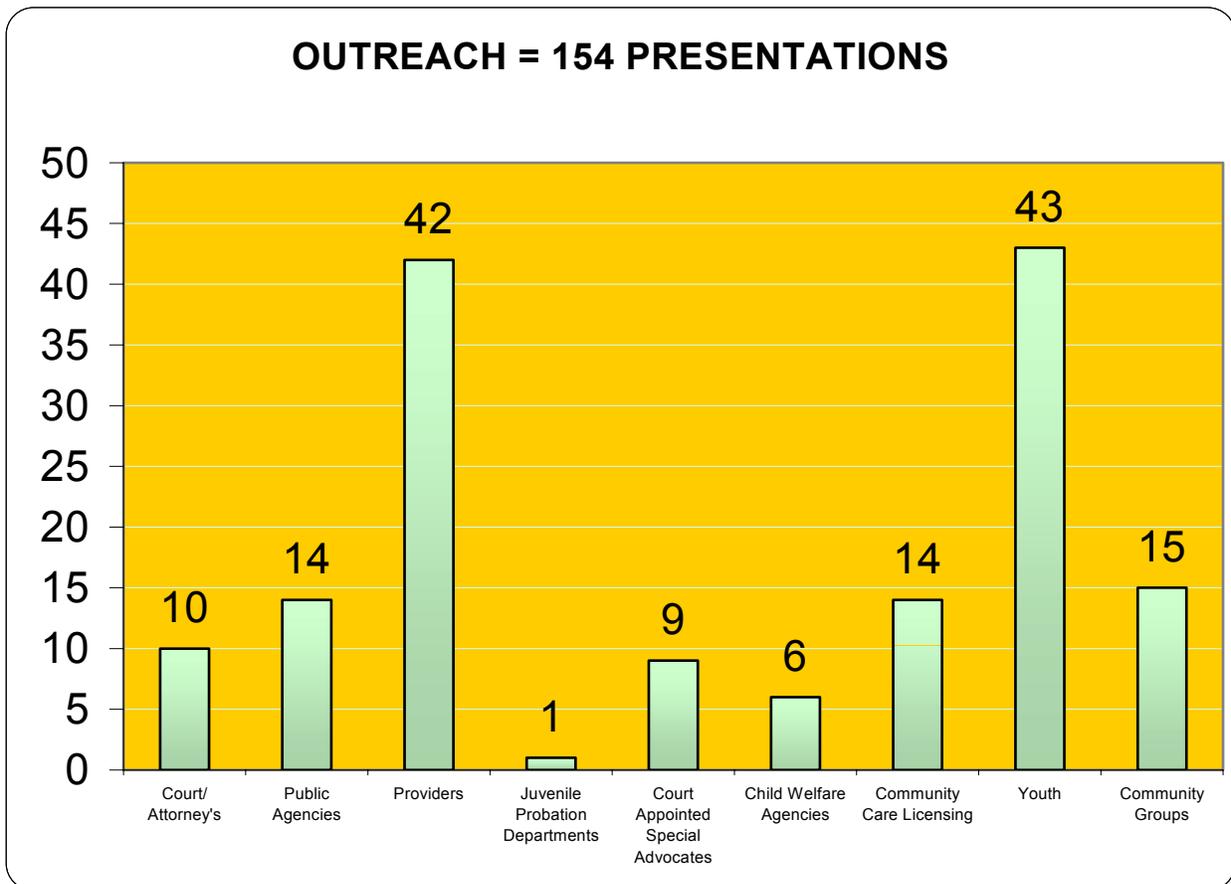
Referrals - 706

In addition to resolving specific complaints, the FCO provides referrals to other agencies and departments to ensure that foster youth receive appropriate services.

