



NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

Center for Child Welfare and Education

**DCFS Northern Region
Permanency Enhancement Project
Fiscal Year 2013 Report
July 1, 2012-June 30, 2013**

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Introduction

Overrepresentation and differential treatment of children of color in the child welfare system has gained national attention and is one of the major issues that needs to be addressed in child welfare. Identification of factors that contribute to this problem has been examined through research with a goal of producing better outcomes for children and families. Increasingly, child welfare systems have begun to actively engage community stakeholders in their efforts to combat these racial inequities. For many, taking steps to address this pressing issue is welcomed and long overdue.

DCFS Permanency Enhancement Project

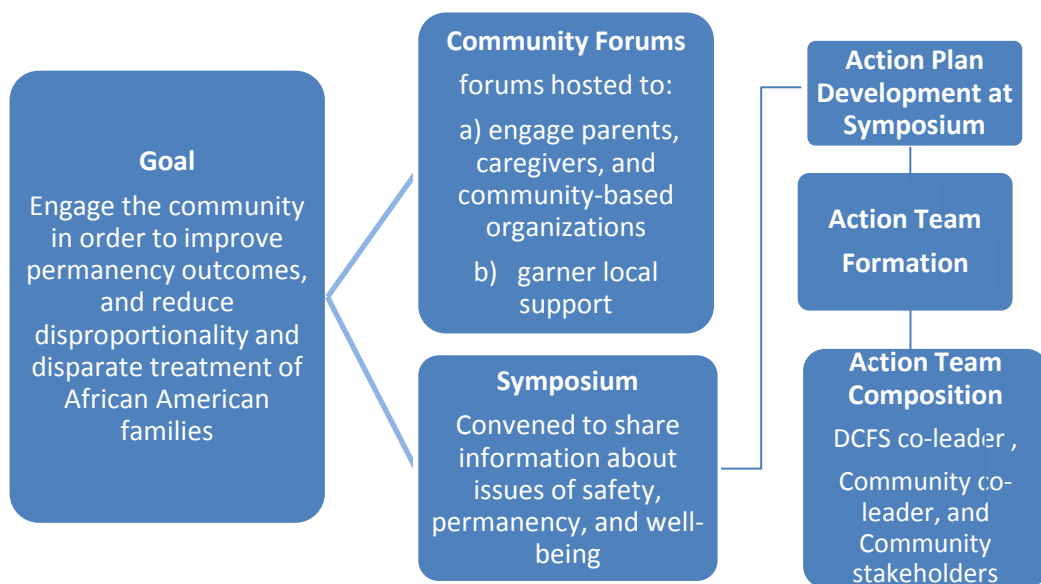
DCFS is committed to addressing issues related to racial disproportionality and disparities. Recognition of these issues and the desire to achieve greater equity for children in child welfare, has led to the Illinois Permanency Enhancement Project (PEP). PEP is a statewide initiative that began in 2006 to engage community stakeholders in its work to improve permanency outcomes and reduce racial disproportionality.

Some of the steps DCFS took to begin collaborations with community stakeholders to examine and address racial disproportionality, disparity and permanency are:

- Conducting focus groups with DCFS/POS caseworkers and administrators, court personnel, birth parents and foster/adoptive parents to understand barriers to permanency and the overrepresentation of African American youth in care.
- Hosting town hall meetings and community forums in several regions
- Convening regional symposiums
- Providing anti-racism training for staff and communities
- Collecting and analyzing data to assess factors that contribute to racial disproportionality and disparity
- Developing partnerships with the Illinois African American Family Commission and four state universities (Illinois State University (ISU), Northern Illinois University (NIU), Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE), and University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC)).
- Recruiting and engaging local communities in addressing the issues.

Figure 1 illustrates PEP's development process.

Figure 1: PEP Development Process



Following symposiums and community forums in which the issues were presented and discussed, local action teams were formed to focus on the following primary goals:

1. Improve remain home permanency outcomes
2. Improve return home permanency outcomes
3. Improve adoption/guardianship permanency outcomes
4. Reduce overrepresentation of African American youth in foster care

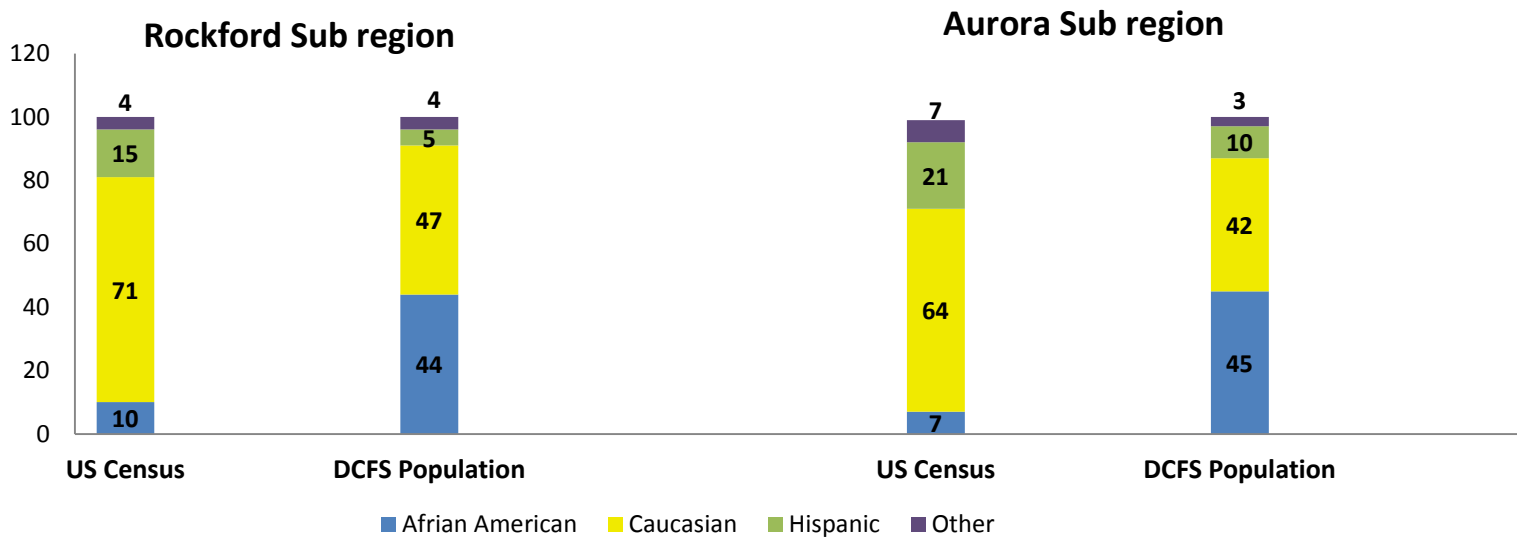
PEP in the Northern Region

Vision- *Improving permanency outcomes and reducing the disproportionate representation and disparate treatment of African American and Hispanic American children in foster care in partnership with the community.*

While DCFS started PEP in the Central Region in 2006, PEP was launched in the Northern Region in March 2008. At that time the disproportionality between the percentage of African American children and Caucasian children was prominent in both sub regions in Northern Illinois. Disproportionality refers to differences in the percentage of children of a certain racial or ethnic group in the population as compared to the percentage of the children of the same group in the child welfare system. According to census data at the time, African American

children in the general population in the Rockford sub region were 10% while African American children in substitute care were 44%. Similarly, in the Aurora sub region African American children in the general population were 7%, while African American children in substitute care were 45%.¹ This is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Disproportionality in DCFS Northern Region in 2008



Northern Region Action Teams

After the initial symposium and community forums across the region in 2008, local action teams were formed to address the permanency and disproportionality problems in the local communities. Each action team is comprised of a DCFS co-leader, a voluntary community co-leader, and various community stakeholders. Community stakeholders play an integral role in supporting the efforts of the action team. Members of the community collaborate with DCFS and take an active role in supporting PEP goals. Action teams work on activities they believe will be beneficial to the children and families in their local communities. Teams dialogue about

¹ Rolock, N., Dettlaff, A. J., Wilder, J. R., & Jantz, I. Jane Addams College of Social Work, (2011). *Disparities and Disproportionality in Child Welfare: Trends in the Northern Region for African American Children*. Chicago: University of Illinois at Chicago.

issues that cause or impact racial disproportionality and/or permanency, develop goals to address the issues, create plans to accomplish the goals, and implement strategies they establish.

Structure of Action Teams



Currently the Northern Region has six action teams that primarily represent the counties in which they are located. The counties are: DeKalb, Kane, Kankakee, McHenry, Will, and Winnebago. The population sizes in these counties range from 23,490 in DeKalb County to 73,580 in Winnebago County according to the US 2010 Census. The number of children in DCFS’ care in these counties as of 7-31-13 ranged from 93 to 1,335 (see Appendix 1).

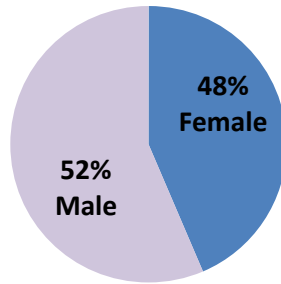
Demographic profile of children in counties with active action teams

Northern Region action teams receive county specific permanency and disproportionality data from DCFS during the year. This data provides summaries on the number of children in each county and breaks it out by gender, race, permanency goal, etc. Examples of the data include: a) number of entries into care by race and age group, b) source of reports, and c) source of indicated reports. By using information derived from the data, action teams become more aware of issues regarding disproportionality and permanency in their communities and can identify where they need to focus their attention and monitor their outcomes.

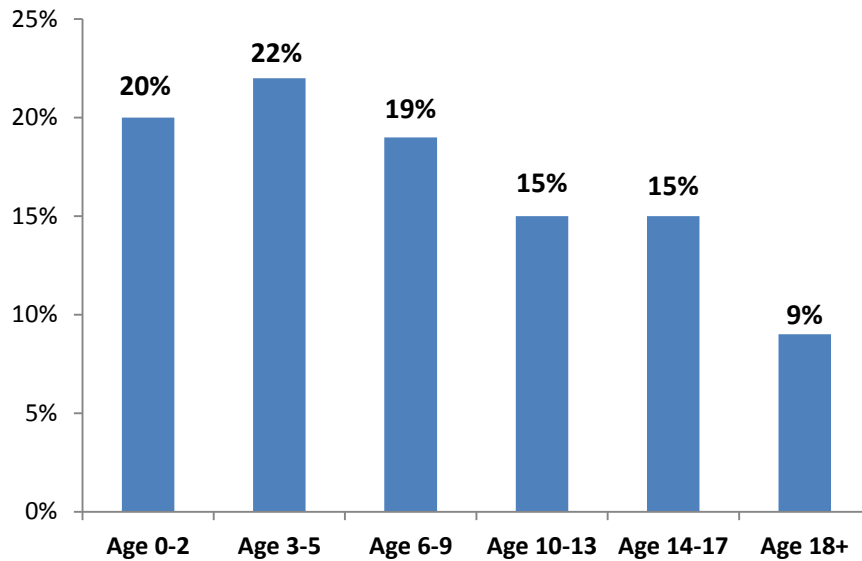
The action team data reported below is derived from 2012 to 2013 data provided by DCFS Northern Region quality assurance. It represents combined totals from the six counties with active action teams (DeKalb, Kane, Kankakee, McHenry, Will, and Winnebago). Altogether

there were 2,497 children in substitute care in these six counties as of 7-31-13 (see Appendix1). Of these children, 1,297 were male and 1,200 were female (see Figure 3). Two out of five of the children were five years old or less (see Figure 4).

