

A Snapshot of Florida's Child Welfare System

Some Recent Trends and Community Comparisons of Children Served and Performance



Florida's Community-Based Approach to the Protection of Children

Florida's child protection system was created to prevent the occurrence of child abuse, neglect, and abandonment, through a partnership between the Department of Children and Families (DCF), other agencies, the courts, law enforcement agencies, service providers, and local communities. (Section 39.001 (1), Florida Statutes)

Florida's community-based system of care is designed to provide equal protection to children under the law through consistent intake decision-making regarding the children to be served at the front end of the system, developing local systems of care to meet varying community needs, matching the needs of children and families to community resources, and allowing flexible development of evidence-based and promising approaches to the protection of children.

Section 409.986(1), F.S. requires that:

- DCF “provide child protection and child welfare services to children through contracting with community-based care lead agencies.”
- Communities “have responsibility for and participation in ensuring safety, permanency, and well-being for all children in the state.”
- Outsourcing be accompanied by “comprehensive oversight of the programmatic, administrative, and fiscal operation of those entities. . . . The appropriate care of children is ultimately the responsibility of the state and outsourcing such care does not relieve the state of its responsibility to ensure that appropriate care is provided.”

Intake for the community-based system of care is provided by DCF and county sheriffs, which provide primarily a gatekeeping function, deciding which children and families will receive services:

- DCF's Florida Abuse Hotline receives almost 300,000 child-related calls, web reports and faxes and determines which ones contain a reasonable suspicion of maltreatment to trigger an investigation.
- Child Protective Investigations are conducted by county sheriffs in six counties and DCF in the other 61. Investigations determine which children and families should receive post-investigation services, protecting the child through removal and placement in out-of-home care, or through case-managed, in-home services (by court order or non-judicially) or through informal voluntary family support services.



Florida's Results-Oriented Accountability Requirements

The Florida Legislature in 2014 required DCF to develop and implement a comprehensive, results-oriented accountability program (Section 409.997, Florida Statutes). The purpose is to monitor and measure the use of resources, the quality and amount of services provided, and child and family outcomes. The program includes data analysis; research review and evaluation; and an assessment of individual entities' performance, as well as the performance of groups of entities working together to provide an integrated system of care. Data analyzed through the program must inform development and maintenance of an evidence-supported program of quality improvement which promotes individual and organizational learning.

The accountability program must incorporate a limited number of understandable, valid and reliable outcome measures, "using available data to quantify outcomes as children move through the system of care." Valid and reliable measures must be gathered over suitable time periods, reflect authentic results, and not be susceptible to manipulation. The program requires "regular and periodic monitoring that track identified outcome measures on a statewide, regional, and provider-specific basis. Monitoring reports must identify trends and chart progress."

An analytical framework will build on the results of outcomes monitoring and assess validity of observed associations between interventions and measured outcomes. It will use quantitative methods to adjust for variations in demographic or other conditions. Longitudinal studies will evaluate longer term outcomes, such as safety, permanency, and transition to self-sufficiency. The analysis may also include qualitative research methods to provide insight into statistical patterns. Research review will identify interventions that are supported by evidence as causally linked to improved outcomes. An ongoing process of evaluation will determine the efficacy and effectiveness of various interventions.

Results must be "transparent for all parties in the child welfare system, as well as policymakers and the public." "Presentation of the data shall provide a comprehensible, visual report card for the state and each community-based care region, indicating the current status of the outcomes relative to each goal and trends in that status over time." Presentation will report outcome measures that assess the performance of DCF, the community-based care lead agencies, and their subcontractors working together to provide an integrated system of care. An annual performance report must be submitted by October 1 of each year to interested parties, including the dependency judges in the community-based care service area.

This report compares and ranks communities on various indicators so communities can see how they compare. No adjustments are made for the diversity in demographics, resources, or other relevant characteristics, as DCF has too little information on the relationships between such local variations at this time to make such adjustments. However, this report continually refers to how differences in communities and their systems of care affect the findings and the relationship between measures.



Florida's Flow of Children through its Child Protection System

Florida's community-based system of care handles a very large volume through its intake process handled by DCF and sheriffs. Many children and families have service needs, but not all needs can be met, due to limitations of available resources. The large volume requires a triage to ensure that only those with the greatest need move deeper into the system.

Florida Abuse Hotline

Of 272,493 intakes (calls, web reports and faxes) concerning suspected maltreatment received by the Hotline in FY 2014-15, 215,337 (79%) were screened in as reports to be investigated. These were handled as 186,504 investigations, with some intakes grouped together into a single investigation.

Child Protective Investigations

The 186,504 investigations included approximately 260,000 children who were suspected victims of maltreatment, and about 45,000 of those children had verified findings. However, only a small proportion were considered unsafe and 15,780 required removal from their families. Others required in-home safety management services. Regardless of findings, many of these children and families could benefit from community services, as many had extensive prior investigations. Of the investigations with initial reports received in April - June 2015, 77.5% had one or more prior investigations:

- 41.4% had 1-4 prior investigations.
- 21.8% had 5-9 prior investigations.
- 12.1% had 10-19 prior investigations.
- 2.2% had 20 or more prior investigations

Community-Based Care Lead Agencies

Of approximately 260,000 suspected victims of maltreatment, 45,000 of those with verified findings in FY 2014-15, only a fraction can be served with existing resources. Referrals to CBC lead agencies are focused on those who are determined "unsafe" and those determined "safe," but at risk and needing services. The following were referred in FY 2014-15:

- 15,780 were removed and placed in out-of-home care.
- 14,190 were referred for case-managed, in-home services.
- 18,174 were opened for family support services (referrals from investigations and others).



Organization of This Report

This report uses a set of charts visualizing recent child welfare data to give the reader a better understanding of Florida's community-based child welfare system. It uses a set of trend and comparison charts. Trend charts tell us how we are changing over time. Community comparison charts tell us how our communities are doing in relation to statewide averages. Sometimes such comparisons may trigger celebration of high performance. Other comparisons may signal a need for improvement. More often, recognition of differences will simply trigger questions about how one's community is different from others.

This report walks the reader through Florida's community-based child welfare system in this sequence:

- Recent statewide growth in the number of children in out-of-home care.
- Community variation in estimated need for services and resources.
- Community variation in rates of removal, discharge, and maltreatment verification.
- Community variation in rates of referral for post-investigation services.
- Community variation in rates of provision of active services.
- Community variation in measured performance of:
 - Safety
 - Permanency
 - Well-Being of children in care.
- Community trends in out-of-home care population, removals and discharges.

When reviewing these charts, we should keep in mind that the flexibility to meet varying community needs means that our varying systems of care will have different mixes of services, which may lead to varying levels of performance on outcome measures.



Dynamics of Children in Out-of-Home Care:

Introduction to Trends and Community Comparisons of Florida's Child Welfare System, Using Aggregate Data

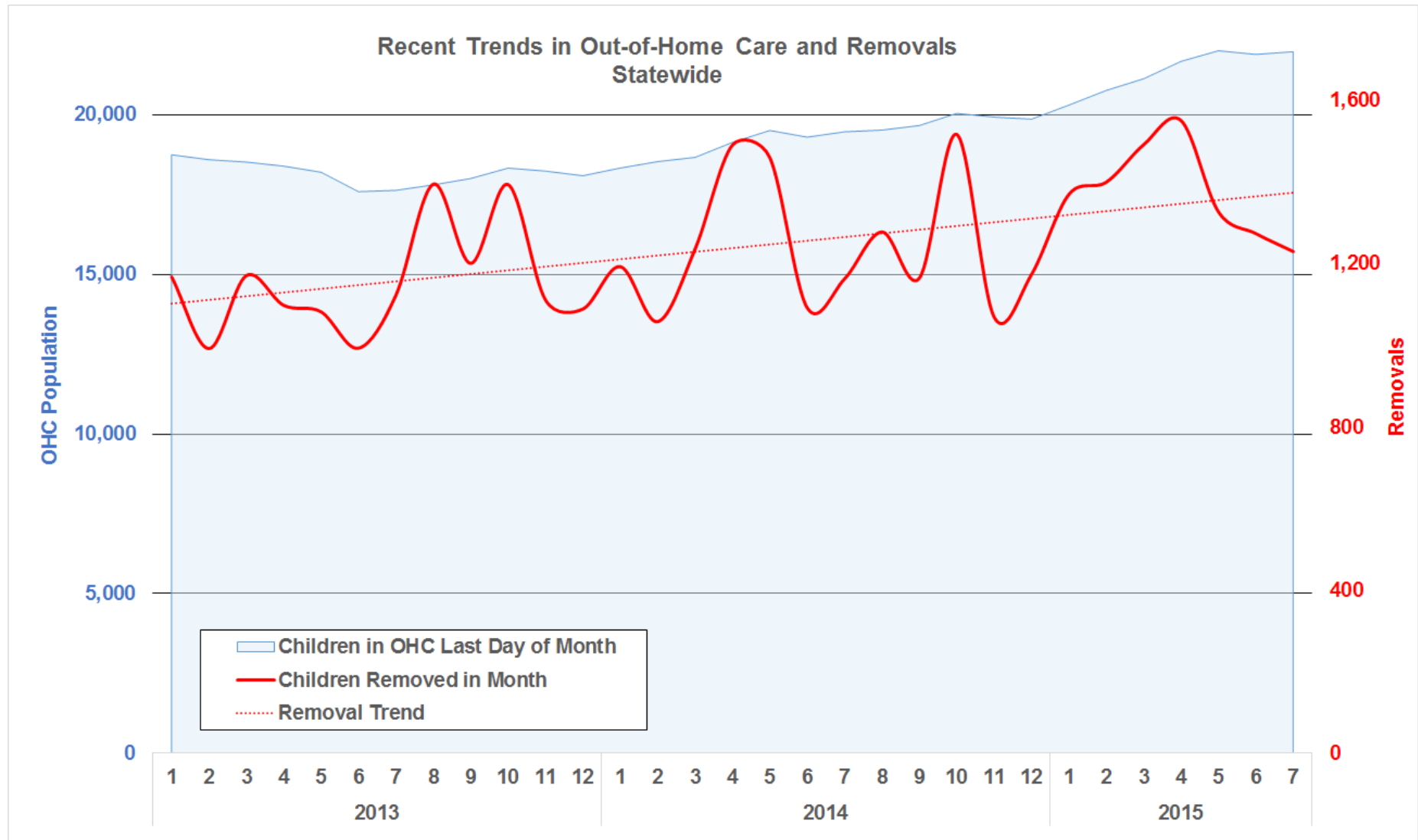
A logical walk through Florida's child welfare system might start with primary and secondary prevention programs, then move to intake provided by the Florida Abuse Hotline and Child Protective Investigations, and on to services provided by community-based care (CBC) lead agencies. This report starts with a single issue, the recent increase in the number of children in out-of-home care, and examines some community differences in the front end that drive the changes, and impacts on the system further downstream. Included are:

- Statewide trends in out-of-home care and related factors, including services to prevent removal and placement, population of children in care, placement types, and removals and discharges.
- Differences in communities apart from the child welfare system response, including child poverty and the rate of children being reported for maltreatment.
- Differences in systems of care reflected in the flow from investigations to services.
- Differences in measured child safety performance, for children receiving services and recently terminated from services.
- Differences in achievement of timely permanency for children who must be removed from their families and whether they must return to care.
- Differences in the well-being, or quality of life, for children in foster care until they achieve permanency, and whether those who do not achieve permanency are prepared for being self-sufficient adults.



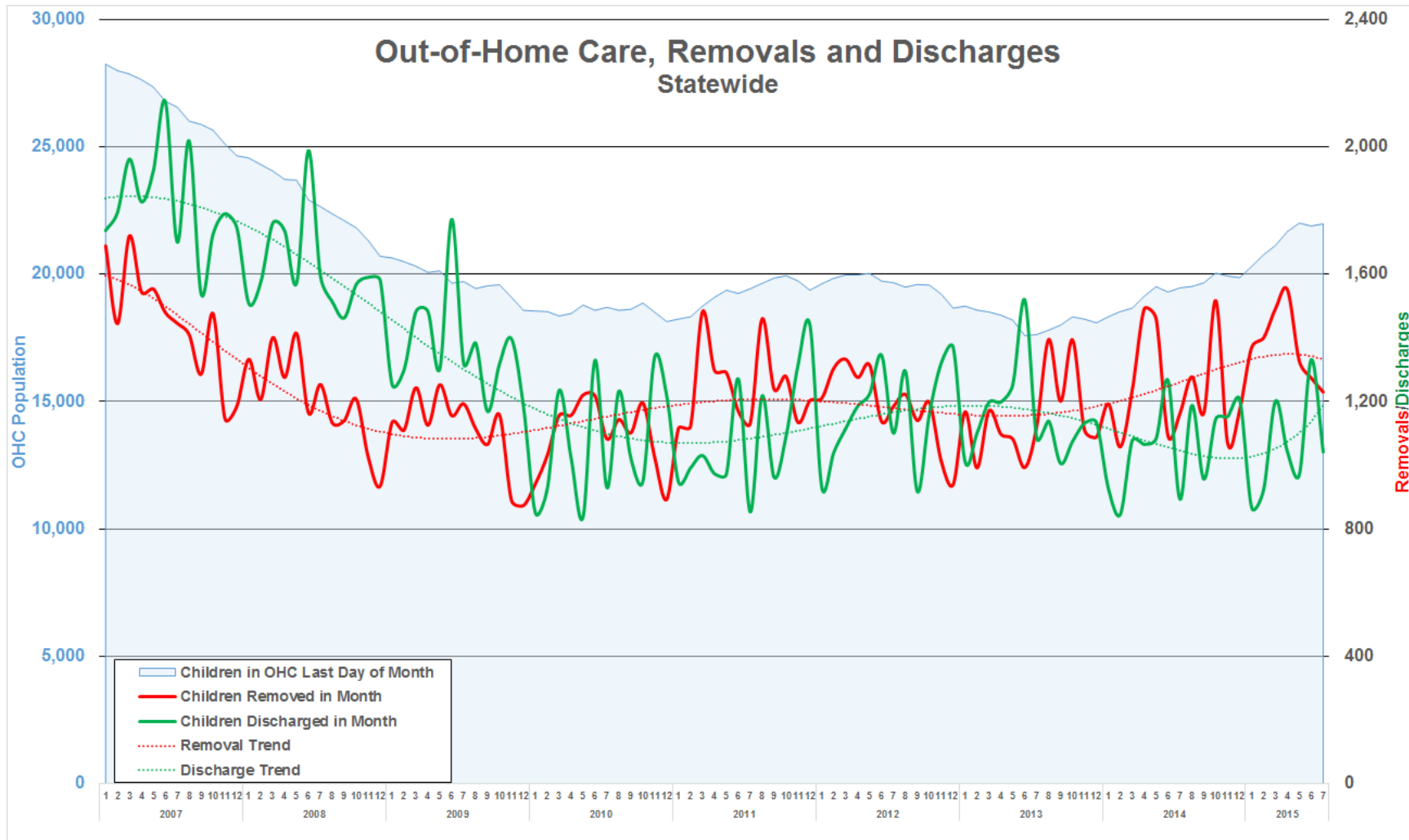
Recent Increase in Out-of-Home Care and Children Removed from Their Families

Florida has experienced a significant statewide increase in the number of children in out-of-home care (OHC) over the last 24 months. This increase parallels an increase in the number of children removed from their families. This package includes a set of charts visualizing recent child welfare data to facilitate community understanding of this issue.



