

# **Trends in the numbers of children and young people in out-of-home care in NSW**



---

A U T H O R

Stephanie Taplin

P R O D U C E D B Y


NSW Centre for Parenting & Research  
Research, Funding & Business Analysis  
NSW Department of Community Services

H E A D O F F I C E

4-6 Cavill Avenue  
Ashfield NSW 1800  
Phone 02 9716 2222

JUNE 2005

ISBN: 0 7310 4357 X



- The number of children and young people in out-of-home care (OOHC) on 30 June 2004 was 10,337.
- More children and young people in OOHC are in family/kinship care than any other type of care (46.8% as at 30 June 2004), an increasing trend since 1997.
- 26.1% of the children and young people in OOHC in June 2004 were Indigenous, most of whom were in family/kinship care (62.3%).
- 4,382 children and young people entered care on 7,173 occasions in 2002/03<sup>1</sup>. Of this 4,382, 1,090 children entered care arrangements to provide periodic relief to their carer (on 2,840 occasions).
- The number of children and young people *entering* care has been decreasing since 1999, while the number *in care* has been increasing.
- As the actual numbers of entries into care has decreased since 1998/99, the number of entries each year because *the carer is unable to care without periodic relief* and because the *child was at risk* have also decreased.
- A large number of children enter care before the age of one year. Only a small number enter care after the age of 15 years.
- Most children *in care* are between the ages of four and 14 years. The number in care between these ages has shown some increase in recent years.
- The proportion of children in a continuous placement (longer than two years) has increased since 1998, to 57% in 2003.

<sup>1</sup> Data on the number of entries into care in 2003/04 was unavailable at the time of writing.

This paper provides an overview of recent trends in the numbers of children and young people in out-of-home care (OOHC) in New South Wales.

## BACKGROUND

Out-of-home care (OOHC) provides alternative accommodation to children and young people who are unable to live with their parents.

To remove a child from home, the NSW Department of Community Services (DoCS) must have a parent's consent to provide support to the family, or sufficient evidence to satisfy a court that the action is necessary for the child's wellbeing. The Children's Court ultimately determines whether the parental responsibility for a child or young person will be placed with the Minister or another person.

The current placement options for children and young people in NSW are the same regardless of whether they are in voluntary or statutory care arrangements. They may be placed with relatives or kin, with foster parents or in residential or independent living arrangements.

DoCS, and non-government agencies that receive DoCS' funding, deliver a range of care, accommodation and support services to children and young people across NSW. In 2003/04, DoCS' budget for OOHC services was \$250.5 million, including grants and subsidies to community partners to provide OOHC and adoption services.<sup>2</sup>

## DESCRIPTION OF THE DATA SOURCES

The data presented in this report are drawn exclusively from published sources.

Three different published sources have been used to describe the NSW population of children and young people in out-of-home care. They include DoCS' *Annual Reports* 1996/97 to 2003/04, DoCS' quarterly reports which are published on the DoCS website ([community.nsw.gov.au](http://community.nsw.gov.au)) and the *Child Protection Australia* reports from 1996/97 to 2003/04, published by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). The DoCS and AIHW reports use different methods of enumeration, resulting in some variations in the numbers reported, such as in the number of children and young people entering OOHC. However, these variations are relatively minor and do not impact on the trends observed.

Data from 2003/04 are limited to the numbers of children and young people *in care*. No data are available on the numbers *entering* care during this period.

## NUMBER OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN OOHC

As reported in the *DoCS Annual Report 2003/04*, there were 10,337 children and young people in OOHC in NSW on 30 June 2004.

Forty seven percent of these children and young people were female and 53% were male.

## PLACEMENT TYPES

Table 1 shows that of those in care at 30 June 2004, the majority were in family or kinship care (46.8%) with the next most common type of care being foster care (36.2%). A further 17.0% were with non-related family, parents or in other forms of care.

2,703 Indigenous children were in OOHC as at 30 June 2004, most of whom were in family/kinship care (62.3%). Non-Indigenous children and young people were more evenly distributed between family/kinship and foster care.