OUTREACH PRESENTATIONS

The Foster Care Ombudsman conducts numerous outreach activities to identify issues and trends related to the foster care system. In addition, the FCO presents information on the rights of youth in out-of-home care as well as the services provided by the Office. During the second year of operation, the FCO gave 154 informative presentations about the work of the Office to the following groups and organizations:

Foster youth	43 presentations	28%
Care providers	42 presentations	27%
Community groups	15 presentations	10%
Community Care Licensing	14 presentations	9%
Public agencies	14 presentations	9%
Court/Attorneys	10 presentations	6.5%
Court-appointed Special Advocates	9 presentations	6%
Child welfare agencies	6 presentations	4%
Juvenile probation departments	1 presentation	.5%



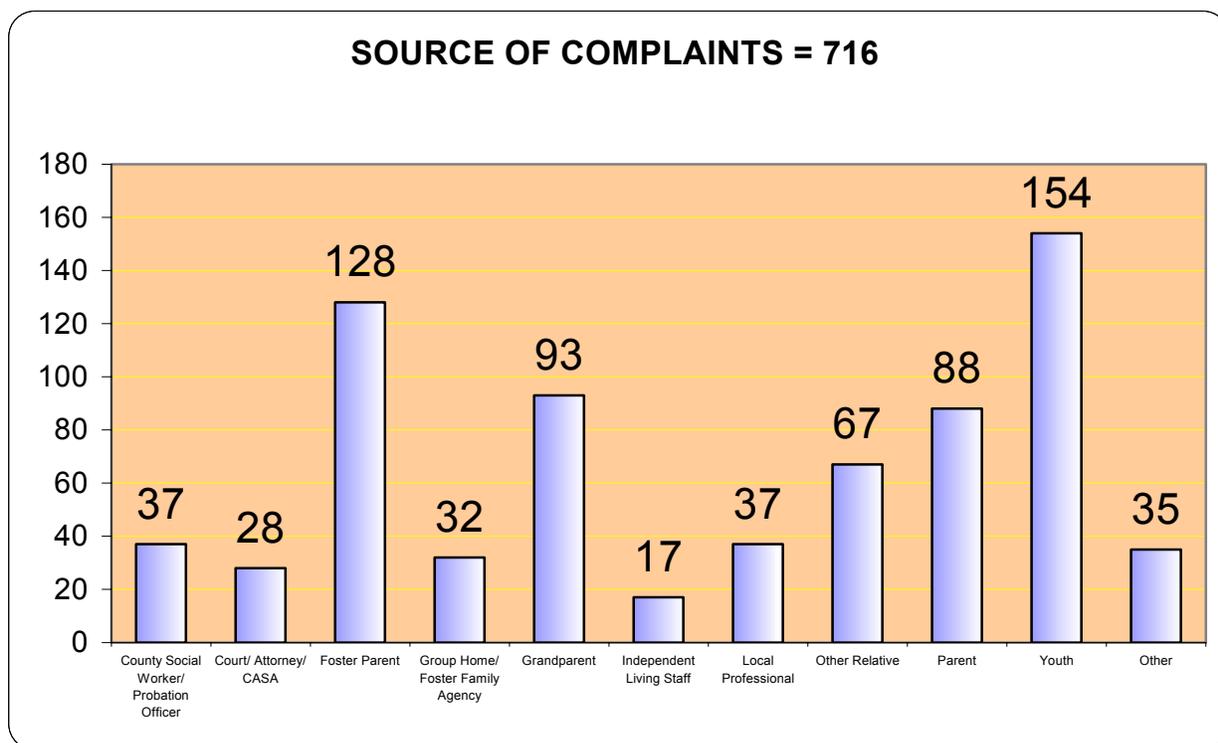
COMPLAINT DATA

Complaints: Who is complaining and what are their concerns?

The Foster Care Ombudsman received 716 complaints made by or on behalf of youth placed in foster care during the past year. The following categories and examples illustrate the challenges and complexity of the current foster care system:

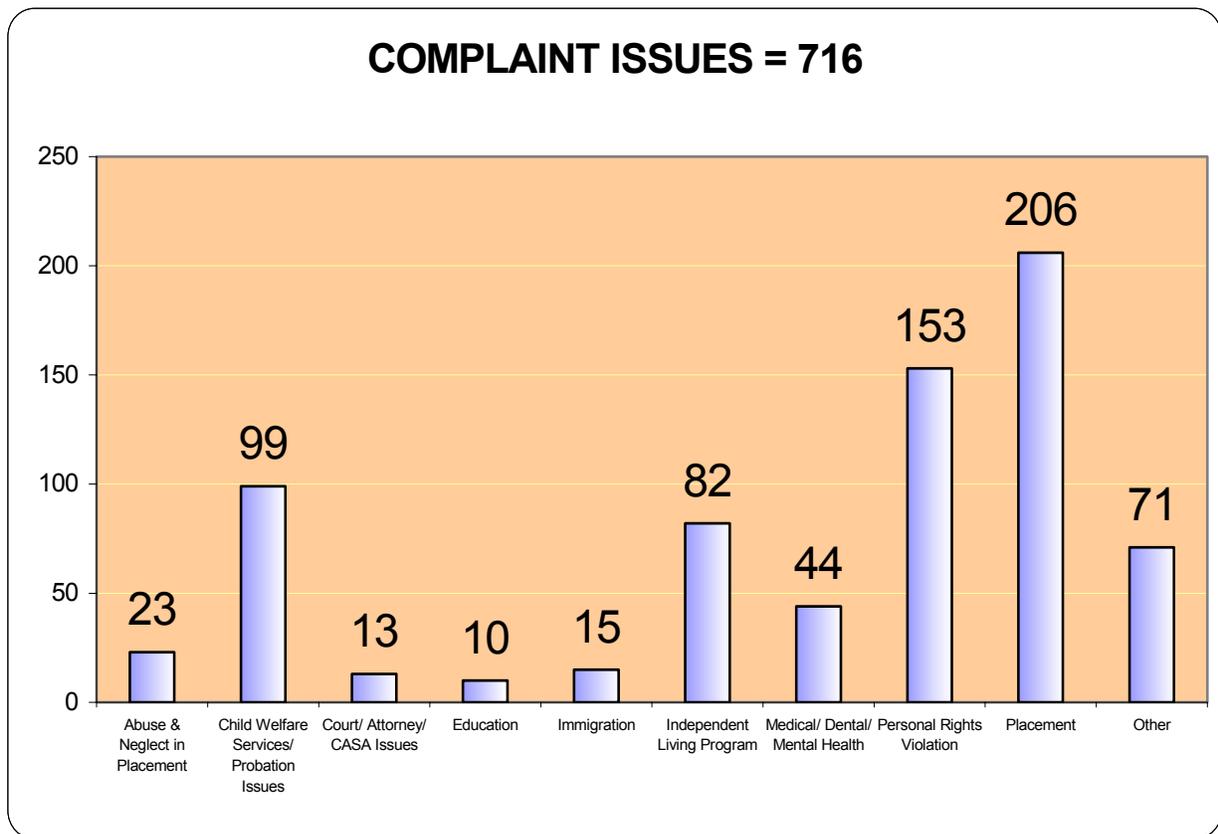
- The largest number of complaints was received from current or former foster youth - 21.5 percent
- The second largest category of complaints was from foster parents - 18 percent
- When relative categories are combined, they represented approximately 35 percent of the total number of complainants.

As the chart below indicates, in addition to these main categories, complaints are received from a broad range of people interested in children and youth in foster care, such as county social workers, ILP staff and representatives of community agencies.



COMPLAINT ISSUES

The types of complaints received by the Foster Care Ombudsman cover a broad range of concerns. Some have to do with abuse and violations of personal rights. Other complaints relate to lack of educational resources or mental health services as the following chart and narrative indicate.



COMPLAINT ISSUES

1. Placement

County placement workers are required by law to find the most appropriate placement for children and youth in foster care. Some of the variables that affect a worker's ability to find good matches between a foster youth and an appropriate foster family or group home are: inadequate assessments of the youth, which results in a lack of information being provided regarding the type of placement needed; type of placement needed is known but not available. Concerns regarding placement decisions comprised the most complaints received by the FCO.

The following are examples of common placement complaints:

- Youth requested a change in placement
- Relatives of foster youth were not considered as a placement resource
- Relatives were not allowed to visit children in foster care
- Grandparents were denied having their grandchildren placed with them

A grandmother contacted the FCO to request help because the county was planning to remove her grandson from her home. The grandmother was in the process of adopting the child who had been in her care since birth. The grandmother was overwhelmed by the paperwork involved with the adoption process for her grandson and the classes she had to attend and had asked the county for assistance. County staff assumed that her request indicated that she was not able to adequately care for the child and informed the grandmother that her grandson would be removed. The FCO contacted the Director of the county Children and Family Services who, after reviewing the case, agreed that the grandson should not be removed. He also indicated that the child would not be removed in the future without a thorough, proper assessment. This child is with his grandmother who is in the process of adopting him.