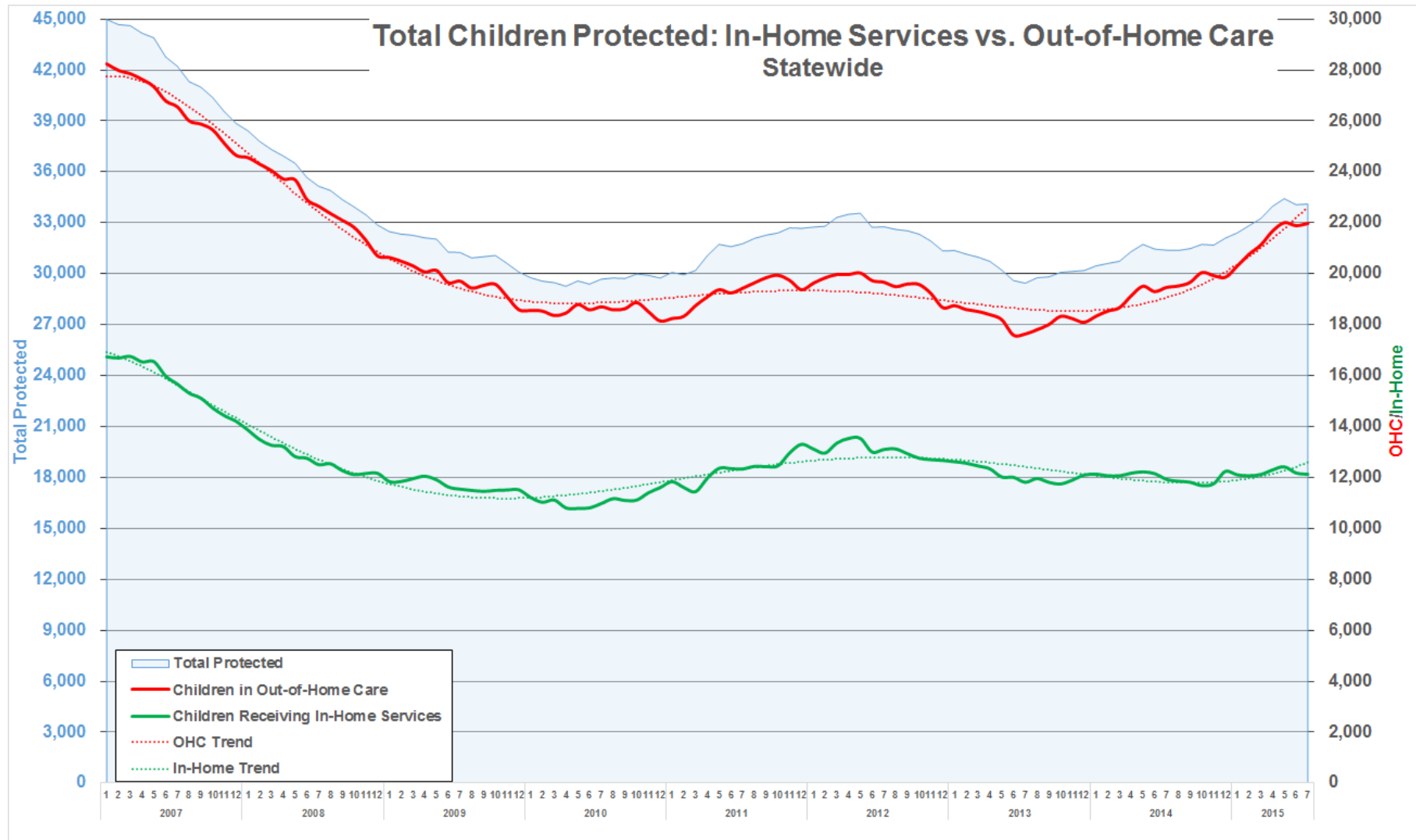
Relationship between Out-of-Home Care, Removals and Discharges over Time

The 22,000 children currently in out-of-home care is about the same level as in 2008, and not as high as in early 2007. Note that the periods with a significant gap between removals from home and discharges from out-of-home care drive changes in the OHC population. The recent increase in the OHC population was driven by simultaneous increases in removals and decreases in discharges. Individual charts with these trends are included at the end of this package for each community-based care lead agency area.



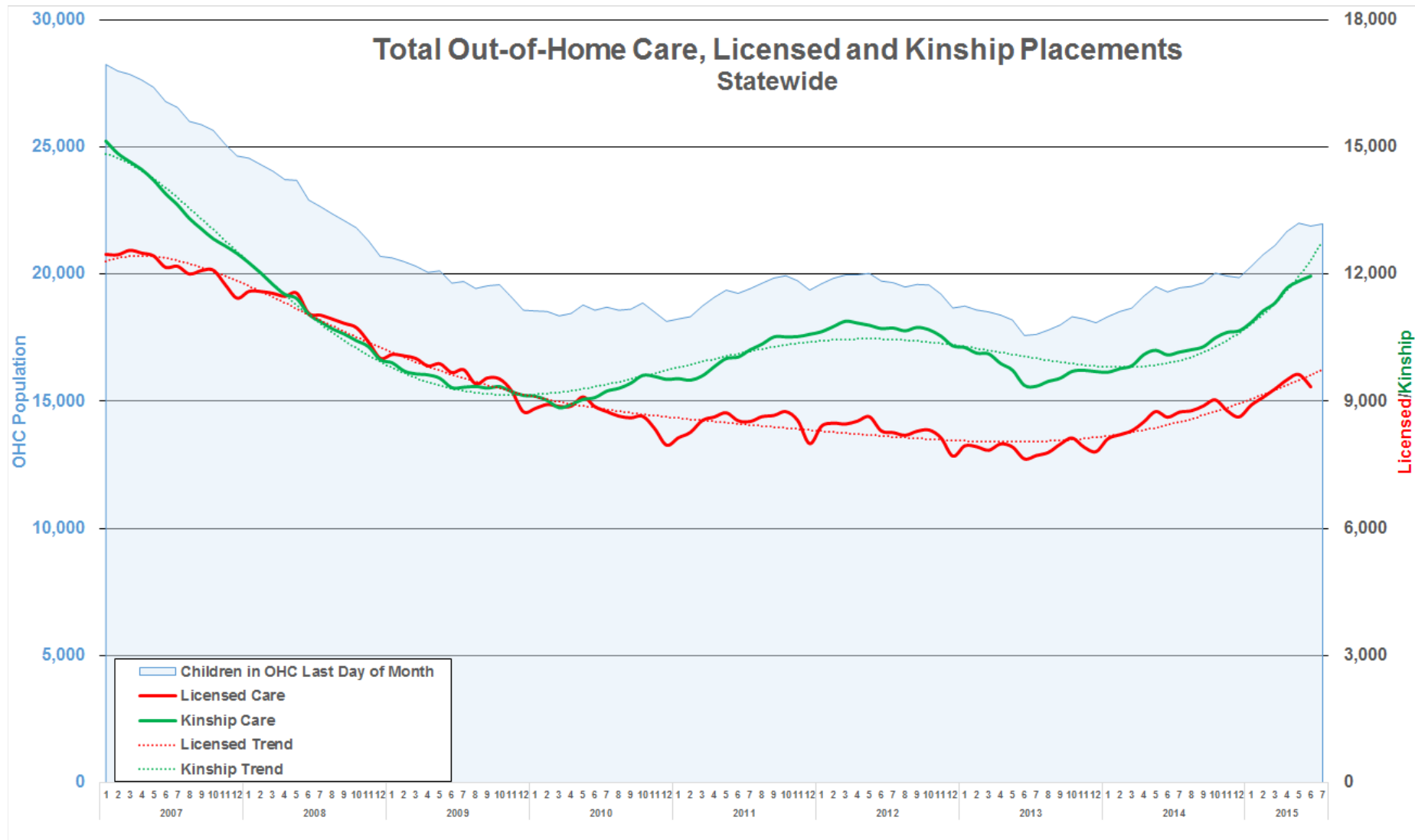
Trend in Services to Protect Children: Case-Managed, In-Home Services vs. Out-of-Home Care

Florida law requires preserving and strengthening families whenever possible, removing the child from parents only when the child cannot be safeguarded without such removal. However, more children are removed than protected in their own homes. The total number protected has declined over the years and the number protected in their own homes has not increased with the increase in OHC.



Statewide Trends in Out-of-Home Care Placement Types: Licensed Care vs. Kinship Care

The sharp drop in out-of-home care from 2007 to 2010 was driven primarily by a decline in kinship care (placement with relatives and non-relatives with a connection to the child before removal from the family). The small peak in 2011-12 was driven entirely by an increase in kinship care. The recent increase in OHC included similar increases in each placement type. Kinship care is important for maintaining the child's family connections and is less costly than licensed care.



Community Variation in Need for Services and Resources to Meet the Need

In trying to understand community variation on removals and discharges, services mix, and measured outcome performance, there are some important differences between communities. There are wide variations in the proportion of children living in poverty and the public response to maltreatment, measured through maltreatment reporting rates. Both indicators are included on the following pages.

Although additional indicators are not included in this report, other indicators, such as teen births, employment, education, crime, etc. could help develop a broader understanding of how such community variations might affect community indicators in this report.

Communities are variable in the allocation of resources to various components by lead agencies, including the mix of case management, residential placement (e.g., foster family homes vs. group care), safety management and other direct services.

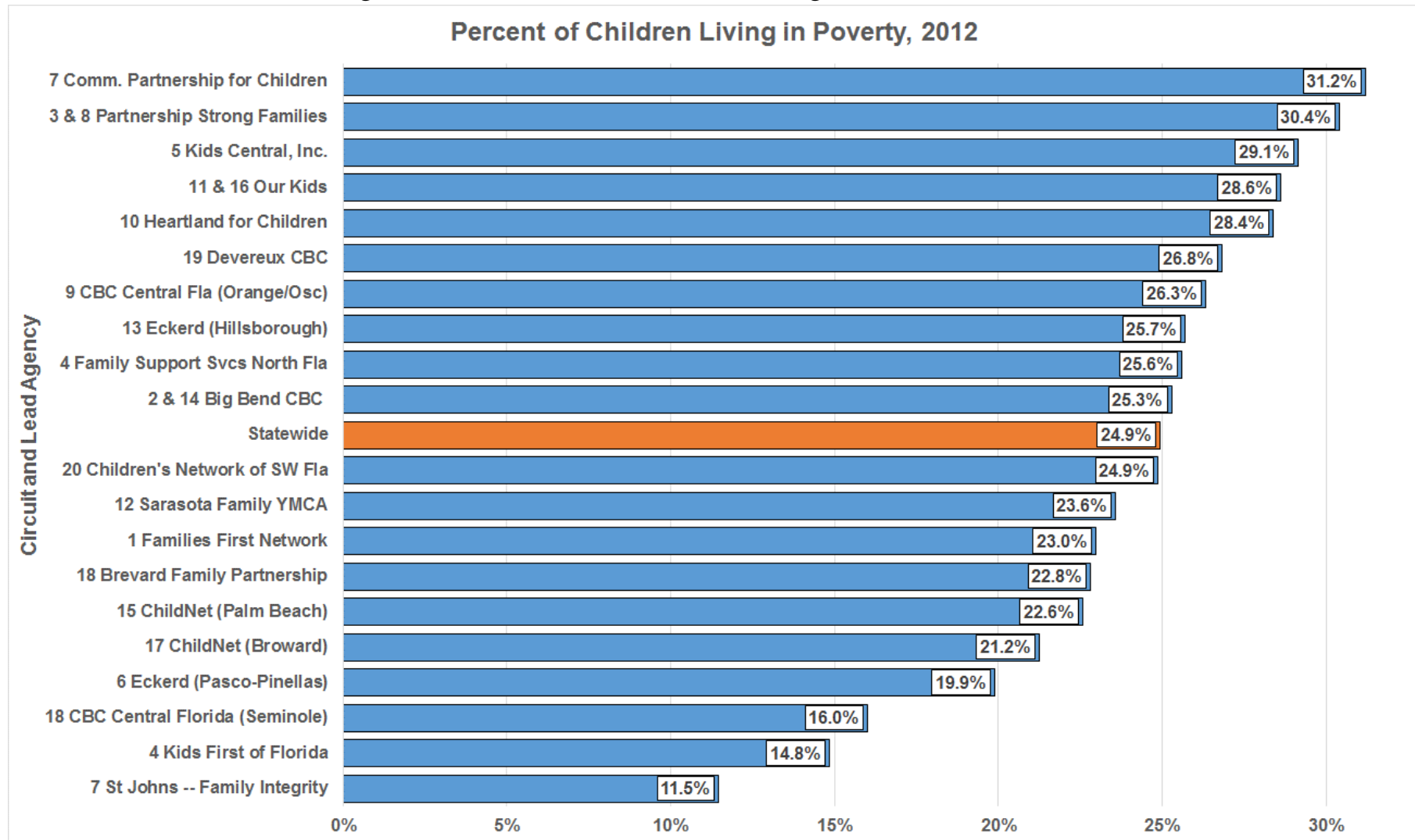
Communities are variable in the availability of additional resources devoted to child welfare, such as those with Children's Services Councils supported by local taxes.

Finally, communities are variable in potential resources that might be available, using such indicators as median income, the number of children compared to the general population, and income inequality (e.g., the ratio of the 80th percentile income to the 20th percentile income).



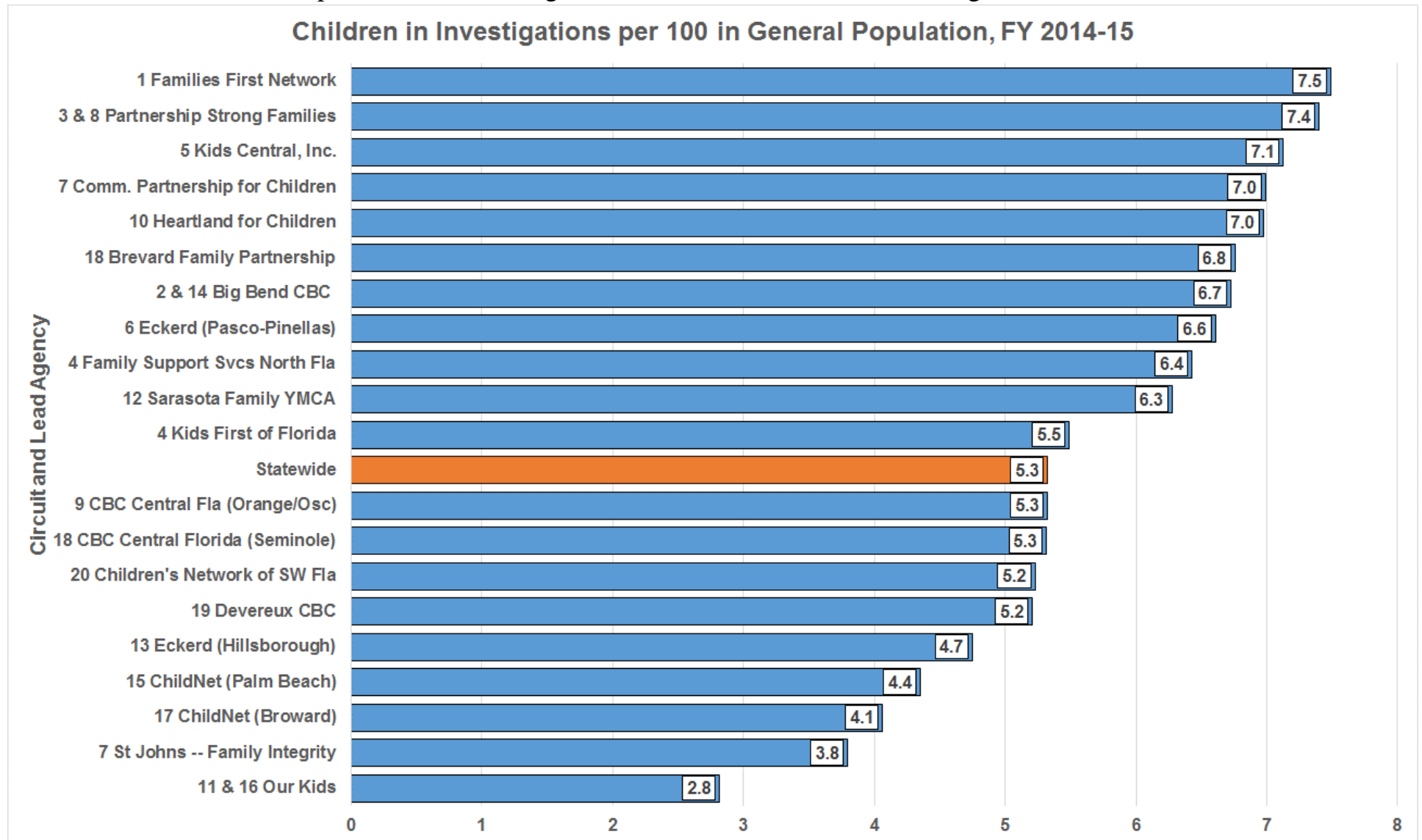
Child Poverty Rates

Most children served by the child welfare system were living in poverty when they were referred, but most families living in poverty do not abuse or neglect their children. However, when comparing communities on various child welfare indicators, poverty is an important factor to consider, including its relationship to reporting rates on the next page and implications for service needs. Note that the highest rates are almost three times as high as the lowest rates.