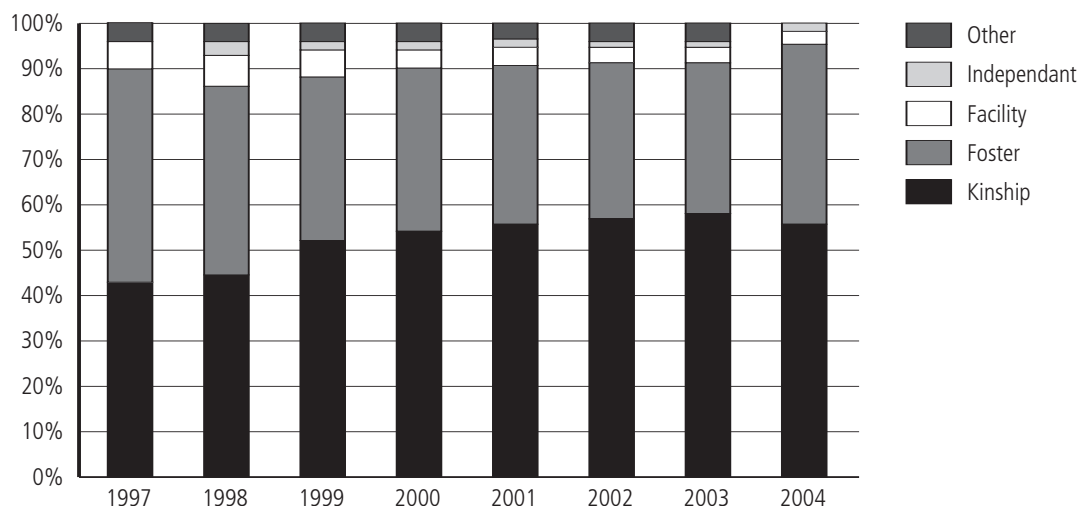
**Table 1: Children and young people *in care* by placement type as at 30 June 2004**

Placement type	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Total
Family/kinship care	1,684 (62.3%)	3,152 (41.3%)	4,836
Foster care	728 (26.9%)	3,018 (39.5%)	3,746
Non-related person	124	504	628
Parents	85	450	535
Residential care	52	272	324
Independent living	21	139	160
Supported accommodation	7	91	98
Not stated	2	8	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,703</b>	<b>7,634</b>	<b>10,337</b>

Source: DoCS Annual Report 2003/04

Figure 1 below shows that since 1997, the proportion of children and young people in kinship care has tended to increase, along with some decreases in the proportion in foster and facility-based care.

**Figure 1: Trends in types of OOHC: Percentages in each type of care as at 30 June 1997 to 30 June 2004**



Source: AIHW 1996/97 to 2003/04

As table 2 below shows, **on entry** to care Indigenous children are just as likely to be placed in family/kinship care as in foster care, whereas non-Indigenous children are far more likely to be placed in foster care. The proportion of children **in family/kinship care** is higher than the proportion **entering family/kinship care**. This may indicate that, amongst both Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups, there is some movement into family/kinship care after being initially placed in foster care.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 2: Children and young people entering care by placement type in 2002/03**

Placement type	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Total
Family/kinship care	369 (34.6%)	545 (16.4%)	914
Foster care	380 (35.6%)	1,699 (51.3%)	2,079
Non-related person	78	223	301
Parents	33	112	145
Residential care	68	213	281
Independent living	1	10	11
Supported accommodation	10	76	86
Other	128	437	565
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,067</b>	<b>3,315</b>	<b>4,382</b>

Source: DoCS Annual Report 2002/03

<sup>3</sup> Of the 10,059 children and young people in OOHC in 2002/03, 59.0% of Indigenous children were in family/kinship care and 23.1% in foster care, compared with 38.3% non-Indigenous children in family/kinship care and 34.2% in foster care.