**Figure 3: Gender
6 Action Teams Combined**

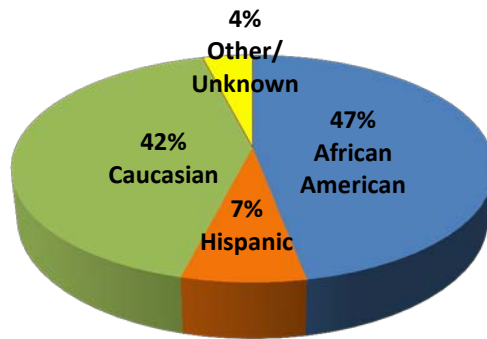


**Figure 4: Age Ranges
6 Action Teams Combined**



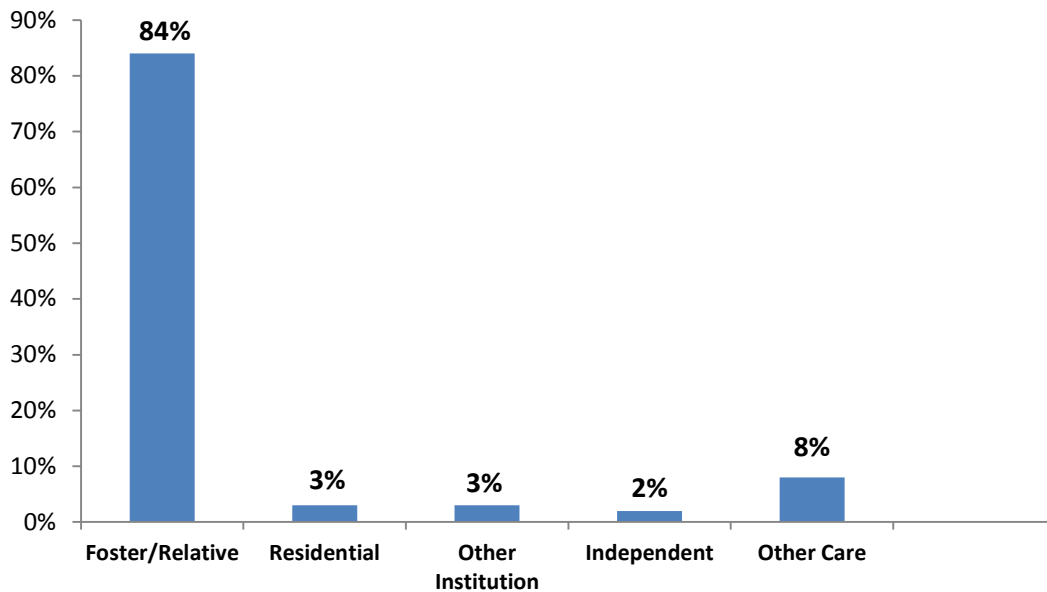
Regarding race/ethnicity, African American children accounted for nearly half of the foster children (47%) in the six counties. Caucasian children accounted for 42%, and 7% were Hispanic. See Figure 5.

Figure 5: Race/Ethnicity



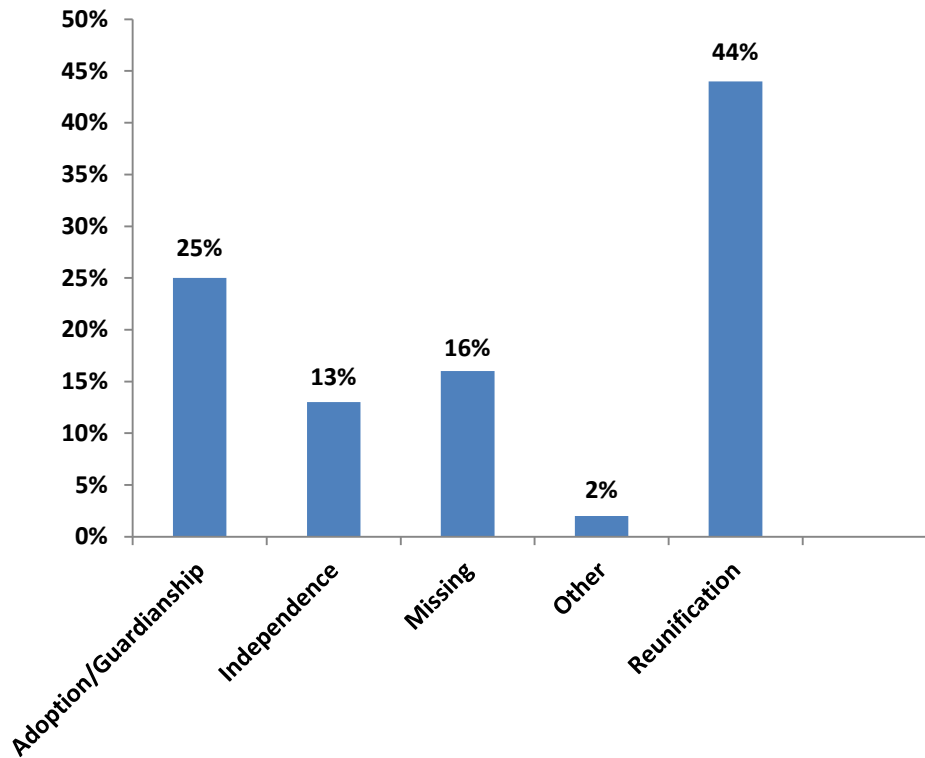
The vast majority of children in these six counties were in foster and/or relative placements. Six percent of them were in residential placement or other institutions and two percent were in independent living arrangements (see Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Placement Type
6 Action Teams Combined**



And nearly half of the number of children in care in these six counties had a permanency goal of reunification (44%), while one in four children had the goal of adoption or subsidized guardianship (see Figure 7).

**Figure 7: Permanency Goals
6 Action Teams Combined**



Disproportionality and disparity in counties with action teams

As previously mentioned, disproportionality refers to differences in the percentage of children of a certain racial or ethnic group in the population as compared to the percentage of the children of the same group in the child welfare system. The disproportionality charts of the six counties referenced earlier are represented in Appendix 2. All the counties with currently active action teams have a disproportional representation of African American children. Of these six counties, McHenry has the smallest percentage of African American children in its general population (1.2%), but it has the largest proportion of overrepresentation; 10% of the children in foster care in this county are African American. Despite this, McHenry’s action team tends to place greater focus on Hispanic families because 17% of children in the general population are Hispanic.

The disproportionality ratio for African American children was calculated by dividing the percentage of African American children in substitute care as of 7-31-13 by the percentage of children of African American children in the child population in the last US census. The disproportionality ratio for McHenry County is 8.33. Kane County similarly has a significantly high African American disproportionality ratio - 6.94. Other counties were as follows: Will County 4.07, Winnebago 3.26, Kankakee 3.02 and DeKalb 2.76.

Similarly, using the total number of indicated child victims by race (see Appendix 5) the disparity odds for African American children compared to Caucasian children was calculated. Disparity occurs when there is unequal treatment in services to one segment of a community, relative to other segments. In child welfare, this may be observed at key decision points (investigation of reports, indicated findings, entry into substitute care placement, and long term placement). African American children were more likely to be indicated as victims than Caucasian children in each of these counties.

Across the six counties, the largest percentage of children entering care was ages birth to 5 years for every race (see Appendix 4). Noteworthy is that in FY13 the number of African American children who entered care in Winnebago County exceeded every other race; there were 220 African American children who entered care (that is 46%).

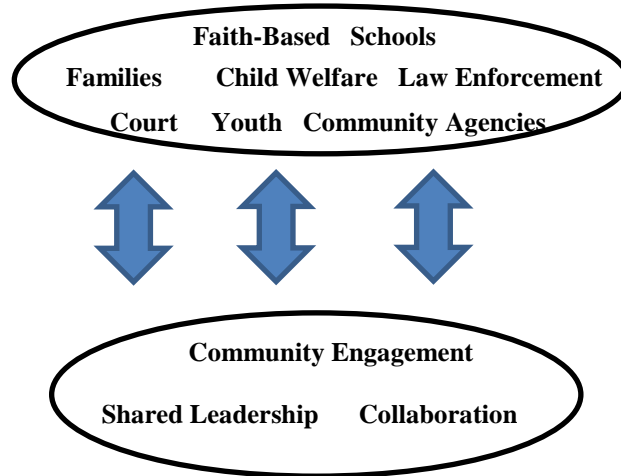
Action team activities

As mentioned earlier, action teams are comprised of DCFS appointed co-leaders, voluntary community co-leaders (for some teams), and community stakeholders. The co-leaders share the responsibility of facilitating the meetings and keeping the action team focused and moving forward. The six action teams have been working to address problems related to disproportionality and permanency. Each action team addresses at least one of the following primary PEP goals: 1) reduce disproportionality and disparate treatment, 2) reduce the rate at which children are brought into the child welfare system, 3) increase the number of children who are returned home, and 4) stabilize post-adoptive placements.

During the first half of fiscal year 2013, Northern Region action teams got off to a slow start due to the uncertainty of continued employment for some DCFS staff. Despite these challenges, some teams were able to remain engaged and active, staying focused on their goals. In fact, in collaboration with community stakeholders in the Northern Region, the work to improve permanency and reduce disproportionality is going strong in some of the action teams. NIU continued this year to provide data and consultation to assist and guide their conversations and effort. Some of the action teams have strong community co-leaders and/or partnerships and other teams are re-establishing themselves. Below summarizes some overarching objectives that a number of the action teams worked on this year.

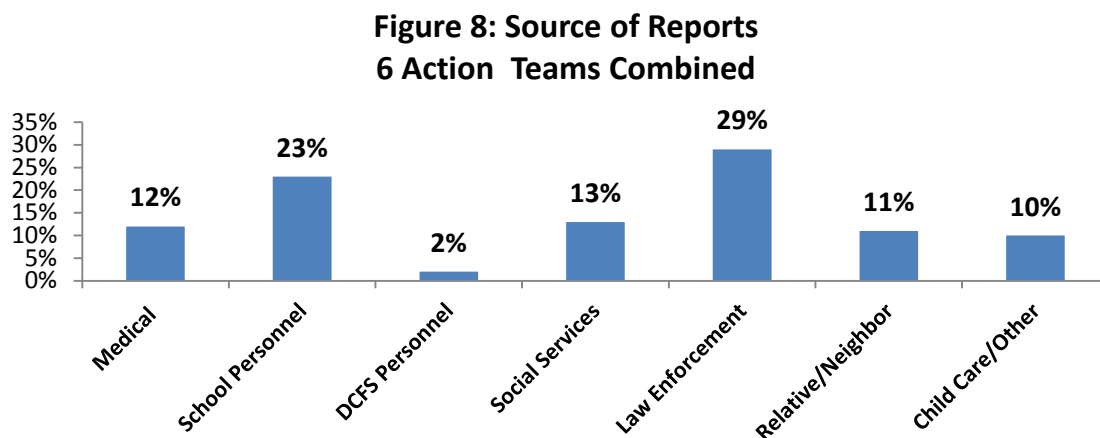
- Communicate, educate, and help families to fully integrate in the communities by connecting families to available resources that can improve their lives and defray involvement in the child welfare system
- Work to build trust and collaborative relationships and communication among schools, court, private agencies, parents, and community members
- Continue recruitment and retention of community stakeholders
- Maintain stabilization of action teams

One common thread amongst the teams is that they understand how essential it is to engage a diverse array of stakeholders to include: faith-based, schools, families, youth, courts, child welfare, community agencies and others. Members of the community engaged in working together have the innate power to change their environment.



