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# A DATA STUDY OF FOSTER CHILDREN WHO REFUSED PLACEMENT IN HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY



**MIAMILAW**  
UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI SCHOOL OF LAW

Children &  
Youth Law  
Clinic

# ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report is a response to public concern over children who have refused placements in Hillsborough county. The report finds that these children were part of a system experiencing extreme placement instability. The report is offered to the Hillsborough community to provide information to help reduce that instability. The report finds as follows.

1. The children who refused placement were diverse in terms of age, gender, and experience in the system, but they were disproportionately non-white. These children had a range of 1 to 89 placements prior to refusing their first placement, with a median of 21. Many of those placements were secure settings. Nevertheless, providers asked for the children's removal in 33% to 100% of those placements, with a median of 74%. Being ejected from providers was a key feature of the children who refused placements.
2. Refusing a placement did not have a significant impact on a child's placement stability. In fact, the data show that children were somewhat more stable after a refusal in large part due to agency efforts to obtain therapeutic placements. In contrast, both an arrest and a Baker Act episode significantly disrupted children's placement stability and pushed them out of family settings and into congregate care.
3. The Suncoast Region has the highest concentration of extremely unstable foster children in the state. The Hillsborough placement array appears to have a very liberal culture of ejecting children after they have been accepted. The array also appears to lack local therapeutic providers that can work effectively with this population. Instead, children are frequently sent away to programs in other counties. The refusal children were moved a median of 1,080 miles from placement to placement.

This report recommends a close look at the existing placement array to determine which portions of it are contributing to instability. The report also recommends creating an escalation policy for children who are repeatedly ejected from placements, to reduce the harms that lead them to refuse placement or run away. The author hopes this information will be helpful to the community in seeking better outcomes for its children.

**Author: Robert Latham, JD**  
Associate Director  
Children & Youth Law Clinic

*This report was created using public data from the Department of Children and Families' Florida Safe Family Network (FSFN). Due to limitations in the data, it is only intended to be descriptive of the Department and its contractors' activity in Hillsborough county and may not generalize to other regions or systems.*

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## 2 | BACKGROUND & MAIN FINDINGS

In August 2019, the Juvenile Justice Board of Circuit 13 created an ad hoc committee (the Committee) to recommend changes to the system of care for youth who were dually involved in the foster care and juvenile justice systems.<sup>1</sup> The Committee's report focused heavily on children with a history of refusing placements in the dependency system and concluded that existing law was insufficient to care for these children.

### THE COMMITTEE WROTE:

*“ Our overall review has led to the conclusion that children under the care and custody of Florida's child welfare system should not have the ability to refuse temporary placements that have been determined to be in their best interest by the parties charged with their care.*

*We routinely have children as young as 13 refuse placement and Florida Law does not currently provide any mechanism to order these children into an appropriate level of care. This is an ever-present challenge. One which our current system of care is unable to address.*

*Placement refusals are common and they set an uncharted course of night to night placements and leave us with no permanent solution to engage the child in a meaningful treatment modality.* ”

As a legislative response, the Committee proposed extending the Children in Need of Services (“CINS”) provisions to include dependent youth in the child welfare system.<sup>2</sup> The Committee further proposed adding **three new grounds** for the commitment of dependent children. These new grounds do not appear anywhere else in the law of Florida or any other state.<sup>3</sup> The criteria, on their face, would apply to all dependent youth irrespective of their current delinquency status.





Under the proposed regime, a dependent child could be placed in a staff-secure program or a physically secure program under the following circumstances:

#### EXISTING CINS GROUNDS

1. When the child has *persistently run away* despite reasonable efforts to remedy the conditions contributing to the behavior;
2. When the child is *habitually truant from school* despite reasonable efforts to remedy the situation;
3. When the child has *persistently disobeyed the reasonable and lawful demands of their caregivers* and are beyond their caregiver's control despite efforts by the caregivers to remedy the conditions;

#### PROPOSED DEPENDENCY GROUNDS

4. When the child is found to be *refusing services* ordered by the court;
5. When it is determined necessary for the safety, well-being and permanency of the child by a multidisciplinary team; and
6. When the child has a *history or current delinquent behaviors*, has disrupted multiple placements as a result of such behaviors, presents a threat of harm to other children, and refuses to engage in services determined necessary.

The Committee's recommendations were based in part on a World Café meeting structure that synthesized the personal experiences of individual group participants into themes.<sup>4</sup> As such, many of the claims in the report are anecdotal and provide no sourcing for objective verification. Participants were largely administrative and leadership level employees in the DJJ system, with a smaller number of DCF participants. Notably, the group facilitator met with foster youth separately but did not invite them into the World Café structure. It also appears the facilitator did not process the proposed commitment solution with the youth, or their responses were not reported.

#### NEVERTHELESS, THE COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATIONS APPEAR BASED ON SEVERAL CORE FACTUAL ASSERTIONS:

- 1 Placement refusals are common.
- 2 Placement refusals cause or significantly contribute to placement instability and its negative consequences.
- 3 The current law is insufficient to provide care for this population of children.

This report seeks to address those factual assertions using public data obtained from DCF's placement database. Based on a review of the data, the basic premises of the Committee's recommendation are not sufficiently supported to justify the creation of a new legal commitment regime; however, the data do support the claims of lack of coordination and planning, and would support an expansion of the placement array to better serve the population of children who have been pushed out of other placements due to delinquency history, mental health needs, or other reasons.

<sup>1</sup> The report is available online in the project repository at <https://miami.bbox.com/v/Refusal-Report>.

<sup>2</sup> See § 984.03, Fla. Stat. Ann.

<sup>3</sup> A 50-state search of Westlaw showed no identical language in any state or federal statute, code, or court opinion.

<sup>4</sup> The World Café model is described more fully online at <http://www.theworldcafe.com>. Rachel Alred at the University of East London has criticized the model as providing results that overstate consensus and elide participants' underlying differences of opinion and power. Alred, R. (2011). From community participation to organizational therapy? World Café and Appreciative Inquiry as research methods. Community Development Journal, Volume 46, Issue 1, 57-71.

## MAIN DATA REPORT FINDINGS

- The forty-nine children who refused placement in the public data were very diverse in terms of age, gender, and experiences in the system. The group, however, was disproportionately composed of black and mixed-race children.
- The number of children who refused placement was small compared to the size of the Hillsborough system and the number of other negative placement events experienced on a daily basis. Refusals, however, were likely labor intensive for case management because the child required supervision during the episode.
- Delinquency involvement was not a unique feature of the children who refused placement. The children in the group who were in detention did not spend any longer than other detained children with high placement counts.
- Refusing placement appeared to be a feature of pre-existing placement instability and not its cause. The children experienced a median of 21 placements prior to their first refusal. The children had a median of nearly 70% of placements end because the provider requested that they be removed, and had lower rates of placement disruption than other teenagers and high-placement children.
- Children were slightly more stable in the 60 and 120 days after their first refusal than before. The main factor appeared to be the level of case management agency response.
- In contrast, children were significantly less stable after their first arrest and their first Baker Act. Children who were arrested or Baker Acted spent less time in family-like settings and more time in congregate care after the incident.
- The current law appears sufficient to obtain care for the children. The data shows many examples of case management seeking higher levels of care for children. However, the availability of placements and ability to leverage services in a timely manner on individual cases varied.

The problem as described by the Committee, therefore, appears incomplete. The question is not why a handful of foster youth refused placements, but more broadly **why so many providers accepted and then ejected these and other youth, sometimes over 80 times.**

## 3 | EXISTING RESEARCH

There is no known research specifically on the issue of foster children who refuse placements. There is, however, substantial research on two related phenomena: **children who run away from foster care** and **children who experience foster placement instability**. Relatedly, legal scholars have critiqued the punitive ways the law responds to children who must live their childhoods outside of the structure of a family. Existing research on these children provides insights on children who refuse placements.

### 3.1 | THE OPPOSITE OF RUNNING AWAY

Children who refuse placement are, quite adamantly, **not running away**. They remain at the agency office or elsewhere. Therefore, while the precipitating causes between running and refusing are possibly similar, the resulting harms from refusing placement appear significantly more manageable through therapeutic and crisis-focused intervention. The research on children who run from foster care shows the following:

- **Running away from home is fairly common.** Approximately one in eight American adolescents have run away from home at some point.<sup>5</sup> Running away among foster youth is much more prevalent, with one multi-state study finding that 46% of 17-year-olds in care had run away at least once.<sup>6</sup>
- **Running away is a high-risk behavior.** It exposes children to heightened criminal victimization, human trafficking, sexual exploitation, substance abuse exposure, long-term homelessness, and delinquent behavior.<sup>7</sup> The longer a youth is away, the higher the risk.
- **Not all children are at the same risk of running away.** A comparative study from 2012 found that children who ran away from foster care tended to be older, African American, and with behavior problems or diagnosed disabilities. They were also older at the date of their removal from home and were more likely to experience placement instability.<sup>8</sup>
- **Children run for a variety of reasons.** One focus group study of Florida foster youth found that youth ran for *access or avoidance*. The children reported running to gain access to family, friends, extracurricular activities (both positive and negative), and autonomy. The youth reported running to avoid negative peers and staff at foster homes, restrictive living environments, and boredom.<sup>9</sup>

Children who refuse placements may share some of these characteristics. By refusing a placement, a child may seek to avoid an offered placement that they view as negative, or they may refuse all placements other than a specific one they view as positive. If the refusal happens in the course of a psychiatric decompensation, the refusal may not be rational goal-seeking at all; and may instead be an emotional-behavioral defense to temporarily avoid further stressors. This report cannot answer the question of why children refuse placement. Much more research needs to be done on the youths' perceptions, motivations, and experiences in order to create effective interventions.

<sup>5</sup> Whitbeck, L. B., & Simons, R. L. (1990). Life on the streets: The victimization of runaway and homeless adolescents. *Youth & Society*, 22(1), 108–125.

<sup>6</sup> Courtney, M. E., Terao, S., & Bost, N. (2004). *Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Conditions of youth preparing to leave state care*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

<sup>7</sup> Courtney, M. E., Skyles, A., Miranda, G., Zinn, A., Howard, E., & Goerge, R. M. (2005). *Youth who run away from out-of-home care*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.

Nesmith, A. (2006). Predictors of running away from family foster care. *Child Welfare*, 85(3), 585–609.

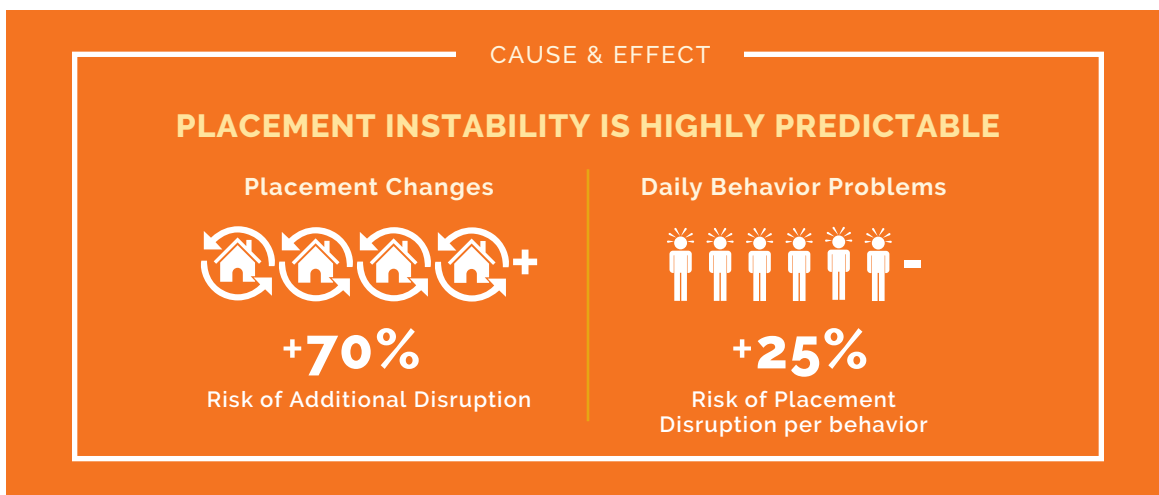
<sup>8</sup> Lin, C. (2012). Children who run away from foster care: Who are the children and what are the risk factors? *Children and Youth Services Review* 34, 807–813.

<sup>9</sup> Crosland, K., Joseph, R., Slattery, L., Hodges, S., Dunlap, G. (2018). Why youth run: Assessing run function to stabilize foster care placement. *Children and Youth Services Review* 85, 35–42.

## 3.2 | A CAUSE & EFFECT OF INSTABILITY

The Committee's report suggests that placement refusal causes instability for a child. The research on instability suggests that cause and effect may not be easily separated. Placement instability has been linked to a host of emotional-behavioral harms for children. According to a 2019 meta-analytic review by Konjin et al., studies have shown the following regarding placement instability:

- Placement instability is related to child behavior problems (especially externalizing behavior, which are stressful to caregivers), placement with non-relatives (especially for younger children), low quality foster parenting, older age at initial placement (especially for ethnic minority youth), placement separate from siblings, and a history of maltreat (especially for ethnic minority youth).
- Instability has a negative effect on developmental outcomes, including physical development, brain development, and well-being. Instability increases the risk of behavioral, social, and academic problems, negative self-esteem, psychopathology, and increased distrust of guardians and other adults.
- Conversely, stable placements result in less risk of externalizing behaviors, delinquent behavior, psychopathology, and an increase in brain development and academic achievement.
- The problems associated with placement instability tend to result in a *"negative spiral: the ability of building new secure attachments to new caretakers or foster parents decreases, children's behavior problems increase, and the risk for instability in the next placement grows."* The study notes that *"behavior problems can serve as a cause as well as a consequence of placement instability."*<sup>10</sup>



Fisher et al. points out that **placement instability is highly predictable**. First, prior instability predicts future instability: one study found that children with **four or more placement changes had a 70% risk of additional disruption**. Second, a **child's level of problem behaviors** predicts the risk of disruption. At **six or fewer problem behaviors per day** (as reported by the caregiver), the risk of disruption was 8.5%, but that risk increased **25% with each additional problem behavior**. Therefore, identification of children at risk of instability is inexpensive and easy. Fisher also notes that there are evidence-based interventions to minimize placement disruptions for youth at heightened risk.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Konjin, C., Admiraal, S., Baart, J., van Rooij, F., Stams, G., Colonessi, C., Lindauer, R., Assink, M. (2019). Foster care instability: A meta-analytic review. *Children and Youth Services Review* 96, 483-499.

<sup>11</sup> Fisher, P., Mannering, A., Van Scoyoc, A., Graham, A. (2014). A Translational Neuroscience Perspective on the Importance of Reducing Placement Instability among Foster Children. *Child Welfare* - Vol. 92, No. 5.

### 3.3 | THE LAW FAILS CHILDREN WHO LACK REGULAR CARETAKERS

Legal scholar Jonathan Todres at the Center for Law Health and Society at Georgia State University has written on *“independent children,”* who spend most of their day without a regular adult caregiver. This group includes homeless youth, children orphaned by war or disease, migrant children, and quite frequently foster children. These children are often required to take on adult duties of self-care and support other children in their families and communities in order to survive. Many such youth show remarkable fortitude and ingenuity in navigating their worlds but are frequently punished by the law for doing so. Professor Todres argues that the law fails these children in two ways relevant to children who refuse placements:

- First, the law forces children out of public spaces and back into private homes that often hold the harms they were seeking to escape.
- Second, the law frequently requires that children access services and support only through a designated adult caregiver, which children may not have access to.



The result is that children without stable adult caretakers find themselves in a double bind: they are acting autonomously to survive the breakdown of their family structure and navigate a world that is not always safe, but are punished or ignored for doing so by systems that are supposed to care for and support them through the breakdown.<sup>12</sup> The law, therefore, prefers the child to be *“in a home”* versus *“on the run”* or *“in an office,”* irrespective of the child’s perception of the home’s safety or effect on their well-being. Similarly, agency and school policies frequently require foster youth to have a stable address and single designated caregiver to access services, thereby preventing youth experiencing intense instability from normalcy and support.

A reasonable assessment from the research would be that foster placement refusals, either as an externalizing behavior or a rational response to negative experiences in foster care, may be both *caused by* and *a contributor to* foster care instability. The law has a role in either supporting these children or pushing them out of the system completely.

This report looks at the placement histories of the 49 children who refused placements in Hillsborough county since 2017. As predicted by existing research, the data show that, for most of the children, placement instability began long before their first refusal and was often accelerated by a first arrest or first Baker Act. The data also show a high level of instability in the placement array itself, which further multiplied the effects on the children.

<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Todres, *Independent Children and the Legal Construction of Childhood*, 23 S. Cal. Interdisc. L.J. 261 (2014).



## 4 | THE DATA

Florida maintains its child welfare data in the Florida Safe Families Network ("FSFN"). This data is entered into the system by child protective investigators, case managers, attorneys, and other DCF employees and agents. FSFN is used to manage cases, including making payments to placement providers, and for printing case plans and judicial review reports for the court. It is therefore assumed to be reasonably reliable.

In September 2019, the Children and Youth Law Clinic obtained public records consisting of all data related to children's placements in the FSFN database. The request contained information for 294,781 children, 210,723 providers, and 1,155,221 placements covering from approximately 2000 to September 2019. It also included 12,959 placements recorded from the 1980s and 1990s for children who were still in care when the database was first created.

### FSFN Public Placement Database

(from 2000 to 2019)



FOSTER CARE PROVIDERS

210,723



CHILDREN

294,781



PLACEMENT ENTRIES

1,155,221

Each entry in the data corresponds to one placement episode for a child and includes the following information:

- Unique identification numbers for the child and placement provider;
- The name, zip code, and placement type of the provider;
- The agency that made the placement;
- The dates and reasons for each removal episode;
- The dates and reason for each placement's end; and
- Non-identifiable demographic information about the children, including gender, age at removal, race, primary language, and Indian tribe membership.

Using that information, the author was able to generate additional statistics to aid in calculations.

The data in this report was generated by selecting children from the public placement database via SQL queries.

Three main comparison groups were created to test for differences and similarities with the children who refused placement.

## COMPARISON GROUPS WERE CREATED AS FOLLOWS:



### GROUP 1 REFUSAL CHILDREN

The group of children who had any placement entry labeled as ***“Placement Refusal Child”*** as the service type.<sup>13</sup>

To identify distinguishing features of the children who refused placements,  
**TWO COMPARISON GROUPS** were created.



### GROUP 2 10+ PLACEMENT CHILDREN

A group of 101 children were selected as a 10% random sample from all children in the database who were handled by Eckerd Hillsborough or the Hillsborough Sheriff and had **10 or more placements**. The group was limited to children who entered care between 2001 and 2018 to be in line with the Refusal Children group.



### GROUP 3 TYPICAL TEENS

A group of 108 children were selected as a 10% random sample from children in the database who were handled by Eckerd Hillsborough or the Hillsborough Sheriff in 2017 or later and who were **at least 13 years or older** during that window of time. The ages of these children naturally put them within the same years as the other two groups.

Composition and differences in the groups are discussed below. A summary of each child and the complete placement history is available for review online. The underlying data and calculations are available in the project repository at <https://miami.box.com/v/Refusal-Report>.

<sup>13</sup> FSFN does not have a method for flagging children who refuse placements. (OIG Report 2018, p33.) The placement service type flag came about through a “Refusal Protocol” instituted by Eckerd Hillsborough in July 2017, which was expanded in January 2018 to add three service types to FSFN: “Placement Refusal – Child”, “Placement Refusal – Provider”, and “No Appropriate Placement Found.” No other lead agency uses these codes, so the children are limited to Eckerd and the Hillsborough Sheriff’s Office.