## TRENDS IN ENTRIES INTO CARE

In 2002/03, 4,382 children entered OOHC on 7,173 occasions.

**Table 3: Trends in number of children and young people *entering* OOHC during year and in OOHC as at 30 June**

Year	Number entering care during year	Entry events during year	In care as at 30 June
1996	4,872		
1997	5,039		
1998	5,236		6,663
1999	5,573	9,548	7,757
2000	5,117	8,158	8,517
2001	5,007	8,096	9,151
2002	4,411	7,047	9,273
2003	4,382	7,173	10,059
2004			10,337

Source: DoCS Annual Reports 1995/96 to 2003/04

\* The number *entering* OOHC covers a twelve-month period, while the number of children and young people *in care* is a snapshot as at 30 June. Some children and young people enter and exit care within the same twelve-month period and would not be counted as being in care as at 30 June. Those who have been in care long-term would be counted as being in care as at 30 June but may not appear in the entry and exit figures.

The number of entries into care has decreased each year since 1998/99 from a high of 5,573. Between June 1999 and June 2003, the number of children entering care and the number of entry events per annum have decreased by 21.4% and 24.9% respectively.

Conversely, the number of children in care has steadily increased each year, increasing by 29.7% between 1999 and 2003. A further small increase occurred in the number of children in care between June 2003 and 2004.<sup>4</sup> The rate of children in OOHC in NSW has been steadily increasing since 1997, and was reported to be 5.7 per 1,000 at 30 June 2004.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> It is difficult to conclude from this table that there has been a large decrease in the number who exited from OOHC, however, figure 4 shows some decrease in exits, and table 5, an increase in the number in long-term care.

<sup>5</sup> AIHW (2005) *Child Protection Australia 2003/04* page 49.

## REASONS FOR ENTERING CARE

Table 4: Entries into care by reason for entry in 2002/03

Reason	Number of children	Number of events*
Child at risk	1,836	2,281
Carer unable to care without periodic relief	1,090	2,840
Significant family breakdown	516	741
Carer unable to care due to illness	343	522
Carer unable to care due to AOD** problems	68	107
Carer unable to care due to incarceration	96	112
Child homeless	76	95
Other	357	475
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,382</b>	<b>7,173</b>

Source: DoCS Annual Report 2002/03

\* The number of entries into care (events) is different from the number of children or young people entering care. A child or young person may enter care more than once within any specified period.

\*\* Alcohol and other drug.

Of the 4,382 children who entered care in 2002/03, 1,090 (24.9%) entered to provide periodic relief to the carer. 1,836 (41.9%) entered care as the child was at risk. The other 25.1% entered care as the carer was unable to care because of AOD problems, incarceration, illness, family breakdown, or homelessness, and another 8.1% due to 'other' reasons. The **proportions** of entries into care for the above reasons remained relatively stable each year between 1998/99 and 2002/03.

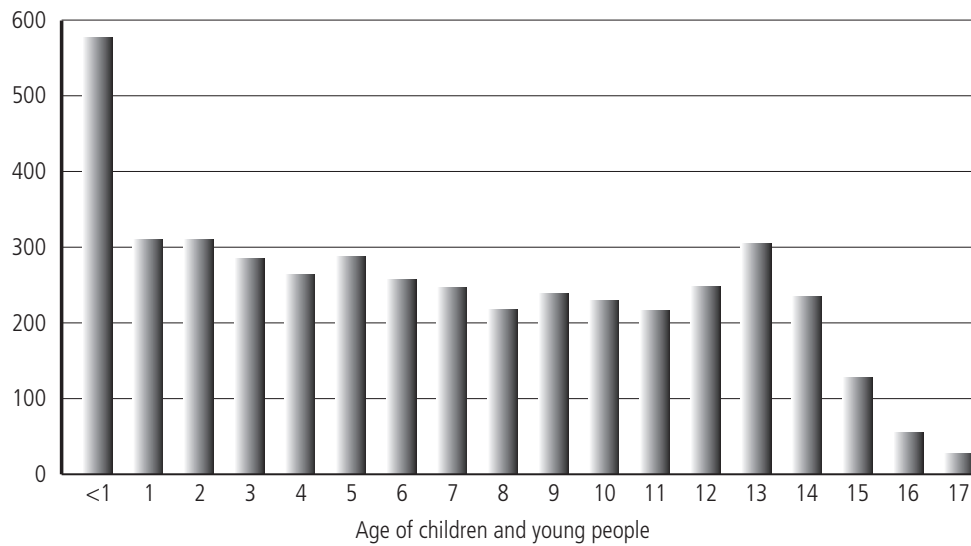
As the actual numbers of entries into care has decreased since 1998/99 (see table 3), the number of entries for each of the above reasons has generally decreased. The number of entry events each year because *the carer is unable to care without periodic relief* decreased by 34.3% between 1998/99 and 2002/03, whereas the number of entry events each year because the *child was at risk* decreased by 25.9% between 1998/99 and 2001/02, but increased slightly in 2002/03.