2. Placement Agency Relationships

As with placement decisions, how county placement workers interact with foster youth has a great impact on the experience they have in out-of-home care. If placement workers do not work closely with relatives, care providers, other county workers, and the youth themselves, difficulties arise which result in complaints to the FCO. These are examples of common issues related to communication and interaction with placement agencies:

- Miscommunication or lack of communication among the county placement agencies, the care-providers, the parents or relatives and the foster youth
- Placement workers or agencies did not provide sufficient resources to ensure successful family reunification
- Placement workers did not fully release foster youths' information to the care-providers upon and during placements
- Placement workers or agencies were not always diligent in their documentation of concerns related to the care, services and placements of the foster youth

A youth reported to the FCO that she was having difficulty contacting her social worker. She had left many messages for her social worker regarding her legal guardian's decision to rescind guardianship but had not received a response. The youth requested that a meeting be held with the FCO and her social worker to discuss these issues. The FCO met with the youth and the social worker. A decision was reached to place the youth with a relative.

COMPLAINT ISSUES

3. Foster Youth Rights

The licensing regulations which govern foster family homes, foster family agencies and residential care homes have afforded foster children certain rights for some time. Passage of AB 899 (Foster Youth Bill of Rights) further ensured that foster youth's rights be clarified. The rights relate to a variety of subjects such as health, home environment, court process and attorney access, education, and the right to some independent activities. Many calls regarding possible rights' violations are received by the FCO, and the number of these calls is increasing.

Examples of typical issues are:

- Lack of access to telephone/privacy on telephone
- Not being informed of rights
- Not being allowed to call Ombudsman office/CCL
- Foster youth receiving opened mail
- Property being stolen
- Allowance - foster youth not being informed about their right to receive an allowance or no consistent amount given

A youth whose group home would not allow her to go to work as a consequence of being caught smoking contacted the FCO. The FCO contacted the group home and informed staff that this action was a violation of her rights and suggested that other consequences be found to address her behavior. The group home allowed the youth to attend work.

4. Abuse and Neglect in Placement

Complainants are advised that the FCO staff are mandated reporters of suspected child abuse and thus are required to report all allegations of child abuse and neglect to Child Protective Services and/or Community Care Licensing. These complaints are not common but do occur. All callers are informed that information shared with the FCO may not be confidential.

A foster youth called the FCO to report that she was being physically disciplined by staff at the facility. The youth indicated that she wanted to be removed from the home. FCO staff reported the concerns to the County's Child Abuse Hotline and contacted the social worker and notified CCL. By the end of the day, the youth was in a new placement.

COMPLAINT ISSUES

5. Independent Living Program (ILP)

This program is state and federally funded and is intended to provide resources and services to foster youth age 16 and older to learn the skills needed to successfully emancipate from the system. All California counties have an ILP which offers instruction in basic skills such as finding an apartment, seeking employment, cooking meals, writing checks and budgeting money. County ILPs vary substantially with regard to the services offered. In focus groups around the State, concerns were expressed by youth regarding their preparation for emancipation.

The complaints focused on:

- Youth who were or were soon to become homeless
- ILP classes viewed as not relevant to youth's needs
- Inconsistent services offered from county to county

A 19 year old former foster youth contacted the FCO stating that he was going to be homeless. He emancipated from foster care when he turned 18 and was attending college. The FCO contacted the local ILP social worker who interviewed the youth and was able to get him into a transitional housing program within two weeks. The youth contacted the FCO after getting his own apartment and thanked the staff for assisting him so quickly.

6. Medical/Dental/Mental Health Services

Many foster youth have medical and mental health treatment needs, partly due to the situations which caused them to be placed in foster care and occasionally due to their experiences in out-of-home care. The most critical needs for these children are that they receive appropriate treatment and be placed in home situations which can meet their physical and emotional needs.