Action teams are able to advance in their effort to address permanency and disproportionality in their communities through collaborative relationships among these stakeholders. They meet monthly. Action team members utilize DCFS county specific data about maltreatment reports, investigation, entry into foster care, permanency, etc. as well as anecdotal data from members of the action team to guide their plans and actions.

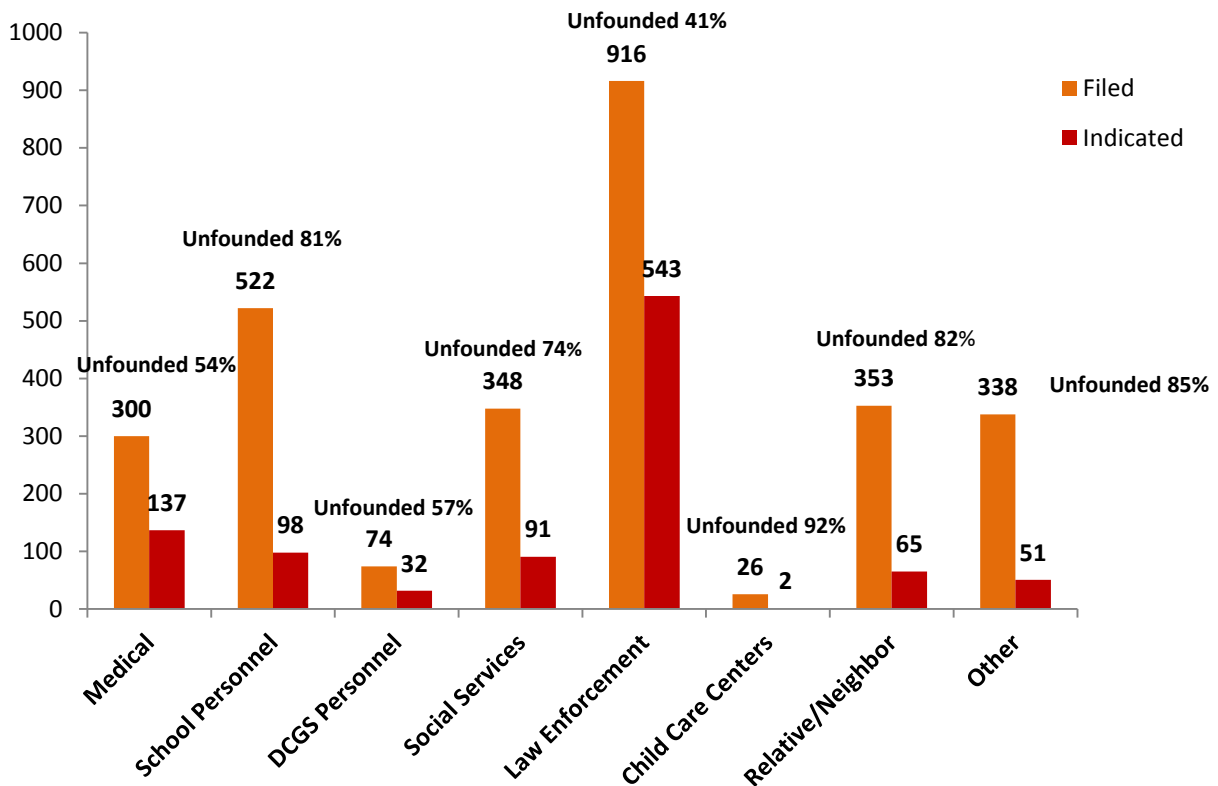
The following use of reporting, investigation and findings data provides an example. The largest sources of reports are law enforcement and schools. The source of reports for each county may be seen in Appendix 3. Below is a chart (Figure 8) that compares the source of reporting for the combined six counties with active action teams.



Law enforcement reported the highest number of alleged maltreatment; they also have the largest percentage of indicated reports (see Figure 9). Schools generally had the second highest number

of reports filed. However, the vast majority of their reports are unfounded. Some action teams in the Northern Region have thus recruited school representatives to join the table where they examine and engage in activities to improve school’s understanding of mandated reporting and increase their knowledge of available community resources.

**Figure 9: Winnebago County
Filed vs. Indicated -FY13**



Below are further examples of the work of action teams in the Northern Region.

DeKalb Action Team

The DeKalb Action Team is one of the most consistent in the region. The team meets monthly with a core group of stakeholders, and has had a consistent DCFS co-leader since 2008. Some of the accomplishments of the DeKalb Action Team are:

- Parent Cafes were planned to serve as an additional source of support to parents with the intent of expanding their knowledge of local resources within the community and building protective factors. Both DCFS and the community were actively involved in the planning process.

- Community members were trained to become host/facilitators of Parent Cafes.
- Flyers were developed and distributed to the local school district, homeless shelter, child care centers, and other places throughout the community.
- The action team has strong community support and commitment in the county. There has been a committed group of community stakeholders that volunteer their time in ensuring the success of the parent cafes. The action team has been able to secure sponsors for food, volunteers to provide child care for café participants, and were able to use free facilities within the community to conduct the cafes and training of host/facilitators.

This action team has been successful at engaging the community. Its participants include DCFS, community agencies, families, schools, faith-based, community leaders, etc. Relationships and collaborations have remained consistent and members of the action team continue to share their ideas and resources.

Winnebago Action Team

Winnebago is the largest county in the Northern Region, so it is crucial that this action team remains engaged despite challenges. Indeed during the early part of this fiscal year, when there was no DCFS co-leader, the community co-leader remained committed and as a result, this team has been able to keep stakeholders who remain active and focused on the goals of addressing disproportionality and permanency in Winnebago.

In order to accomplish its goals, the Winnebago Action Team has established the following three committees: 1) outreach committee, 2) education committee, and 3) open house/symposium committee. Each committee has a chair who reports at the action team meetings on its progress towards accomplishing its goals. The outreach committee has garnered participation and support from community organizations such as the NAACP, the YWCA and the Joyner Neighborhood Resource Center partnerships which have proved helpful. For instance, the YWCA is willing to consult with the action team on making a commercial awareness piece pertaining to disproportionality of African American youth in foster care. The education committee conducted a survey to gather information from potential at-risk parents. The education committee is also working to coordinate a meeting with school personnel, hospitals, and the park district about training on mandated reporting.

The open house/symposium committee is working on hosting a symposium which would highlight community resources available throughout Winnebago County, and provide educational sessions on various topics beneficial to the community. The action team has submitted a proposal for a Court Improvement Program (CIP) grant to fund the symposium and is recruiting presenters for the breakout sessions. CIP is a federally funded initiative designed to improve the quality of the court process for children and families involved in abuse, neglect, dependency, and termination of parental rights proceedings.

Community members are an integral part of the Winnebago Action Team. Members of the Winnebago Action Team also engage in activities that may not be initiated by the committees but can be effective at accomplishing the goals to improve permanency outcomes and reduce disproportionality. For example following an action team meeting, faith-based leaders committed to educating other ministers in the community about issues related to mandated reporting. The action team continues to work on increasing participation of diverse community stakeholders such as the Latino Coalition, birth parents, foster parents, and the mayor's office.

Kankakee Action Team

Kankakee Action Team is an example of a team with new DCFS leadership that has reestablished itself, and is actively growing. This action team maintained a collaborative relationship with the Juvenile Court System and community-based organizations. The team recently collaborated with Big Brothers Big Sisters to develop a CIP grant proposal to seek funding for a mentoring program for children in the custody of DCFS. In addition, the Kankakee Action Team is currently working with Be Strong Families to begin to offer Parent Cafes similar to the ones in DeKalb.

The Kankakee community stakeholders and the co-leaders seem passionate about the mission, and the team is working to get more school, caregiver, and community agency involvement.

Continued Support for PEP

The Northern Region administrators continued to address issues of permanency and disproportionality this year working in conjunction with NIU, active action teams and their communities. Their efforts included:

- Convening a Northern Region PEP Summit to: 1) learn about the activities, challenges and needs of each action team, 2) examine disproportionality and disparity data, 3) learn about the status of a judicial proposal to provide racial equity training to the Juvenile Court judges, and 4) discuss the integration of statewide and Northern Region priorities and supports for PEP
- Supporting the education of community stakeholders and other systems about disproportionality through training, and the utilization of data
- Encouraging the strengthening of relationships with community stakeholders and community-based agencies for the sustainability of action teams
- Scheduling quarterly meetings with action team co-leaders. The meetings create an environment that allows open communication and action team leader engagement. Accomplishments, issues, needs and barriers to action team success are documented.

NIU Center for Child Welfare and Education has also continued to support DCFS' effort to improve permanency outcomes for youth in foster care, while reducing disproportionality and disparate treatment of African American and Hispanic families in the Northern Region. To this end, the University has provided data analysis, planning, consultation and technical assistance.

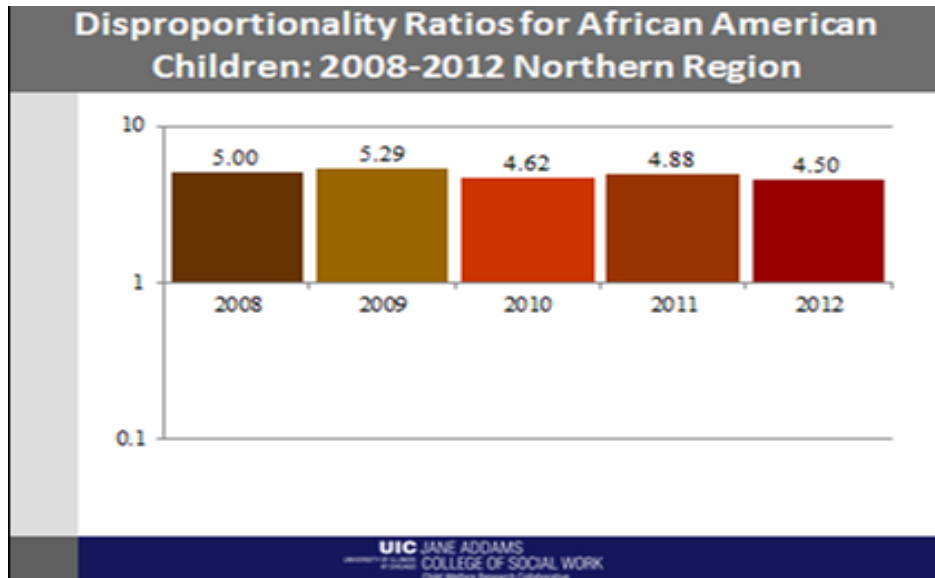
NIU analyzed and disseminated data in a format that action team members, co-leaders and county constituents could digest and act upon. Using DCFS county specific permanency and disproportionality data, action teams were able to: a) increase the knowledge/awareness of participants on child welfare issues of permanency, disproportionality and disparity in their communities, b) help action team members to identify where they need to focus their attention, and c) monitor their outcomes by tracking specific data. In addition to its role in collaboration with DCFS in planning and facilitating the Northern Region PEP Summit, the university presented disproportionality and disparity data at the summit to increase the understanding of action team leaders and Northern Region administrators about these issues in the region.