## ENTRIES INTO CARE BY AGE

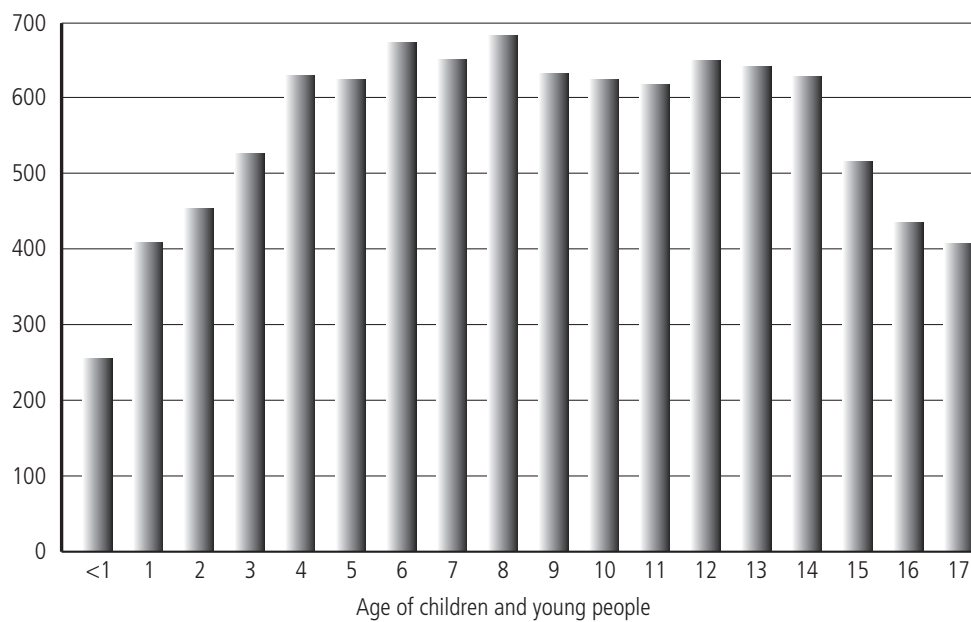
The following graph shows that the largest number of entries into care was amongst babies: 571 children less than one year of age entered care in 2002/03. Numbers entering care tended to decrease with increasing age between one and eight years, after which they remain relatively stable. An increase in numbers entering care is evident at age 13. Few young people entered care after the age of 15 years.

**Figure 2: Age of children and young people *entering* care in 2002/03 (number of each age in years)**



Source: DoCS Annual Report 2002/03

**Figure 3: Age of children and young people *in OOHC* as at 30 June 2003 (number of each age in years)**



Source: DoCS Annual Report 2002/03<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Although data on the numbers of children in OOHC were available for 2003/04 at the time of writing, the numbers entering care were not. For comparative purposes 2002/03 data is represented here. Figure 6 shows trends in the ages of children in care including 2003/04 data.