Two recurring health issues were:

- Inappropriate placement of foster youth; unable to meet child's needs
- Limited and inconsistent access to medical, dental and mental health services

An anonymous caller contacted the FCO regarding a foster youth who was blind, mentally disabled and suffering from diabetes. The caller reported that the youth was placed in a foster home where the caregiver was not trained to deal with her health issues. The nurse advised the foster parent to keep the child's glucose levels at an unusually high level, apparently so the child would not need as much attention. This action subjected the youth to possible strokes, heart attack and death. The FCO contacted CCL to report the alleged conduct by the foster parent. In addition, the FCO reported the alleged conduct of the nurse to the Board of Registered Nursing (BRN). CCL and BRN took appropriate action regarding the situation. The youth is now placed in a licensed home trained to meet her needs and is doing well. The supervisor of the Child Welfare Services agency dealt with the personnel issues regarding the social worker who placed the child in an inappropriate home.

COMPLAINT ISSUES

7. Immigration

Increasingly, youth who were born in other countries are placed in foster care in the United States. When these youth near the age of emancipation, the county placement worker must seek Special Immigrant Juvenile Status for them to ensure they do not risk deportation when they leave the system. Complaints from youth indicate they were emancipated from care without having obtained their Special Immigrant Juvenile Status.

A youth who attended a group home presentation communicated with one of the presenters that he needed assistance. He was in the foster care system, but was going to turn 18 years old in less than a month. He did not have a green card, although all the paperwork was being processed. His county social worker told him he would likely be deported back to Mexico. He wanted to know if the FCO could assist him in staying in the United States since he wanted to become a citizen. The FCO contacted his immigration attorney, who provided his alien registration card and social security number. Senator Barbara Boxer's office was contacted to see if his immigration papers could be placed on a fast track due to his age. At his emancipation court hearing, the public defender was able to continue his dependency in the foster care system for another six months and to ensure he would be moved to a foster home. The youth was able to get a work permit with the assistance of his immigration attorney. At the last court hearing, the judge told him he should be receiving his green card in the next four months. He is very excited about being able to stay in the United States and continues to keep the FCO updated on his accomplishments.

8. Education

The importance of appropriate education for foster youth cannot be over emphasized. Foster youth often face multiple placements and all too often the quality of their education suffers dramatically. Statistics on educational attainment for these children reflect this issue. On-site schools of residential care facilities can be a particular problem as there is very little oversight of the quality of education offered.

Two issues in particular stood out among the complaints received by the FCO:

- Multiple placements that affect school attendance and participation
- Lack of records transferred from one school district to another

The FCO gave a presentation at a group home that had an on-site school. A number of the residents complained about the quality of the education they were receiving. The FCO met with the director of the group home and addressed the resident's issues and concerns. The Director took appropriate action to correct the problems by hiring an educational specialist /consultant. He also established a resident council to discuss any problems in the program, and to brainstorm solutions. The group home director informed the FCO of the actions he had taken to address the educational issues. The FCO followed-up with the residents to verify that their concerns had been addressed.

COMPLAINT ISSUES

9. Court/Attorney Issues

All children and youth in foster care are entitled to legal representation by counsel (except as delineated by law). Their attorneys are required to represent their best interest while their cases are involved with the juvenile court system. Youth are also entitled to attend their court hearings and receive copies of their court reports.

Complaints were commonly related to:

- Foster youth not receiving copies of their court reports
- Foster youth not knowing they have the right to go to court
- Foster youth not knowing their assigned attorney
- Attorneys not returning calls to foster youth

A Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) called the FCO office wanting clarification of the right of foster youth to attend their court hearing. The FCO assured the CASA that foster youth have the right to attend their court hearing and faxed a copy of the rights. The CASA explained that the group home was not allowing the foster youth to attend her court hearing. The FCO also clarified these rights with the director of the group home and the county social worker. The foster youth was transported to the court hearing, as she had requested.

10. Other Issues

In addition to the issues above, a myriad of other concerns were raised by callers, such as:

- Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children
- Gay and lesbian foster youth issues

A gay foster youth called the FCO to complain that he was told by his social worker that he could not visit with the foster mother's brother who is also gay. The FCO contacted the social worker and discussed how important it was that the youth have positive support for his sexual orientation. The social worker agreed to work out a visitation plan. The youth was allowed visitation which provided an appropriate role model.