Throughout the year, NIU also served as a resource to action team leaders and regional administrator designees and provided technical assistance to the active action teams. NIU worked with action teams that requested assistance and support with planning strategies and sustaining their action team efforts. NIU participated in some of the action team meetings and all of the Northern Region quarterly meetings. As part of the university partner agreement, NIU presented and facilitated a statewide panel at the June 2013, African American Advisory Council institute that brought together child welfare professionals and stakeholders from across the state to discuss critical issues that influence permanency outcomes of African American children in the child welfare system. Staff also participated in meetings with university partners to discuss progress of PEP across regions.

Data Trends

It is evident that there has been a lot of discussion and work on the issue of disproportionality and disparity of children and families of color in the child welfare system during the last five years (2008-2012). UIC analyzed DCFS data to examine the disproportionality ratio trend over the past five years of African American compared to Caucasian children in substitute care in Illinois at regional and sub-regional levels. The trend in the Northern Region is depicted in Figure 10.

Figure 10

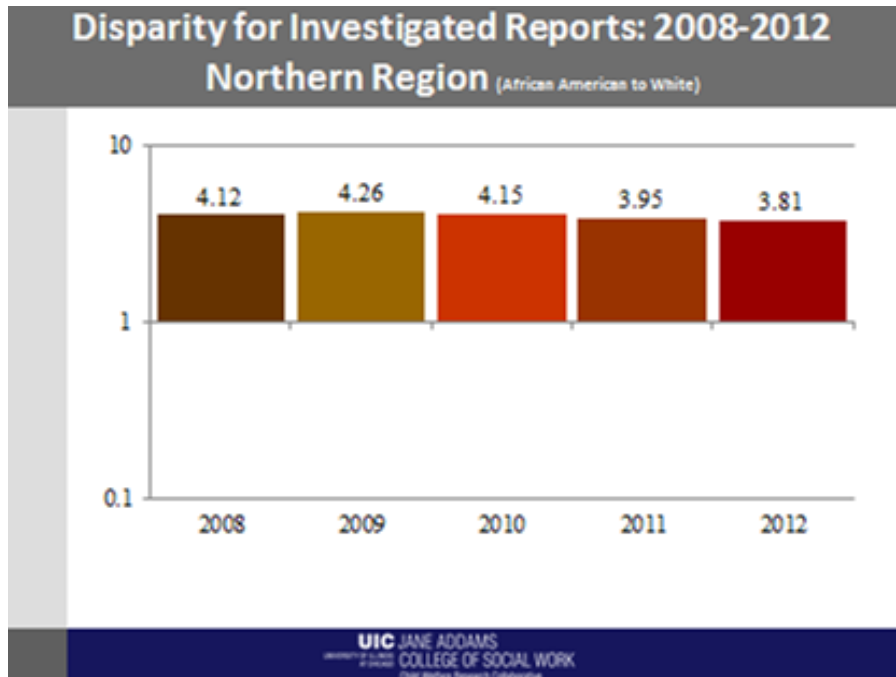


In 2009, an African American child was over five times more likely to be in the foster care system than a Caucasian child in the Northern Region. The graph also demonstrates that the disproportionality ratio has been trending downward since it peaked at 5.29 in 2009.²

Likewise, UIC examined the level of disparate treatment that African American children in child welfare experience compared with Caucasian children at each decision point. Using DCFS data, UIC plotted disparity indices on a logarithmic scale on which disparity indices less than 1.0 represent decreased odds relative to the comparison group while values greater than 1.0 represent increased odds. They found in the Northern Region that when compared to Caucasian children, African American children experience increased odds of disparity at every decision point examined that is at the points of investigation of reports, indicated findings, entry into care and long term placement.

² Rolock, N., Dettlaff, A. J., Wilder, J. R., & Jantz, I. Jane Addams College of Social Work, (2011). *Disparities and Disproportionality in Child Welfare: Trends in the Northern Region for African American Children*. Chicago: University of Illinois at Chicago.

Figure 11



The level of disparity fluctuated over the past five years (2008-2012) at each decision point other than investigation. They found that the disparity odds for African American children compared to Caucasian ranged from 1.13 to 1.21 for indicated reports, 1.69 to 1.95 for entry, and 1.19 to 2.08 for placement in care over 3 years.³ However, investigation of reports of alleged abuse or neglect had disparity odds that ranged from 3.81 to 4.26. Figure 11 demonstrates that the disparity index for investigation peaked at 4.26 in 2009, and trended downward in successive years.

While the University partners did not develop research to distinguish causality for shifts in disproportionality or disparity ratios, the above graphs demonstrate a direct correlation between the years in which Northern Region PEP was active and the years of decline. Further research is needed to ascertain causes and/or contributions to this phenomenon.

³ Jane Addams College of Social Work, Child Welfare Research Collaborative. (2012). *Disparities and Disproportionality in Child Welfare: Trends in Northern Region for African American Children, 2008 - 2012*. Chicago: University of Illinois at Chicago.

Conclusion

As mentioned in the introduction, the overrepresentation of children of color in the child welfare system is one of the major issues being discussed nationally. The extent of this overrepresentation varies in the Northern Region, but does exist in all six of the identified counties in this report. Although the action teams encountered some challenges, they continued to work on action team recruitment and retention strategies, establishing collaborative relationships, utilizing data to make informed decisions, and examining the composition of the action teams for racial and organizational diversity.

The action teams have focused their attention on interventions and/or strategies they believe will help reduce racial disproportionality and move children closer to permanency. Community stakeholders have been instrumental in their teams' ongoing efforts to attain their stated PEP goals.

For the first three to four years of PEP in the Northern Region, about 10 counties participated in this effort to address permanency and disproportionality. While administrative decisions were made to concentrate efforts on the six most active action teams, there is a plan to extend the work to other counties in the future.

Since a disproportional representation of African American children in child welfare continues to exist such that African American children are 4.5 times more likely to be in foster care than Caucasian children in this region, the efforts of the action team persists. DCFS Northern Region remains committed to collaborating with communities and University partners to improve permanency and reduce disproportionality.

**Appendix 1- Counties with Active Action Teams by Race
July 31, 2013**

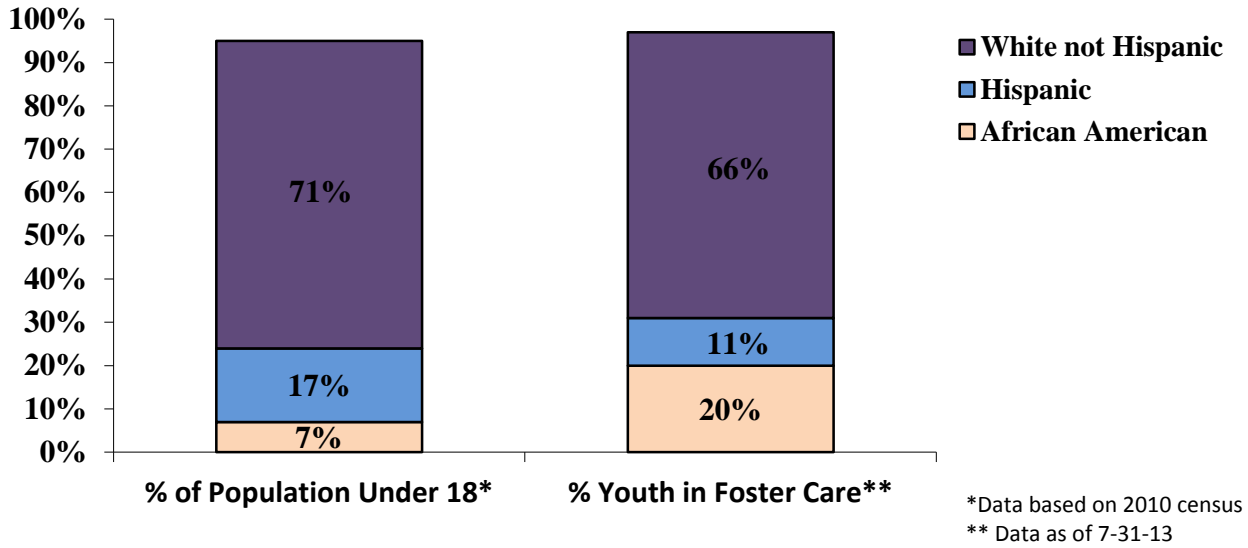
Action Teams / Counties	Total No. in foster care	African American	Hispanic	Caucasian	Other or unknown
DeKalb	93	19	10	61	3
Kankakee	154	88	1	58	7
Kane	336	144	67	118	7
McHenry	134	14	9	107	4
Will	445	214	34	178	19
*Winnebago	1335	687	53	539	56
Total	2497	1166	174	1061	96
Total Percentage	100%	47%	7%	42%	4%

*Winnebago figure is as of 6-30-13

Appendix 2-Disproportionality Charts

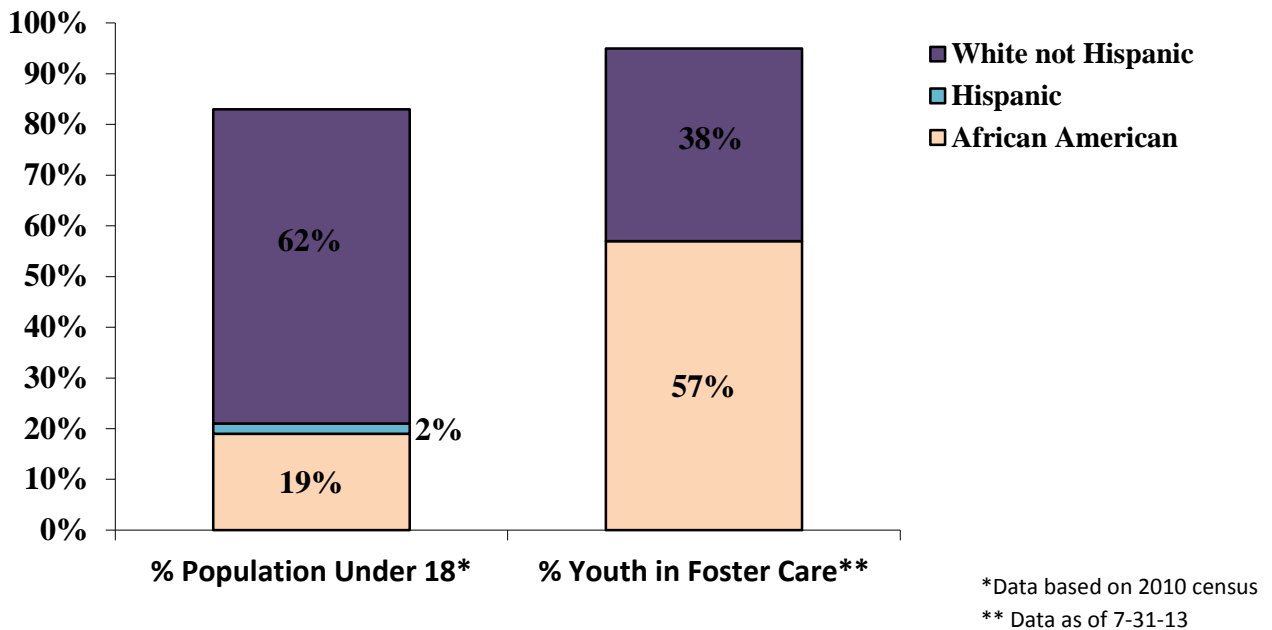
DeKalb County

Total Population under 18 Years = **23,490** / Total Youth in Foster Care = **93**