Unlike the entries into care, children under one year of age represented the smallest group in care (n = 254) in June 2003. Numbers in care in each age group tended to increase with increasing age until the age of eight after which they become relatively constant. Beyond the age of 14 years the numbers in care reduce.

The large difference between the number of under one-year-olds entering and in care can be explained by differences in the way the data are reported in the two datasets: the numbers entering care cover a twelve-month period whereas the numbers in care are reported as at a particular day. Therefore, babies may be recorded as entering care any stage during the twelve months of 2002/03 but by the time they are counted as being in care at 30 June, most will be over one year of age. Only a small number of babies are discharged from OOHC within the same period they entered care prior to turning one year of age (see Table 4).

## TRENDS IN ENTRIES/ADMISSIONS AND DISCHARGES

In the following table it can be seen that the number discharged from care in each age group is around one-third of the number admitted to care. However amongst the over 14 year olds, a far greater number are discharged than are admitted to care, as expected.

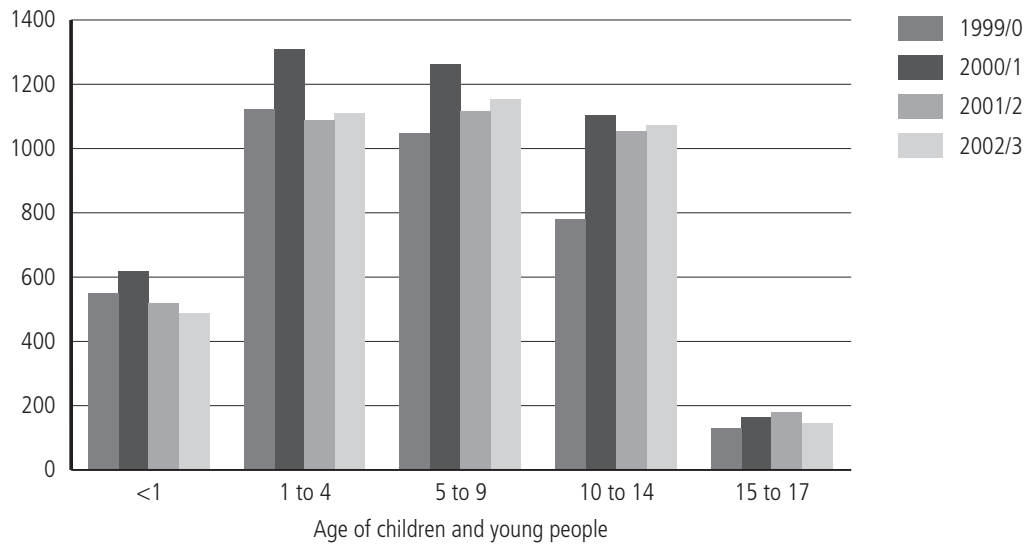
**Table 5: Number of children admitted and discharged from OOHC in NSW by age group during 2002/03**

Age in years	Admitted	Discharged
<1	501	113
1-4	1,106	352
5-9	1,153	343
10-14	1,073	404
15-17	148	418
Unknown	7 <sup>*</sup>	–
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,988</b>	<b>1,630</b>

Source: AIHW 2002/03

\* AIHW data used here differ from data provided in the DoCS Annual and Quarterly Reports due to differences in counting rules.

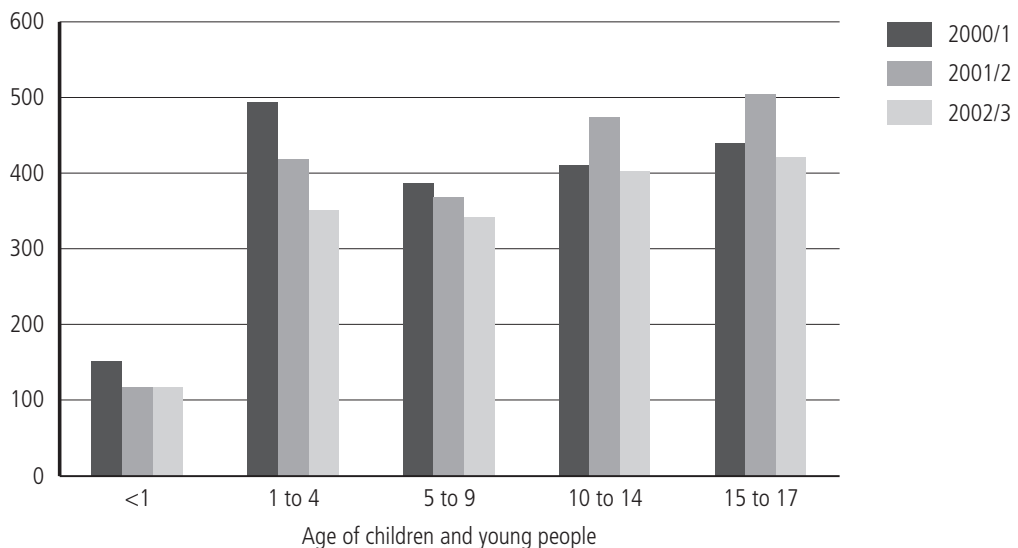
**Figure 4: Trends in number of admissions/entries into care (AIHW 1999/2000 to 2002/03)**



Source: AIHW 1999/2000 to 2002/03

The above graph shows that there were increases in admissions amongst most age groups between 1999/2000 and 2000/01, but between 2000/01 and 2002/03 admissions decreased slightly amongst the under 15 year olds.

**Figure 5: Trends in numbers of discharges from care**



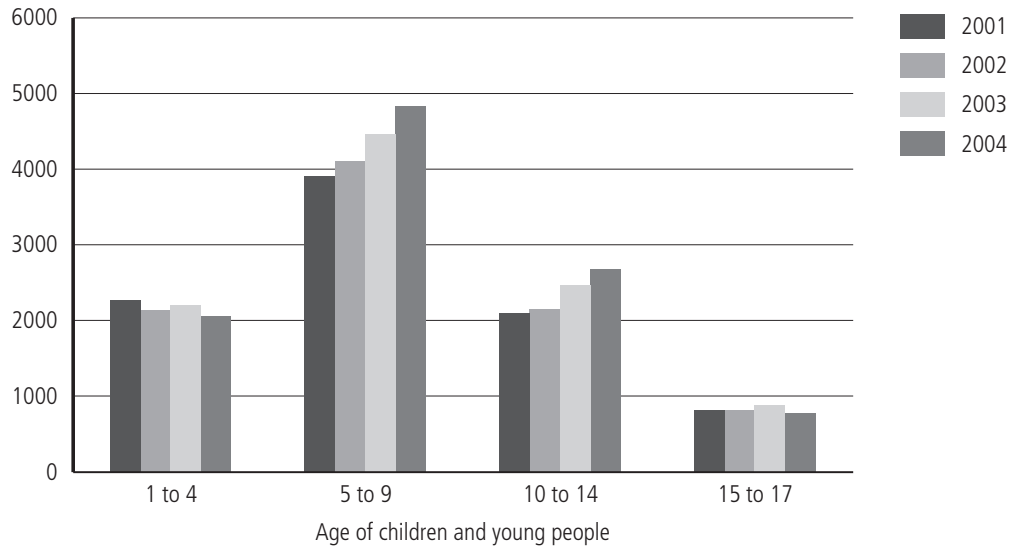
Source: AIHW 2000/01 to 2002/03

The above graph shows that in recent years there have been some decreases in the number discharged from OOHC amongst the under ten-year-olds, but fluctuations in discharges amongst the older age groups.

The total number of children and young people discharged from OOHC per annum has decreased slightly between 2000/01 and 2002/03.

## TRENDS IN THE AGE OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE

Figure 6: Trends in age groups of children *in care* by age: number in each age group as at 30 June



Source: DoCS' quarterly data

The above graph shows that since 2001 there has been some decrease (12.1%) in the number of children under the age of five years in OOHC. Conversely, the numbers of children in OOHC between the ages of five and 11 years and between 12 to 15 years have increased by 23.7% and 28.7% respectively. The number of 16 and 17-year-olds in OOHC has remained relatively stable since 2001.

## INDIGENOUS STATUS

**Table 6: Indigenous status of those entering and in OOHC**

	Indigenous	Non-indigenous
Number of children and young people who entered care in 2002/03	1,067 (24.3%)	3,315 (75.7%)
Number of children and young people in care as at 30 June 2003 <sup>7</sup>	2,706 (26.9%)	7,353 (73.1%)

Source: DoCS Annual Report 2002/03

Table 6 above shows that around 25% of the children and young people both entering and in OOHC were Indigenous. At 30 June 2003, 87% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in OOHC were placed with either an Indigenous carer or relative.<sup>8</sup>

## TRENDS IN THE NUMBER AND PROPORTION OF INDIGENOUS AND NON-INDIGENOUS CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE

**Table 7: Trends in the Indigenous status of children in out-of-home care between 30 June 1999 and 30 June 2004**

Year	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Total
1999	1,891 (24.4%)	5,866	7,757
2000	2,145 (25.2%)	6,372	8,517
2001	2,454 (26.8%)	6,697	9,151
2002	2,345 (25.3%)	6,928	9,273
2003	2,706 (26.9%)	7,353	10,059
2004	2,703 (26.1%)	7,634	10,337

Source: DoCS Annual Reports 1998/99 to 2003/04

Table 7 shows that between June 1999 and 2004, the number of Indigenous children and young people *in OOHC* increased by 42.9% (n = 812). Although the increase in the number of non-Indigenous children *in OOHC* was far greater (n = 1,768), the percentage increase (30.1%) over this five-year period was not as great as for Indigenous children.

<sup>7</sup> 2,703 Indigenous children were in out-of-home care as at 30 June 2004, representing 26.1% of the out-of-home care population.

<sup>8</sup> AIHW (2004) *Child Protection Australia 2002/03*

## TRENDS IN PLACEMENT DURATION

Table 8: Children in OOHC: Trends in length of time in a continuous placement in NSW as at 30 June (percentages)

Time in continuous placement	Percent					
	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
< 1 month	13	13	13	14	13	11
1 to 6 months	14	14	12	9	8	10
6 to 12 months	13	12	11	11	9	9
1 to 2 years	16	17	17	17	15	13
2 to < 5 years	44*	23	26	28	32	32
5 years or more		21	20	20	22	25

Source: AIHW 1997/98 to 2002/03

\* 2 years or more

Table 8 shows that 11% of those in out-of-home care as at 30 June 2003 had been in a continuous placement for less than one month; 30% had been in a continuous placement for less than 12 months. The proportion of children and young people in a continuous placement for longer than two years has increased since 1998, to 57% in 2003.

## DISCUSSION OF TRENDS

The data show that the number of children and young people *entering* care has been decreasing since 1999, while the number *in care* has been increasing. This indicates a tendency to remain in care for longer periods which has also led to an ageing of the OOHC population.

Family/kinship care is increasingly being used more than any other type of care, particularly amongst the Indigenous population.

Additional analyses will be required to further examine these trends and provide explanations for the findings outlined in this paper.

## **DATA SOURCES**

Department of Community Services quarterly reports (2001 to 2004) published on the DoCS website:  
[http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/html/news\\_publications/data.htm](http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/html/news_publications/data.htm)

Department of Community Services Annual Reports 1996/97, 1997/98, 1998/99, 1999/2000, 2000/01, 2001/02, 2002/03 and 2003/04  
[http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/html/news\\_publications/reports.htm](http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/html/news_publications/reports.htm)

Australian Institute of Health & Welfare *Child Protection Australia reports* 1996/97, 1997/98, 1998/99, 1999/2000, 2000/01, 2001/02, 2002/03 and 2003/04  
<http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/subject/5>