ON-GOING ACTIVITIES

COLLABORATION

An important component of the FCO is the promotion of collaborative relationships among various departments and agencies to address issues and concerns. The FCO works with the following departments and agencies to address issues and concerns expressed by foster youth and other complainants:

- **Child Advocacy Groups** - The FCO works closely with the following advocacy groups whose perspective is important in providing needed feedback on ways the foster care system can be improved and in hearing directly from the youth in foster care:
 - Children’s Lobby
 - California Partnership for Children
 - California Youth Connection (CYC)
 - Youth Law Center
 - Court Appointed Special Advocates
- **Provider Groups** – The FCO continues to meet with groups to gain information regarding their needs and perspectives in caring for the foster children and youth in their care such as:
 - California Alliance of Children and Family Services
 - California State Foster Parent Association
 - Grandparent and Kinship Associations
- **County Child Welfare Ombudsman Programs** - The FCO encourages the creation of child welfare ombudsman programs in every county that does not currently have one. The FCO has provided technical support to these counties in the creation of their ombudsman programs. The counties that currently have child welfare ombudsman programs are: Alameda, Fresno, Kern, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano. The FCO hosts statewide and regional meetings of county child welfare ombudsman to exchange best practice approaches to complaint resolution and perspectives.
- **County Child Welfare and Juvenile Probation Professionals** - The FCO has met with representatives from county probation offices, the Juvenile Justice Commission and the county welfare directors to explain the scope of the FCO program and to gain information regarding their challenges in meeting the needs of the children and youth in their systems.

FOSTER YOUTH FOCUS GROUPS

The FCO conducted five foster youth focus groups throughout the state during this reporting period (2001—2002). Through these groups, the FCO had the opportunity to discuss a variety of issues with foster youth and to share information regarding the issues that youth are facing in foster care. The FCO will continue these focus groups in the community in an effort to more effectively address the issues affecting foster youth.

ON-GOING ACTIVITIES - continued

FOSTER CARE OMBUDSMAN ADVISORY COMMITTEES

FCO Advisory Committees in both the northern and southern regional offices continue to assist in clarifying the role of the FCO, sharing ideas for effective outreach, and providing feedback to the FCO on protocols and procedures, outreach materials, the complaint tracking system and other relevant issues. The Committees are composed of individuals representing children's advocacy organizations, current and former foster youth, and representatives from provider associations. Various departments and associations within the State are also represented

OUTREACH MATERIALS

The FCO has created outreach materials including color brochures in English and Spanish, laminated cards about the FCO, and a poster and brochure on foster youth rights. These materials are distributed at outreach presentations. The materials are used to assist individuals in understanding the services provided by the FCO. In addition, as the FCO recognizes patterns regarding the types of complaints, fact sheets are created and distributed explaining the issues and addressing specific ways to resolve them.

THE WEB SITE (www.fosteryouthhelp.ca.gov)

The FCO maintains a web site that provides information on the FCO program as well as a wide range of resources to assist foster youth, providers, and the general public. The site includes information on the FCO program as well as a wide range of resources on programs, career development opportunities, employment and educational resources. In addition, a variety of FCO publications (including foster youth rights brochures and posters), forms, other brochures and reports can be accessed. The FCO continues to assess the needs of youth in foster care (as well as those who have emancipated) and places that information on the website.

DATA BASE

The FCO has designed and developed a comprehensive database to track all calls. This tracking system provides a compilation of the number of calls, type of calls, referrals and other data received by the FCO (as mandated by WIC Section 16164 (a) (7)).

RESOURCE DIRECTORY

A comprehensive resource directory has been compiled listing various federal, state and community resources that are available to current and emancipated foster youth. In addition, a youth resource directory and a gay, lesbian, transgender and questioning youth resource directory has been completed. These directories are used by FCO staff to assist foster youth in finding appropriate resources and are continually updated.