## 5 | FINDINGS ON THE CHILDREN

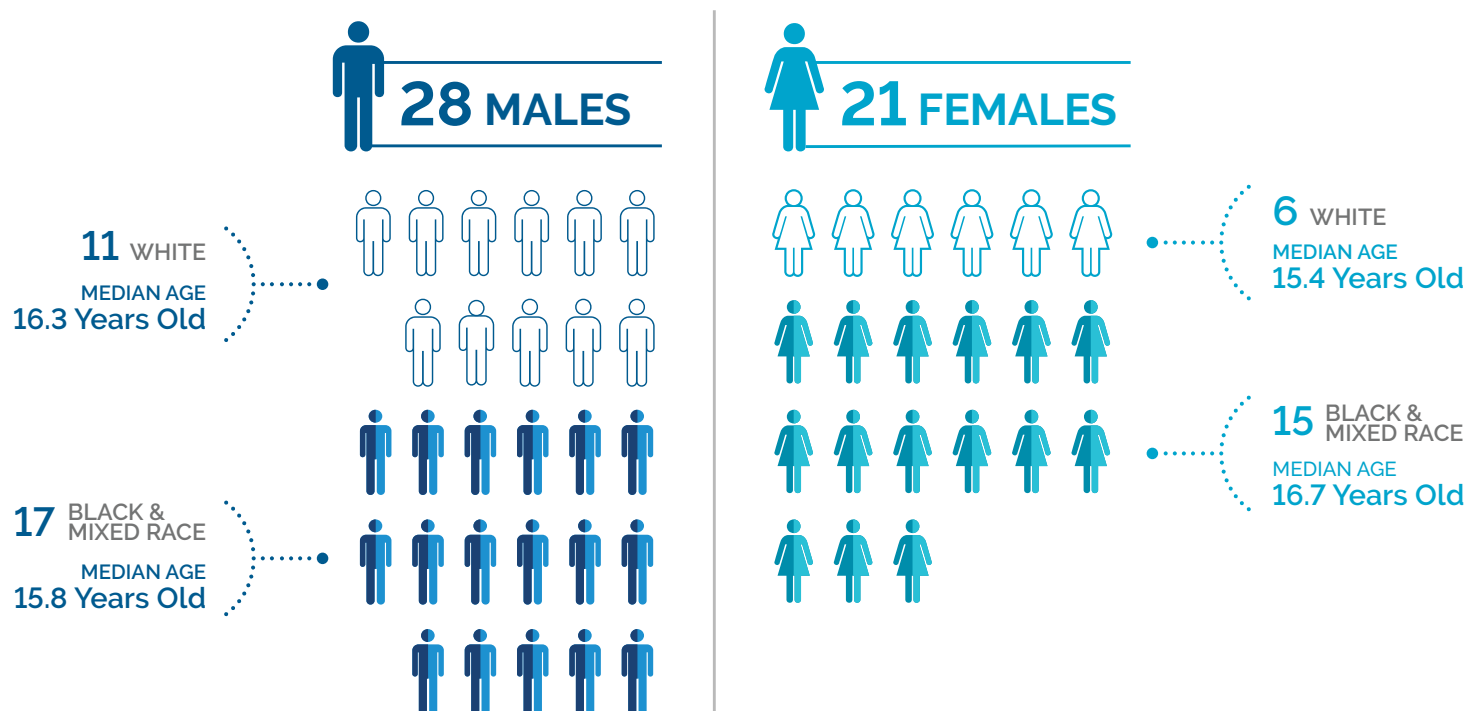
This report summarizes the data analyzed for forty-nine children who refused placement in Hillsborough County.<sup>14</sup>

### 5.1 | A DIVERSE BUT DISPROPORTIONATE GROUP OF CHILDREN

A wide range of children refused placements since Hillsborough began logging refusals in 2017. The children had ages ranging from 7.2 to 17.9 when they first refused a placement, but the median was in the teens. There were slightly more boys than girls and significantly fewer white children than non-white children in the group. White female children were the smallest subset in the group. Mixed-race children were the most overrepresented.

#### HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY

### 49 CHILDREN WHO REFUSED PLACEMENT









<sup>14</sup> This report uses statistical methods to compare groups. The calculations are available in the project repository at <https://miami.box.com/v/Refusal-Report>.

## 5.1.1 | AGE & RACE

The three comparison groups were proportionate in terms of gender. All three groups were disproportionately black compared to children in the community and in Hillsborough's system.<sup>15</sup> Even beyond that, white children were significantly underrepresented in the refusal group compared to both the typical teens and the children with ten or more placements. Black children had lower representation among the typical teens, and mixed race children were a significantly larger segment of the refusal children.

TABLE 1. AGE & RACE DIFFERENCES IN COMPARISON GROUPS<sup>16</sup>

					
GENDER	TYPICAL TEENS		REFUSAL CHILDREN		10+ PLACEMENT CHILDREN
MALES	52.8%	≈	57.1%	≈	44.6%
FEMALES	47.2%	≈	42.9%	≈	55.4%
RACE	TYPICAL TEENS		REFUSAL CHILDREN		10+ PLACEMENT CHILDREN
BLACK	36.1%	<	53.1%	≈	43.6%
WHITE	61.1%	>	34.7%	<	54.5%
MIXED RACE	2.8%	<	12.2%	>	2.0%
	1.9%	≈	8.2%	>	0%

 TYPICAL TEENS
  REFUSAL CHILDREN
  10+ PLACEMENT CHILDREN

### SUMMARY

- **WHITE** children were underrepresented in the group of children who refused placements.
- **MIXED-RACE** children were significantly overrepresented.
- **WHITE FEMALE** children were the **smallest demographic** in the group.

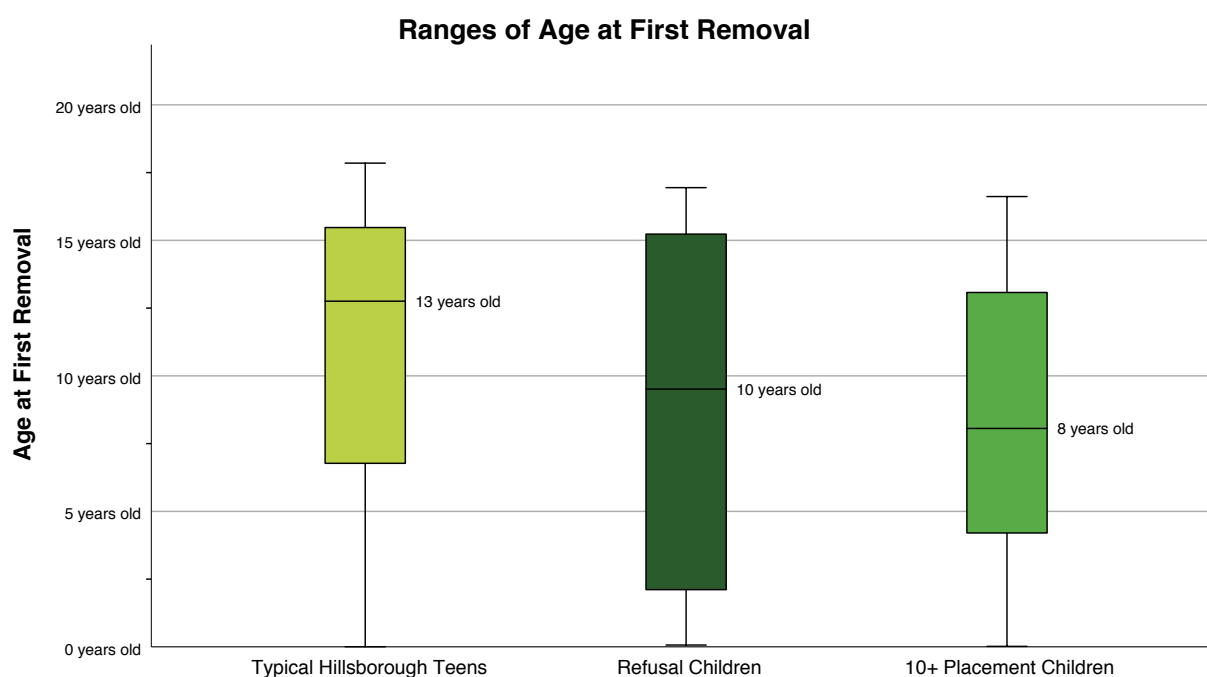
<sup>15</sup> According to DCF's public dashboards, the Hillsborough out-of-home care population is 34.2% black. Therefore, black children are overrepresented in each of the comparison groups.

<sup>16</sup> Comparisons were made using statistical tests described in the Data Addendum to this report. The comparison symbols in the chart should be read as (≈) meaning that the two measures were not significantly different at the .05 level. The symbols (<) and (>) should be read as the groups were significantly different. Note that significance takes into account the sample size and distribution and may not be simply a comparison of the means.

## 5.1.2 | ENTRIES INTO CARE

The children who refused placements had a broad range of experiences in the system. Some were first removed from their families as babies and others as adolescents. They were not predominately new to the system. Many had been previously reunified, entered guardianships, or been adopted and re-entered care later. A handful had been in foster care without interruption for nearly their entire lives. Refusal children were therefore very similar to other teens in the system. The chart below shows that refusal children were not significantly older than the comparison groups at their last removal.

FIGURE 1 - THE CHILDREN'S AGES AT THEIR MOST RECENT REMOVAL



### SUMMARY

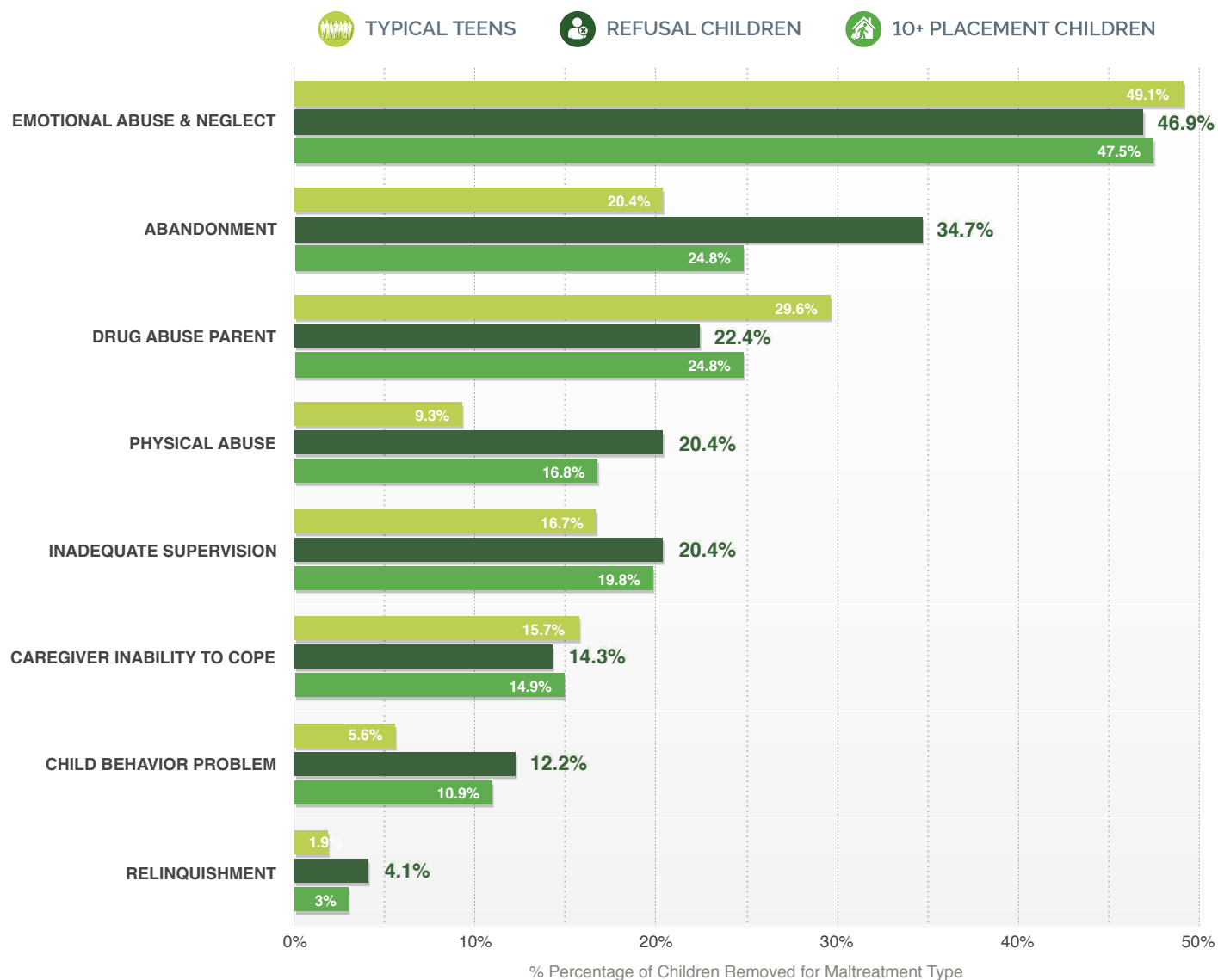
- The refusal children were largely not new to the system.
- Some had been in and out of care their whole lives, but others came in more recently.
- Their removal patterns were similar to typical teens in care.



### 5.1.3 | MALTREATMENTS

There were no significant differences in the reasons the children came into care. Refusal children, like the other groups, predominately experienced emotional harm, abandonment, and substance abuse by their parents. The least common maltreatment codes in the group were relinquishment, the child's own behavior problems, and the caregiver's inability to cope. The data do not support the contention that refusal children were simply turned over to DCF by their parents.

**TABLE 2. PROPORTION OF CHILDREN REMOVED FOR MALTREATMENT TYPE**






### SUMMARY

- The refusal children's maltreatment patterns were similar to other teens and children with high placement counts.
- The refusal children were not predominately "lock outs" or children put into care solely because of their own behaviors.

## 5.1.4 | PLACEMENT SETTINGS

The refusal children were similar to the 10+ placement children in terms of placement setting patterns. Where they were unique was in the amount of time spent in group care and the number of miles they traveled from placement to placement. This suggests difficulty finding family homes and local placements for this group. The refusal children were also placed with providers who had previously housed higher numbers of children, indicating that they were placed in larger, older placements with higher turnover.

TABLE 3. STATISTICS ON PLACEMENT SETTINGS BY COMPARISON GROUPS

		 TYPICAL TEENS	 REFUSAL CHILDREN	 10+ PLACEMENT CHILDREN
NO DIFFERENCE	FOSTER CARE RATE	20.3%	≈ 31.2%	≈ 35%
SIMILAR TO 10+ PLACEMENT CHILDREN	INSTITUTIONAL CARE RATE	0.0%	< (3.9%)	≈ 4.3%
	RELATIVE CARE RATE	19.3%	> (1.2%)	≈ 1.4%
	ON RUN RATE	0.0%	< (0.6%)	≈ 0.7%
REFUSAL CHILDREN UNIQUE	GROUP CARE RATE	6.4%	< 37.4%	> 18.0%
	MILES MOVED	72 MILES	< 1,090 MILES	> 509 MILES
	CHILDREN IN PLACEMENT PRIOR	93 CHILDREN	< 1,135 CHILDREN	> 456 CHILDREN

**!** Notably, a child's first refusal did not significantly change their placement setting patterns. For the 34 refusal children who had at least 90 days in care before and after the refusal for comparison, the only significant difference in placement was a *reduction* in percentage of time in relative care by a median 4.9% per child. As will be shown below, a child's first arrest or first Baker Act had significantly stronger impacts.

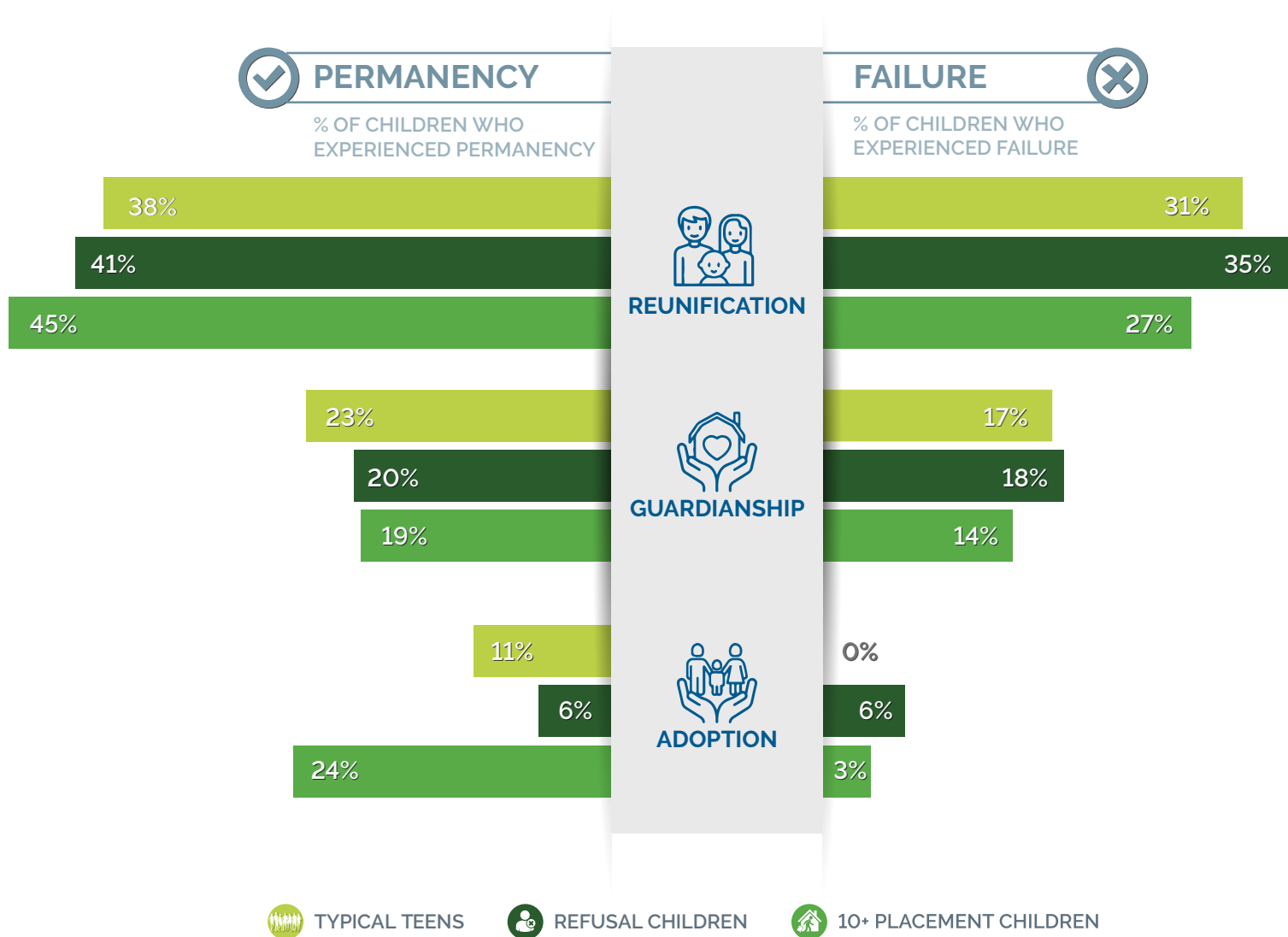
### SUMMARY

- The refusal children had placement patterns that were very similar to other children with high placement counts.
- Refusal children were unique in the high rate of time they spent in older, larger congregate care settings and the extremely high number of miles they were moved.

## 5.1.5 | EXITS FROM CARE

The children who refused placement had similar experiences around permanency as the other groups. All three groups had similar proportions of children who experienced reunification and guardianship at some point, and similar rates of those permanent placements disrupting. The refusal children only had three adoptions in their group – a low rate on par with typical teens and lower than the 10+ placement children. No child who refused placement went on to later be adopted.

TABLE 4. STATISTICS ON DISCHARGES FOR COMPARISON GROUPS



### SUMMARY

- All three groups had poor permanency outcomes with many having reentered care.
- Refusal children and typical teens had lower adoption rates, possibly due to their older ages.
- Refusal children had three adoptions in their group and all three failed.

## 5.2 | A COMMON EXPERIENCE OF INSTABILITY & EJECTION

Despite the differences in the group, the children who refused placements had one striking feature in common: they all experienced extreme rates of instability driven in large part by providers asking that they be removed from their placements. For most of the children, this was true even before their first refusals and generally continued afterwards.

For context, Hillsborough County has mixed performance on placement stability measures. The refusal children in Hillsborough, however, experienced **extreme levels of placement instability** both prior to and after their first refusals. They were repeatedly moved at nearly 5.5 times the rate of all other children in the Hillsborough system and nearly 3.5 times the rate of all Hillsborough teens.