Maltreatment Reporting Rates

Maltreatment reporting rates are extremely variable, with the highest rates almost three times the size of the lowest rates. Note the relationship to the poverty rates, with some important exceptions. Variation in reporting rates affects measured recurrence of maltreatment, later in this report. Note that the highest rates are almost three times as high as the lowest rates.



Community Variations in Verification, Removal and Discharge Rates

We have seen how the number of children in out-of-home care changes over time, driven by the changes in removals and discharges.

We have also seen some major differences in community needs for services, as indicated by child poverty rates and maltreatment reporting rates.

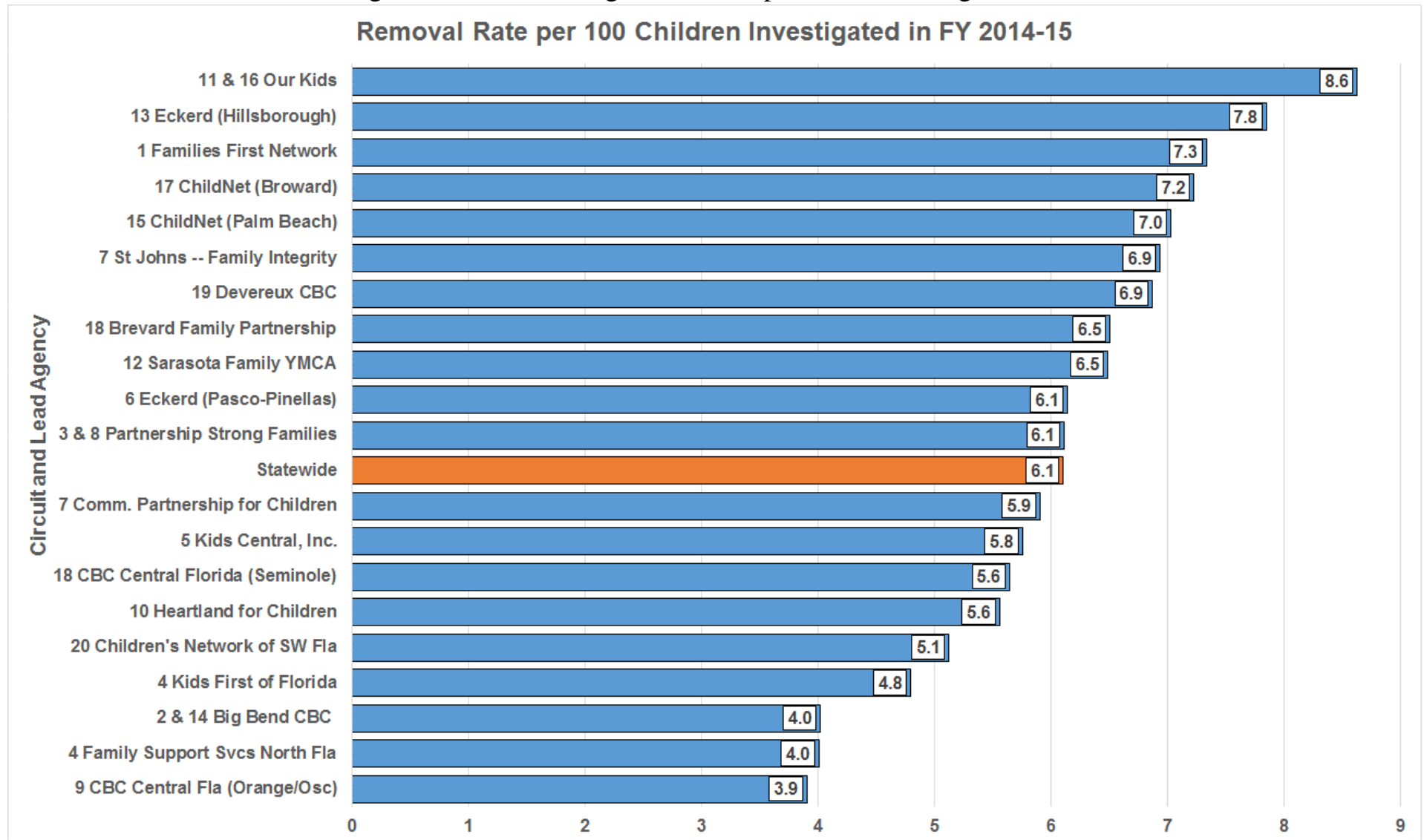
On the following pages, we will examine community differences in maltreatment verification rates, removal rates, and discharge rates. As we do so, we may notice some relationships among these indicators, and the relationship between these indicators and the poverty and reporting rates that preceded them.

We might also notice some relationship between community variation on poverty and reporting rates, verification, removal and discharge rates, and referral to post-investigative services, case mix, and performance outcomes, which will be shown on subsequent charts.



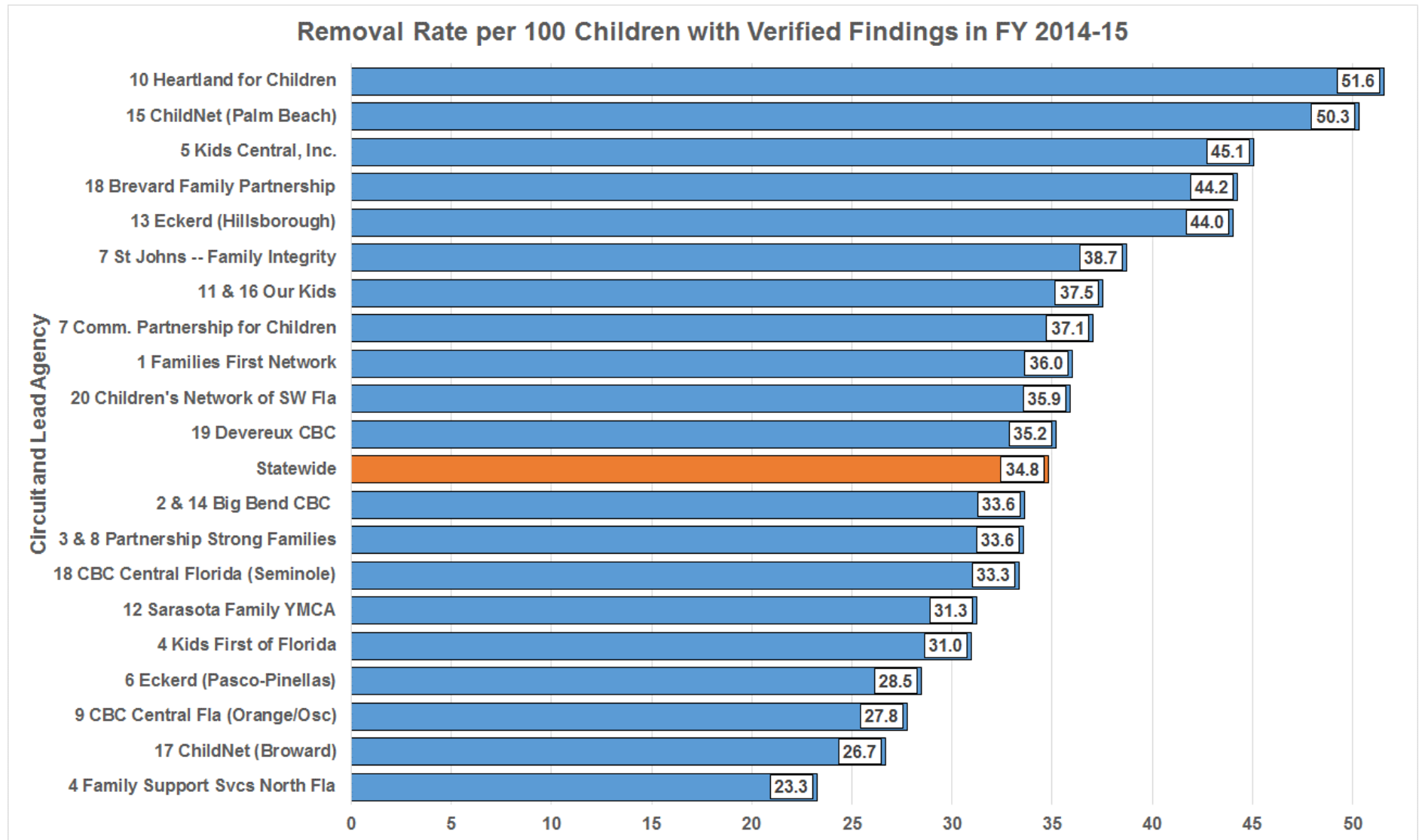
Removal Rates

Removals are up and discharges are down for the state as a whole, but trends in each area are different. In order to compare communities, we calculate rates. For removals, we use the rate of removals per 100 children in investigations and per 100 children with verified findings. Note the wide range, with the top two areas having twice the rates of the bottom three.



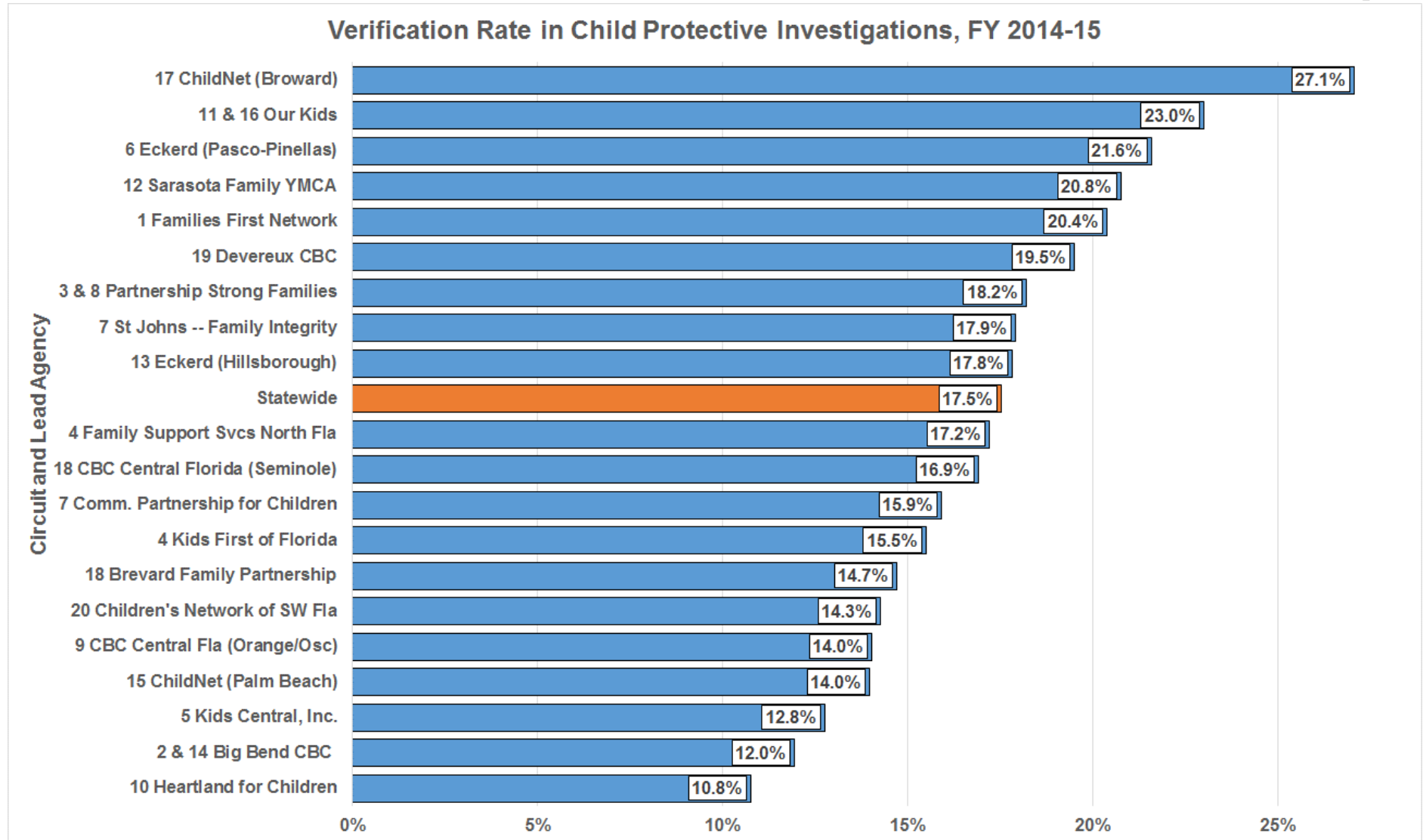
Removal Rates for Children with Verified Findings

When comparing the number of removals to the number of children with verified findings, the rates are much higher than on the last page, again with much variability and a different pattern among communities. Note that the two areas with the highest rates have approximately half as many removals as children with verified findings. The difference between this chart and the last one is due to local variation in verification rates, which we will see on the next chart.



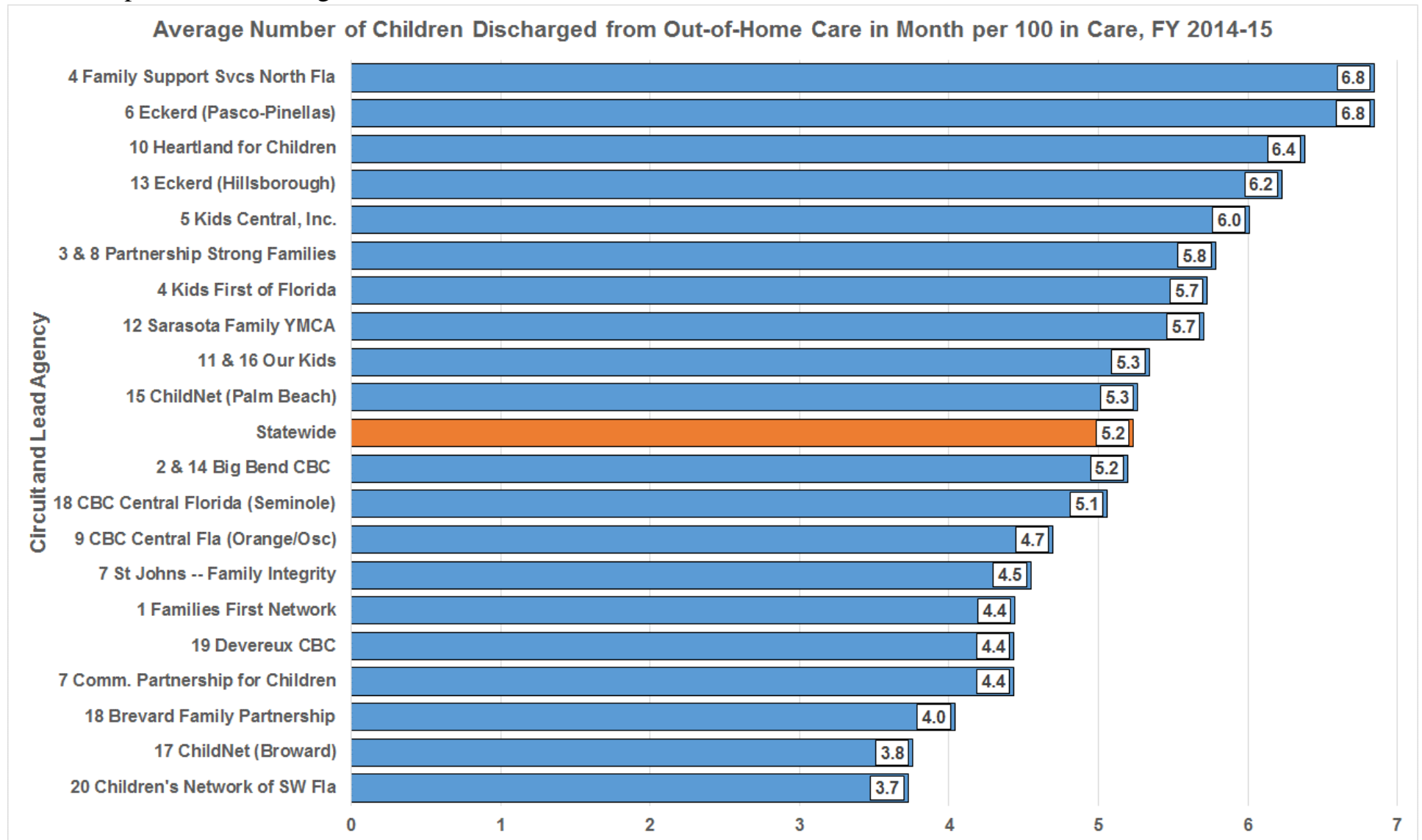
Verification Rates

Removal decisions should be based more on safety determination than verification, but evidence of maltreatment is important. The wide range from highest to lowest suggests that there is great variation in local practice, rather than such wide variation in the evidence of maltreatment. Variation in verification rates affects measured recurrence of maltreatment, later in this report.



Discharge Rates

In order to compare communities on discharges, we calculate rates. For discharges, we compare the average number of children discharged each month to the average number of children in out-of-home care at the end of each month. Note the wide range, with the top two areas having almost twice the rates of the bottom three areas.



Community Variation in Flow from Investigations to CBC Lead Agencies

Among the purposes of Florida’s child protection law is “To preserve and strengthen the child’s family ties whenever possible, removing the child from parental custody only when his or her welfare cannot be adequately safeguarded without such removal.” (Section 39.001 (1)(f), Florida Statutes)

Section 409.988, F.S., requires that a community-based care lead agency “Shall serve all children referred as a result of a report of abuse, neglect, or abandonment to the department’s central abuse hotline, including, but not limited to, children who are the subject of verified reports and children who are not the subject of verified reports but who are at moderate to extremely high risk of abuse, neglect, or abandonment, as determined using the department’s risk assessment instrument, regardless of the level of funding allocated to the lead agency by the state if all related funding is transferred. The lead agency may also serve children who have not been the subject of reports of abuse, neglect, or abandonment, but who are at risk of abuse, neglect, or abandonment, to prevent their entry into the child protection and child welfare system.”

The first three outcomes established by Section 409.986, F.S., are focused on protecting children in their own homes to prevent unnecessary removal and placement:

- (a) Children are first and foremost protected from abuse and neglect.
- (b) Children are safely maintained in their homes, if possible and appropriate.
- (c) Services are provided to protect children and prevent their removal from their home.

Flexibility in community-based systems of care results in a varying mix of referrals to post-investigation services, and varying mixes of active services. These differences may also be related to variations in measured performance, presented later in this report.

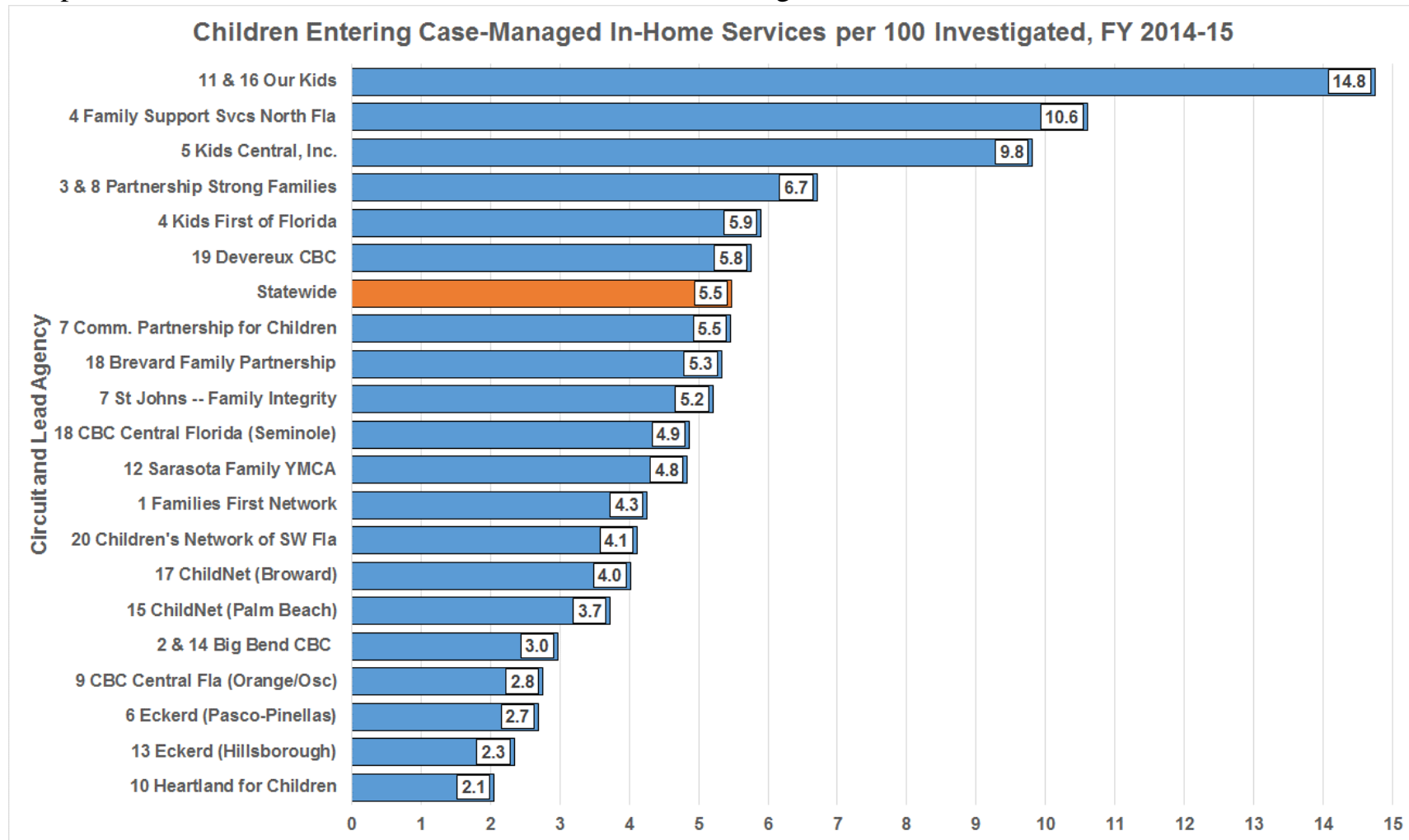
The charts on the following pages examine the extent to which services are provided to maintain children in their own homes, compared to those placed in out-of-home care. They examine the relationships between the number of children in investigations, the number of children with verified maltreatment and the number of children being served by lead agencies. The charts are in two groups:

- The flow from investigations to CBC lead agencies.
- The high-level mix of active services provided by CBC lead agencies.



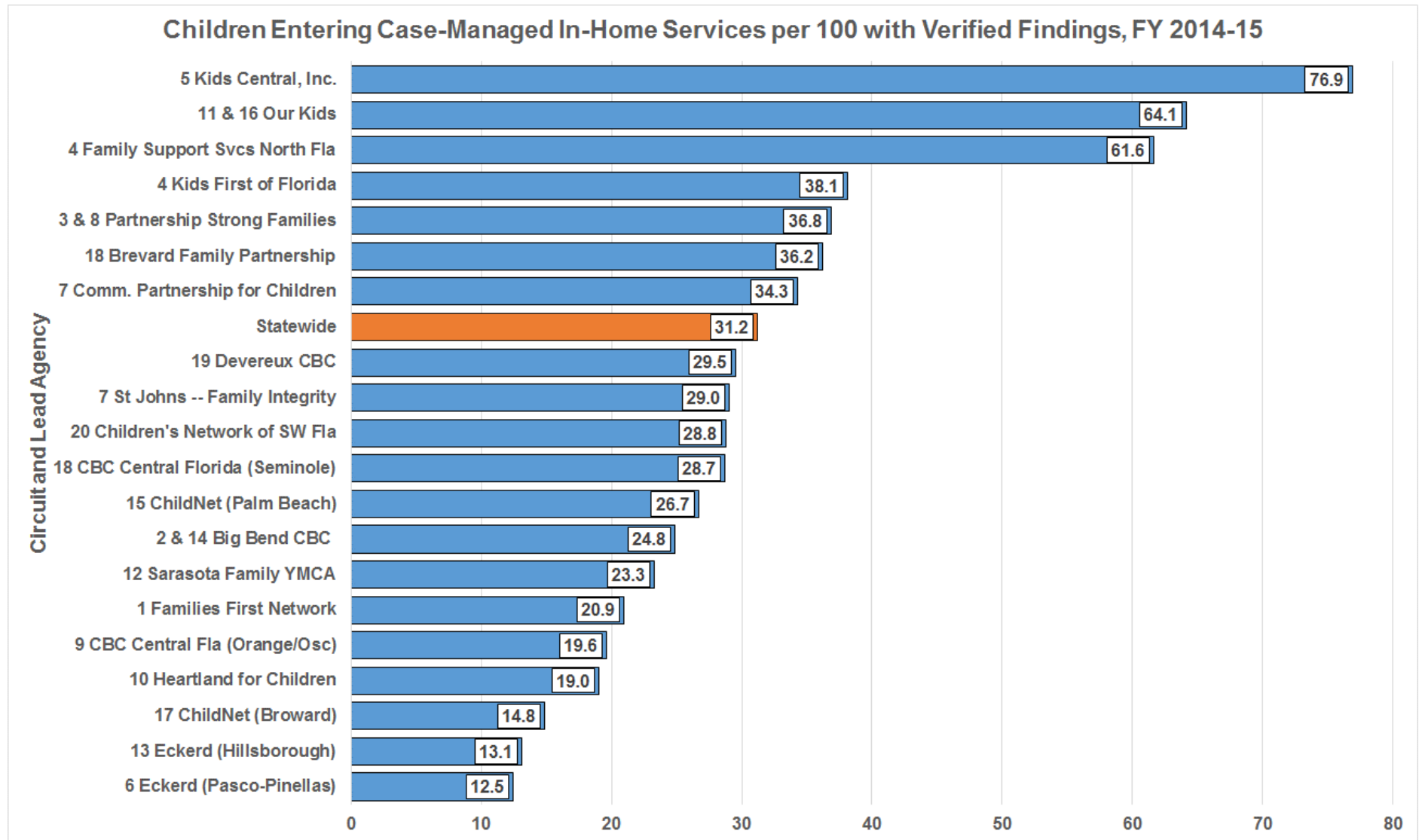
Referral Rates: Case-Managed, In-Home Services Compared to Children in Investigations

The primary services to protect children and prevent removal from their home is usually called “family preservation services,” and increasingly “safety management services.” “Case-managed, in-home services” is used here to describing those formal services with controls, including required assessments, case plans and child visits no less often than every 30 days, provided either by court order or non-judicially. These are to be distinguished from the less formal “family support services.” In order to compare communities on the extent to which an effort is made to protect children in their own homes through these services, we compare the number of children referred to the number investigated. Note the variation from less than two to more than ten.



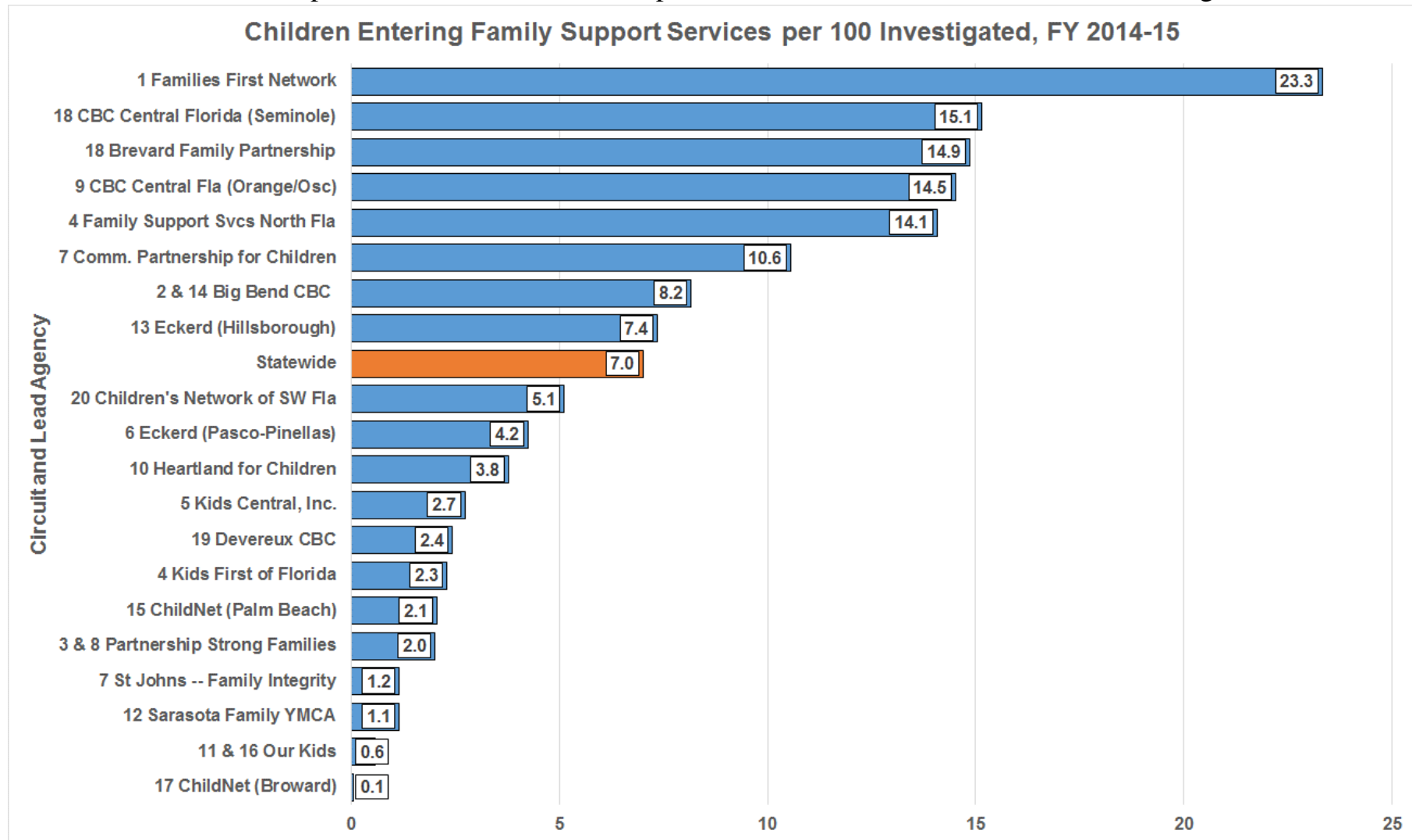
Referral Rates: Case Managed, In-Home Services Compared to Children with Verified Maltreatment

A second method of comparing communities on the extent to which an effort is made to protect children in their own homes through case-managed, in-home services is to compare the number of children referred to the number with verified findings. Once again, note the extreme variation, but three areas have extremely high rates. In some areas, the rates are much higher on this indicator due to low verification rates.



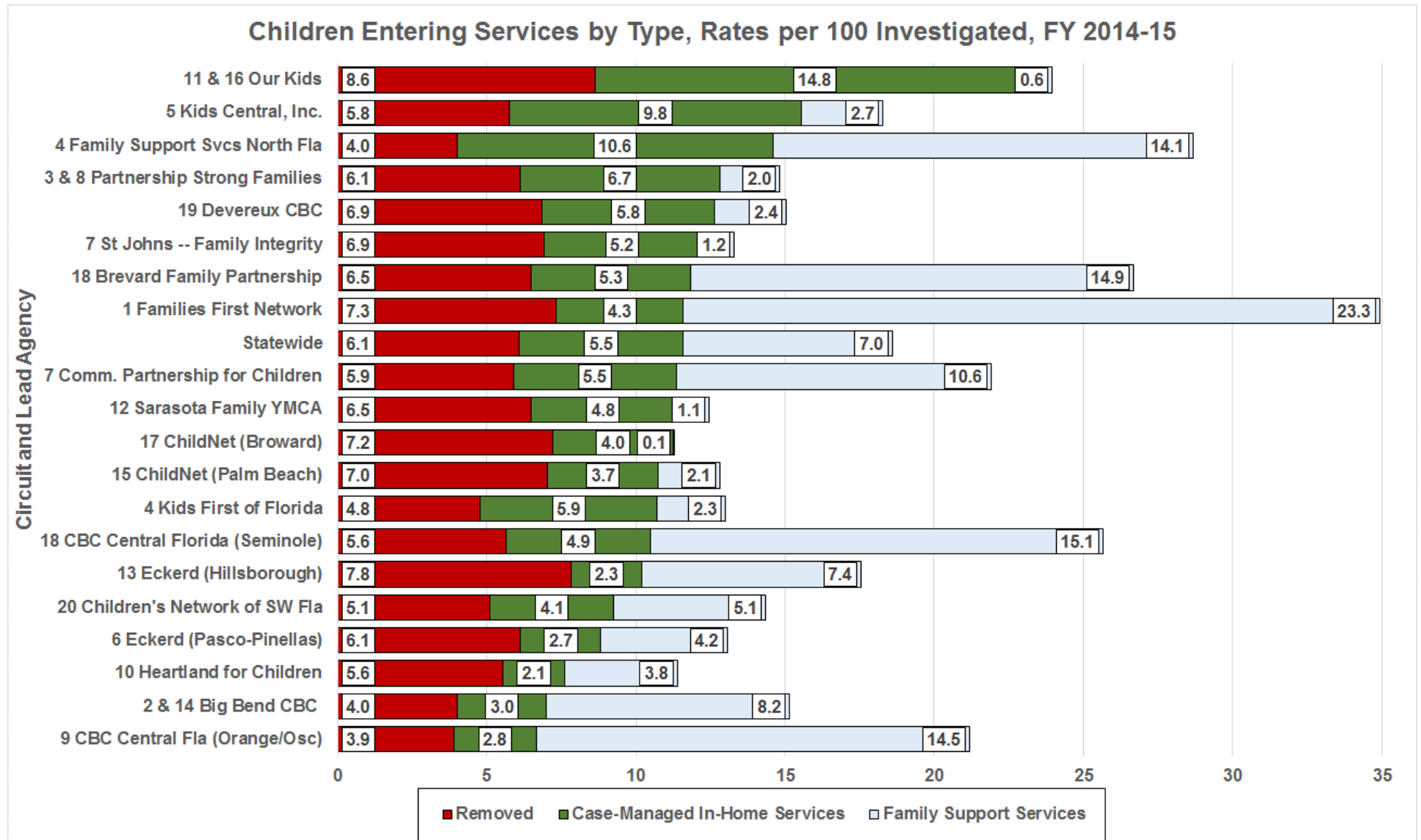
Opening Rates: Family Support Services

Family support services (FSS) are less formal than case-managed services. Cases are opened by lead agencies through referrals from investigations, self-referrals, and referrals from the community. FSS lacks the standardized controls of case-managed, in-home services, such as assessments, plans and visitation, and should be limited to families with children who are determined to be safe, but in need of services. In order to compare communities on the use of these services to a consistent community indicator of need, we compare the number of children opened to FSS to the number of children investigated.



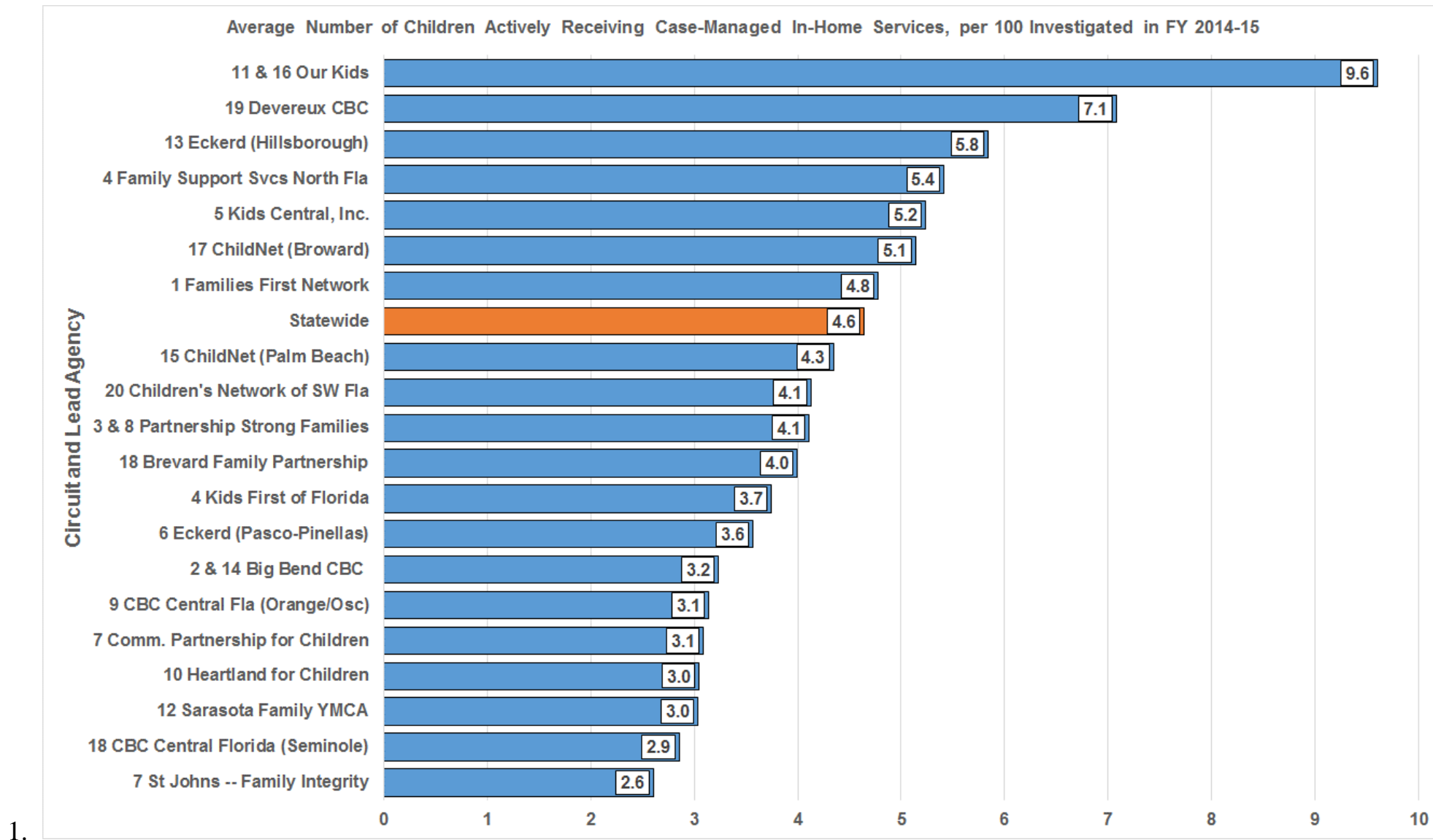
Overall Rates of Children Entering Services

The following chart combines the rates of children opened to out-of-home care after removal, case-managed in-home services, and family support services, all compared to the number investigated. Again, we see wide variation in service array, with some providing few services as an alternative to removal, and high variation in use of family support services.



Rates of Active Case-Managed, In-Home Services to Children Investigated

In order to compare communities on the extent to which children are being protected in their own homes at a point in time, we compare the number protected to the number of children in investigations.

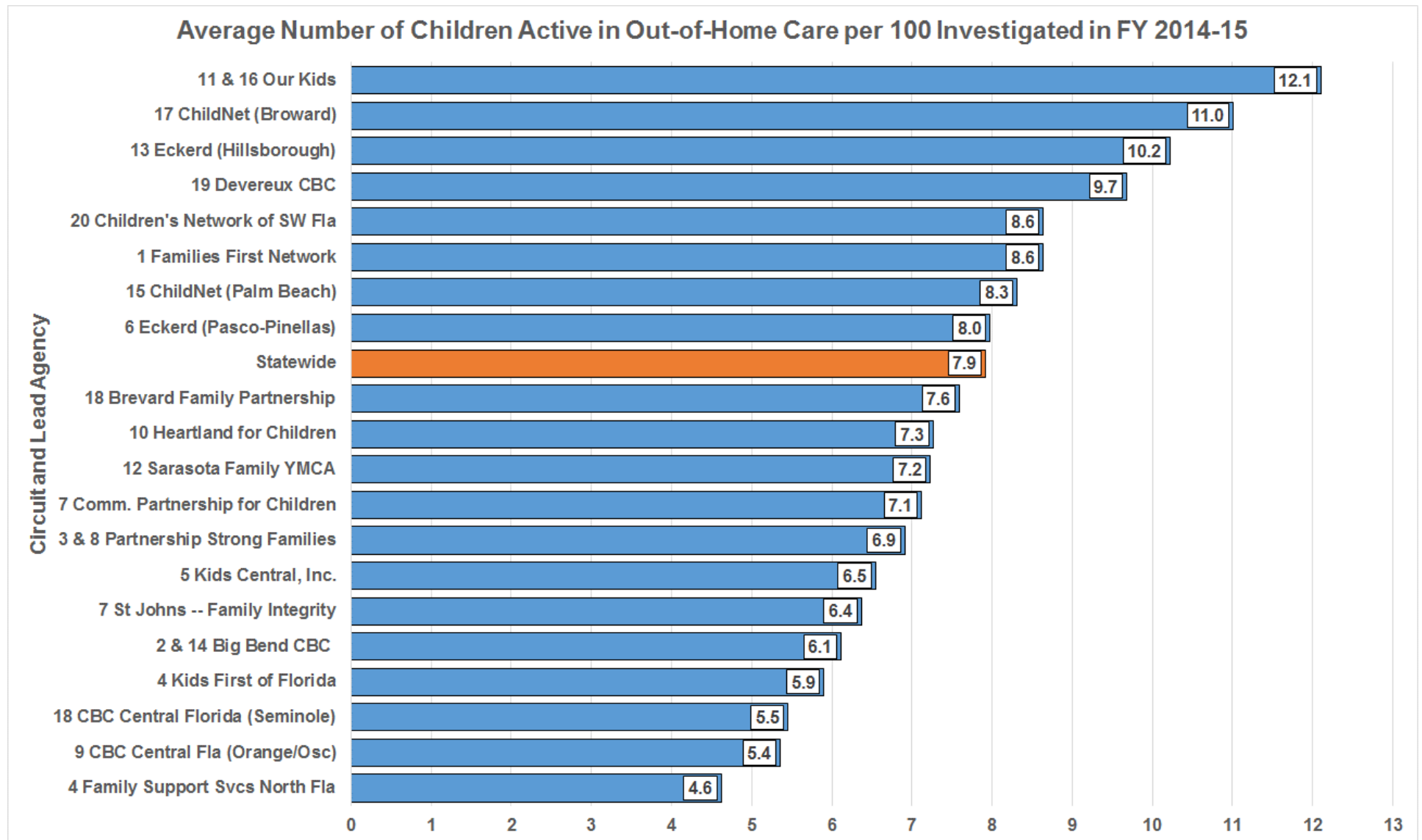


1.



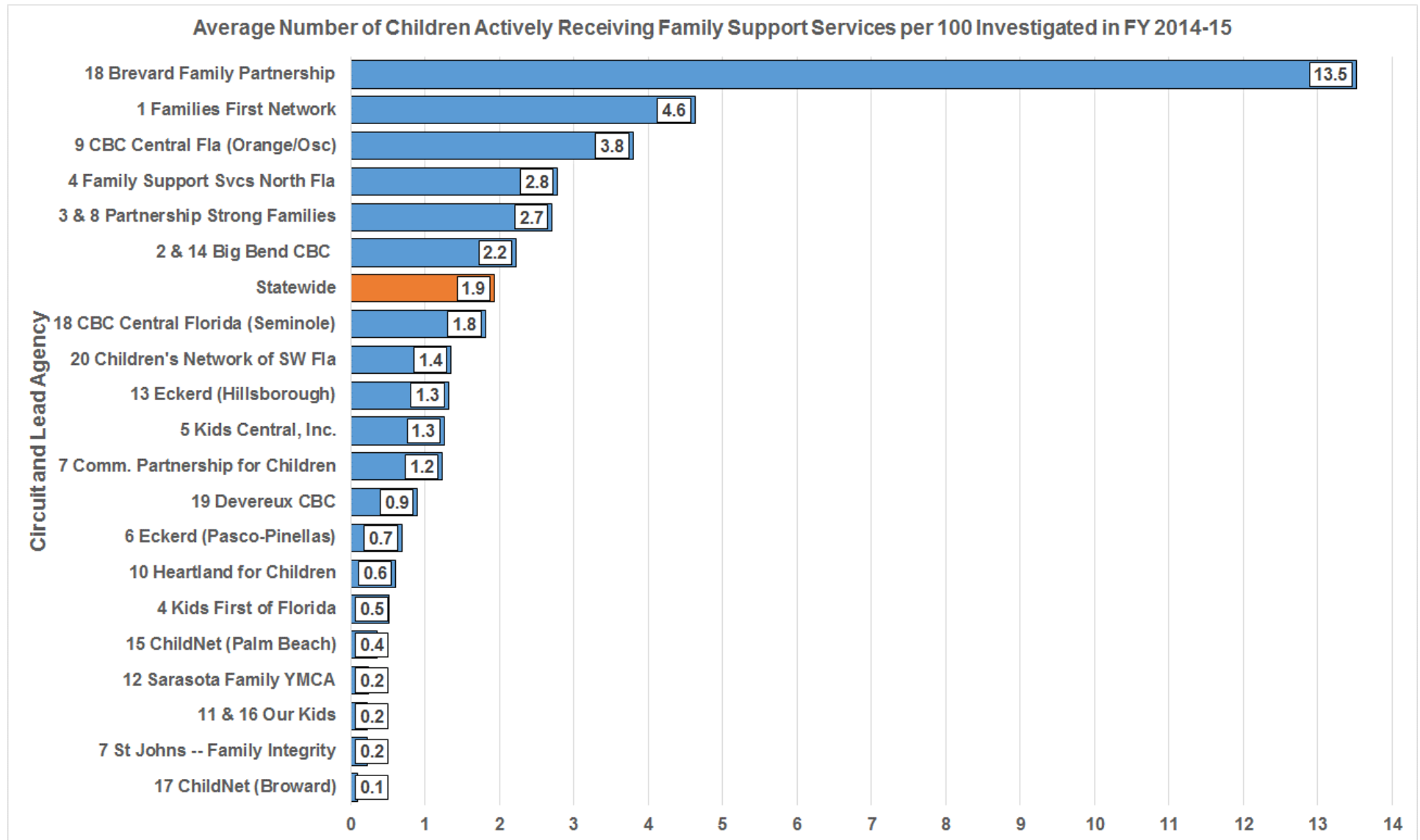
Rates of Children Active in Out-of-Home Care

In order to compare communities on the number of children in out-of-home care at a point in time, we compare the number protected to the number of children in investigations.



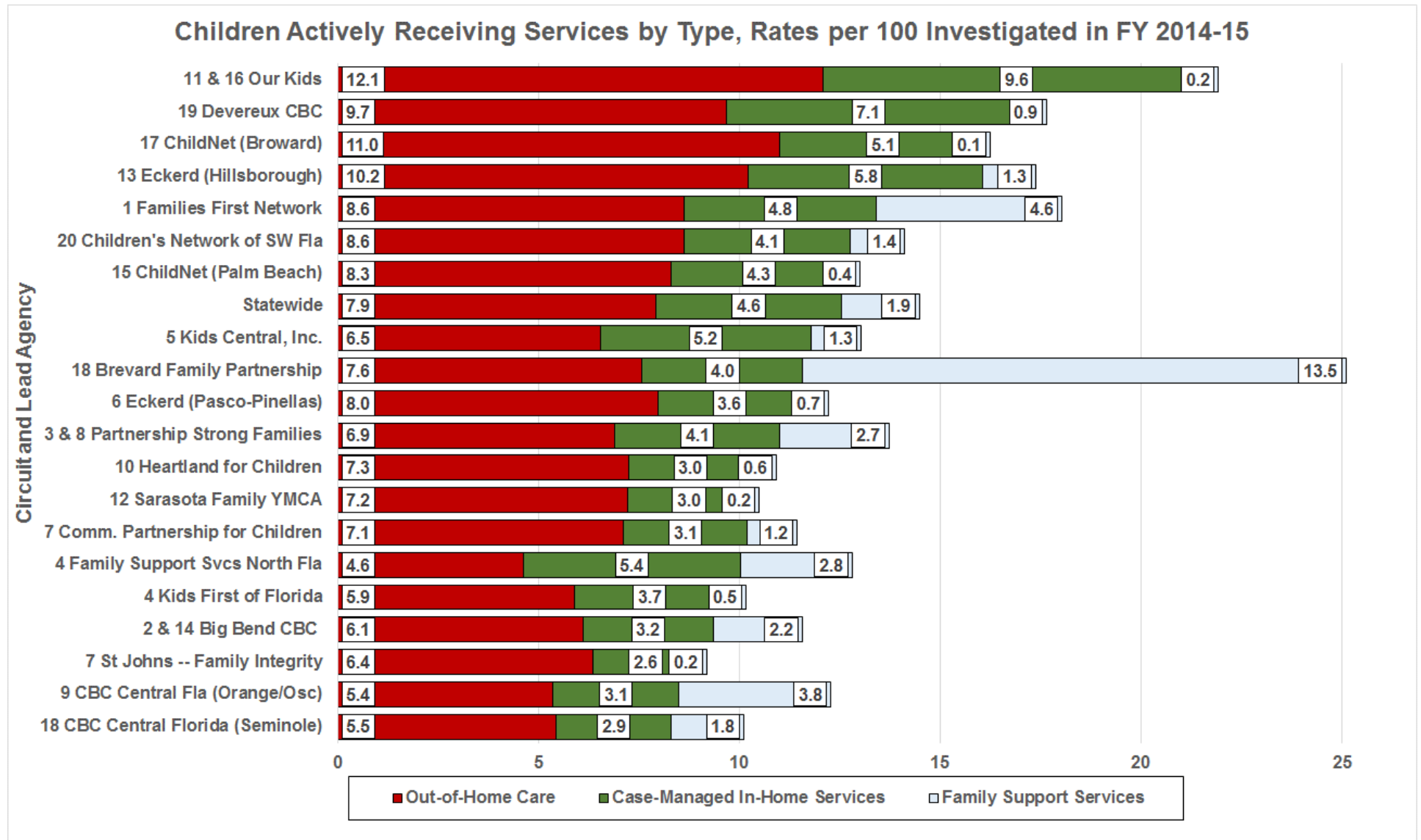
Rates of Active Family Support Services

In order to compare communities on the number of children in families receiving family support Services at a point in time, we compare the number receiving services to the number of children in investigations. Here we see a range of extremely high use of this service to virtually none, compared to the community need represented by the number of children in investigations.



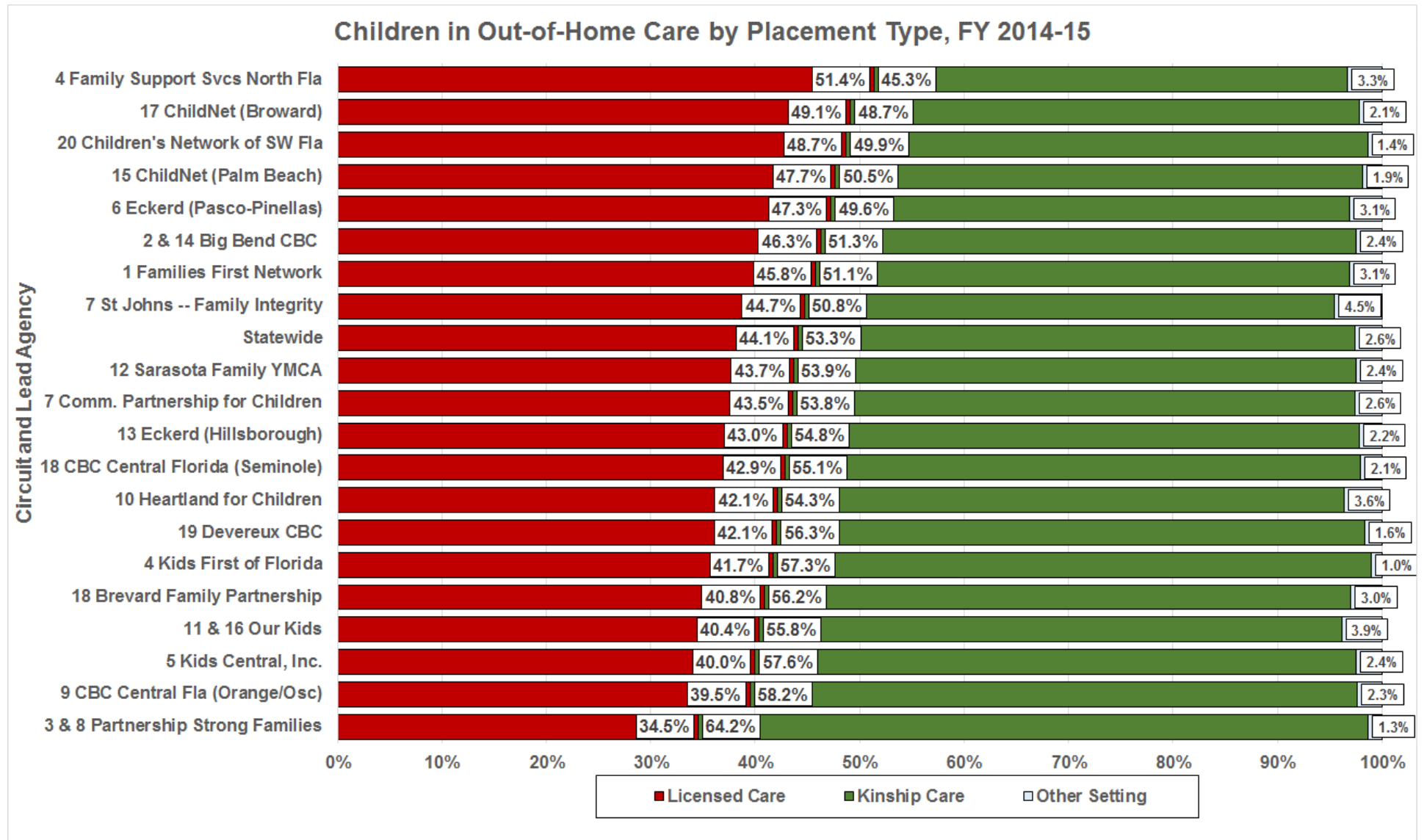
Overall Rates of Children Receiving Services

The following chart combines the active services rates from the last three charts, with each service compared to the number of children in investigations. Once again, we see wide variation in service array, with some providing relatively few services as an alternative to removal, and high variation in family support services.



Mix of Placement Types

The variation in mix of placement types is not as wide as in the other comparison charts in this package. Some areas may put greater effort into finding suitable kinship (relative and non-relative) placements, but the variation may reflect simply the lack of such placements.



Performance Outcome Indicators

Child welfare performance outcome indicators are usually placed in the three groups, according to the three goals of safety permanency and well-being established by the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act.

Safety Indicators

These indicators are focused on whether children referred to the child welfare system for maltreatment have subsequent maltreatment, especially while receiving services and after termination of services.

Permanency Indicators

These indicators are focused on whether children removed from their families have timely reunification or other permanent living arrangement, including adoption and guardianship. They also measure the extent to which children who are discharged from out-of-home care return.

Child Well-Being Indicators

These indicators are focused on quality of life for children in out-of-home care, including having stable placements that allow continuing important connections and preparation for adulthood.



Safety Outcome Indicators

State and federal law place an emphasis on safety outcomes over all others.

Included in the purpose section of Florida's child protection law is the priority given to child safety:

1. The health and safety of the children served shall be of paramount concern.
2. The prevention and intervention should engage families in constructive, supportive, and non-adversarial relationships.
3. The prevention and intervention should intrude as little as possible into the life of the family, be focused on clearly defined objectives, and keep the safety of the child or children as the paramount concern" (Section 39.001 (1)(b)1-3., Florida Statutes)

The Legislature also requires "that the design and delivery of child welfare services should be directed by the principle that the health and safety of children should be of paramount concern."(Section 39.4085, F.S."

However, comparing safety performance among circuits, lead agencies and states can be problematic. The charts on reporting rates and verification rates showed wide variation in each. Such variation affects measured recurrence of maltreatment:

- Higher overall reporting rates increase the likelihood that subsequent maltreatment will be reported. If two communities had identical recurrence apart from its being reported, the community with a higher reporting rate is likely to have higher measured recurrence.
- Recurrence measurements are limited to verified findings. If two communities had identical actual and reported recurrence apart from their verification rates, the community with a higher verification rate is likely to have higher measured recurrence.

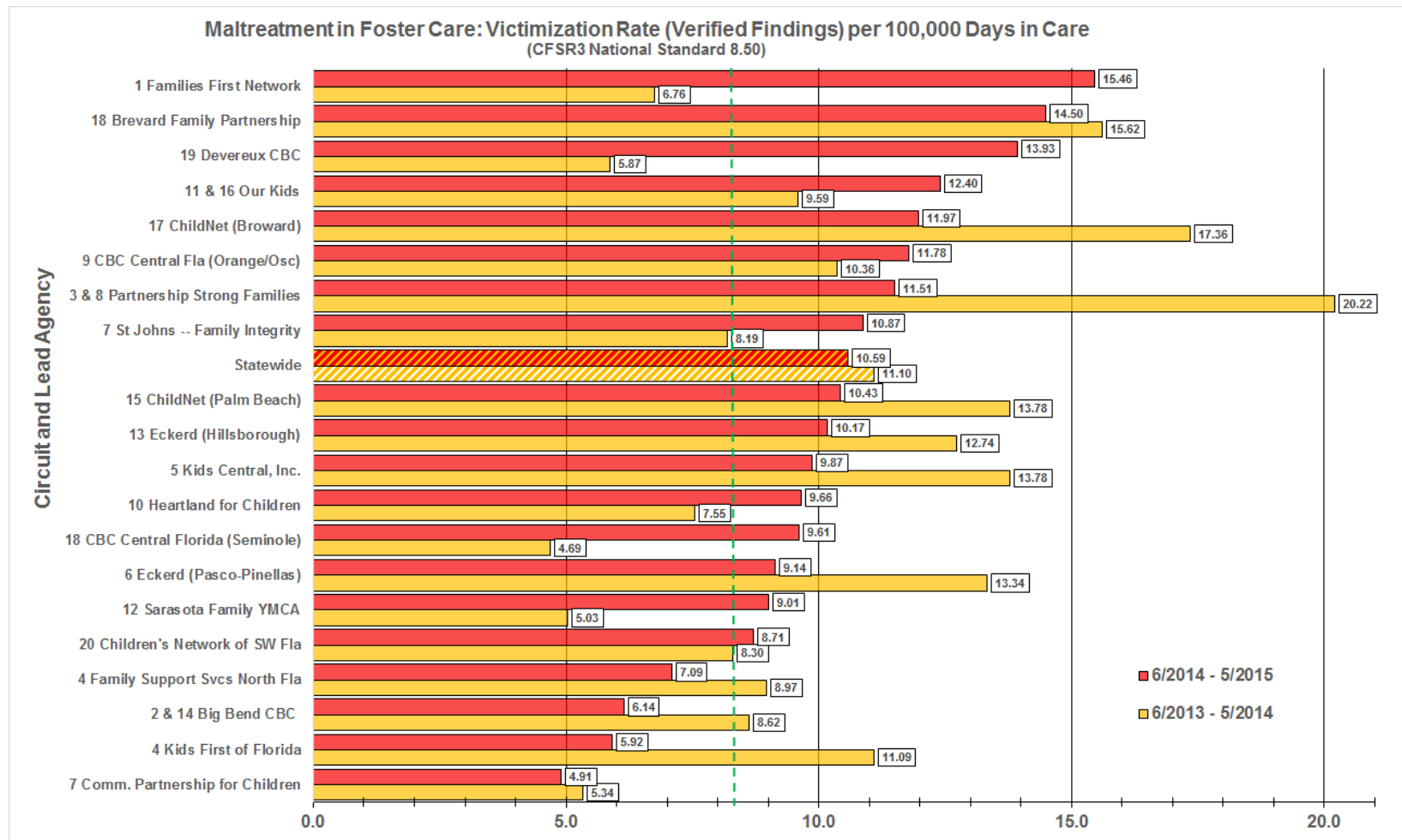
Four safety indicators are included on the following pages:

- Maltreatment in Foster Care
- Maltreatment during Case-Managed, In-Home Services
- No Maltreatment within Six Months of Termination of Supervision
- No Maltreatment within Six Months of Termination of Family Support Services