SPECIAL PROJECTS

AB 899

In January 2002, Assembly Bill 899 (Chapter 863, Statutes of 2001) became effective. This new law set forth 21 rights for children and youth in foster care. Rights are to be communicated in two ways: 1) facilities licensed to care for six or more foster youth are required to exhibit a foster youth rights poster; and 2) caregivers and placement workers are required to provide a foster youth rights orientation to each school age foster child. To meet these requirements, the FCO, with the help of an advisory group and Transcend, Inc., a translation company working pro bono, designed a colorful brochure and poster presenting the rights and the toll free telephone number for the FCO. The posters and brochures are being distributed throughout the state in accordance with AB 899. It is anticipated that the posters, which will be distributed in September 2002, will be of particular benefit to foster youth placed in group homes.

The FCO is working with several groups to design a curriculum for former foster youth and child welfare professionals to conduct training in their local communities on the foster youth rights. This training will be provided to foster youth, CASA's, attorneys, judges, relatives, and social workers.

FOSTER YOUTH QUESTIONNAIRE

The FCO, in collaboration with CDSS' Community Care Licensing (CCL) and the California Youth Connection (CYC), developed a Foster Youth Questionnaire regarding the youth's perspective on their placement. This questionnaire helps assess the quality of their placement, and their understanding of their rights. The questionnaire will be used by CCL analysts when they interview youth at the annual visit of their foster home or group home. The questionnaire will then be sent to the FCO for data analysis.

TITLE 22 REGULATIONS UPDATE

The FCO created a workgroup in collaboration with CCL, CYC and other relevant parties to identify various Title 22 regulations which created barriers for foster youth learning life skills necessary for self-sufficiency after emancipation. Specific CCL regulations were identified that require excessive supervision of older foster youth and were inhibiting their ability to grow up in the same way as non-foster youth. The report from this group was submitted to the statewide Child Welfare Stakeholders group for further review and action.

GOVERNOR'S INITIATIVE ON HOMELESSNESS

The FCO participated in the Governor's Summit on Homelessness and submitted a proposal for an initiative to help prevent foster youth from becoming homeless. This initiative was accepted by the Governor's office and will develop collaborative programs between the California Department of Social Services, the Employment Development Department and the California Workforce Investment Board to meet the needs of emancipating foster youth and establish a plan to encourage foster youth to register at "One-Stop Centers." This would enable current and former foster youth to obtain information regarding services provided, including employment opportunities and training programs.

SPECIAL PROJECTS - continued

PERMANENCY PLANNING FOR OLDER FOSTER YOUTH

The Foster Care Ombudsman (FCO) has identified the need for older Foster Youth to be connected with committed adults and permanent families. Many foster youth emancipate without these lifelong connections. They lack adult supports that they can call on for assistance in an emergency. Current research shows that many children are not fully independent until age 28, and rely on support at various times from their parents and family members. However, too many of our foster children do not have this life long support.

The FCO participated in a convening by the Stuart Foundation on “Permanency for Older Foster Youth”. This convening shared information and success stories from various agencies around the United States that have found permanent families and committed adults who make a life-long commitment to youth in foster care. The FCO feels that California needs to continue to challenge itself to create similar programs to facilitate finding permanent families for our older foster youth. No child should exit from foster care without a lifelong connections. These individuals can provide foster youth with care and support and assist them with their successful transition into adulthood.

According to the Federal Adoption and Safe Families Act, permanency is the goal for all children in foster care, regardless of age. The foster youth’s permanency plan needs continuous updates in efforts to facilitate foster children having permanent families; either with their parents, relatives or with an adult in the community. This will also avoid expensive, long-term placements and multiple placements.

In many states across the country, Family Conferencing and team decision making have been used to facilitate/ find a permanent home for older foster youth. These models have a proven track record and can be expanded in California. These conferences can bring together extended family, and other supportive adults to explore and develop possible long-term supportive adult relationships. The family conference and the youth’s permanency plan should be documented in the Transitional Independent Living Plan (TILP) of each foster youth age 16 and older. The social worker should conduct an review to identify individuals who are important to the child, and efforts to facilitate establishing life-long support for the foster youth should be on-going.

EMANCIPATION SERVICES

The FCO sees the need for more coordination of services between the Foster Care Independent Living Programs (ILP) and Adult Social Services. When former foster youth reach 21 years of age, they are not eligible for ILP services, and thus need coordinated services through adult programs such as mental health, addiction services, CalWorks, prevention programs, SSI and housing programs. The most effective programs are those that have a dedicated case worker who is knowledgeable, able to coordinate the delivery of services and create a relationship with the former foster youth and actually take them to obtain the services needed.