Kankakee County

Total Population under 18 Years = **28,754** / Total Youth in Foster Care = **154**

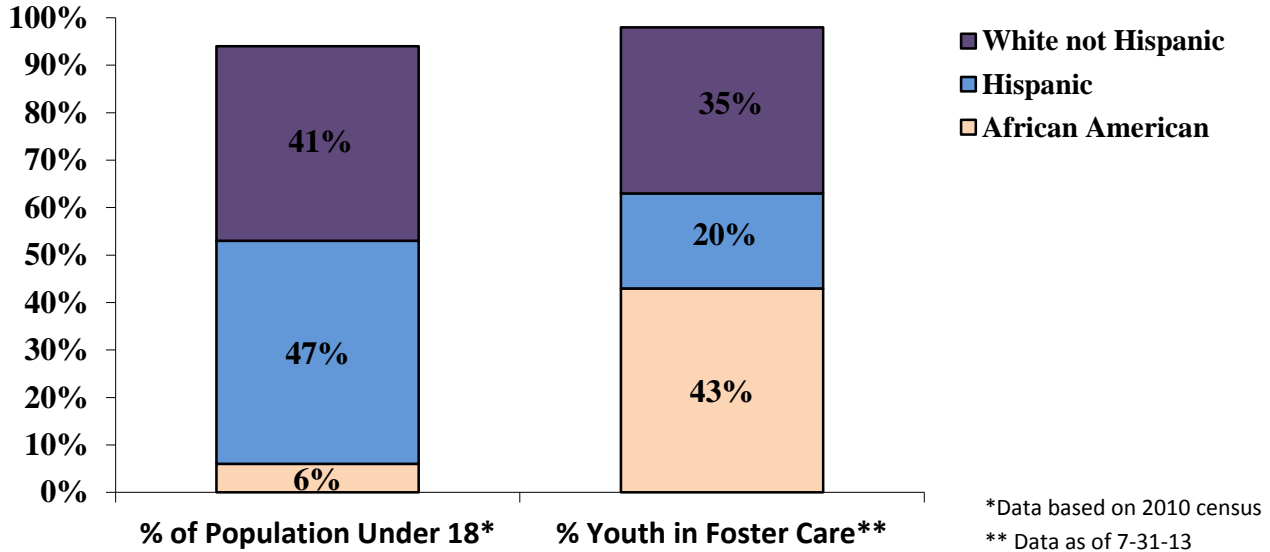


DCFS Hispanic population in Kankakee is less than one percent (0.006).

Appendix 2 continued

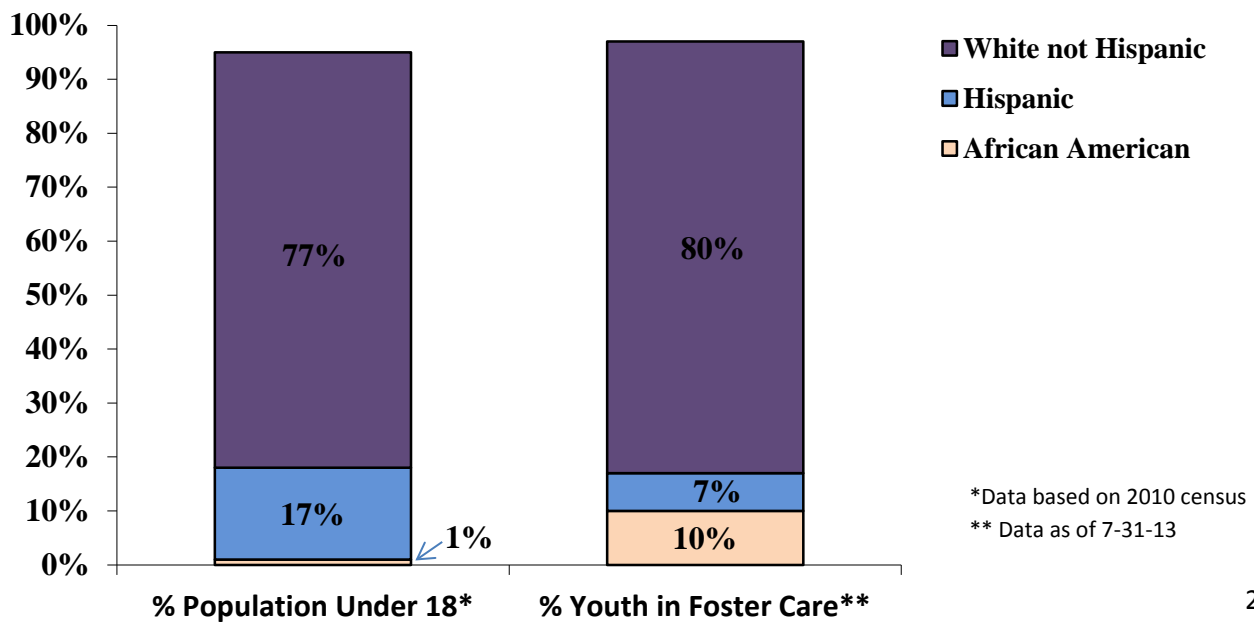
Kane County

Total Population Under 18 = 149,190 / Total Youth in Foster Care = 336



McHenry County

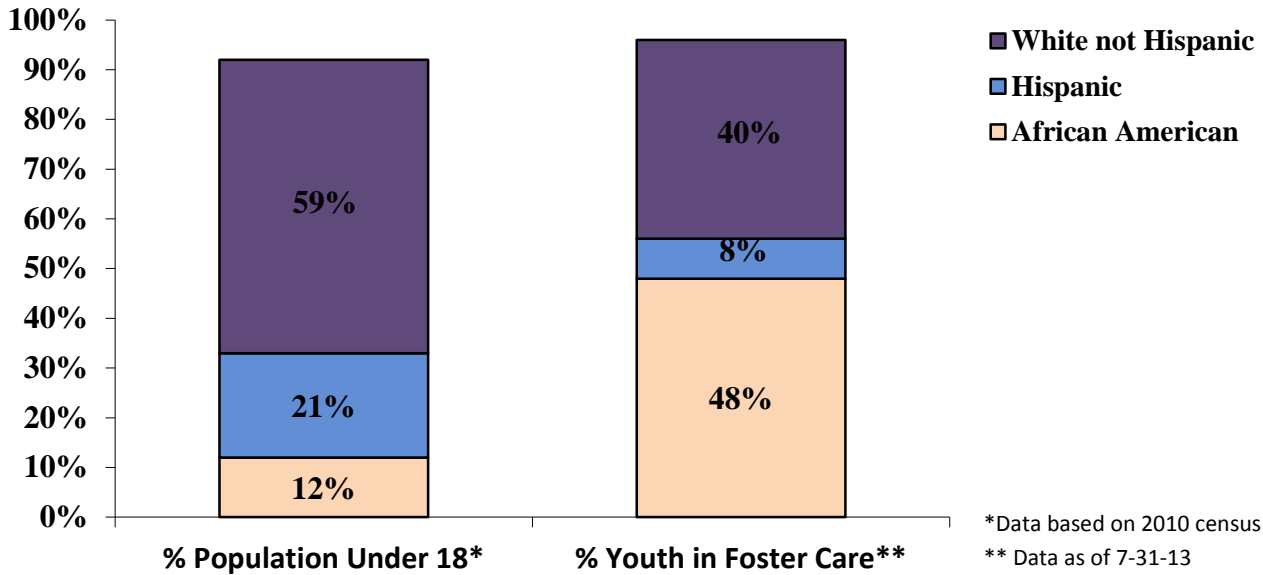
Total Population under 18 Years = 84,175 / Total Youth in Foster Care = 134



Appendix 2 continued

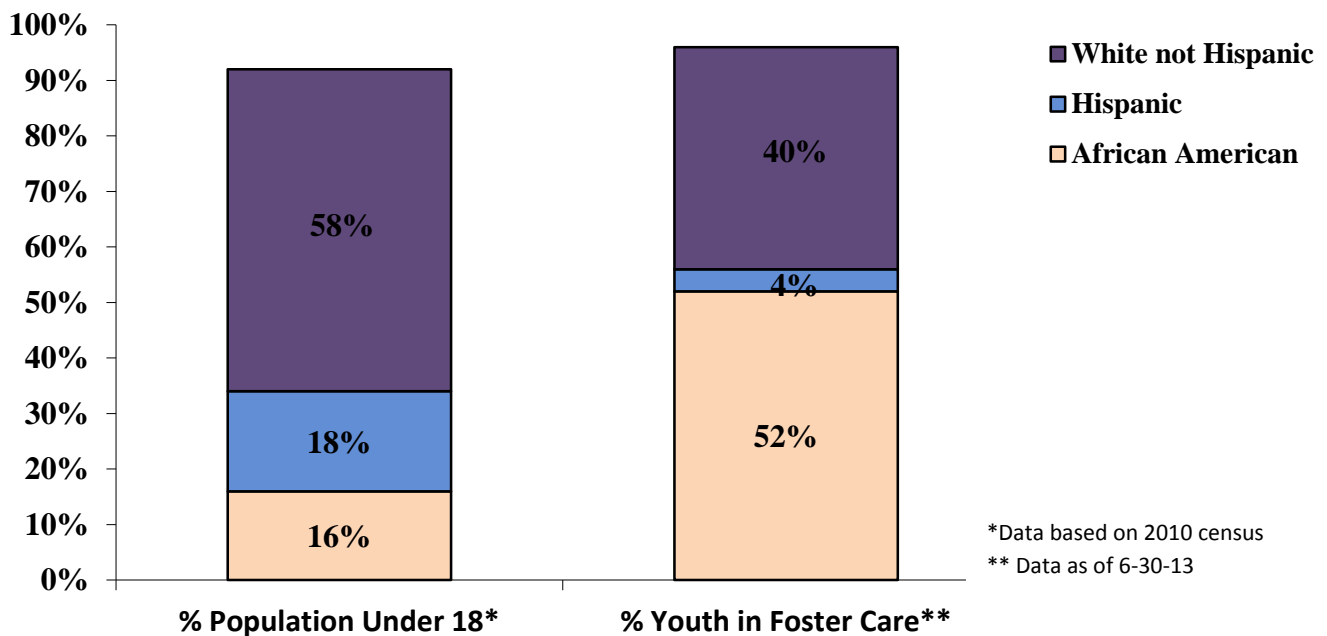
Will County

Total Population under 18 Years = 196,954 / Total Youth in Foster Care = 445



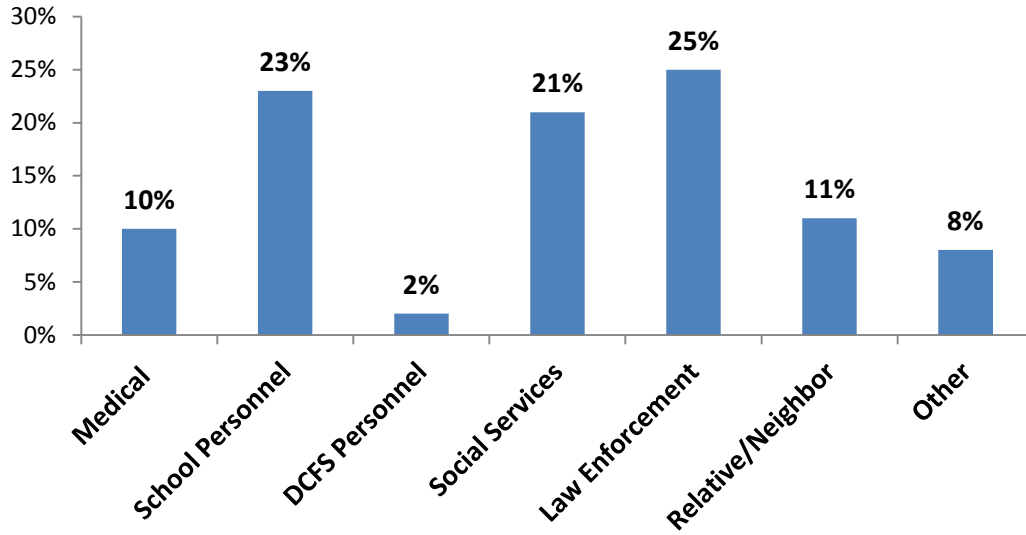
Winnebago County

Total Population under 18 Years = 73,580 / Total Youth in Foster Care = 1,335

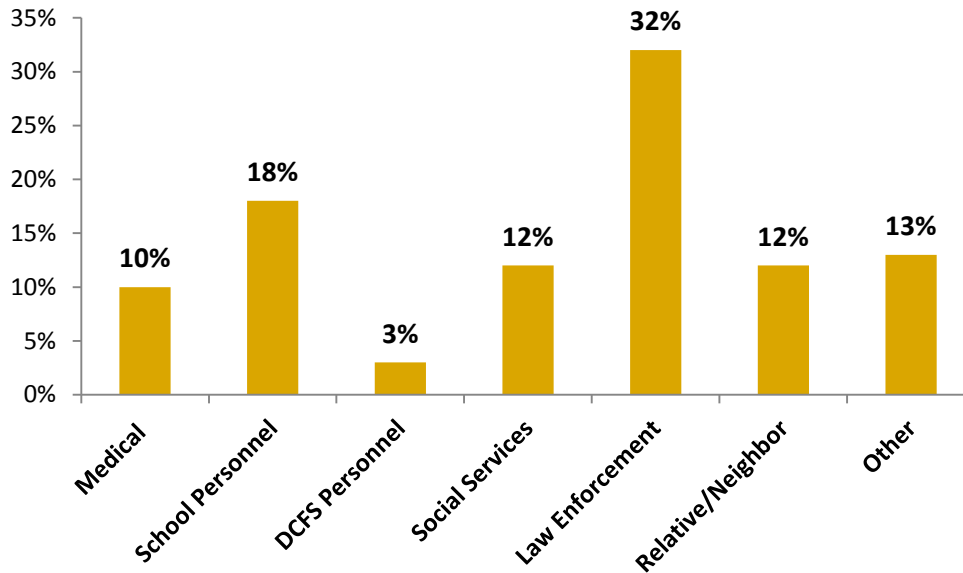


Appendix 3-Source of Reports

DeKalb County Source of Reports 8-1-12 to 6-30-13

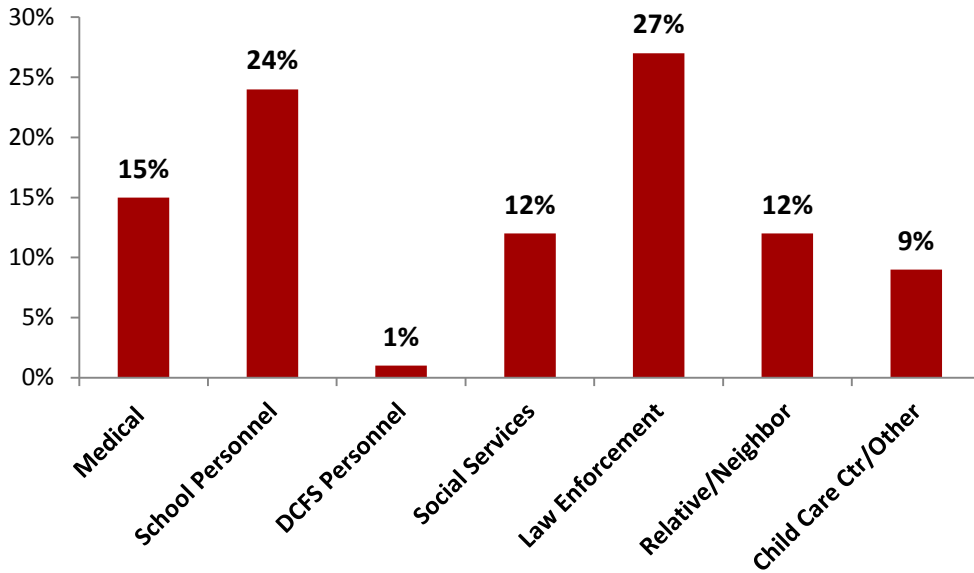


Winnebago County Source of Reports 7-1-12 to 6-30-13

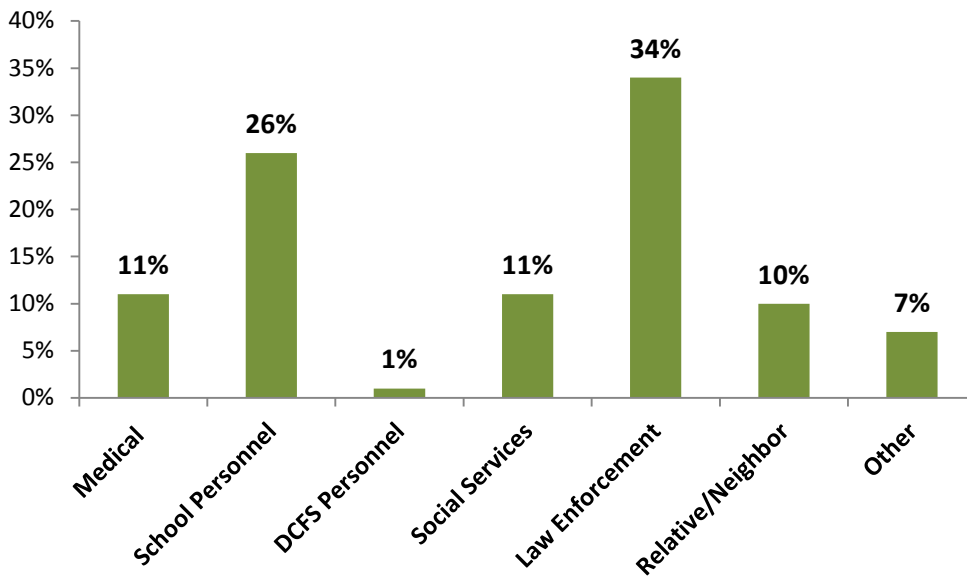


Appendix 3 continued

**Will County Source of Reports
8-1-12 to 6-30-13**

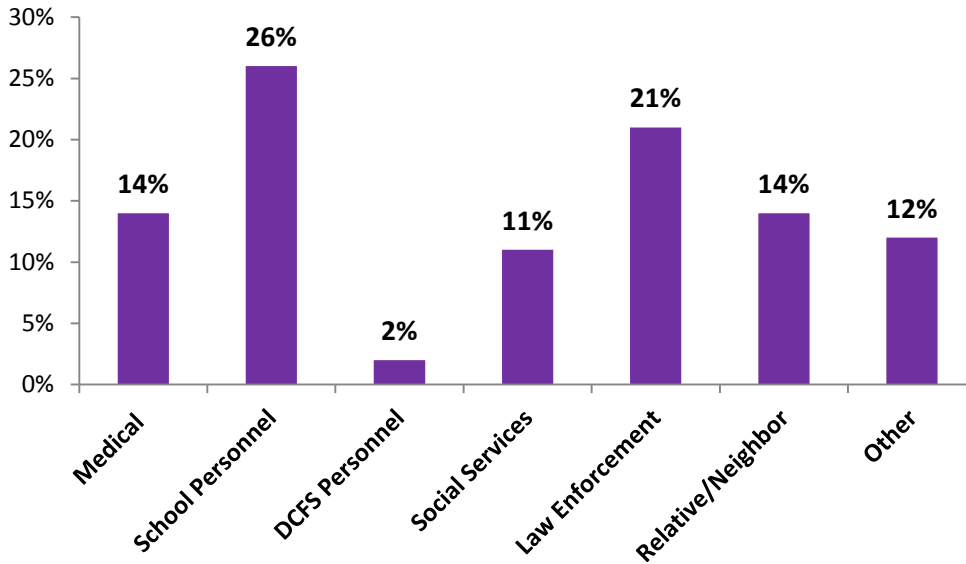


**Kane County Source of Reports
8-1-12 to 6-30-13**

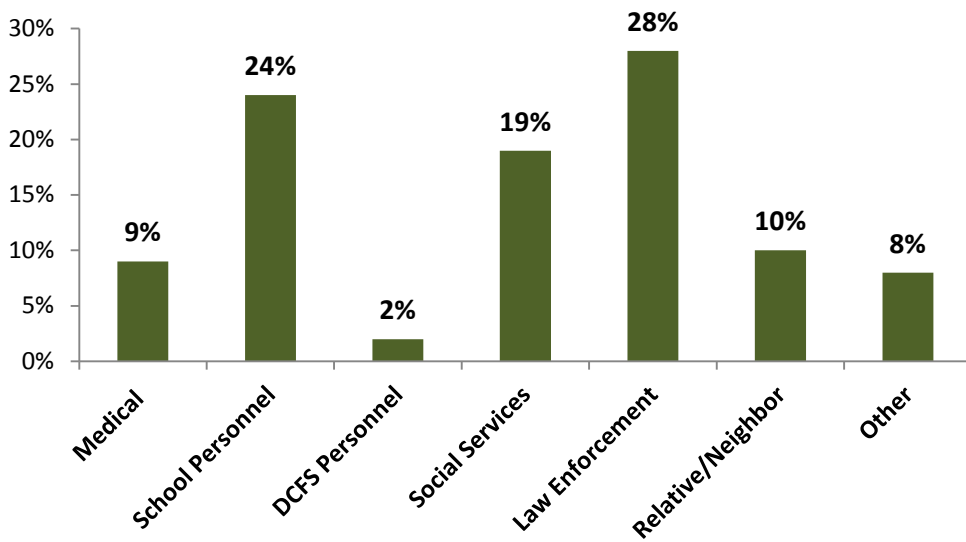


Appendix 3 continued

Kankakee County Source of Reports 8-1-12 to 6-30-13

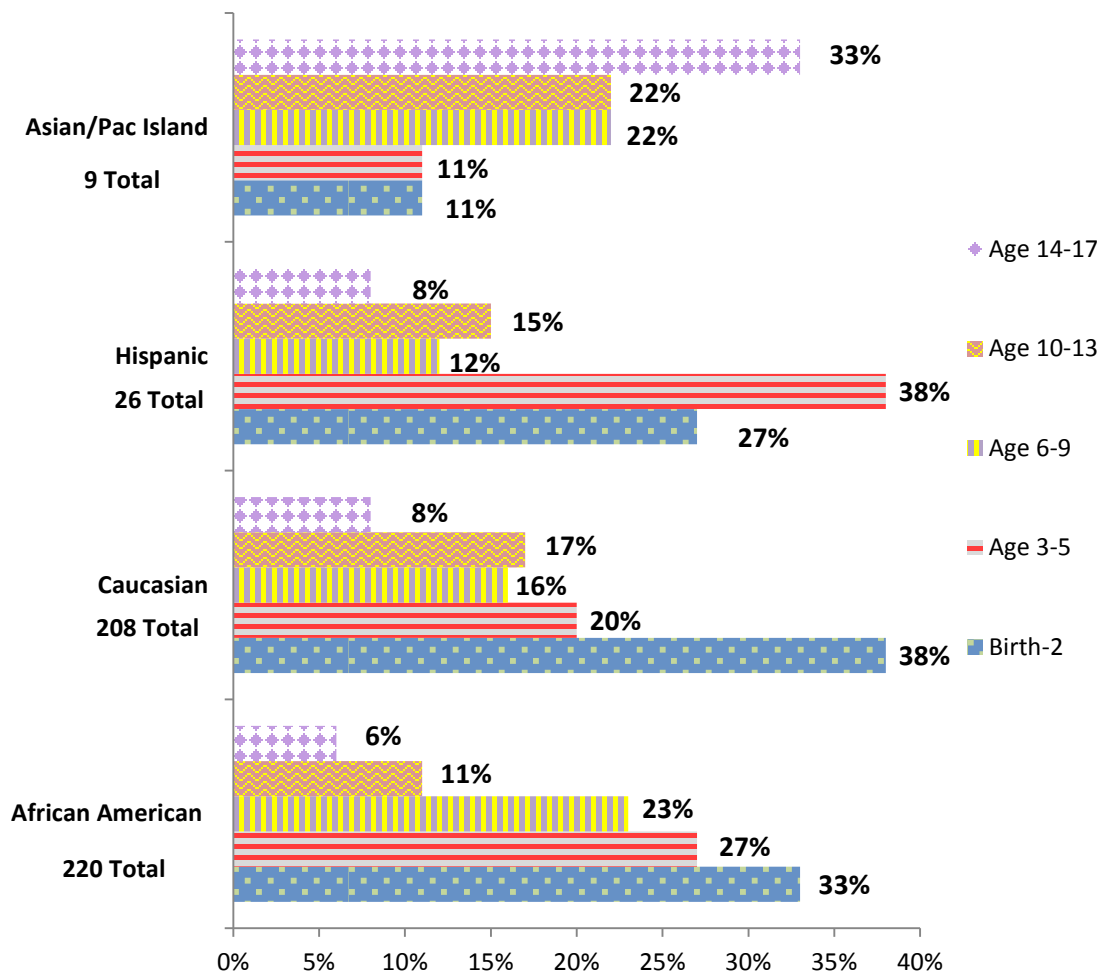


McHenry County Source of Reports 8-1-12 to 6-30-13



Appendix 4-Entries into Care by Race and Age 8-1-12 to 6-30-13

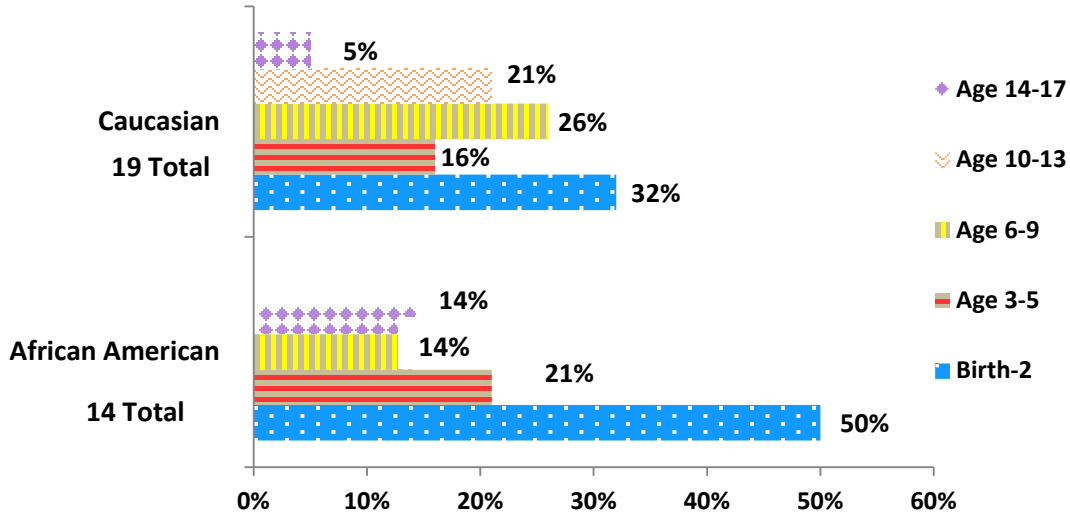
**Winnebago County Entries Into Care
7-01-12 to 6-30-13
Total Entries 480***



*17 unknown race

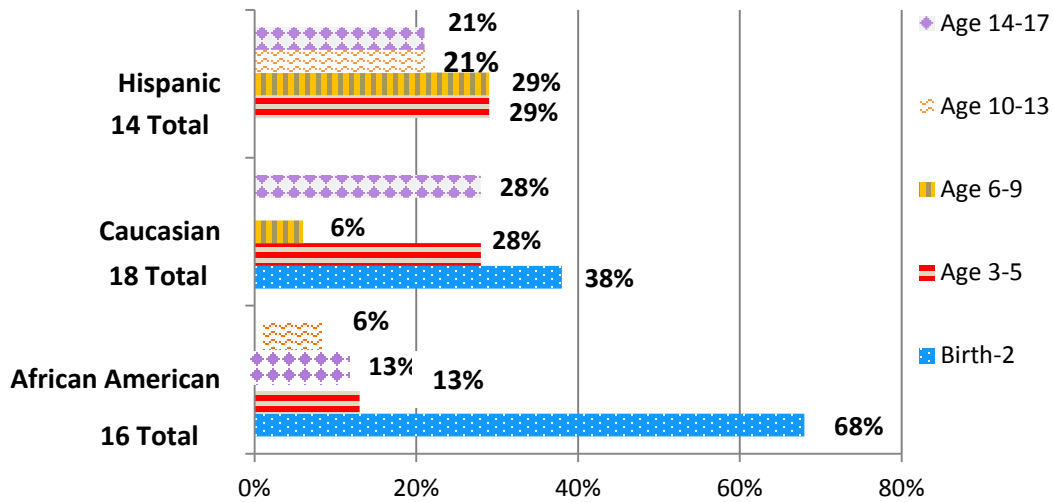
Appendix 4- Continued

Kankakee County Entries Into Care 8-1-12 to 6-30-13 Total Entries 35*



*No Hispanic entries, 2 unknown race

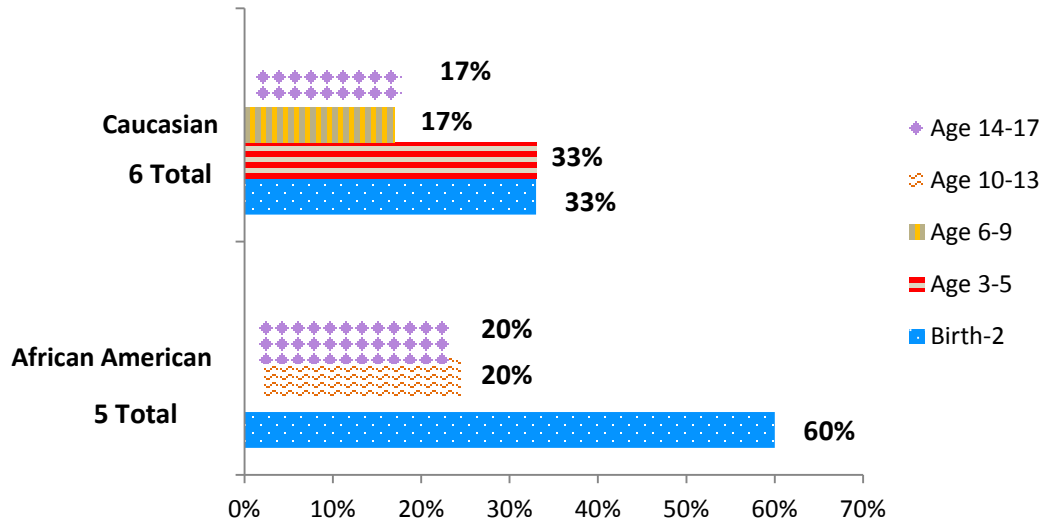
Kane County Entries Into Care 8-1-12 to 6-30-13 Total Entries 49*



*1 unknown race

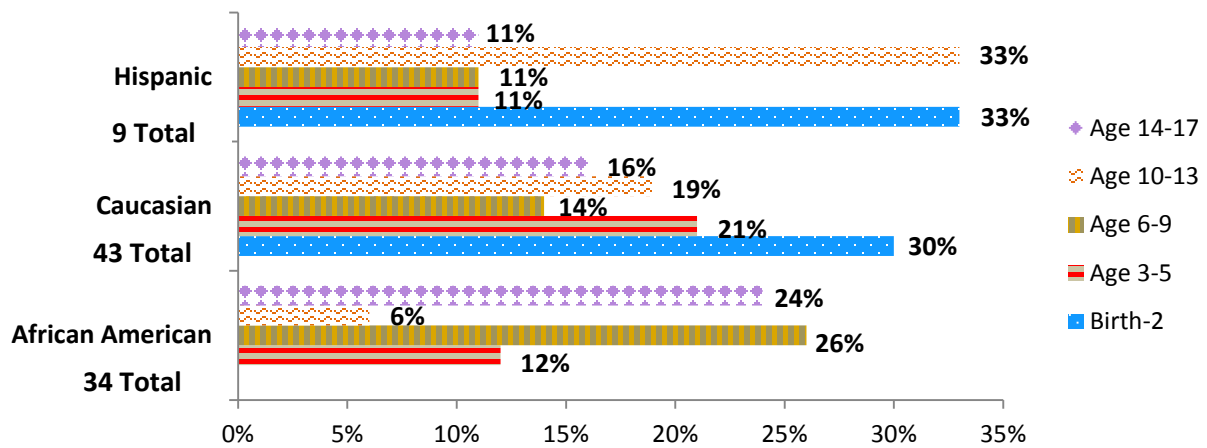
Appendix 4- Continued

DeKalb County Entries Into Care 8-01-12 to 6-30-13 Total Entries 11*



*No Hispanic entries

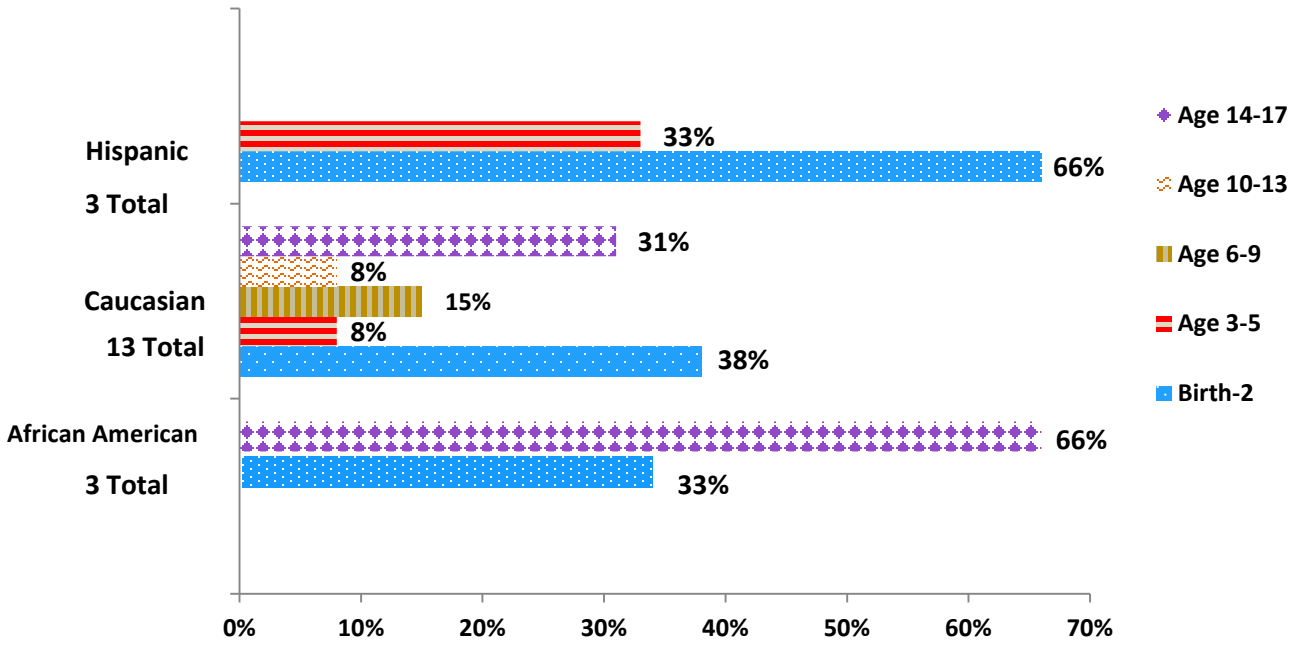
Will County Entries Into Care 8-01-12 to 6-30-13 Total Entries 91*



*5 unknown race

Appendix 4- Continued

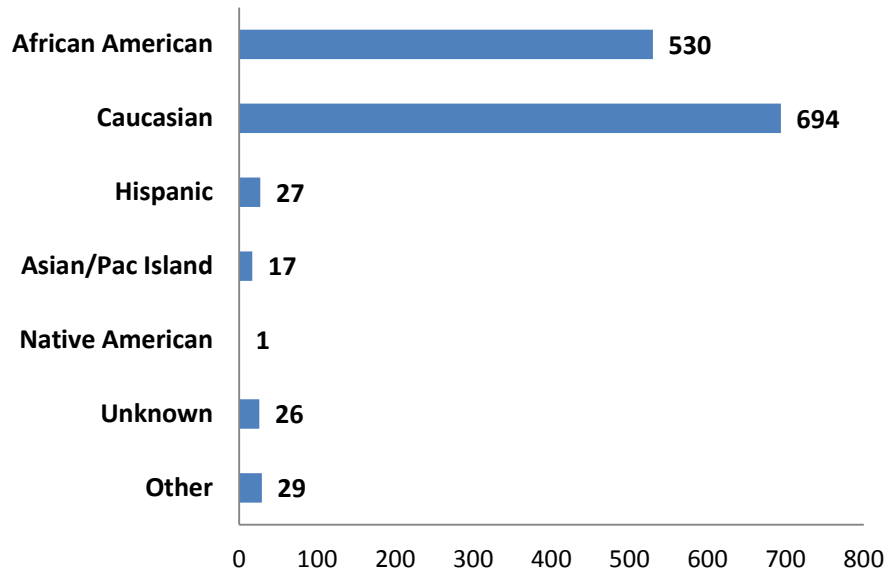
**McHenry County Entries Into Care
8-01-12 - 6-30-13
Total Entries 20***



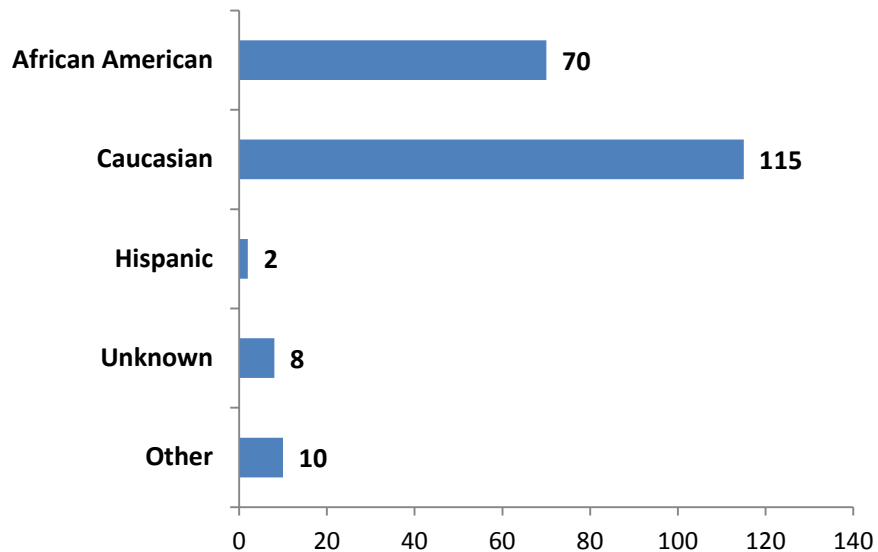
*1 unknown race

Appendix 5- Number of Indicated Child Victims by Race

**Number of Indicated Child Victims
Winnebago County 7-01-12 to 6-30-13
Total 1,324**

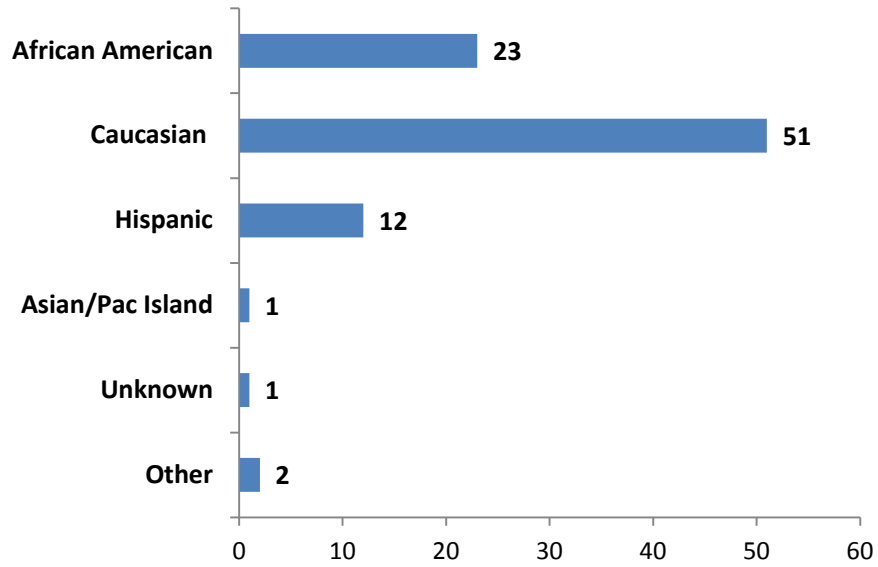


**Number of Indicated Child Victims
Kankakee County 8-01-12 to 6-30-13
Total 205**

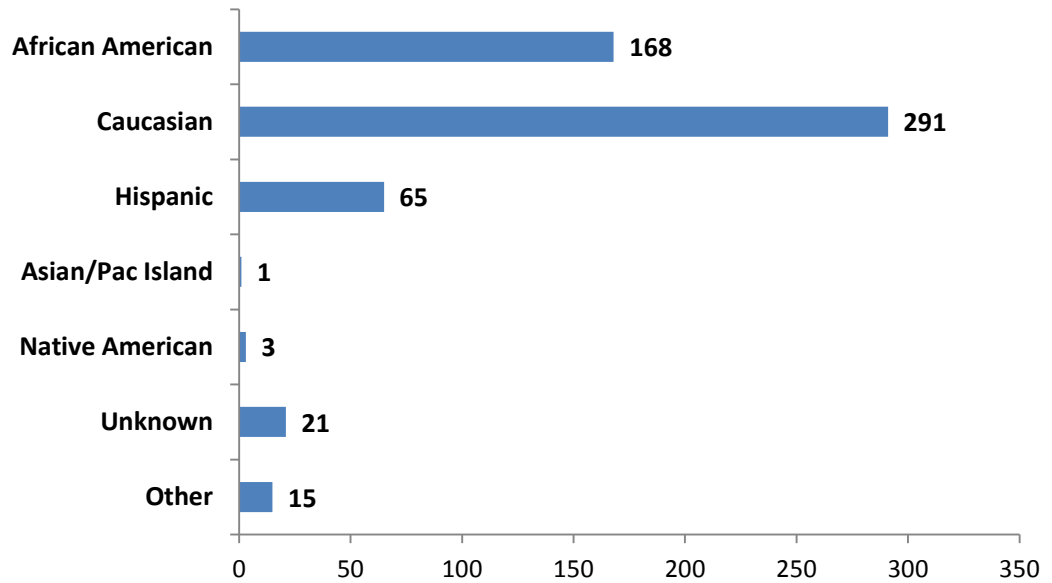


Appendix 5 continued

**Number of Indicated Child Victims
DeKalb County 8-01-12 to 6-30-13
Total 90**

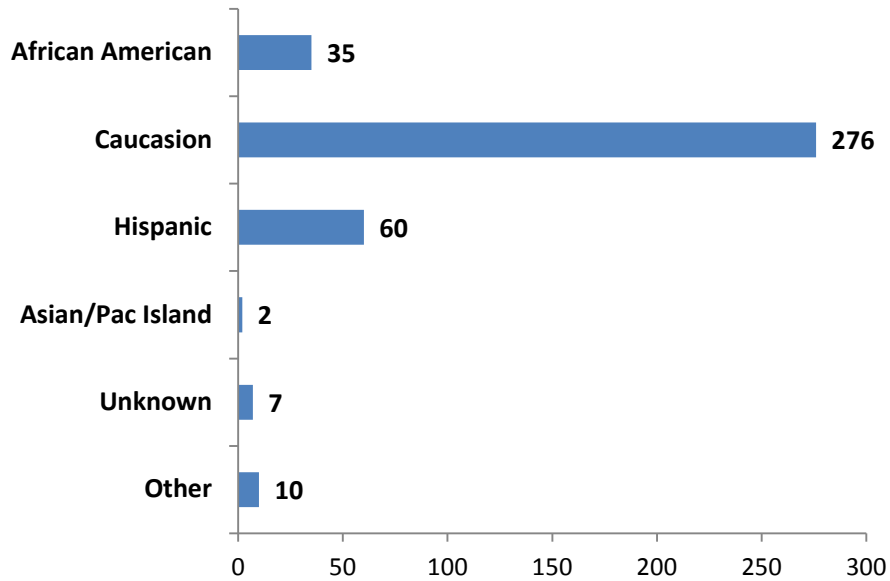


**Number of Indicated Child Victims
Kane County 8-01-12 to 6-30-13
Total 564**



Appendix-5 Continued

**Number of Indicated Child Victims
McHenry County 8-01-12 to 6-30-13
Total 390**



**Number of Indicated Child Victims
Will County 8-01-12 to 6-30-13
Total 582**