TABLE 5. COMPARATIVE STABILITY MEASURES SINCE 2017

	TOP 10 CBCS	HILLSBOROUGH AGE 0-17	HILLSBOROUGH AGE 13-17	REFUSAL CHILDREN
AGGREGATE MOVES PER 1,000 DAYS <sup>17</sup>	8	8.2	13.0	45.2
MEDIAN PLACEMENTS PER CHILD	3	2	4	31
% OF PLACEMENTS UNDER 3 DAYS	16.7%	23.3%	30.7%	54.8%
% PROVIDER REQUESTED CHANGE	24.1%	50.5%	54.8%	73.2%



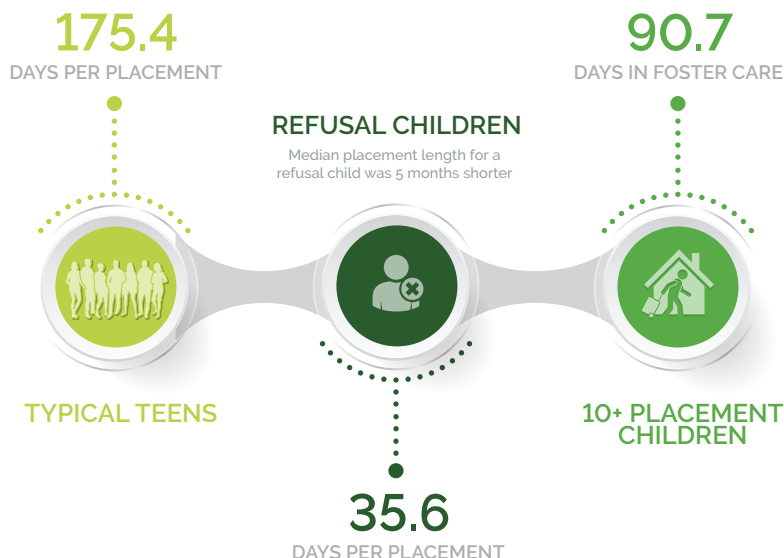
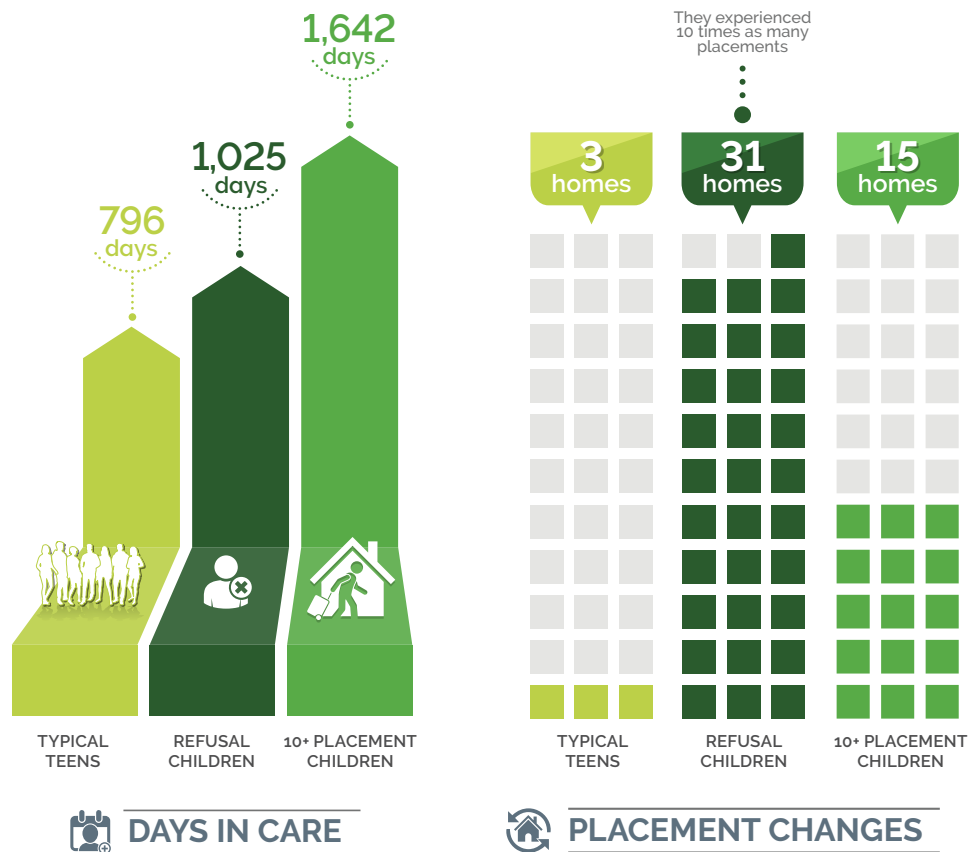
**EXTREME LEVELS  
OF PLACEMENT  
INSTABILITY**

<sup>17</sup> This aggregate measure was calculated by dividing the total number of bed days since 2017 by the number of non-administrative placement entries in FSFN. The federal and state "moves per 1,000 days" formula includes other limits on the population of children counted. This number is therefore not equal to the measure found on the DCF dashboards but is comparable across this chart. DCF's dashboards show that Eckerd Hillsborough had 6.41 moves per 1,000 days in Q1 2020, compared to 4.69 statewide.

## 5.2.1 | HIGH RATES OF PLACEMENT INSTABILITY

The refusal children had high rates of instability compared to both comparison groups. They experienced twice as many placements as the 10+ placement children and over 10 times as many placements as a typical teen in the system. Moreover, the median placement length for a refusal child was two months shorter than the 10+ placement children and almost five months shorter than a typical teen.

TABLE 6. STABILITY MEASURE STATISTICS FOR COMPARISON GROUPS



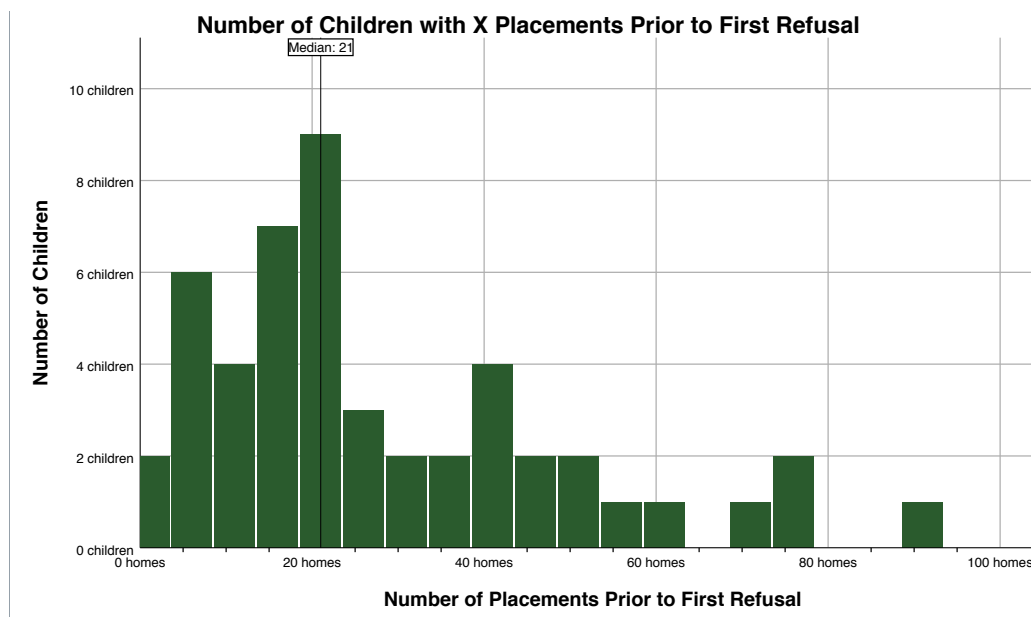
DAYS PER PLACEMENTS



## 5.2.2 | MOVES PRIOR TO FIRST REFUSAL

The children's instability largely began before their first refusal. The children who refused placements had a median of 21 placement changes before first refusal. The range was from 1 to 89 placements prior to refusal.

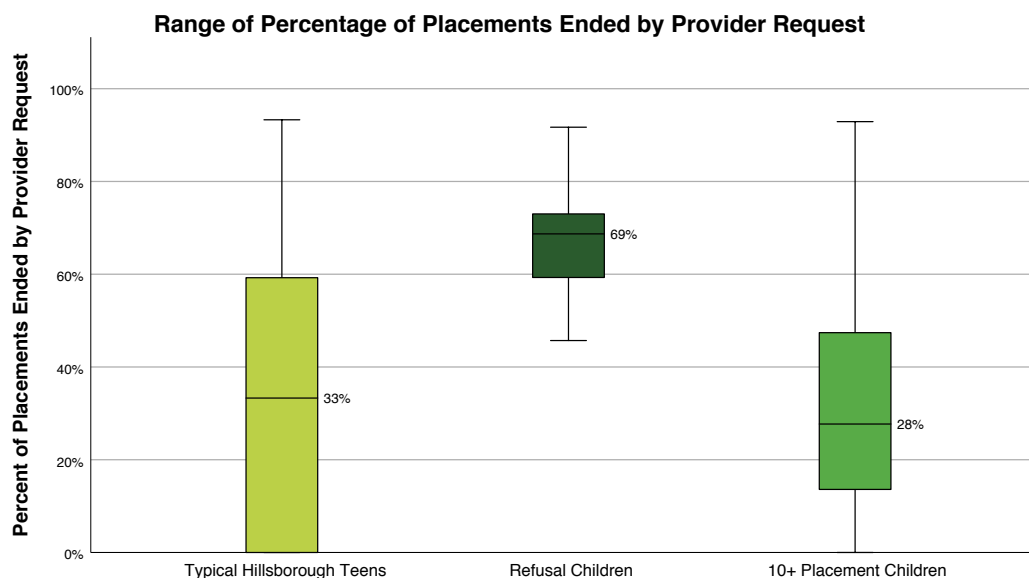
FIGURE 2. PLACEMENT CHANGES BEFORE FIRST REFUSAL. THE MEDIAN WAS 21 PLACEMENTS.



## 5.2.3 | EXTREMELY HIGH RATES OF EJECTION

The children who refused placements experienced extreme rates of providers requesting that they be moved after they were already placed. This is known as *ejecting* a child. Compared to both groups, the refusal children experienced significantly higher rates of ejection. The graph below shows the stark difference between the three groups. Refusal children had a level of ejection seen in only the extreme ends of the other two groups. **Having high rates of ejection is the primary distinguishing feature of the placement refusal children.**

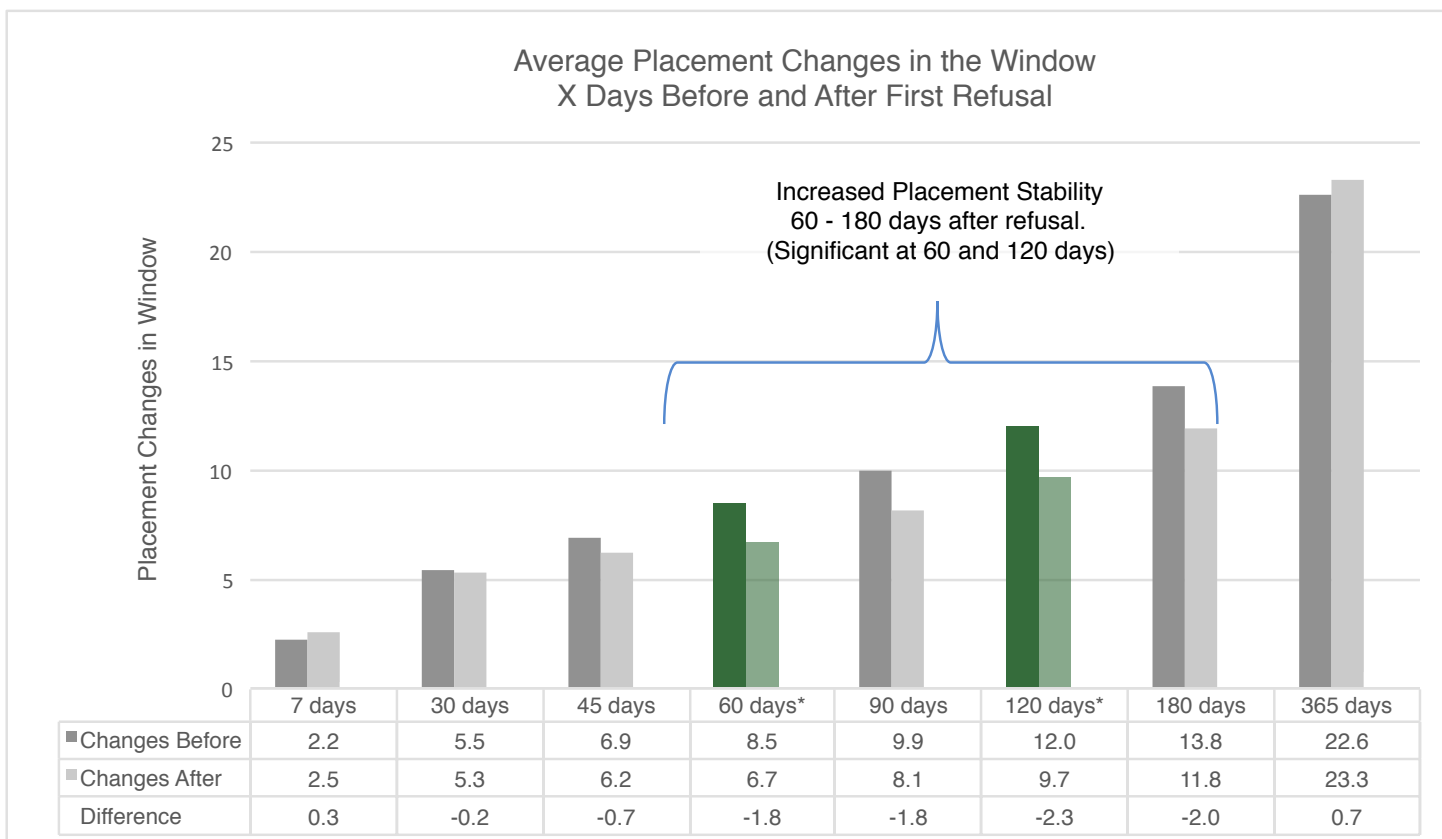
FIGURE 3. RATE OF PROVIDERS REQUESTING CHANGE OF PLACEMENT FOR EACH GROUP.



## 5.2.4 | REFUSALS LED TO INCREASED STABILITY

Contrary to expectations that refusal episodes would increase instability, children were up to 36% more stable on average in the 60 and 120 days after their first refusal episode than before. The largest increases in stability appeared due to agencies' seeking therapeutic placements for the children during that period.<sup>18</sup> The children who were less stable after their first refusal tended to continue in night-by-night placements without any obvious intervention. The level, speed, and consistency of the agency's response appears to be a major factor in stability.

FIGURE 4. PLACEMENT STABILITY CHANGE IN WINDOWS BEFORE AND AFTER FIRST REFUSAL.



### SUMMARY

- The refusal children had extremely high rates of placement instability compared to other children in Hillsborough and statewide.
- The refusal children also had extremely high rates of providers asking that they be removed.
- Contrary to expectation, refusal episodes typically resulted in children becoming more stable temporarily.

<sup>18</sup> However, one child went on run for an extended period, one went on an extended family visitation, and another was incarcerated, all of which registered as increased stability.




## 5.3 | POTENTIAL PATHS TO REFUSAL

Due to limitations in the data, this report does not attempt to predict which children will refuse placements. The data does, however, suggest potential factors that may be connected to refusal and should be explored. The data suggest that, contrary to anecdotal reports, children who refused placements were not disproportionately served by the delinquency system. Prior mental health history, however, did appear to have some connection to refusals. By increasing a child's instability, these two factors may raise a child's risk of refusal and further negative outcomes.

### 5.3.1 | DELINQUENCY SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT




Less than half (44.9%) of the refusal children were ever in detention before their first refusal, and five entered detention for the first time after their first refusal. These rates were on par with other children with high placement counts but were 5 to 10 times higher than typical teens, who had very little time in detention at all.

TABLE 7. STATISTICS ON DETENTION BY COMPARISON GROUP

			
WERE EVER IN DETENTION	10.2%	< (55.1%)	≈ 47.5%
IN DETENTION MORE THAN 30 DAYS	3.7%	< (32.7%)	≈ 26.7%
IN DETENTION MORE THAN 180 DAYS	1.9%	≈ 10.2%	≈ 9.9%

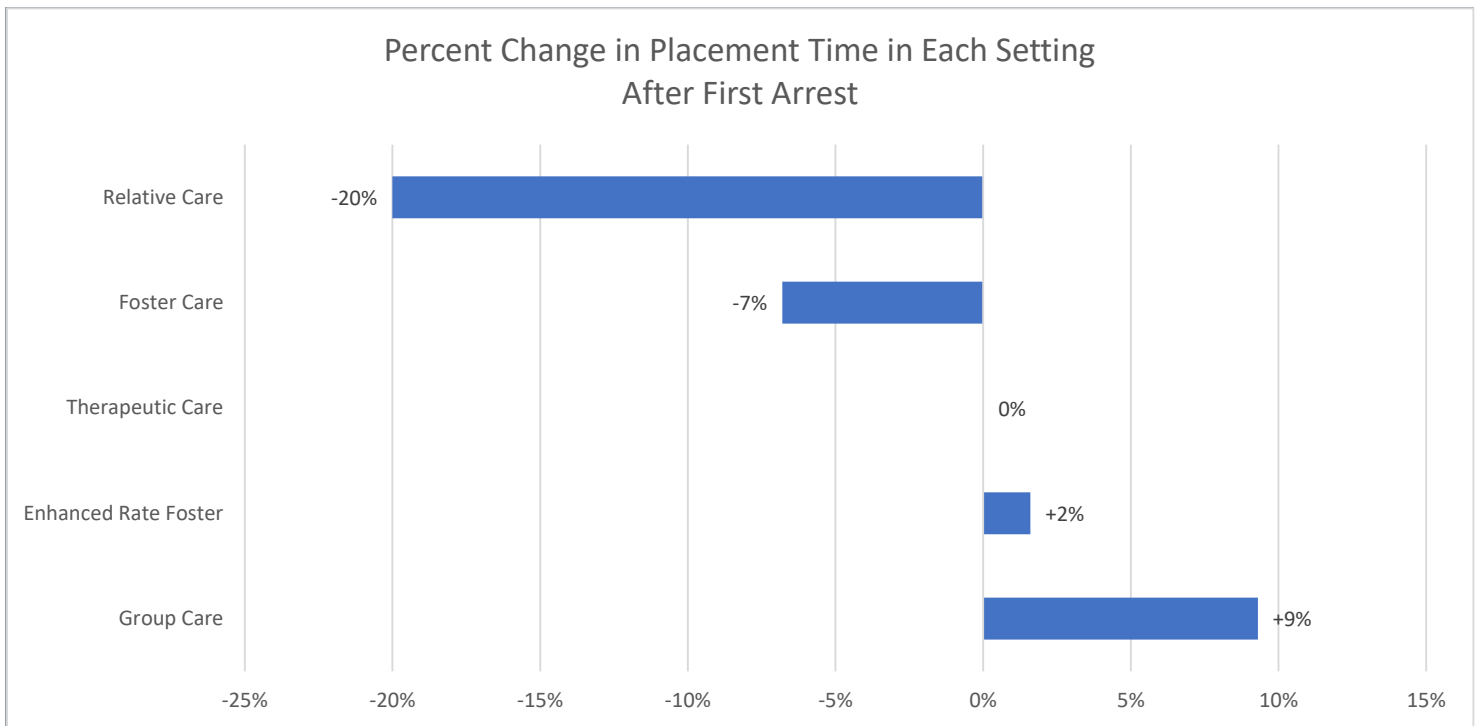
The public data does not include the children's DJJ charges, but their length of detention could be used as a proxy for severity and risk. The refusal children who were put into detention **did not** spend significantly more time detained as a group than either comparison group. **DJJ involvement did not appear to be a distinguishing feature of the refusal children.**

TABLE 8. DETENTION LENGTHS FOR CHILDREN EVER IN DETENTION

			
MEDIAN % TIME IN CORRECTIONAL PLACEMENTS	3.5%	≈ 3.9%	≈ 2.2%
MEDIAN DAYS IN CORRECTIONAL PLACEMENTS	11 DAYS	≈ 27 DAYS	≈ 48 DAYS

A child's arrest may have an indirect impact on refusal, however, by increasing a child's placement instability. A child's first arrest had profoundly negative effects on their placement patterns and stability in care. The data below looks at 112 Hillsborough children who were (1) in care in 2017 or later, (2) arrested at any point, and (3) had at least 90 days before and after their arrest for comparison. After release from detention, children who were arrested saw **significant decreases** in relative care and foster care and a **significant increase** in the percent of time they spent in enhanced rate foster care and group care.<sup>19</sup>

FIGURE 5. CHANGES IN CHILDREN'S PLACEMENT RATES AFTER FIRST ARREST






**!** Notably, the children who were arrested saw significantly reduced placement stability after an arrest. The children's placement stability decreased 30.5 days per placement, and the rate of providers requesting that they be removed rose 31.6%. As discussed above, there was no similar effect after a child's first refusal. To the contrary, the data suggest that refusal led to temporarily increased stability. Arrests, therefore, appear to be a significant disruptive event in a child's time in care.

<sup>19</sup> There was a gendered difference in the data. Male children had a significant decrease in the percentage of time they spent in therapeutic homes after an arrest. Twelve boys had more therapeutic care after arrest, while 26 boys had less. Female children showed no similar patterns. More research should be done on the ways gender affects access to care in Hillsborough.

### 5.3.2 | MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT




Slightly over 57% of refusal children had a Baker Act prior to their first refusal. Two children had their first Baker Act after refusal. Refusal children were placed in CSUs at rates similar to the 10+ placement children; however, significantly more of the refusal children experienced extreme amounts of time in a CSU. It is unknown whether this reflects the severity of their mental health issues or an inability to find placements willing to take them at discharge.

TABLE 9. STATISTICS ON CRISIS STABILIZATION UNIT (CSU) PLACEMENT BY COMPARISON GROUP.

			
WERE EVER IN A CSU	12%	< 63.3%	≈ 44.6%
IN CSU MORE THAN 7 DAYS	4.6%	< 42.9%	≈ 25.7%
IN CSU MORE THAN 21 DAYS	0%	< 24.5%	> 5.9%

Similarly, the refusal children spent a higher percentage of time in CSU placements than both comparison groups. Their number of days in a CSU was higher than the typical teens, but on par with the 10+ placement children.

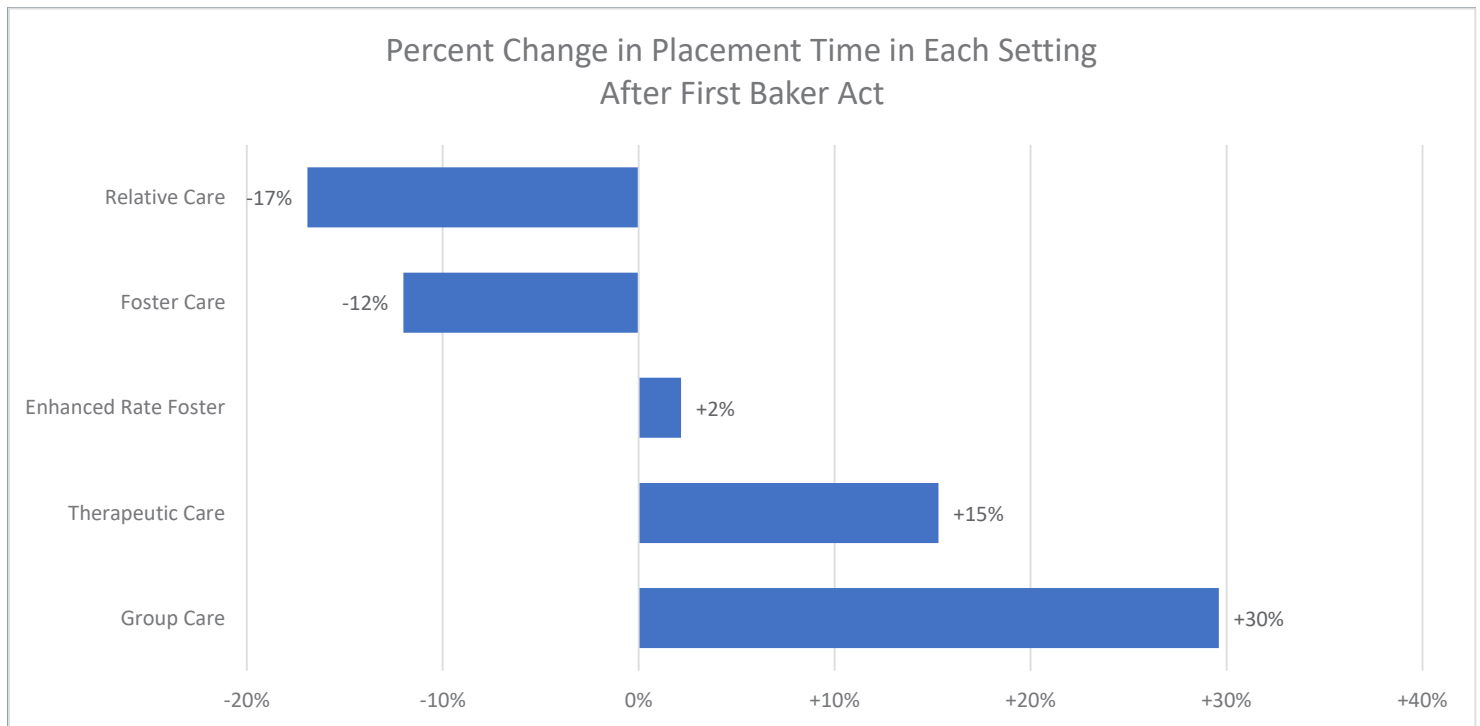
TABLE 10. CSU PLACEMENT LENGTH BY COMPARISON GROUP FOR CHILDREN WHO WERE EVER IN A CSU.

			
MEDIAN % TIME IN CSU	0.28%	< 1.37%	> 0.38%
MEDIAN DAYS IN CSU	4	< 14	≈ 7

Like a first arrest, a child's first Baker Act marked a significant change in their placement patterns. As seen with the arrest data above, the data below consists of 119 Hillsborough children who were (1) in care in 2017 or later, (2) Baker Acted at any point, and (3) had at least 90 days before and after the Baker Act incident for comparison. The chart shows that children's time in family settings decreased and congregate and therapeutic settings increased after their first Baker Act. Notably, their time in therapeutic placements increased significantly more so than after a first arrest (0% vs. 15%).



FIGURE 6. PLACEMENT PATTERN CHANGES AFTER A CHILD'S FIRST BAKER ACT



**!** Notably, the children also saw a significant decrease in their placement stability after a Baker Act. Their median days per placement dropped 55 days per child (compared to 30.5 per placement after an arrest). Similarly, the median rate of children's placements that ended because the provider requested the change rose 36% per child. Again, a child's first refusal episode did not show similar effects. A child's first Baker Act marked a significant change in the child's placement patterns in ways that a first refusal did not.



### 5.3.3 | NO PRIOR DELINQUENCY OR MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS HISTORY

There were 13 children who had no correctional or CSU placements prior to their first refusal. These children had two features that were distinct from the other children who refused placement. First, they had significantly lower rates of providers requesting they be removed compared to the other groups. Second, they had significantly fewer placement changes in total than the children who were Baker Acted. There were no other significant statistics.

A manual review of the placement history found the following:

- One child was placed in traditional group homes before his first refusal but was moved into a home for children with developmental disabilities after.
- One very young child stayed in an office because the agency could not find him an appropriate placement on his eighth day in care.
- Several children had patterns of long-term placements that abruptly disrupted.
- Two of the children were chronic runners.
- Several of the children had failed reunifications and adoptions. One child had his case dismissed and then returned to care.
- Several of the children were placed out of state with relatives and non-relatives after their refusal. One child went on a visitation with a sibling after her refusal.

#### SUMMARY

- A child's first incarceration and Baker Act both had significantly negative impacts on their placement stability.
- Refusals did not show the same level of impact.
- Some children's refusals appeared to be idiosyncratic or based on specific placement goals.

## 6 | FINDINGS ON THE PLACEMENT ARRAY

The forty-nine children who refused placement were part of a larger group of children who experienced extreme instability in the Suncoast Region. The Region had an unusually high population of unstable children and a large network of providers who regularly ejected children after their placement.

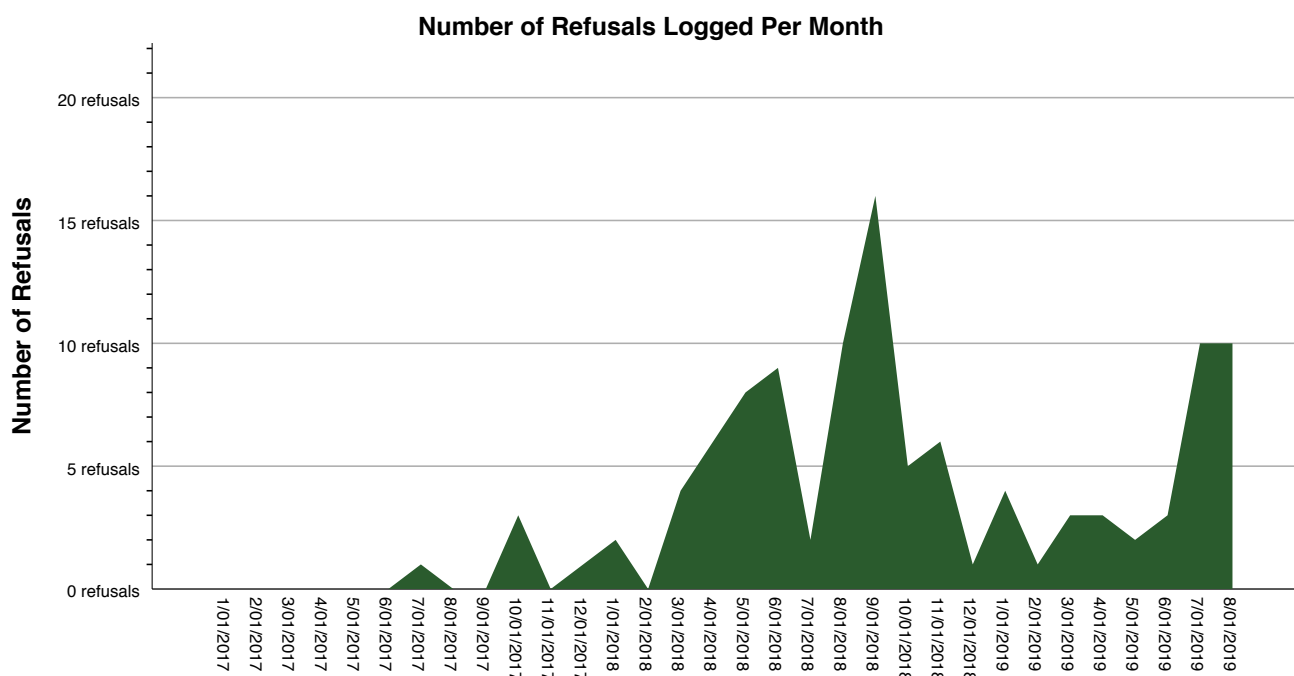
### 6.1 | CONCENTRATED INSTABILITY

#### 6.1.1 | REFUSAL EPISODES WERE ONE COMPONENT OF SYSTEM INSTABILITY

Without minimizing the difficulty that a refusal episode can pose to the child and agency staff, the data show that refusals were infrequent compared to the number of other negative placement events in Hillsborough such as disruptions or run episodes. Refusals appear to be one component of overall instability.

There was a great deal of variability in the number of refusal episodes recorded each month in the FSFN database. There appeared to be a slow buildup of refusal entries, which could be due to training and implementation of the refusal protocol implemented in the county in 2017 and may not reflect an increase in actual refusal episodes.<sup>20</sup> At its highest point, Hillsborough recorded 16 refusals in September 2018 largely due to one child who repeatedly refused. That number dropped significantly to 5 the next month and was more recently 10 per month for July and August 2019. The day with the highest number of refusals was June 23, 2019 when three children refused on the same day.

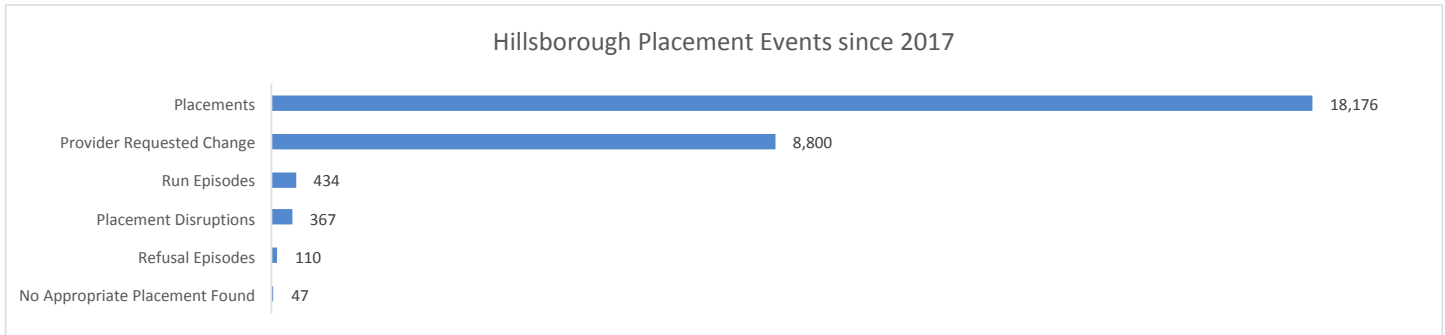
FIGURE 7. NUMBER OF REFUSAL EPISODES PER MONTH.



<sup>20</sup> The creation of the protocol is described in an Inspector General Report available at the repository for this report.

Refusal episodes were not significantly more common than other negative placement events. Since 2017, refusals have accounted for less than 0.8% of all placement made. They were on par with episodes of the agency being unable to find appropriate placements, and they were less common than placement disruptions and children running away.

FIGURE 8. HILLSBOROUGH PLACEMENT EVENTS SINCE 2017



NEGATIVE EVENTS IN THIS CHART EXCLUDE THOSE INVOLVING REFUSAL CHILDREN.

Refusals were also not the most pronounced feature of children's placement histories. Most of the children refused three or fewer times, and most did so for three or fewer days total.<sup>21</sup> The children's median time in care before their first refusal was 818 days with 21 placements. Many refusal children spent time in the agency office due to lack of appropriate placements. A refusal was therefore a small portion of most children's total time in the system.

## 6.1.2 | A HIGH CONCENTRATION OF UNSTABLE CHILDREN

The Suncoast Region had a very large population of children experiencing extreme placement instability. Since 2017, there have been 736 children statewide with (a) 20 or more placements, and (b) 67% or more placements ending in an unplanned exit or in under 4 days.<sup>22</sup> Seventeen percent of those children were in Hillsborough County, and 47% were in the Suncoast Region alone. This concentration of instability in one region suggests a problem in local policy or system structure.

<sup>21</sup> Two children refused more than 10 times and five did so for more than 10 days, but these extreme refusals may be more appropriately classified as run episodes.

<sup>22</sup> "Unplanned" here means the placement ended because the provider requested the change, the child requested the change, the placement disrupted, the child ran away, or the child was incarcerated. Baker Acts are not included because there is no placement end reason code for them.

TABLE 11. CHILDREN WITH HIGH INSTABILITY BY AGENCY. SUNCOAST REGION MARKED IN BLUE.

REGION	AGENCY	# CHILDREN (PER 100 IN CARE)	AVG. PLACEMENT COUNT	AVG. DAYS IN CARE	PERC. UNPLANNED EXITS	AVG. THERAPEUTIC DAYS	AVG. CORRECTIONS DAYS
SC	ECKERD COMMUNITY HILLSBOROUGH	131 (3.55)	39	1,809	86%	217	97
SC	ECKERD COMMUNITY ALTERNATIVES	118 (3.50)	38	1,673	84%	115	106
SC	CHILDREN'S NETWORK OF SW FLORIDA	98 (3.98)	35	1,796	92%	105	133
C	EMBRACE FAMILIES CBC	88 (2.88)	32	1,603	88%	118	137
NE	FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES	63 (2.78)	32	1,606	90%	249	110
S	CITRUS HEALTH NETWORK	47 (1.53)	39	1,687	75%	129	143
C	HEARTLAND FOR CHILDREN, INC.	40 (1.99)	40	1,788	75%	67	259
NE	PARTNERSHIP FOR STRONG FAMILIES	32 (2.03)	39	2,095	80%	391	137
SC	YMCA SOUTH	25 (1.39)	36	1,922	77%	368	57
C	CBC OF BREVARD	22 (1.72)	37	1,544	73%	0	247
SE	COMMUNITIES CONNECTED FOR KIDS	13 (1.09)	37	1,824	76%	93	246
SE	CHILDNET, INC.	12 (0.39)	25	2,386	74%	380	44
C	KIDS CENTRAL, INC.	11 (0.44)	41	1,761	73%	99	294
NW	BIG BEND CBC EAST	9 (0.62)	31	1,460	74%	212	269
NE	COMM. PARTNERSHIP FOR CHILDREN	6 (0.32)	40	1,281	72%	15	33
NW	FAMILIES FIRST NETWORK	6 (0.25)	28	1,237	74%	44	225
NE	ST. JOHNS COUNTY COMMISSION	6 (1.67)	27	1,794	78%	367	141
NE	KIDS FIRST OF FLORIDA, INC.	3 (0.59)	40	1,139	70%	1	34

### 6.1.3 | THE MOST UNSTABLE CHILDREN IN HILLSBOROUGH

Thirty-eight of the 131 unstable Hillsborough children refused a placement since 2017, suggesting the need for intensive work with this population of children to prevent future decompensation. A partial list of the fifteen Hillsborough children with the highest placement counts is included below. Black and mixed-race children were disproportionately represented in this group compared to their representation in the Hillsborough system: white children were 58% of the system but only 36% of this group. More work should be done on the experiences of foster children in Hillsborough around race.

TABLE 12. TOP 15 MOST UNSTABLE CHILDREN IN HILLSBOROUGH

AFCARS ID	EVER REFUSED?	RACE GENDER <sup>23</sup>	PLACEMENT COUNT	DAYS IN CARE	UNPLANNED EXITS	REMOVAL COUNT	THERAPEUTIC DAYS	CORRECTIONS DAYS
405931010009	Y	B:F	128	1,856	92%	3	153	6
572571010369	Y	B:M	93	2,039	97%	1	521	693
900001747301		B:M	86	1,969	79%	3	187	741
220704571501	Y	B:F	83	2,687	93%	3	2	0
976081010199	Y	B:F	83	954	98%	2	0	198
620004659501		B:F	80	2,143	90%	3	285	131
174801010449	Y	W:F	78	893	99%	1	111	34
281705674101		M:M	76	4,035	77%	5	1,216	447
500008050001		W:M	76	1,966	89%	3	0	167
966981010059	Y	B:F	75	1,981	84%	2	308	0
779590000101	Y	B:M	72	3,027	89%	3	0	276
500000745401		M:F	72	986	95%	1	0	494
130007521901		W:M	71	1,802	93%	1	235	434
410005328401		B:F	71	5,339	73%	1	1,938	1
523251000019		W:F	70	3,038	93%	4	23	10

<sup>23</sup> The abbreviations are "Race:Gender" -- ( B = Black, W = White, M = Mixed Race ), ( M = Male, F = Female ).