SPECIAL PROJECTS - continued

EDUCATION OF FOSTER CHILDREN

The FCO has identified as a major concern the quality of education received by foster children. The FCO is participating in a workgroup of the American Institutes on Research to explore the issues, policies and practices affecting the educational needs of foster youth. There are two areas of particular concern:

- **Enrollment delays**

If a foster child or youth is moved from one school district to another and the transfer of educational records does not immediately follow, there is a gap in schooling, which is detrimental to the youth's educational continuity. No one is identified as being responsible for withdrawing a child from school, obtaining the records and enrolling them in the new school. The delay affects foster youth's over all educational attainment, but it also affects California's ability to capture federal dollars. The loss of ADA is substantial when one considers the large number of foster children and youth who are moved from placement to placement and are not able to attend a new school, sometimes for weeks. Foster children and youth should be able to attend school immediately in the new school district while records are being obtained (similar to the federal McKinney Act, which allows homeless children to be enrolled in school immediately wherever they are located).

- **Non-public, group home on-site schools**

Based on feedback from foster youth at Ombudsman presentations and a recent report of the American Institutes for Research, entitled "Education of Foster Group Home Children, Whose Responsibility Is It?", the quality of education in on-site schools is of concern in two general areas. First, foster youth in these schools are isolated from the myriad activities of the mainstream school experience and from normal social contacts with other students and their local community. Secondly, youth have advised the FCO of their feeling that the quality of education does not serve their needs. For example, a number of youth stated they are not able to take the required coursework needed to allow them to attend college such as a foreign language and laboratory work in the sciences.

FORMER FOSTER YOUTH PROFESSIONAL OPPORTUNITY PROGRAM (FFY-POP)

The FCO has developed a proposal to provide former foster youth the opportunity to obtain employment, training and professional development as a Foster Youth Outreach Worker through the Foster Care Ombudsman program. This program proposal was submitted to the Governor's Discretionary Fund of the California Workforce Investment Board, but was not funded. The FCO will be submitting this proposal to additional governmental funding sources as well as private foundations for consideration.

**Final Report, January 25, 2001, American Institutes for Research, University of California at Berkeley, Child Welfare Research Center, and Lodestar Research)*

Staff in the Foster Care Ombudsman Office

In February 2000, Karen Grace-Kaho was appointed as the Ombudsman for Foster Care. In February 2002, Ms. Grace-Kaho was appointed for her second term.

Each of the staff brings a wealth of knowledge, personal talent and commitment which assists them to meet the needs of the FCO. The dedication of the FCO staff is the basis of the excellent service provided to current and former foster youth throughout California.

The FCO staff have a wide array of educational and professional experience. These include:

- Master's Degrees in Social Work (MSW's)
- former CDSS Community Care Licensing (CCL) and foster care policy staff
- former residential treatment facility director
- former county Ombudsman
- former foster youth

APPENDIX

THE COMPLAINT AND INQUIRY PROCESS

The Foster Care Ombudsman has created protocols and procedures for processing complaints and inquiries. The following processes are used by the FCO staff to assist callers in resolving their concerns and issues:

- All contacts are documented in a complaint data base.
- The FCO determines the priority status of the complaint. If the complaint involves an allegation of abuse, a report is made to Child Protective Services and Community Care Licensing.
- The FCO acts as an objective fact-finder.
- The FCO will inquire if the complainant feels safe making this complaint and if there is any fear of retaliation, and will explore various approaches to address their concerns.
- The FCO determines if the complainant has addressed their concerns to other personnel or organizations (i.e., county social worker, probation officer, county Ombudsman, Community Care Licensing, etc.).
- The FCO contacts all relevant parties, either by phone or in person, (including the complainant, family members, social worker, Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), County Ombudsman, attorney, physicians and any other relevant parties).
- The FCO contacts the appropriate attorney in the process of conducting investigations.
- The FCO determines if a referral needs to be made to appropriate agencies or organizations for supportive services.
- The FCO reports back to all complainants as to the action taken by the FCO and the status of the resolution.

OMBUDSMAN

“An appointed public official who investigates activities of government agencies that may infringe on the rights of the individual.” (Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary).