

Report reveals status of McKean County's foster care system

By **MARCIE SCHELLHAMMER**
Era Reporter
marcie@bradfordera.com

Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children released a report Wednesday on child welfare in the state, which revealed that in McKean County just over 40 percent of the children released from foster care in the year prior to April 2007 re-entered the system within 12 months.

The report lists findings for all 67 counties in the state, and details the age groups of the children, how long the children had been in the foster care system, the number of children reunified with their families, the stability of the foster homes and the types of environments the children were placed in.

This story focuses on the findings for McKean County.

In March 2008, there were 85 children listed in the foster care program. Describing the children, the report lists that 12 were between the ages of birth and one year; 15 between the ages of 2 and 5; 10 between the ages of 6 and 9; 10 between the ages of 10 and 12; 14 between the ages of 13 to 15; 21 from the ages of 16 and 17; and three were from the ages of 18 to 20.

Between Oct. 1, 2007, and March of 2008, five children "aged out" of the foster care system in McKean County, and one of those children had been in the system for three years or longer.

The study details the number of children reunified with their families, and the number of those cases where the child re-enters the foster care system within 12 months. The Pennsylvania Partnership for Children explains, "Children enter foster care placement as a result of child abuse, neglect and/or other issues of dependency such as loss of proper parental care, control and supervision, truancy, etc."

The overall county total, from April 1, 2007, to March 31, 2008, was 86 reunifications and 35 reentries. There were 10 reunifications of children from birth to age 1, and four of those children re-entered the system within 12 months; 12 reunifications of children ages 2 to 5 and seven children who re-entered the system within 12 months; seven reunifications of children ages 6 to 9, and four of those children reentered the system within a year; six reunifications of children ages 10 to 12, and one child re-entered the system; 18 reunifications of children ages 13 to 15, and eight who re-entered the system; 33 reunifications of children ages 16 to 17, and 11 who re-entered the system within a year.

The report also spells out the length of time children stay in foster homes. The countywide average for McKean is 11 months. For children who end up leaving foster care through adoption, the average stay in the system is 125 months.

The Partnership for Children study also measured the stability of the homes where the foster care system was placing the children.

During the time frame of Oct. 1, 2007, to March 2008, 101 children were in the foster care system for less than 12 months, and 96 had been placed in two or fewer foster homes. Twenty-seven children were in the foster care system for one to two years, with 21 of those children having two or fewer placements. Twenty-seven children spent more than two years in the system, and 18 of those children were in two or fewer placements.

The report also details the type of environments McKean County's foster children were placed in as of March 2008. According to the report, one child was in a pre-adoptive home; three were with foster families who are related to the child; 46 were with non-relatives in foster homes; 29 in group homes; five in institutions and one was in a trial home visit.