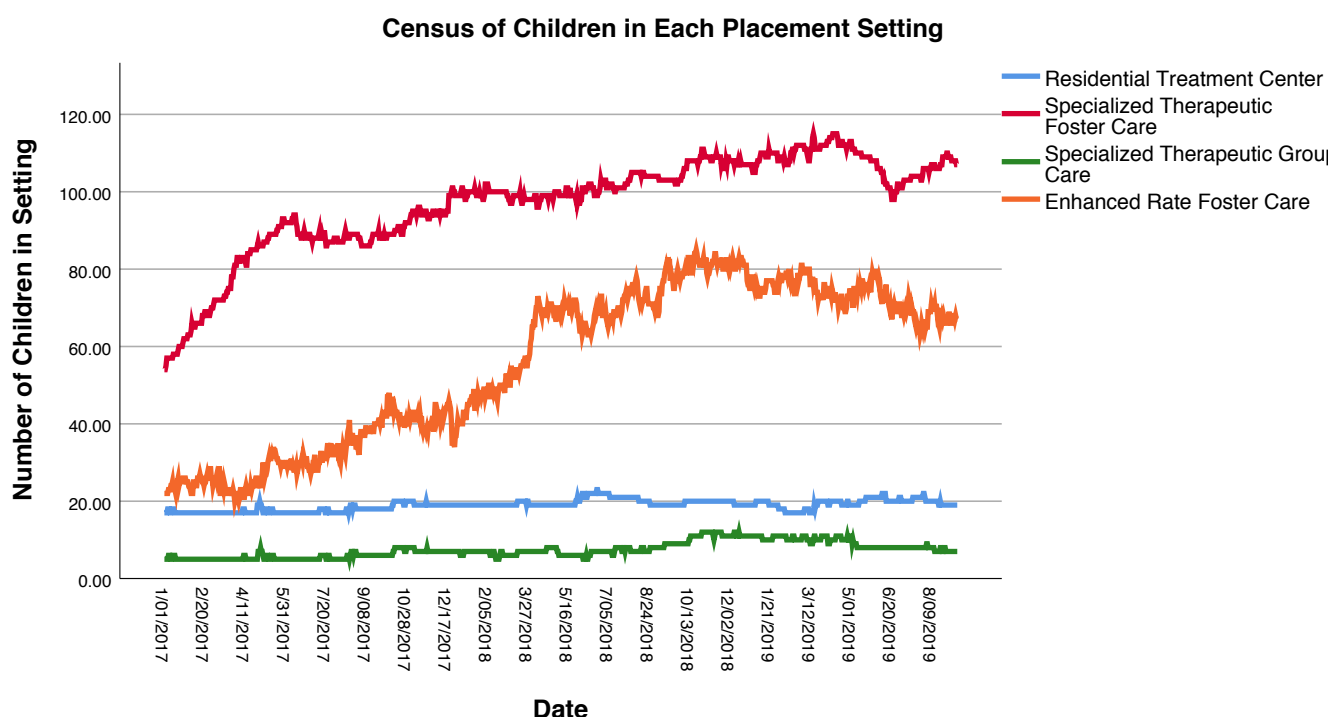
## 6.2 | A FRAGMENTED PLACEMENT ARRAY

The Committee's report recommends creating the equivalent of a specialized therapeutic group care or residential treatment center program specifically for children who refuse placements and other services. This recommendation appears to reflect a much broader need in the region as Hillsborough had very low usage of the STGC level of care while relying heavily on STFC and enhanced rate foster homes for certain populations.

### 6.2.1 | USE OF SPECIALIZED PLACEMENTS OVER TIME

Hillsborough's usage of therapeutic and enhanced rate placements has shown significant changes over time. Most notably, the number of children logged as placed in enhanced rate homes has risen 400% since 2017.<sup>24</sup> Many of these foster homes operated as traditional foster homes first. Similarly, the STFC population also grew, but took a sharp downward turn in 2019 that is only just rebounding. It appears some of the decrease in 2019 was from children moving from STFC to enhanced rate care. The STGC and RTC populations have remained relatively constant and notably low.

FIGURE 9. THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN THE NON-TRADITIONAL PLACEMENT SETTINGS



<sup>24</sup> There are some database entries that appear to place a child in STGC programs and RTC programs but are logged as traditional group care. This report takes the entries in FSFN as literal and accurate and therefore counts these as group home placements.

## 6.2.2 | SPECIALIZED THERAPEUTIC & ENHANCED RATE FOSTER CARE

Enhanced rate homes and STFC homes appear to be serving very different roles in the system. The chart below shows the top 10 providers in each program based on number of children. First, enhanced rate homes handled high volumes of children – some at levels similar to group homes. Second, children stayed in STFC providers for an order of magnitude longer than children stayed in enhanced rate foster homes. The median length for a **single placement** in an enhanced rate home was just 4 days, compared to 78 days for STFC placement. The median age for an STFC placement was 9.5 years old, while the median age for an enhanced rate placement was 12.9. These two programs are not serving the same populations or accomplishing the same goals.

TABLE 13. COMPARISON OF TOP 10 PROVIDERS IN ENHANCE RATE AND SPECIALIZED THERAPEUTIC FOSTER CARE

ENHANCED RATE FOSTER CARE <sup>25</sup> MEDIAN DAYS PER PLACEMENT = 4					SPECIALIZED THERAPEUTIC FOSTER CARE MEDIAN DAYS PER PLACEMENT = 78				
	PROVIDER	CHILD COUNT	AVG. AGE	AVG. DAYS IN HOME		PROVIDER	CHILD COUNT	AVG. AGE	AVG. DAYS IN HOME
1	RUB. SAN.	90	14.5	38.0	1	LAT. GOR.	7	14.1	290.0
2	WIL. DES.	46	13.0	70.6	2	MAR. NOE.	4	16.0	198.3
3	ZAH. NAJ.	28	13.1	56.3	3	CAT. JOH.	4	14.0	231.3
4	JO-. GOM.	21	8.5	13.9	4	CHR. ELL.	4	12.4	300.0
5	LYN. CRA.	14	11.7	28.4	5	FEL. ROB.	4	9.2	86.3
6	NIC. ETI.	13	7.5	69.3	6	NAT. GOD.	3	11.5	152.7
7	CYN. JAC.	12	11.1	35.0	7	EST. VAN.	3	7.1	335.7
8	YAD. AND.	12	4.5	83.3	8	AMY. HOL.	3	10.1	260.3
9	TIA. DIX.	11	10.1	173.4	9	JAN. SAL.	3	15.5	556.7
10	MAR. NOE.	9	12.2	56.6	10	KAT. JAC.	3	5.8	228.3

*Average age is measured at the time of placement. Average days in the home is a cumulative average per child*

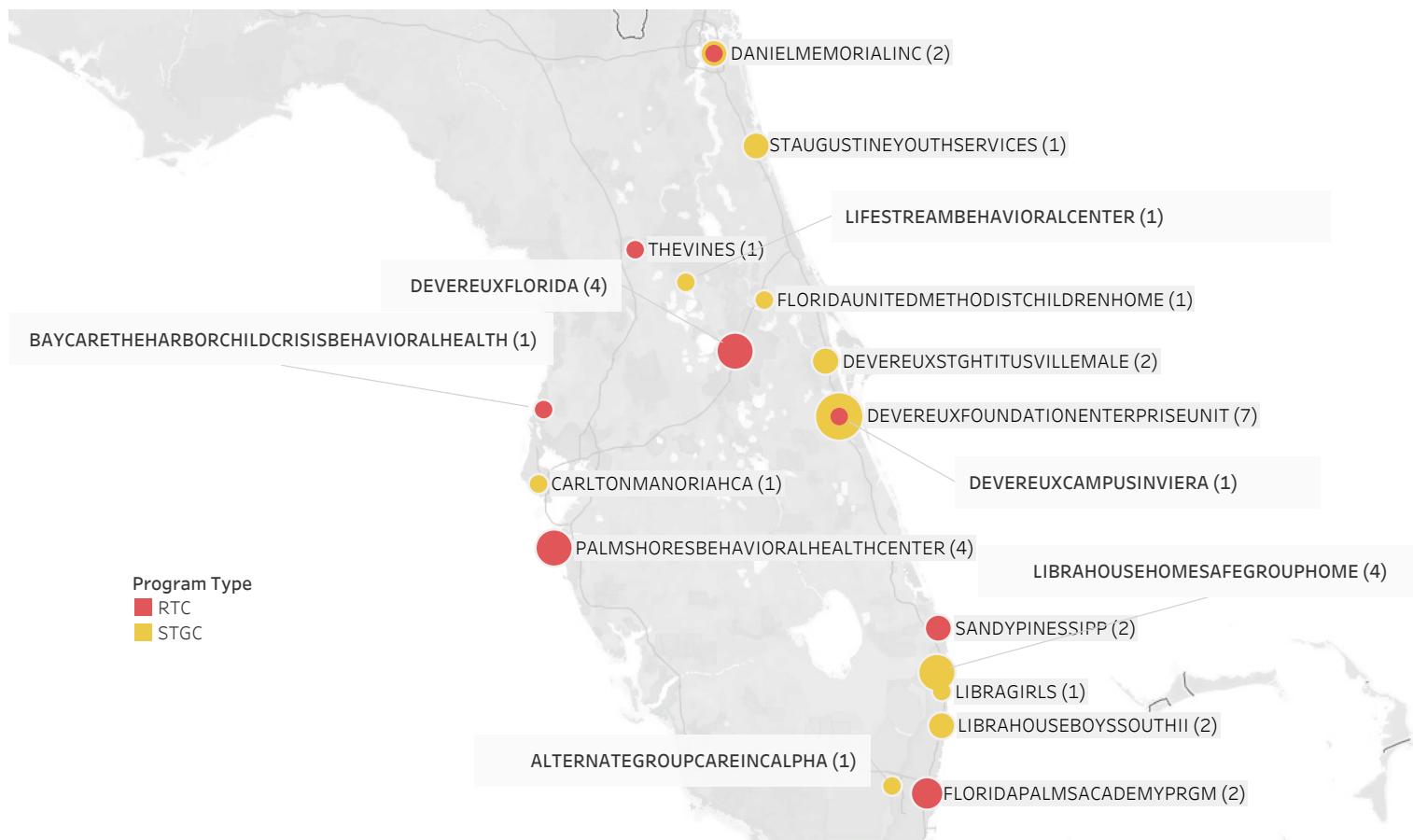
<sup>25</sup> Both groups had placements that were logged as traditional foster care placements. Those have been disregarded for this chart, but will be considered later when discussing capacity and turnover in the homes.



## 6.2.3 | PATTERNS IN RESIDENTIAL GROUP CARE

Hillsborough County does not appear to have any STGC or RTC providers. Despite this, Hillsborough has only placed **one child** with the STGC provider in Pinellas County since 2017.<sup>26</sup> Instead, as seen in the map below, Hillsborough sends its children to STGC providers in Brevard, Palm Beach, and St. Johns counties and RTC providers in Broward and Orange Counties. Children notably traveled a median of 94 miles from their previous placement to an STGC provider. This has significant implications for access to care.

FIGURE 10. LOCATION OF HILLSBOROUGH CHILDREN'S PLACEMENTS IN STGC AND RTC PROGRAMS.



( Number of children indicated in parentheses)

<sup>26</sup> The placement records are not clear on this point. This home is in zip code 33709 and is licensed by AHCA as a therapeutic group home. The FSFN records indicate that ten children were placed in another home run by its parent organization in zip code 33781 that ceased being an STGC provider in 2015. These other placements therefore appear to be traditional group home placements.

## 6.2.4 | A NETWORK OF INSTABILITY

In lieu of local residential treatment programs, Hillsborough uses a network of group home providers and enhanced rate foster homes. The providers that served the highest number of refusal children are listed in the chart below. Many of these programs are staff-secure while some are physically secure settings. Many of these placements are short-term and have high turnover rates for all children placed there, while others have notably shorter placement lengths for the refusal children. Most of these providers on the list have requested over 50% of children placed in them to be moved either by having time-limited policies or by ejecting children once they are placed.

**Only three providers on the list have kept refusal children over 30 days on average. Only ten have an average placement length of over 30 days.** As such, a child could reasonably anticipate that a placement in one of these programs will not be permanent. It appears that Hillsborough has a severe placement array deficiency with a lack of local placements willing to provide long term care for the population of children that have been repeatedly ejected from other placements.

**TABLE 14. PROVIDERS WHO HOUSED 10 OR MORE PLACEMENT REFUSAL CHILDREN**

■ = FOSTER HOMES ■ = INSTITUTIONS ■ = CASE MANAGEMENT OFFICE

□ ALL OTHERS ARE GROUP HOMES. (Foster parent names have been limited to initials.)

PROVIDER NAME	NUMBER OF CHILDREN	AVERAGE PLACEMENT LENGTH IN DAYS	PERCENT PROVIDER REQUESTED CHANGE	AVERAGE CONCURRENT CHILDREN	AGGREGATE DAY RATE 2017-2018 <sup>27</sup>
HILLSBOROUGH CO CHILDREN AND YOUTH SERVICES - LAKE MAGDALENE	27 (146) <sup>28</sup>	27.3 (60.2)	47.5% (51.9%)	22.6	\$149.34
RUB. SAN. (CCC)	24 (125)	4.7 (3.9)	86.6% (85.0%)	3.3	\$53.02
HILLSBOROUGH JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER WEST	23 (126)	15.2 (17.8)	78.6% (64.6%)	9.9	
GRACE POINT MENTAL HEALTH CARE	22 (104)	2.5 (2.6)	85.7% (69.0%)	1.8	
CHILDREN'S HOME NETWORK RESIDENTIAL PROGRAM	21 (214)	59.7 (97)	23.1% (32.7%)	46.1	\$142.40
CYN. JAC. (CCC)	19 (291)	5.1 (10.7)	77.8% (84.9%)	6.0	\$19.51
RAP HOUSE	18 (294)	3.7 (11.2)	65.2% (65.3%)	8.1	\$133.85
IGLESIA DE DIOS PENTECOSTAL MI	17 (155)	9.9 (55.2)	65.4% (62.8%)	15.2	\$126.79
WIL. DES. (CCC)	16 (80)	11.6 (24.6)	75.0% (73.2%)	5.3	\$61.23
MIRACLES OUTREACH FRESH START III	16 (225)	7 (17)	72.3% (48.0%)	10.7	\$143.28

TABLE 14. CONTINUED...

MIRACLES OUTREACH- FRESH START MADISON HOUSE	16 (146)	7.7 (14.8)	71.1% (48.7%)	6.0	\$183.78
A SECOND CHANCE	16 (78)	13.8 (30)	80.6% (64.6%)	6.1	\$165.54
NEW BEGINNINGS YOUTH SHELTER	15 (169)	4.3 (10.4)	72.2% (49.2%)	4.7	\$108.51
JOSHUA HOUSE - CHS	15 (172)	17 (65.8)	68.0% (42.9%)	27.2	\$156.73
ZAH. NAJ. (CCC)	15 (54)	4.3 (4)	80.0% (84.1%)	1.0	\$37.08
HARRIS TEEN HOME	15 (98)	18.3 (21.4)	65.5% (71.1%)	7.3	\$176.68
HARRIS TEEN HOME CLEARWATER	15 (113)	5.2 (19.7)	86.7% (63.0%)	7.3	\$174.53
BEACON YOUTH SERVICES	14 (123)	14 (30.3)	59.1% (67.9%)	8.9	\$126.05
NAS. HAR. (CHI)	13 (69)	9.3 (8.7)	90.9% (89.4%)	2.3	\$154.89
J'S HOUSE FOR GIRLS INC	13 (67)	13.9 (22.2)	75.0% (61.1%)	6.8	
GULF COAST CMO PROVIDER	13 (21)	1.9 (1.7)	72.7% (73.8%)	1.9	
LIGHTHOUSE YOUTH SERVICES	12 (153)	33 (43.4)	59.5% (58.0%)	16.4	\$134.05
360CENTERFORCHANGELLCC	12 (65)	17.9 (46)	70.0% (50.5%)	7.4	
FAMILY RESOURCES - ST PETE SHELTER	11 (19)	4.5 (5.1)	61.5% (68.2%)	1.5	
A KIDS PLACE	11 (312)	76 (90.7)	44.4% (51.8%)	60.9	\$115.57
BAYSIDE BOYS HOME	11 (121)	23.5 (46.4)	92.9% (54.8%)	11.6	\$126.75
ST JOSEPHS BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CARE CENTER	11 (57)	6.1 (7.9)	54.6% (57.1%)	2.2	
PEAK GROUP HOME INC	10 (40)	28.7 (47.8)	66.7% (72.9%)	9.3	\$148.59
PATHWAY TO PURPOSE FOR MALES II	10 (64)	17 (48.4)	100.0% (59.0%)	7.7	\$181.36
DIRECTIONS FOR LIVING CMO PROVIDER	10 (21)	2.4 (2.3)	59.3% (63.0%)	2.4	

<sup>27</sup> Aggregate day rate is calculated from a separate public records request showing all DCF placement payments made to providers. The rate is calculated as the total amount paid in the provider's main payment code divided by the number of days the payments covered. The amount does not include clothing payments or independent living stipends. It also does not include third-party payments through child placing agencies, grants, or Medicaid.

<sup>28</sup> The main number indicates the value for refusal children, and the number in parentheses indicates the value for all children in that placement. So, "27 (146)" would mean that 27 refusal children and 146 total children were placed in that home. Similarly, "27.3 (60.2)" would mean that refusal children spent an average of 27.3 days and all children 60.2 days in that home. Please see the Data Addendum for more information on how the rates were calculated.

## 7 | SUMMARY OF THE CHILDREN'S PLACEMENT HISTORIES

The placement histories created from the public placement database show the paths the refusal children took through the system. These histories show that the agencies were, in many cases, *effective* at seeking higher levels of care for children in need. The histories also show, however, high rates of variability in the level of response by agencies. Some children received timely and aggressive intervention while others did not.

It is important to note that placement histories do not tell the children's stories. A list of placements cannot convey the child's experiences in the homes, whether they saw other children they knew, what it felt like returning to a place they had just been asked to leave, or whether they left with their personal belongings or just the clothes on their backs. To understand what the placement histories mean, someone must talk to the children. The Committee's facilitator did that, meeting with children in a local shelter program.

*"You might stay at a house one night, go to school the next morning, and you have no idea if you're going back or going to a whole new place."*



*Foster Child*

### THE COMMITTEE'S REPORT DOCUMENTS THOSE CONVERSATIONS:

*"Dr. Curry asked about the current strengths in the systems of care. One child responded, "Nothing." This particular child has been removed from her home and has been moved from group homes to night-to-night foster homes. Other children who share her experience discussed anxiety of knowing that everything is unknown. One child summed the situation: "You might stay at a house one night, go to school the next morning, and you have no idea if you're going back or going to a whole new place." They also talked about massive delays in seeing or even talking with their parents.*

*Two additional concerns were the children's awareness that foster parents were paid to keep them and that some foster parents anticipated that the children would automatically be grateful and would love them. "I mean, she thinks she's my mom. I have a mom. Anyway, why am I supposed to say thank you? I didn't ask for this. She's nice, but she's not my mom."*

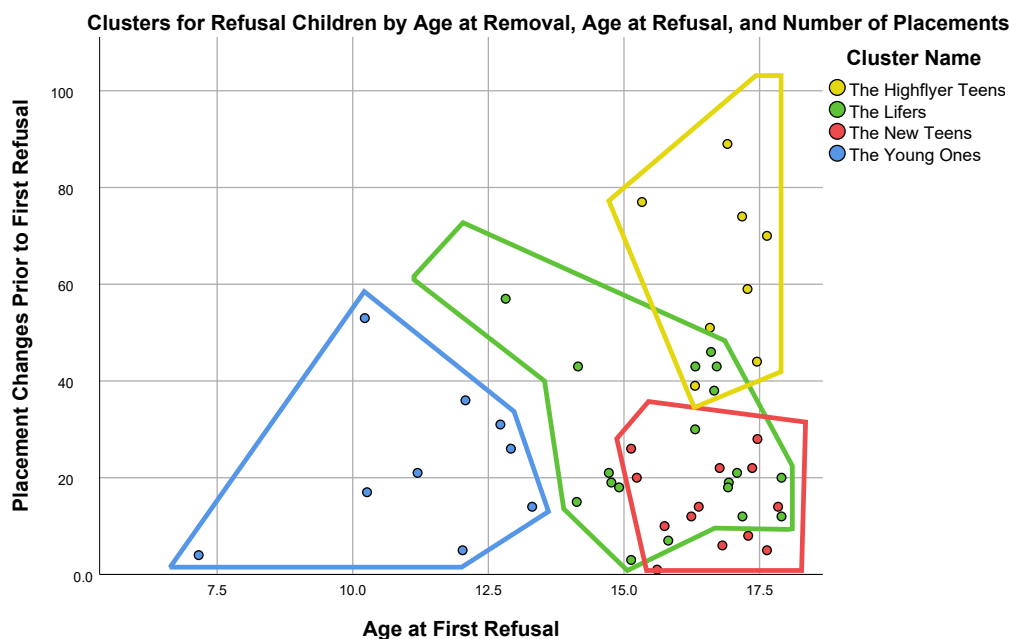
The maps and placement history narratives below bear out the children's experiences.

## 7.1 | CLUSTERS IN THE REFUSAL POPULATION

Cluster analysis was used to divide the dataset into groups. The analysis is highly dependent on the variables used to describe the clusters and requires a decision by the user to determine if the suggested clusters make sense given the data and subject matter. The following variables were chosen:

- AGE AT FIRST REMOVAL,
- AGE AT FIRST REFUSAL
- NUMBER OF PLACEMENTS BEFORE REFUSAL

FIGURE 11. CLUSTERS OF REFUSAL CHILDREN BY COMMON FEATURES



**THE YOUNG ONES** – These 9 children are the youngest in the group of refusers. They had nearly no time on run and more time in therapeutic placements than the Lifers and the New Teens (but no more or less than the Highflyer Teens who spent time in residential programs.)

**THE LIFERS** – These 19 children first came into care around 2005 and have been in and out their entire lives. They have the highest number of days per placement largely because of early long-term placements when they were young. They are the only group with any sizeable amount of time in relative care. They spent less time in Institutional and Enhanced Rate Care than the Highflyer Teens. The group has been further divided based on their rate of disrupting placements: High Disruption and Low Disruption.

**THE NEW TEENS** – These 13 children came into care for the first time as teens, as such their number of placement changes were typically much lower than the other groups. The group has been further divided based on their rate of disrupting placements: High Disruption and Low Disruption.

**THE HIGHFLYER TEENS** – These 8 children have the highest number of placement changes in the group. This is partly due to the length of time they've been in care, but also due to their extreme instability. They were in the largest congregate care settings.

Two children from each group are presented here as examples. The narratives for all 49 children can be found in the Narrative Addendum to this report.

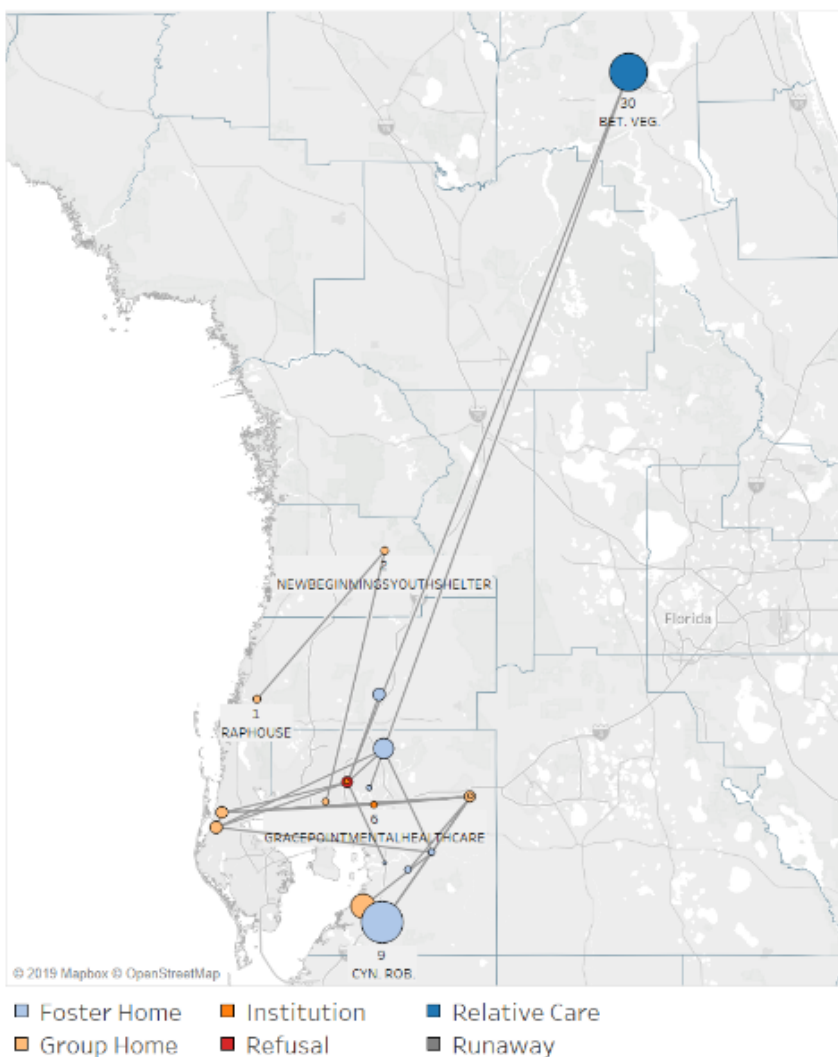
## 7.2 | MAP NOTATIONS AND COLORS

The maps included with these narratives were generated using the zip code data in the Public Placement Database. All 49 placement narratives are available for review online. Eight are included here. The following overview is helpful in understanding the maps.

FIGURE 12. EXAMPLE PLACEMENT MAP

- The dots on the maps indicate the center of the zip code region where a placement was listed. This zip code is typically associated with the actual program or home but is sometimes the business address of a parent organization. Because some placements are in the same zip code, some dots overlap.
- The size of the dots indicates the relative number of days the child spent in that placement with bigger dots for longer placement lengths.
- The color of the dots indicates the placement setting code ranging from dark blue for relative care to dark orange for institutions. Red denotes refusal episodes, but many refusals do not appear on the map because the agency did not log a location where the child stayed.
- The numbers by the dots indicate which database placement entry the dot corresponds to. The maps do not allow text to overlap, so some numbers do not show up, especially on complex maps. The lines between the dots indicate the order the child traveled through the placements. Again, some lines will overlap.
- Runaway episodes and visitations do not typically appear on the map because they do not usually have a location zip code. This creates gaps in the lines as children come back from run and enter different placements.

Child 306401010569



The titles on each placement history narrative below are meant to provide a useful way of referring to them other than by AFCARS number. Additionally, placement refusal episodes are **MARKED** clearly in the narratives to make them easier to locate.

## 7.3 | THE YOUNG ONES

THE YOUNG ONES

The children in this group were the youngest of the refusal children. They had almost no time on run and spent higher percentages of their time in therapeutic care than all groups except the Highflyer Teens.

### 7.3.1 | “NOT QUITE SEVEN”

THE YOUNG ONES

REFUSALS	REFUSAL DAYS	PLACEMENTS	DAYS IN CARE	INTAKE MALTREATMENTS	THERAPEUTIC	CORRECTIONAL	EJECTION RATE
1 over 4 days		53 over 978 days		Emotional Harm, Abandonment, Inadequate Supervision	22.8%	0%	79.2%

**Child 534861010139**, a black male child, was six and a half when he came into foster care. He was placed in a traditional foster home that requested his removal after 49 days. Another traditional foster home kept him for three days, and a third kept him for one. Then a fourth kept him for 14 days, and the fifth kept him for three. Each asked that he be removed.

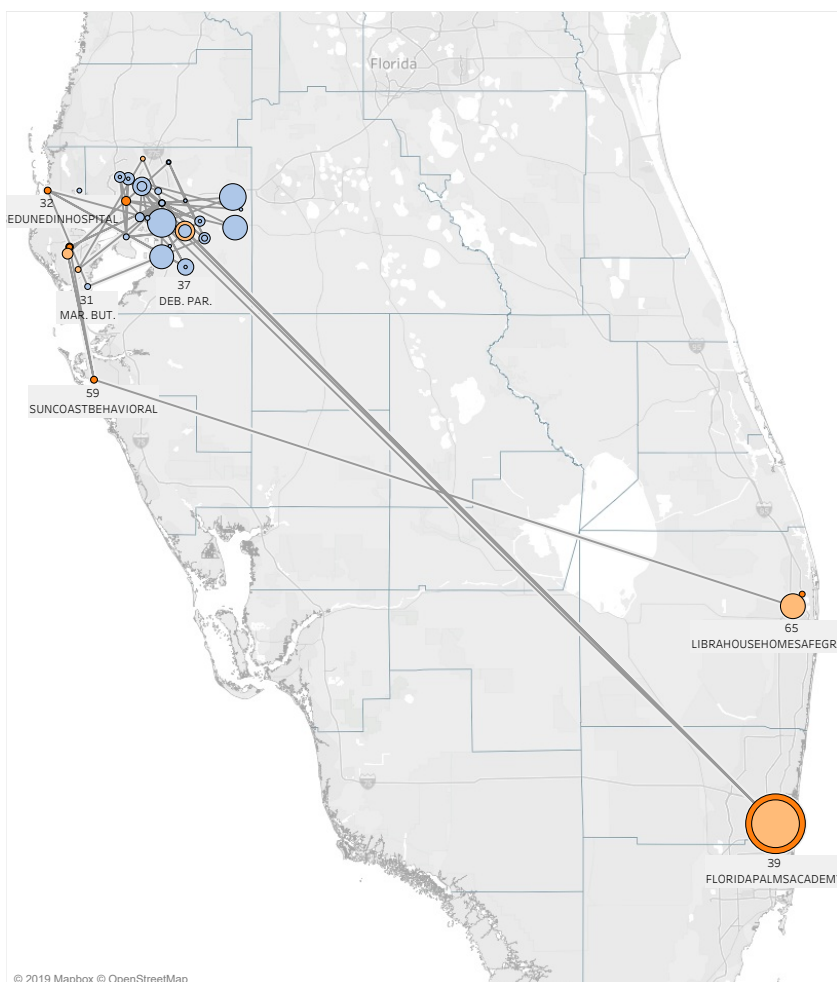
He was then placed in a group home that is found on the common provider list for children who refuse placements. He stayed there a month before a disruption, and he then went to an enhanced rate foster home for one night. The next day he was placed in a Baker Act unit for a week. He was not yet seven.

He had three more night-by-night placements and was Baker Acted again for two days. He was released to a traditional home he had been in before and this time stayed 10 days before she asked him to be removed. He was Baker Acted for the third time.

He did three more night-by-nights and was then placed in a specialized therapeutic foster home. He stayed there 52 days – this was his longest placement in foster care yet. The placement ended with another Baker Act.

When he was released, he stayed two weeks in another therapeutic foster home and was then transferred to a residential treatment center in Broward County. This was placement entry #21. He stayed in that program for 196 days, which is a typical length for such a placement, and was released to a traditional group home in Hillsborough. His placement there ended after one day. The reason listed is “[Case] Dismissed by Court.”

Child 534861010139



© 2019 Mapbox © OpenStreetMap

■ Foster Home    ■ Refusal  
■ Group Home    ■ Relative Care  
■ Institution



"NOT QUITE SEVEN" CONTINUED...

Two months later he was back in care and placed in a traditional foster home. He stayed nine days there and was Baker Acted again. For the next two months he cycled through a mix of traditional and therapeutic (notably not enhanced rate homes), with Baker Acts occurring about once every three to four placements. In placement entry #39, he was put back in the residential treatment center in Broward County. This time he stayed for 306 days.

This time he was released to specialized therapeutic foster homes. One kept him 70 days and asked for his removal. The next kept him for 61 days and asked for his removal. He was now ten years old.

He then entered a period of intense placement instability: 1 night in Baker Act, 2 nights in a group home in Hillsborough, 3 nights in a group home in Pinellas, 2 nights in Baker Act, 1 night in a traditional foster home, 3 nights in Baker Act, 2 nights in a traditional foster home, 1 night in Baker Act, 1 night in an enhanced rate home, 1 night in a traditional home, 1 night in an enhanced rate home, and then 11 nights in an enhanced rate home that had had him before.

**AT THAT POINT, IN PLACEMENT ENTRY #54, HE REFUSED PLACEMENT – FOR ONE DAY. HE STAYED IN AN UNKNOWN LOCATION.**

The next day he was placed in an enhanced rate foster home that asked for his removal after two days.

He was then entered a period of rapid Baker Acts: 10 days in a group home in Pinellas, 3 days in Baker Act, 2 days back in the group home, 4 days in Baker Act, 8 days back in the group home, 9 days in Baker Act (across three different hospitals), and then finally 53 days at a therapeutic group home in Palm Beach County.

His time in the STGC ended with a Baker Act. At this point a new placement pattern began – he started visiting with a relative, possibly his parents. It appears that in placement entry #73, he was reunified. He was ten and a half years old.





## 7.3.2 | "NINE AND A HALF"

THE YOUNG ONES

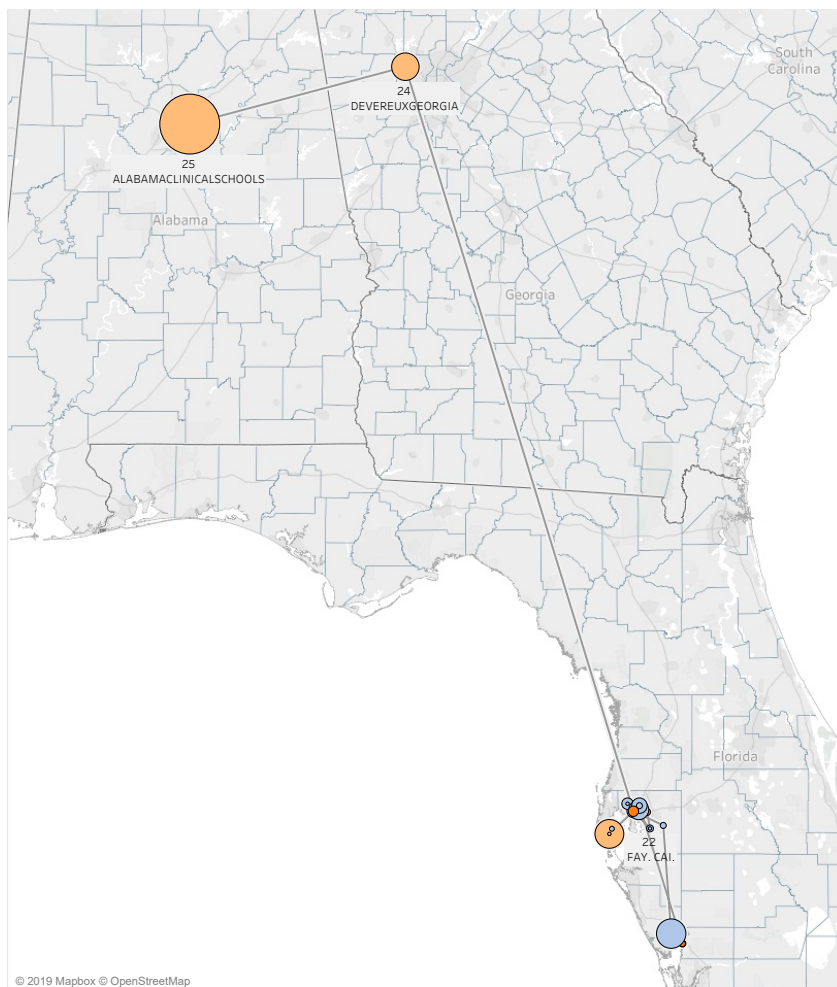
REFUSALS	REFUSAL DAYS	PLACEMENTS	DAYS IN CARE	INTAKE MALTREATMENTS	THERAPEUTIC	CORRECTIONAL	EJECTION RATE
1 over 4 days	17 over 252 days			Drug Abuse Parents	71.8%	0%	68.4%

**Child 659711010429**, a white male, came into foster care in December 2017 at age nine and a half. He spent one day in two traditional foster homes each before being Baker Acted. He was released to another traditional foster home, where he remained for only three days before the foster parent asked for his removal. His next placement was a therapeutic foster home, and it lasted 72 days before it too ended in a Baker Act. It then asked for his removal. He spent over two months at a therapeutic group home and it too asked for his removal.

**IT WAS AT THAT POINT – IN PLACEMENT ENTRY #20 -- THAT HE REFUSED PLACEMENT FOR FOUR DAYS.**

He cycled through foster homes and Baker Acts until he was eventually placed in a group home program in Georgia. After two months, they asked for his removal and he was transferred to a residential treatment center for boys in Alabama. It appears the program specializes in children with sexually reactive behaviors. As of his last placement entry he had been there 299 days. This child had 25 placement entries and was never in a traditional group home.

Child 659711010429



© 2019 Mapbox © OpenStreetMap

- Foster Home
- Group Home
- Institution
- Refusal
- Relative Care

## 7.4 | THE LIFERS



The children in this group came into care very young and were then in and out their entire lives. They had some of the highest stability measures largely due to very long placements when they were young children. They were the only group with any significant amount of time in relative care. They group has been divided into two subgroups -- **Low Disruption** and **High Disruption** -- based on the percent of placement marked as **"Placement Disruption."** One from each subgroup is presented here.

### 7.4.1 | "AN APD KID"



REFUSALS REFUSAL DAYS	PLACEMENTS DAYS IN CARE	INTAKE MALTREATMENTS	THERAPEUTIC	CORRECTIONAL	EJECTION RATE
1 over 1 days	3 over 240 days	Emotional Harm, Drug Abuse Parent, Domestic Violence	0%	0%	33.3%

[Child 49641010019](#), a black male child, came into care at five years old. He was immediately placed in a relative placement that lasted 232 days before ending with a guardianship.

He re-entered care at the age of fifteen and was placed immediately into a group home on the list of common providers for refusal children. He lasted 6 days there before the provider requested a change. He went to another group home on the common provider list and lasted 2 days before there was a placement disruption.

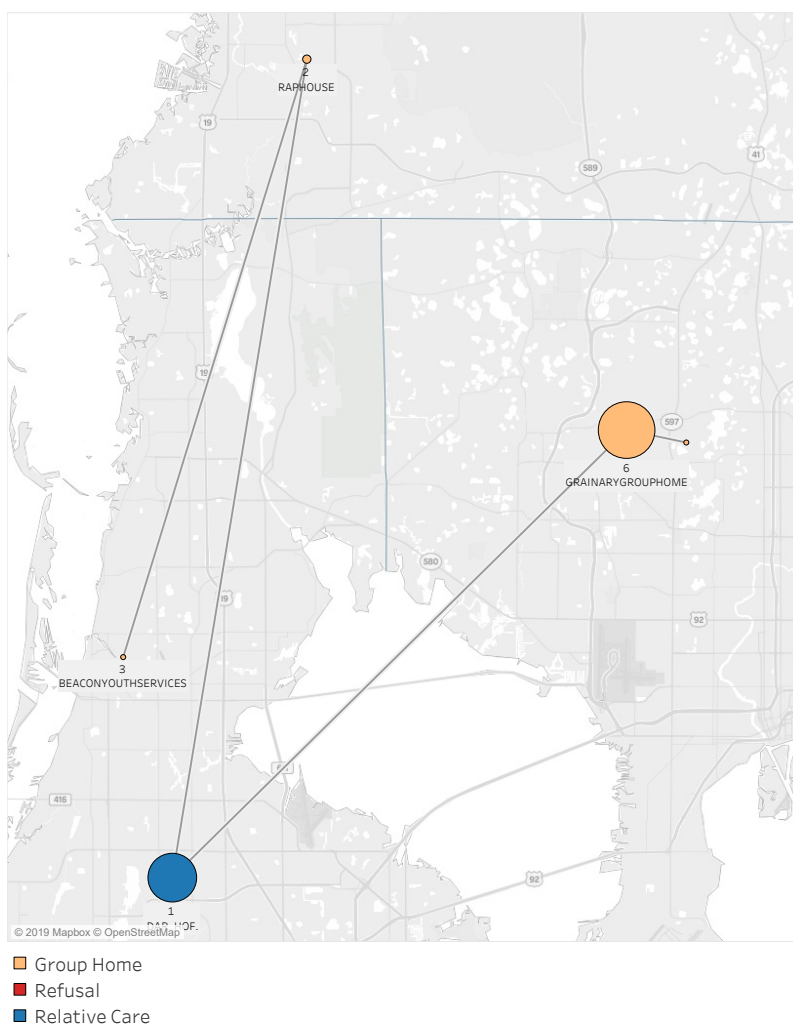
**AT THAT POINT, ON HIS NINTH DAY BACK IN FOSTER CARE IN PLACEMENT ENTRY #4, HE REFUSED PLACEMENT FOR ONE DAY.**

The next day he went to a group home on the list of common providers and was there 5 days before that group home requested that he be moved. He was then placed in a group home for children with developmental disabilities, where he remained for 315 days.

He then left the group home and was placed back with the relative caregiver that had guardianship for nearly a decade. His case immediately closed out in a guardianship even though the law requires children to be in their guardian's custody for six months prior to closing a case. This suggests that he remained in the group home even though placed back in the relative's legal custody.

This child had the lowest rate for providers requesting a change of placement prior to refusal because he only had three placements.

Child 049641010019



## 7.4.2 | "SIBLING VISIT"

REFUSALS REFUSAL DAYS	PLACEMENTS DAYS IN CARE	INTAKE MALTREATMENTS	THERAPEUTIC	CORRECTIONAL	EJECTION RATE
2 over 3 days	21 over 1,558 days	Emotional Harm, Drug Abuse Parents, Domestic Violence, Inadequate Housing, Abandonment	0%	0%	33.3%

**Child 700004601801**, a white female child, came into care at birth and spent her first two years with a relative who eventually took custody of her. She came back into care eight years later and was immediately placed into a group home at age eight. After three weeks there, she went to a traditional foster home and was then placed back with the relative she was removed from. Her case closed out again, this time in a guardianship.

Three years later at age 13, she came back into care. She started in a foster home and was there for over three months before they asked her to leave. She then went through night-by-night placements until being placed in a group home for almost three months. It also asked for her removal. She then went through more night-to-night placements and was put on an extended visitation order with an unnamed person for almost four months.

When she returned, she started cycling through group homes and placements that show up frequently on the lists of children who have refused placement. Those placements were month to month, though, until she was discharged from a foster home in placement entry 20. She then began night-by-nights placements. She went through five night-by-night placements, being asked to leave each one.

**THEN, IN PLACEMENT ENTRY #24, SHE REFUSED PLACEMENT – FOR TWO DAYS. SHE STAYED IN AN UNKNOWN LOCATION.**

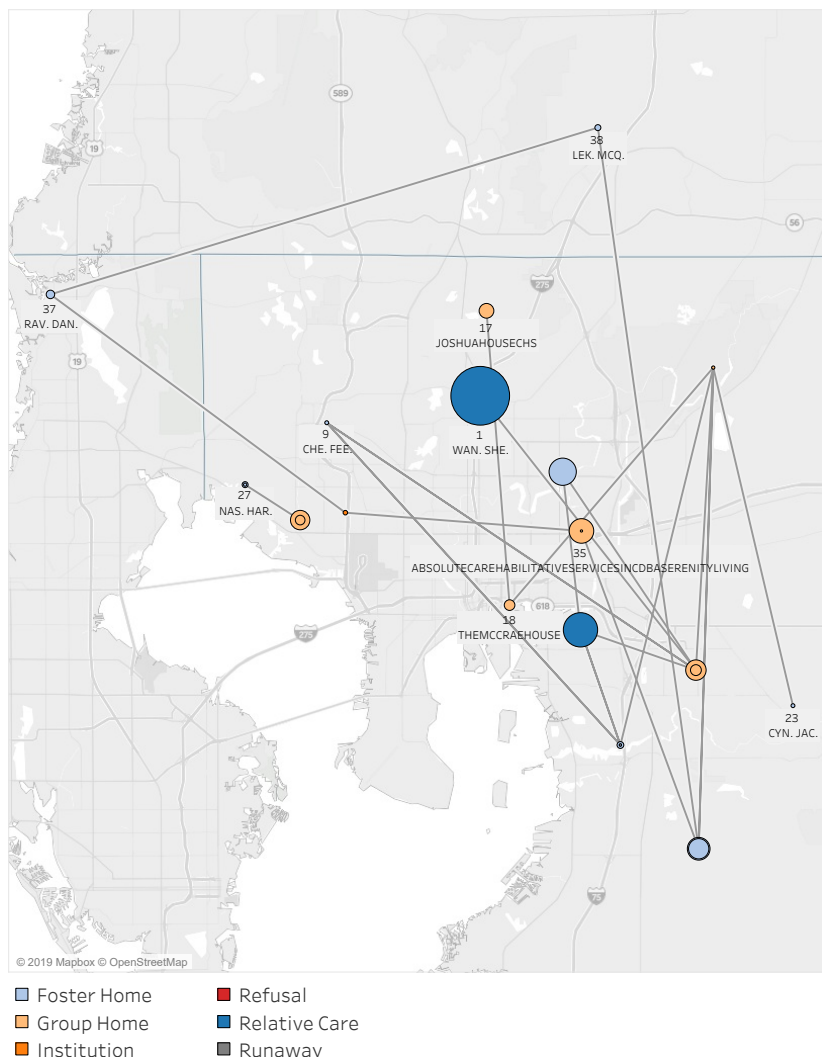
She went to a group home for one day. The placement disrupted.

**THEN, IN ENTRY #26, SHE REFUSED AGAIN – FOR ONE DAY. SHE STAYED IN AN UNKNOWN LOCATION.**

She was placed with a foster parent she had not been with before, but that person kept her only one week. During that time, she went on a sibling visit for three days. She then cycled through group homes and foster homes, running away briefly, until the agency marked her as "No Appropriate Placement Found" and she stayed at the case management office for four days in placement entry #36.

She had two more foster placements after that, one for two weeks and one for one, before being placed with her final foster parent. As of the end of the database, she had been there for 100 days.

Child 700004601801



## 7.5 | THE NEW TEENS

THE NEW TEENS

These children were new to the system as teenagers. As such they tended to have much lower placement counts than the other groups. The group has been subdivided in **High Disruption** and **Low Disruption** based on the percent of placements ending due to “Placement Disruption.” One of each subgroup is presented here.

### 7.5.1 | “CASE DISMISSED”

THE NEW TEENS

REFUSALS REFUSAL DAYS	PLACEMENTS DAYS IN CARE	INTAKE MALTREATMENTS	THERAPEUTIC	CORRECTIONAL	EJECTION RATE
2 over 2 days	5 over 213 days	Emotional Harm	0%	0%	50%

**Child 619931010279**, a black male child, came into foster care for the first time just short of his 17th birthday. He was placed in a group home that’s found on the list of common providers for children that refuse placements. After 112 days, the court dismissed his case.

He came back into care six months later and was placed with a non-relative placement. He was asked to leave after 35 days. He then moved to an enhanced rate foster home and was asked to leave after 8 days. He was then put in a residential group care facility in Orange County, and only stayed there 29 days before running away. That placement was not labeled as therapeutic.

When he returned, he was placed in a Hillsborough group home on the list of common providers for children who refuse placements for a day before the placement disrupted.

**AT THIS POINT, IN PLACEMENT ENTRY #7, HE REFUSED PLACEMENT FOR THE FIRST TIME – FOR A SINGLE DAY. HE IS LISTED AS STAYING AT THE CASE MANAGEMENT OFFICE.**

He then ran away for four days.

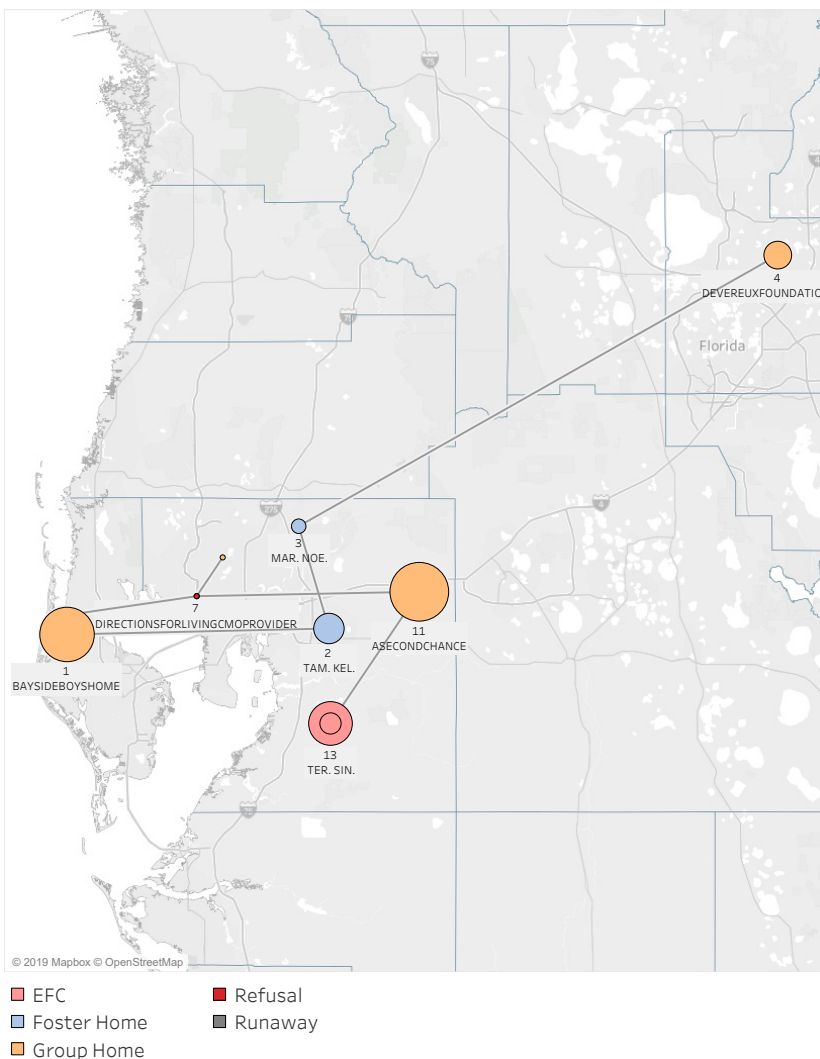
When he returned, he was placed in another group home on the common provider list, and that placement disrupted after a day.

**HE THEN REFUSED FOR THE SECOND TIME IN PLACEMENT ENTRY #10 – FOR A SINGLE DAY. HE WAS LISTED AS STAYING AT THE CASE MANAGEMENT OFFICE.**

He was then placed in a group home on the list of common providers where he stayed for 130 days before aging out. He has been in an Extended Foster Care (EFC) home for 89 days as of the end of the database.

He never had any therapeutic placements and was never incarcerated.

Child 619931010279





## 7.5.2 | "DAY ONE AND HOMELESS"

THE NEW TEENS

REFUSALS REFUSAL DAYS	PLACEMENTS DAYS IN CARE	INTAKE MALTREATMENTS	THERAPEUTIC	CORRECTIONAL	EJECTION RATE
1 over 1 days	22 over 212 days	Child Behavior Problems, Caregiver Inability to Cope	0%	0.9%	92.6%

**Child 527611000039**, a white male child, came into care at age 16. The agency immediately logged that it had no appropriate placement. He stayed that day in an unknown location.

The next day he was placed in a group home that kept him for 2 days, then another group home that kept him another 2 days, then a third group home that kept him 71 days. He was then arrested for a day.

He was released back to the same group home and stayed there 21 days. This placement ended with his transfer to a drug detox center for almost a week. He was transferred to a drug program in Polk County for 19 days before being asked to leave.

He was then placed in a group home in Pasco County for 5 days, a group home in Hillsborough for 20 days, and then a group home in Pinellas for 11 days. All three requested he be moved.

This began a period of intense placement instability: 1 day in a group home, 5 days in an enhanced rate foster home, 1 day in a different group home, 6 days back at the foster home, 2 days on run, 1 day in a Baker Act unit, 4 days back at the foster home, 7 days in a group home, 1 days in a new enhanced rate foster home, another day in a Baker Act unit, 4 days on run, and then 1 day in juvenile detention, 1 day on run, and 1 day in a drug detox center.

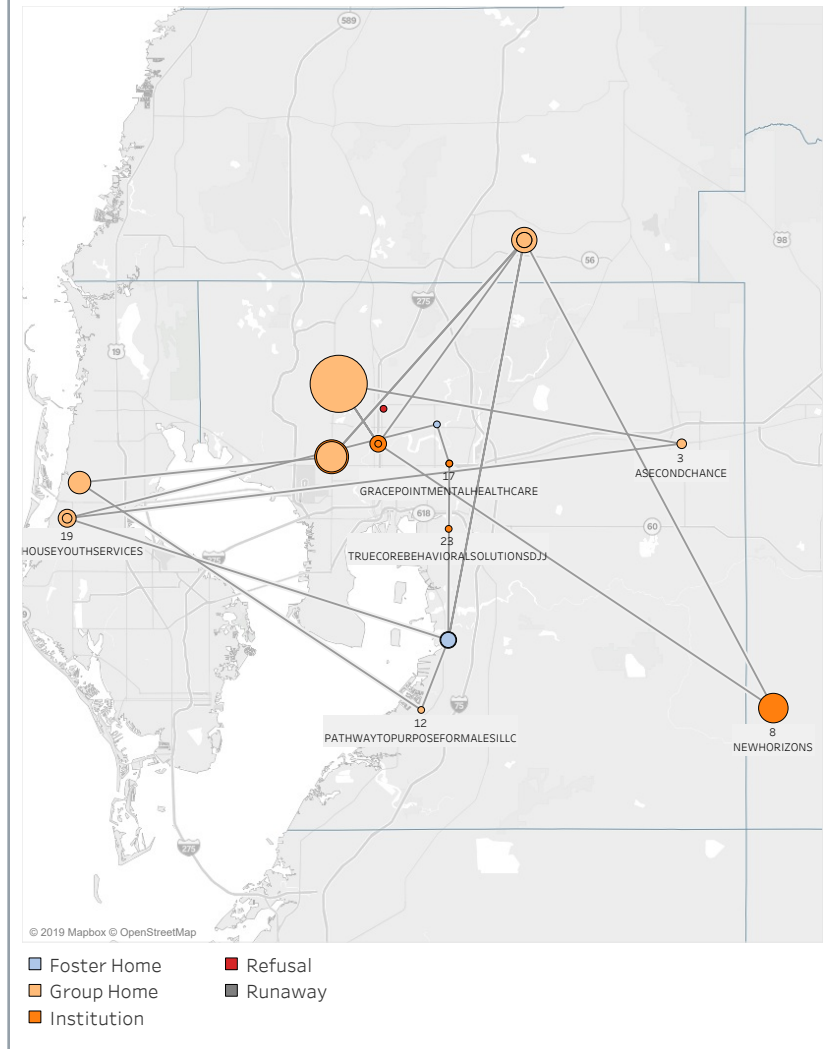
He was moved back to the group home in Pasco but ran away after four days.

**WHEN HE RETURNED NINE DAYS LATER, HE REFUSED PLACEMENT IN PLACEMENT ENTRY #28 – FOR ONE DAY. HE STAYED THAT NIGHT IN THE CASE MANAGEMENT OFFICE.**

The next day he went on run for 28 days. He was recovered, placed in juvenile detention, and released back to the group home in Pasco. He ran again for 3 days and was arrested again. This time for 25 days. He was released, again, to the group home in Pasco County. At the end of the database, he had been there two weeks.

Despite repeated Baker Acts and Marchman Acts, this child was never placed in a therapeutic placement other than the brief stay in a drug program in Polk. He had 34 placement entries.

Child 527611000039



## 7.6 | THE HIGHFLYER TEENS

### THE HIGHFLYER TEENS

These children had the highest number of placement changes, a factor of both the amount of time they spent in care and their high levels of instability. They were placed in the largest and highest turnover congregate care programs. Two examples are presented here.

### 7.6.1 | “THE KID EVERYONE IS TALKING ABOUT”

### THE HIGHFLYER TEENS

REFUSALS	REFUSAL DAYS	PLACEMENTS	DAYS IN CARE	INTAKE MALTREATMENTS	THERAPEUTIC	CORRECTIONAL	EJECTION RATE
3 over 3 days		44 over 790 days		Child Behavior Problems, Caregiver Inability to Cope	0%	39.5%	65.4%

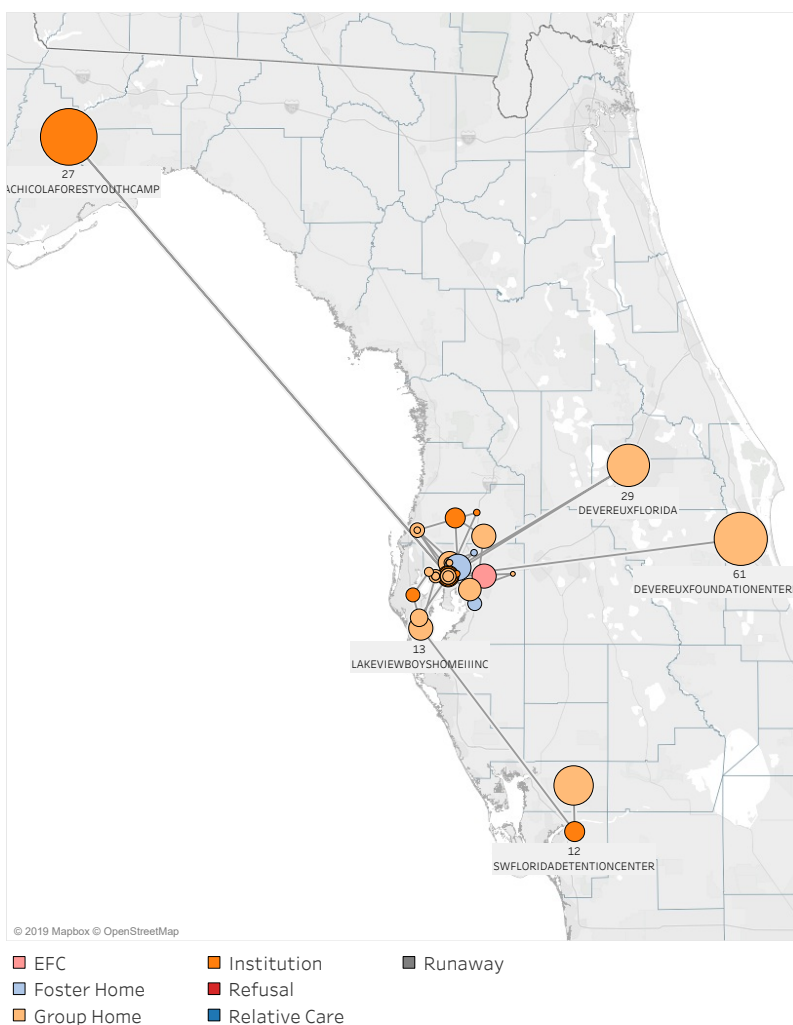
Child 996871010479, a black male child, came into foster care at age fifteen. He went directly into a shelter program found on the list of common providers for children who refuse placements, and then six days later he went to jail. He was only in DJJ custody for one day before being released back to the same shelter. They kept him for two weeks before he appears to have entered a Juvenile Addictions Receiving Facility for two days. When he was released, he went back to the same shelter for two weeks. At that point, in placement entry #6, he was arrested for the second time.

This time he was released to a different group home. He stayed there two weeks before being arrested again. He spent ten days in jail this time. He was put in a third group home, but only lasted four days there before they asked for him to be removed. He was then put in a charter school for youth with significant problems in foster care. He lasted almost three months there before being arrested again. He was in jail 21 days this time.

He was placed in a group home for a month, but they requested he be moved. He then stayed three days at a group home that is found on the list of common providers for children who refuse placement, and this appears to begin a period of intense instability. He spent 3 nights there, 2 nights on run, 3 nights back at the group home, 2 nights in jail, 9 nights back at the group home, 3 nights back in jail, and then 27 nights in another group home on the list of common providers, before winding up in jail again – this time for 20 days.

He was released into night-by-night placements: 1 night, 2 nights, 1 night, and then 24 nights in jail. At this point he appears to have been committed to a program in Northern Florida. He spent 175 days there. And when

Child 996871010479



he was released, he returned to Hillsborough and was placed at the homeless shelter he was first placed in when coming into foster care. He was then transferred to a residential program in Orange County, where he stayed for three months before they asked for him to be removed.

He returned to an enhanced rate foster home that's on the list of common providers. He stayed there a month. He ran for two days, returned, ran again, and was placed in another common provider. He cycled through four more night-by-night placements (all on the common provider list) before being arrested again in placement entry #38.

He was released back to a common provider foster parent, went to a common provider group home, and was arrested again. When he was released, he cycled through enhanced rate foster homes (all on the list) until he was arrested again. When he was released again, he began to cycle again.

**IN PLACEMENT ENTRY #53 HE REFUSED A PLACEMENT FOR THE FIRST TIME – FOR ONE DAY, AND HE STAYED IN AN UNKNOWN LOCATION.**

He ran the next day – for one day.

When he returned, he was put back into a group home on the common provider list. He stayed there six days before "parent/relative/guardian" asked for him to be removed.

**AT THAT POINT HE REFUSED AGAIN – FOR A SINGLE DAY -- AND STAYED IN AN UNKNOWN LOCATION.**

He was then put back in the same shelter he was in when he first came into care and first got out of the program in North Florida. He was there two days before there was a disruption.

**HE THEN REFUSED PLACEMENT AGAIN – AGAIN FOR ONE DAY.**

He was put in a group home that's on the common provider list and he stayed there almost a month before being Baker Acted. He spent 10 days in the Baker Act unit, far longer than statutorily allowed without court involvement. When he was released, he was placed in a therapeutic placement for the first time – in placement entry #61: a specialized therapeutic group home in Brevard County. He stayed there five months and aged out. This was his longest placement since the delinquency program in North Florida at placement entry #27. According to the database, in placement entry #63, he participated in Extended Foster Care for 31 days before apparently being terminated. He is now an adult.



## 7.6.2 | "ELEVEN DAYS OF (TRAFFICKING) SANCTUARY"

### THE HIGHFLYER TEENS

REFUSALS	REFUSAL DAYS	PLACEMENTS	DAYS IN CARE	INTAKE MALTREATMENTS	THERAPEUTIC	CORRECTIONAL	EJECTION RATE
2 over 2 days		51 over 1,103 days		Emotional Abuse or Neglect,	1.2%	8.3%	61.1%

[Child 175581010229](#), a black female child, entered care at age 10 and was placed in a foster home in Pinellas County. After 76 days, a placement disruption caused her to be moved to another foster home in Pinellas. She was there eight days before there was another placement disruption. She then went to a third foster home in Pinellas, this time for three days before the foster parent asked her to be removed.

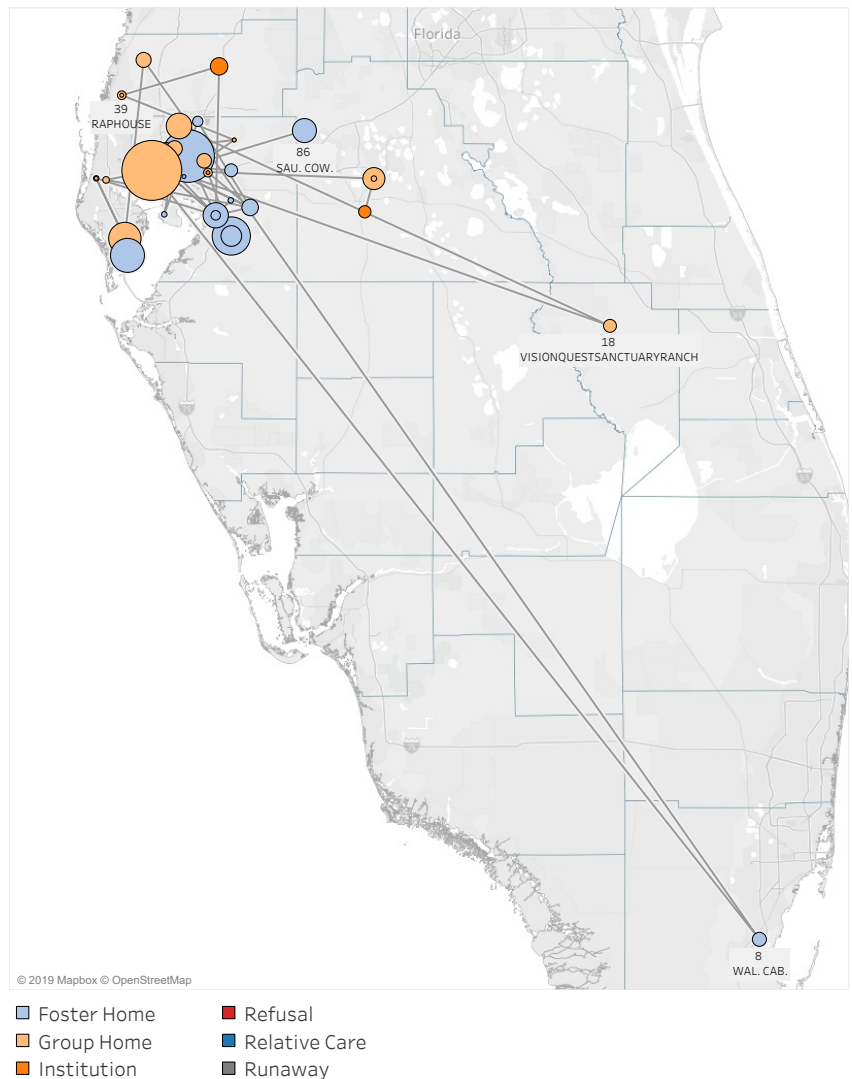
She then went to her first group home, also in Pinellas, for 69 days. Another placement disruption sent her to a shelter for one day, back to the group home for six days, and then another group home for fifteen days. After yet another placement disruption, she was placed in a therapeutic foster home in Miami-Dade County. This is placement entry #8.

The Miami home only lasted thirteen days before another placement disruption brought her back to Hillsborough County. She stayed in a group home there for 236 days. It ended with her going on a five-day trial visit to her parents, returning for a day, and then running for a day. She came back to the group home and they kept her for 24 more days. She was then reunified with her parents.

Two years later, at the age of 13, she came back into care. She entered a group home that's on the list of common providers for children who refuse placements and stayed there two weeks when she was Baker Acted for a day. When she was released, she went to a different group home and stayed there 43 days. It asked that she be removed. She was then placed in a program that specializes in housing victims of human trafficking. She was there eleven days and was arrested.

She spent ten days in the Polk County juvenile detention center and was released to a group home in Polk. After a month, she ran away. When she returned, she was placed in Hillsborough in a group home on the list of common providers. She went from a foster home to another foster home, then ran for nearly a month. She was recovered when she was arrested. She spent 17 days in the Hillsborough juvenile detention center. This was her 29th placement entry.

Child 175581010229





She was released to a traditional foster parent who kept her for two days. She went to another traditional foster home for a week, and then yet another traditional home for 18 days. Each of those homes asked that she be removed. She then entered a group home that is on the common provider list. She stayed there five days before going on run for three days. When she returned, she was put back in a traditional foster home and had night-to-night placements: 1 day in a foster home, 1 day in a group home, 1 day in another group home, 1 day on a visitation with an unknown person, 5 days in a group home she had been in before, 20 days in the Pasco County juvenile detention center, 6 days in an enhanced foster home that's on the common list, 2 days in a traditional home, and then 42 days in that previous provider on the list. This was her longest placement since she came back into care the second time, and the provider requested she be removed.

The agency presumably had nowhere to place her, so she went on a visitation with a relative for 12 days. When she returned, she went back on night-to-nights: 3 days in a traditional, 1 day in a traditional, 3 days on run, 2 days back in the home that had kept her 42 days, 2 days in a traditional, 20 days in the Hillsborough County juvenile detention center. When she was released, she then essentially spent the summer (76 days) on a visit with a relative. When she returned, it was back to night-by-night placements – ten of them before she was arrested again, released again, and back to night-to-nights. Three more before she ran away again: this time for 140 days.

She was recovered by getting arrested and spent 21 days in the Hillsborough juvenile detention center. When she was released, the pattern began again: 1 day in an enhanced home on the common provider list, 14 days in a group home, 1 day in a group home. The agency then logged that "no appropriate placement" could be found and she stayed that night in an unknown location. That was placement entry #72.

**ON THE NEXT DAY, IN PLACEMENT ENTRY #73, SHE REFUSED A PLACEMENT FOR THE FIRST TIME AND SPENT ANOTHER NIGHT IN AN UNKNOWN LOCATION.**

The next day she was placed back in an enhanced rate foster home that she had been in once before. She was there five days, then went on a trial home visit. When she came back from her home visit, she was sent to another foster home for four days, then another one for 124 days. The provider requested she be removed, and she was sent to a group home and ran away after two days.

**WHEN SHE RETURNED, SHE REFUSED PLACEMENT – FOR ONE DAY, AND SHE SPENT THAT TIME IN AN UNKNOWN LOCATION.**

The next day she ran away again. The next day she went to a non-relative placement that kept her for 16 days. Then she transferred to yet another non-relative placement which kept her for 182 days. This was her longest placement ever and, after it ended, she ran away for 141 more days. She was picked, again, and held at the Hillsborough County juvenile detention center for 19 days. When she was released, she was placed back in yet another non-relative placement. She had been there for 38 days as of the end of the database. She had 86 placement entries.



## 8 | DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The data show that the problems identified by the Committee are broader than just youth who are dually served in the Dependency and Delinquency systems, and even broader than children who refused placements. Instead, the underlying cause of much of the turmoil these children face appears to be extreme levels of placement instability for a specific population of children that is driven in large part by a high rate of ejection and limited access to intensive therapeutic programs. This is especially true for children who had been placed in detention or Baker Acted.

These problems are not easily fixed. The recommendations below are offered based on the data.

### THE REFUSAL CHILDREN ARE TOO DIVERSE FOR A ONE-PROGRAM SOLUTION.

The data show that refusal children as a group had a wide range of ages, genders, races, and experiences in care. Though there is a definite need for expansion of the placement array in Hillsborough, any solution focused on creating one program would be too limited to address the diverse population of children experiencing the negative outcomes described here.

Similarly, delinquency system involvement appeared to be a major factor for fewer than half of the refusal children, and not any more so than other children with high numbers of placement changes. A child's first arrest and Baker Act raised their instability rates significantly. Therefore, solutions must create stable housing for this population while also addressing the underlying causes pushing children into the criminal justice systems.

While the refusal children were diverse, they were also disproportionately black and mixed-race compared both to their proportions in the general community and their proportions in Hillsborough's system. Racial disparity in the child welfare system is well documented, but this report shows that it also extends to the population of children who refuse placements. Hillsborough should discuss with the children their experiences around race in foster homes and programs to determine what role it plays in children having unstable placements.

### HILLSBOROUGH APPEARS TO HAVE AN EJECTION CULTURE THAT IS SIGNIFICANTLY ACCELERATING PLACEMENT INSTABILITY.

The main distinguishing feature of the refusal children and others like them was placement instability. This instability was driven in large part by providers requesting that children be ejected. As seen in the data, some children were ejected from over 90% of their placements. High rates of ejection were seen in both group homes and the enhanced rate foster homes. Foster homes were less represented with this group of children, suggesting a high rate of *rejection* (i.e., denial prior to placement), especially for children who had delinquency and Baker Act history.

Ejection is not always a negative. A child may be ejected from a program to one that can better meet their needs, or a foster parent may "do the agency a favor" and take a child for the night who would otherwise have nowhere to go pending an identified placement. In limited circumstances, both acts can be beneficial to a child. The data and placement histories, however, suggest that Hillsborough children were routinely ejected without

a plan for their transition to a more stable program, and children were pushed into serial night-by-night placements with no more appropriate placement waiting. Even if those ejections were a result of the children's behaviors, that does not excuse serially placing a child with numerous prior ejections into additional homes that are not suitable for their care. The aggregate effect in Hillsborough is a rampant ejection culture that is driving up placement instability and, based on the Committee's interviews with youth and the high numbers of refusals, causing a deterioration in the engagement and trust levels of this population of children.

This report takes no position on what Hillsborough's reject/eject policy should be. Some states and systems have adopted strict "no reject / no eject" policies that significantly limit the circumstances under which a program can refuse a child. Policies that too narrowly limit a program's ability to determine its own *milieu* (i.e., admitted group of children) without other options for placement of children may create problems internal to the programs. Hillsborough should discuss the level of ejection it wishes to permit and how it wishes to handle children who are serially ejected from placements. Whatever it decides, it should adopt an escalation plan for these youth and then follow it consistently.

## THE LAW IS NOT THE LIMITING FACTOR.

The current legal regimes appear sufficient to provide care for this population of children. The placement histories show examples of children being successfully placed through section 39.407, the delinquency commitment process, and the Department's plenary placement authority for foster care and group care placements. The speed at which many of these placements changed suggests that children agreed to the placements as well.

There does not appear to be any need for an entirely new commitment regime for children who refuse placements. Notably, chapter 39 already permits DCF to place a child in a staff-secure program without a court order, and section 39.407 permits the commitment of children to physically secure residential treatment centers if they are diagnosed with an emotional disorder and cannot be cared for in an available less restrictive setting. The legal standard for emotional disorder encompasses children with severe conduct disorders, mood disorders, and oppositional defiant disorder. The proposed regime, therefore, appears redundant to existing law.

The data, however, show that children's placement options shift after their first arrest or Baker Act, away from family settings and into congregate care. The data also show that even many secure placements frequently requested the children's removal after placement. The significant limiting factor, therefore, appears to be the lack of available therapeutic group care and residential treatment programs that are willing to work with this population. There is no reason to believe any new program would not face similar milieu challenges. The solution, therefore, must aim at root causes as well as expanding placement options.

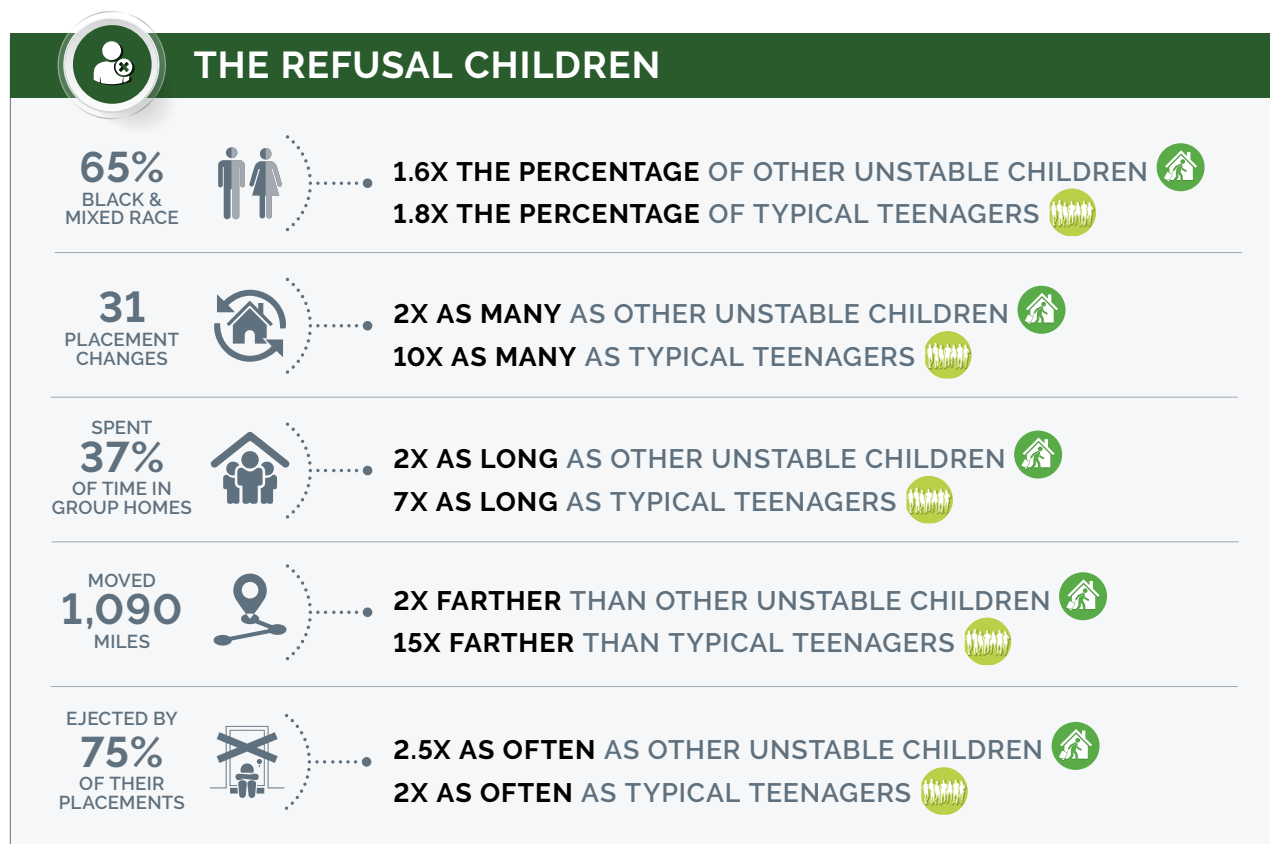
The data additionally suggest that male children with a history of delinquency involvement were not as frequently considered for or approved for therapeutic placements after their arrest. Hillsborough should explore whether there are artificial barriers between children seen as "mental health" cases and "behavioral" cases when determining which service array to utilize and whether those barriers have gendered components. These barriers could be in the MDT staffing process, the suitability assessment process, or the admissions criteria for the programs.

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The author hopes this report is helpful to the Hillsborough community. Please feel free to contact us with any questions or concerns.

## WHO ARE THE CHILDREN REFUSING PLACEMENTS IN HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY?

Placement instability severely harms children's emotional wellbeing, brain development, education attainment, and ability to form positive relationships. Most foster children have three or fewer placements, but the **children who refused placement** had **TEN TIMES** that number, typically before they ever refused.



## HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY HAS TWO PROBLEMS



### HIGHEST CONCENTRATION OF HIGHLY UNSTABLE CHILDREN

- 3.55 out of 100 children in Hillsborough were highly unstable with 20+ placements and with 67% or more unplanned placement exits.
- The statewide rate was 1.31 unstable children out of 100.
- The children were routinely sent 100+ miles away to therapeutic group care programs.



### HIGHEST CONCENTRATION OF PROVIDERS WHO EJECT CHILDREN

- Hillsborough providers requested children be removed 2x as often as the other largest regions of the state.
- In 2017, 60% of all Hillsborough placements ended because of provider request.
- Only 3 of the most common 30 placements for refusal children kept them more than 30 days on average.



## THE SUNCOAST REGION NEEDS LOCAL PROVIDERS WILLING TO WORK WITH HIGH NEEDS CHILDREN.

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The **Children & Youth Law Clinic** is an in-house, live-client clinic that represents children in foster care and former foster youth in dependency, health care, mental health, disability, independent living, education, immigration and other general civil legal matters, ensuring that they have a voice in court proceedings. Leveraging its position within the University for the benefit of the wider community, the Clinic participates in interdisciplinary research, provides training and technical assistance for lawyers, judges, and other professionals, and produces legal scholarship and practice materials on the legal needs of children, with an emphasis on older foster youth.

Author: **Robert Latham** ([rlatham@law.miami.edu](mailto:rlatham@law.miami.edu))

Student research and review by:

Nicole Toback (Miami Law)

Margarita Aviles (Barry University School of Social Work)

The author has no affiliation with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter of this report except as disclosed here. The author is Associate Director of the Children and Youth Law Clinic at the University of Miami School of Law, a live-client clinic representing children and young adults who have been in Florida's foster care system. The author mentors a statewide group of former and current foster youth pro bono and has spoken at child welfare conferences and consulted with state and private agencies on child welfare related issues. The author served as next friend in a federal class action lawsuit against DCF related to placement instability in Florida's Southern Region.

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI  
SCHOOL of LAW



1311 Miller Drive, F305  
Coral Gables, Florida 33146  
Ph: 305-284-3123