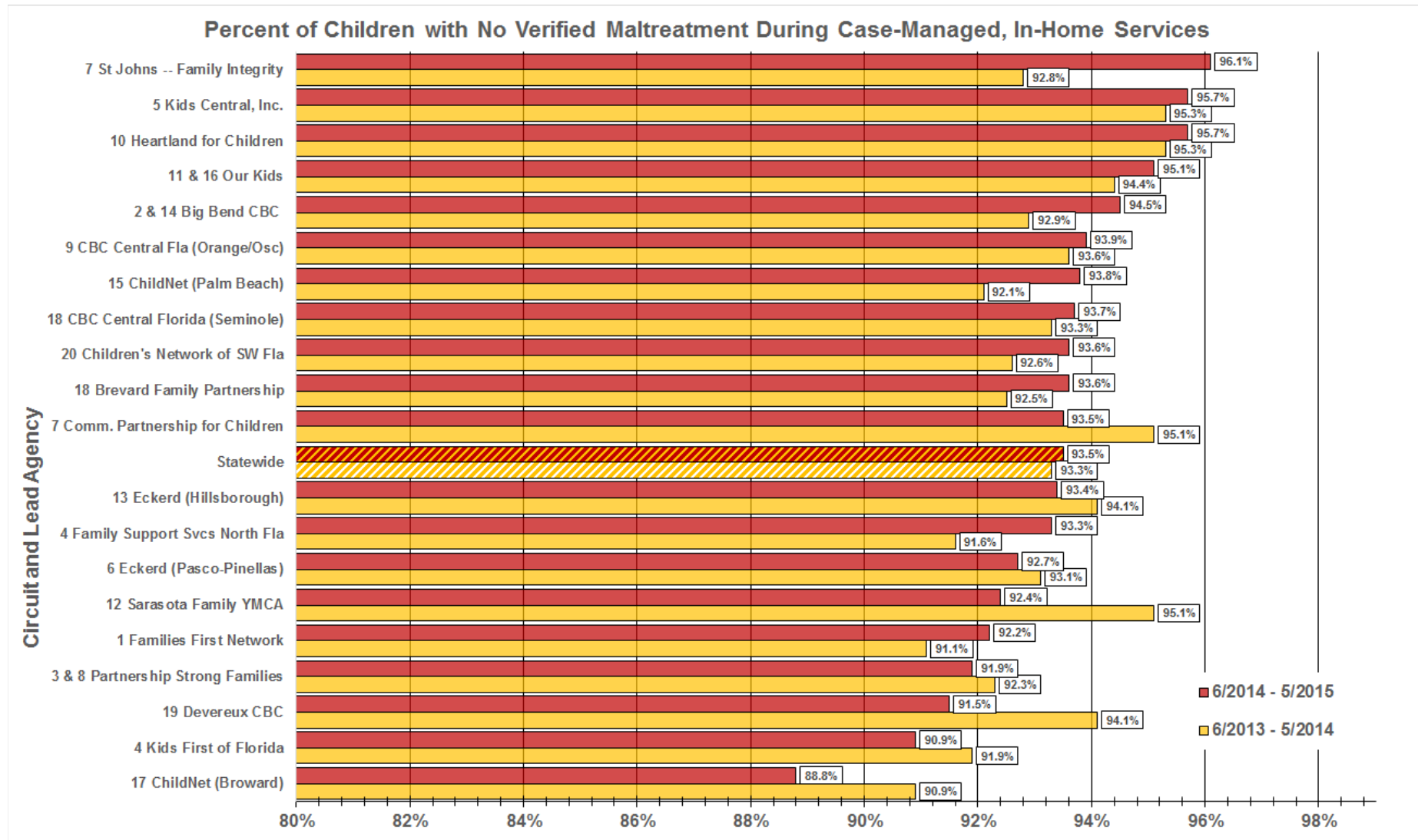
Safety Indicator: Maltreatment in Foster Care

Maltreatment in foster care is a very rare event, so it is measured differently from other indicators, using verified maltreatment per 100,000 days in care. The following chart is based on the new federal measure of maltreatment in foster care, used in the federal Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR) Round 3. It includes both licensed care and kinship (relative and non-relative) care and maltreatment by persons other than the OHC caregiver. The most recent available 12-month period is June 2014 – May 2015, with the same period a year earlier for comparison. Florida’s statewide performance of around 11 is above the national standard of 8.5 for CFSR Round 3, indicating a need for improvement. Because of the low numbers, we see wide variability from area to area and year to year.



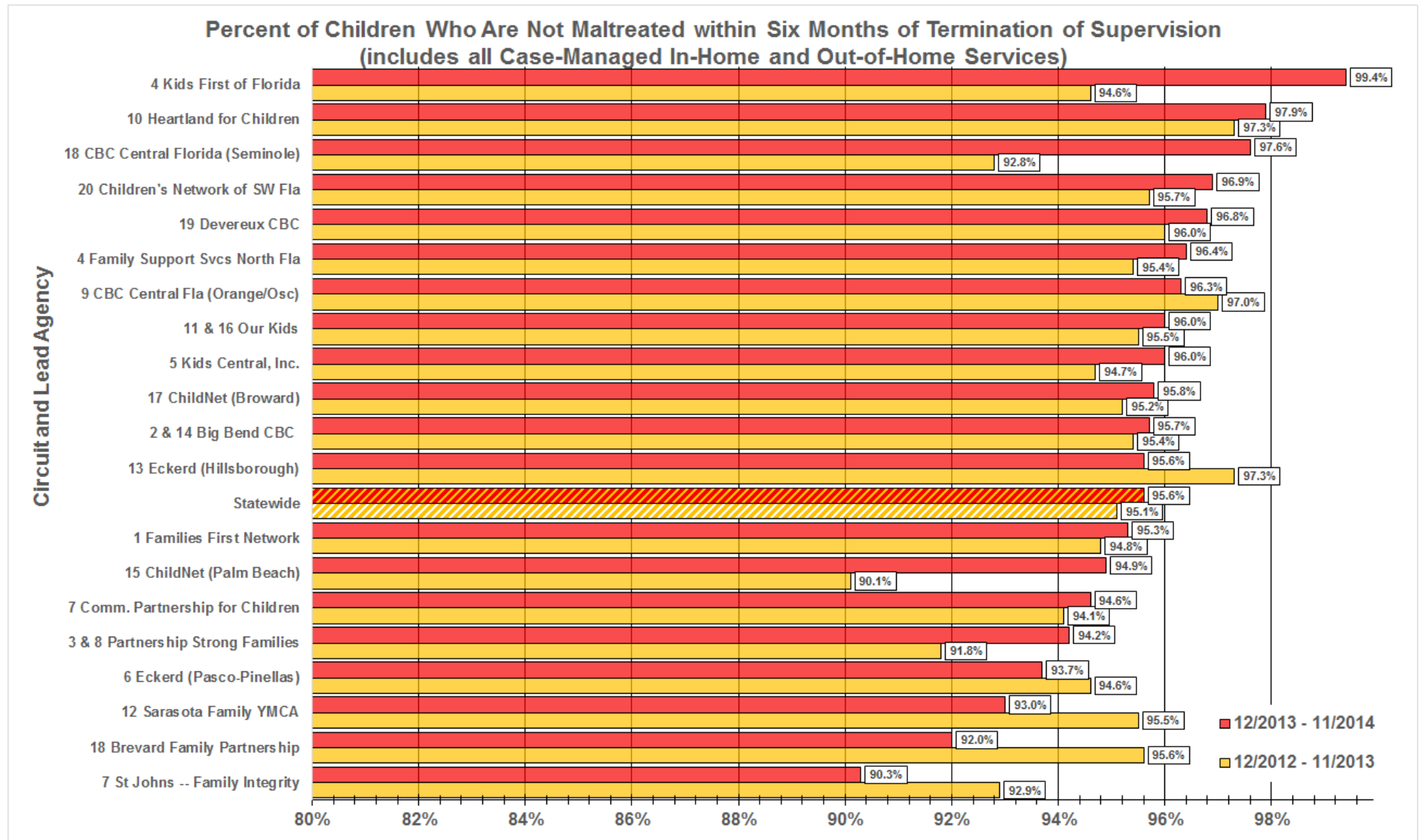
Safety Indicator: No Maltreatment during Case-Managed, In-Home Services

Most areas have a measured non- recurrence rate in the range of 93-96%, which seems reasonable with a population of children determined “unsafe” in the past, with moderate to high risk of recurrence. Some of the variation is not surprising, given the variation in reporting and recurrence. For example, Circuit 17 has both the highest verification rate and the lowest non- recurrence rate.



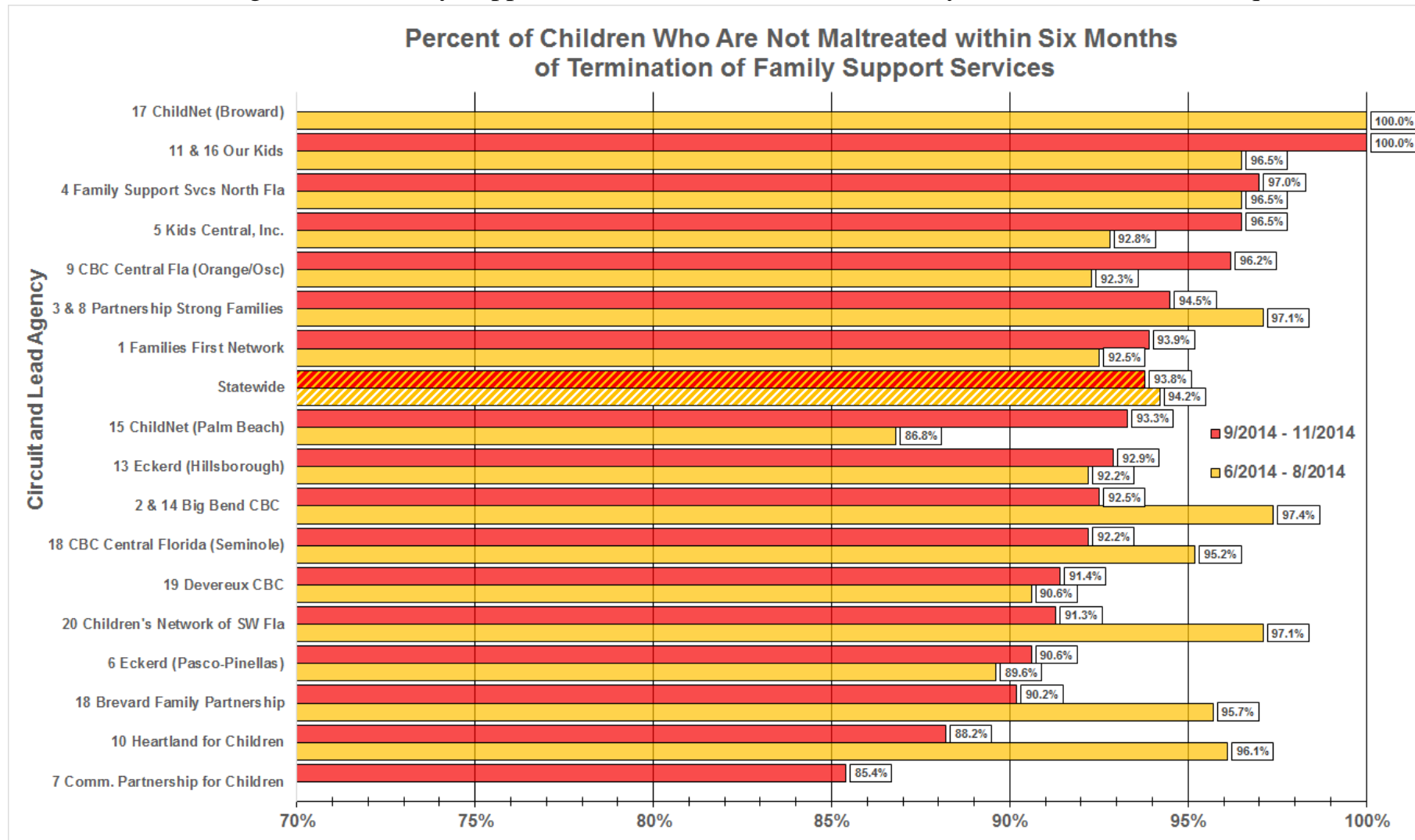
Safety Indicator: No Maltreatment within Six Months of Termination of Supervision

Most areas have a measured non-recurrence rate in the range of 93-96%, which seems reasonable with a population of children determined “unsafe” in the past, with moderate to high risk of recurrence. Some of the variation is not surprising, given the variation in reporting and recurrence. For example, Circuit 17 has both the highest verification rate and the lowest non-recurrence rate.



Safety Indicator: No Maltreatment within Six Months of Termination of Family Support Services

These services are for families with children determined to be safe, but in need of services, with some risk of maltreatment in the future. However, the statewide non-recurrence rate on this indicator is 94% -- lower than average of 95+% for children terminated from case-managed services. Some have extremely low rates, suggesting that families have been inappropriately referred from investigations to Family Support Services. Some of these have very few terminations in the quarter.



Permanency Outcome Indicators

After children has been removed from their families, the child welfare system must work quickly to ensure permanency. Included in the purpose section of Florida's child protection law are the following provisions:

- To ensure that permanent placement with the biological or adoptive family is achieved as soon as possible for every child in foster care and that no child remains in foster care longer than 1 year. (Section 39.001 (1)(h), Florida Statutes)
- To ensure that, when reunification or adoption is not possible, the child will be prepared for alternative permanency goals or placements, to include, but not be limited to, long-term foster care, independent living, custody to a relative on a permanent basis with or without legal guardianship, or custody to a foster parent or legal custodian on a permanent basis with or without legal guardianship. (Section 39.001 (1)(j), F.S.)

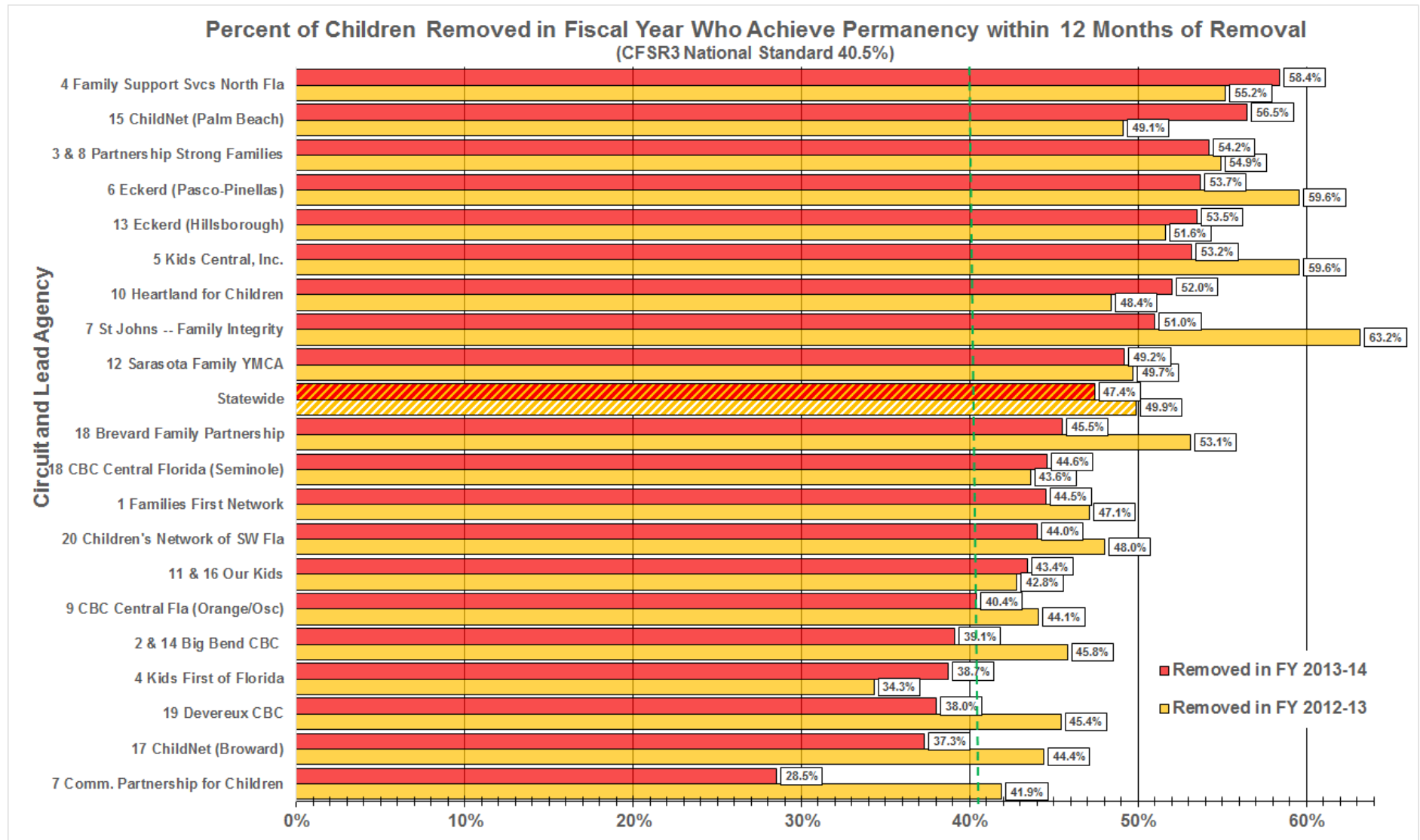
Four permanency indicators are included on the following pages:

- Children Achieving Permanency within 12 Months of Removal
- Children in Care 12-23 months on July 1 Who Achieve Permanency by June 30
- Children in Care 24+ months on July 1 Who Achieve Permanency by June 30
- Children Reunified Who Return to Care within 12 Months of Reunification



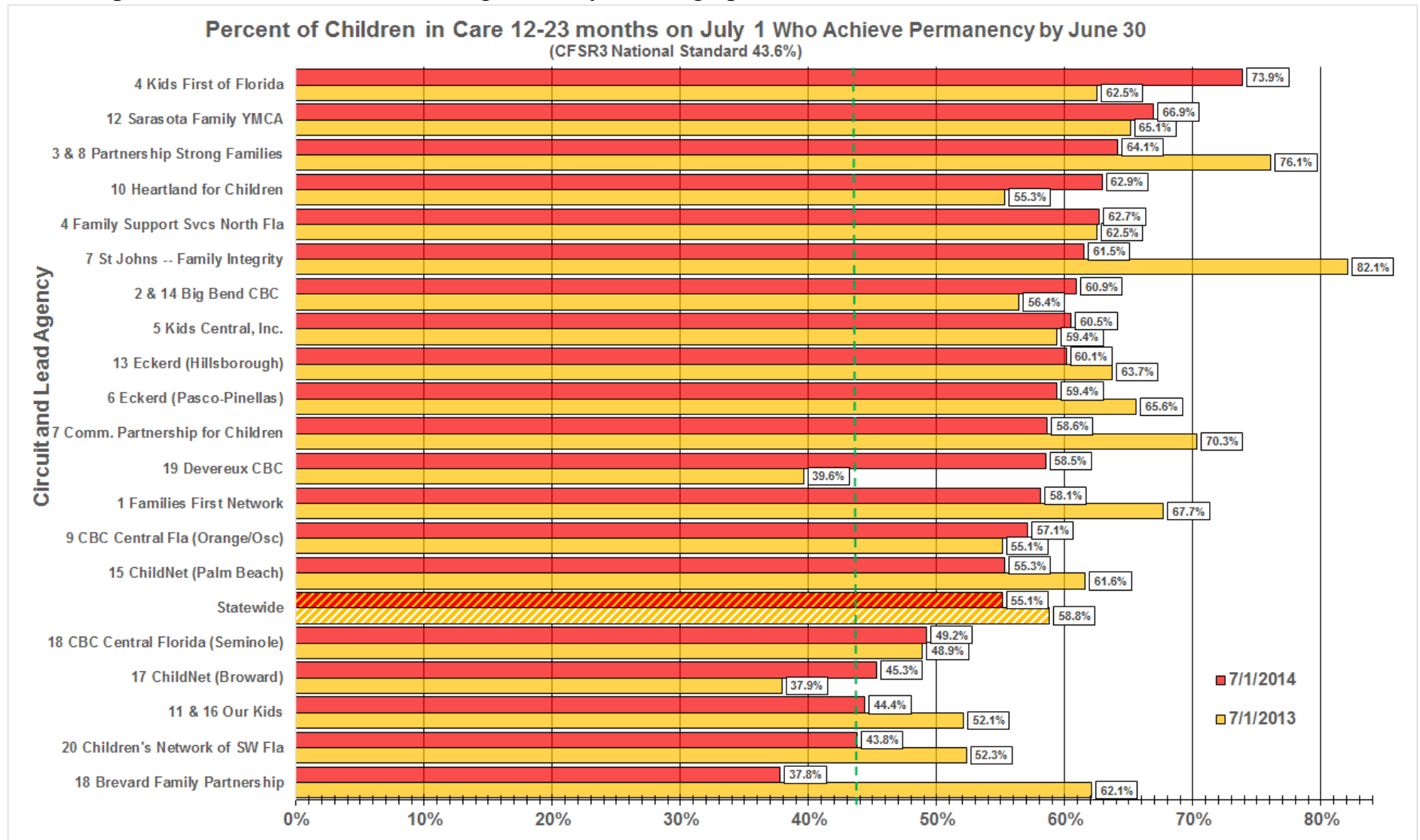
Permanency Outcome Indicator: Children Achieving Permanency within 12 Months of Removal

This indicator is based on one used in the federal Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR). Florida's statewide performance of nearly 50% is well above the national standard of 40.5% for CFSR Round 3. However, several areas are in need of improvement on this indicator, which is aligned with Florida's statutory standard.



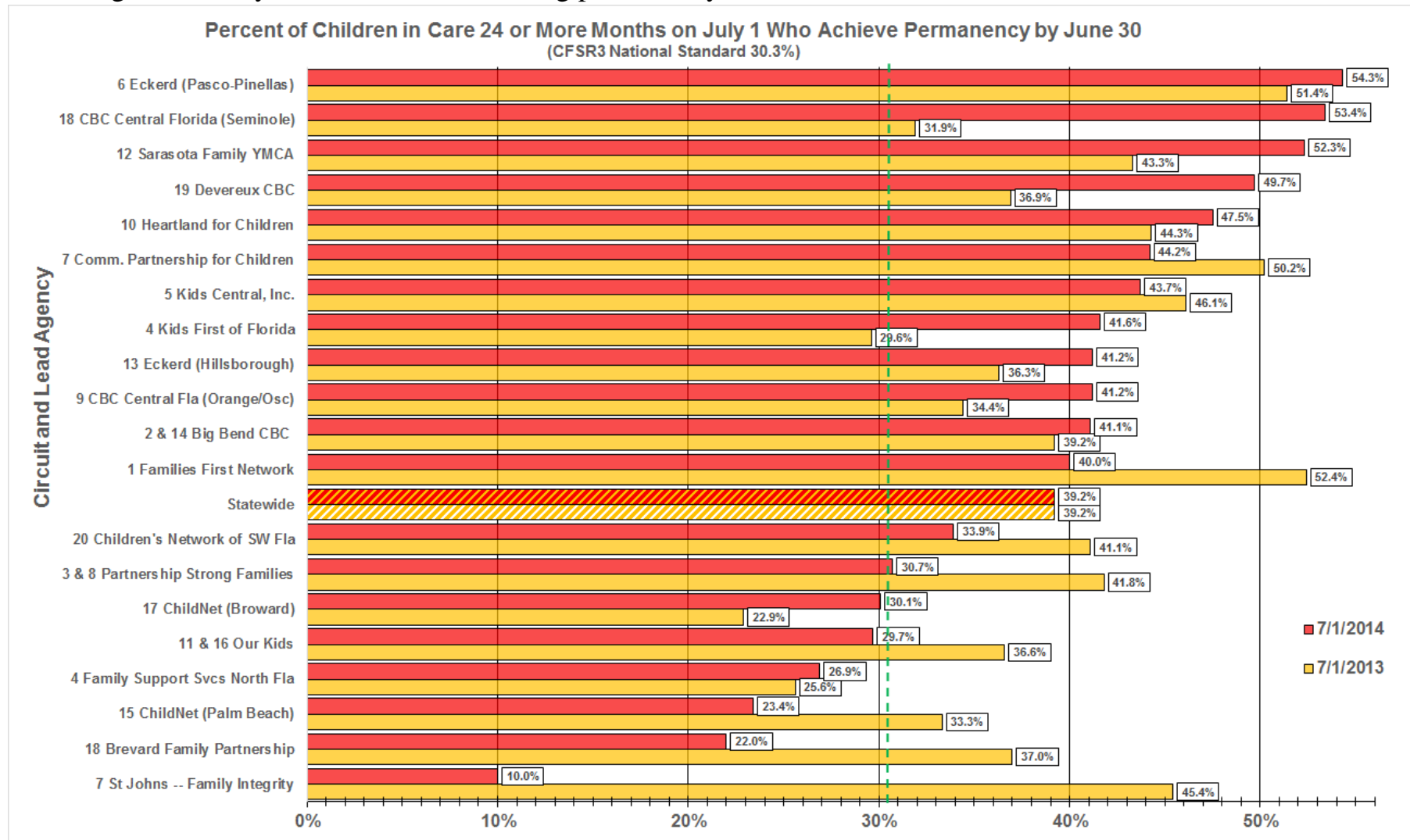
Permanency Indicator: Children in Care 12-23 Months Who Achieve Permanency in FY

This indicator and the next one address those children who did not achieve permanency within 12 months. It is also based on an indicator used in the federal CFSR Round 3. Florida's statewide performance of nearly 60% is well above the national standard of 43.6% for CFSR Round 3. This indicator should be viewed in conjunction with the other permanency indicators. An area with low performance for children entering care may have high performance on this one, and vice versa.



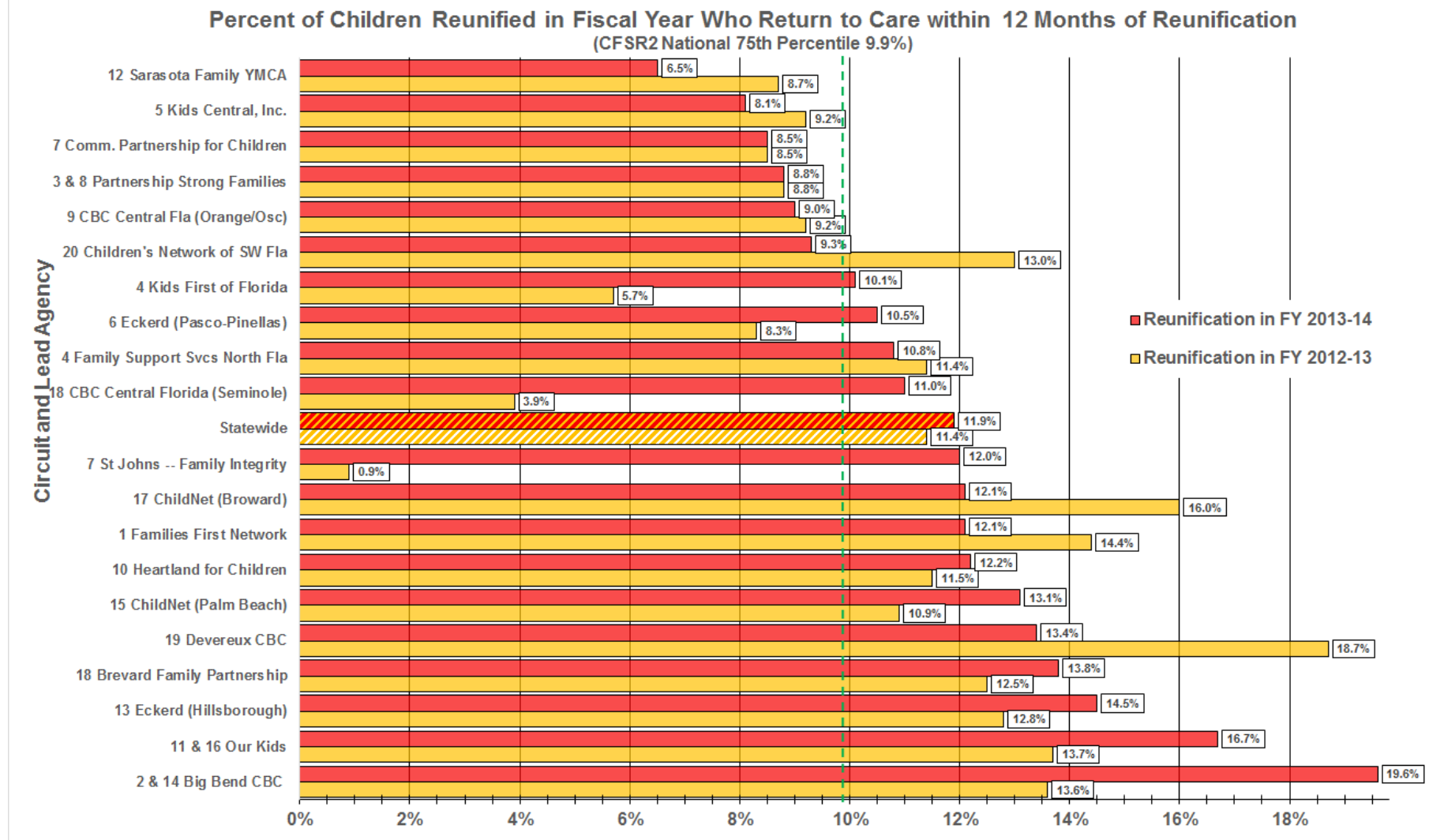
Permanency Indicator: Children in Care 24 or More Months Who Achieve Permanency in FY

This indicator and the last one address those children who did not achieve permanency within 12 months. It is also based on an indicator used in the federal CFSR Round 3. Florida's statewide performance of nearly 39.2% is well above the national standard of 30.3% for CFSR Round 3. This indicator should be viewed in conjunction with the other permanency indicators. An area may have low performance on this indicator because of extremely high performance on the first two, as their children remaining in care may have more issues making permanency more difficult.



Permanency Outcome Indicator: Re-entry into Out-of-Home Care

Discharges from care must be timely, but should also be lasting. This indicator is based on an indicator used in the federal CFSR Round 2, as it covers a broader group of children than those selected in the indicator used in Round 3. Florida's statewide performance of nearly 12% does not meet the old national standard of 9.9% for CFSR Round 2. This indicator should be viewed in conjunction with the other permanency indicators. An area's low performance on this indicator might be related to high performance on the first three. However, some areas have high re-entry rates in addition to low rates of timely permanency.



Well-Being Indicators

After children have been removed, the child welfare system must not only work quickly to ensure permanency, it must also find appropriate and stable placements to ensure the child's family, school and community connections, and promote the well-being and normalcy of children in placement. Florida's child protection law includes the following purpose statements:

- “To secure for the child . . . in all cases in which a child must be removed from parental custody, that the child is placed in an approved relative home, licensed foster home, adoptive home, or independent living program that provides the most stable and potentially permanent living arrangement for the child, as determined by the court. . . .” (Section 39.001 (1)(i), Florida Statutes)
- “To make every possible effort, if two or more children who are in the care or under the supervision of the department are siblings, to place the siblings in the same home . . .” (Section 39.001 (1)(k), F.S.)
- “To ensure that . . . when children are removed from their homes, disruption to their education be minimized to the extent possible.” (Section 39.001 (1)(m), F.S.)

Section 409.986 (2), F.S., includes the following outcomes:

- Children have permanency and stability in their living arrangements.
- Family relationships and connections are preserved for children.
- Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.
- Children receive services to meet their physical and mental health needs.
- Children develop the capacity for independent living and competence as an adult.

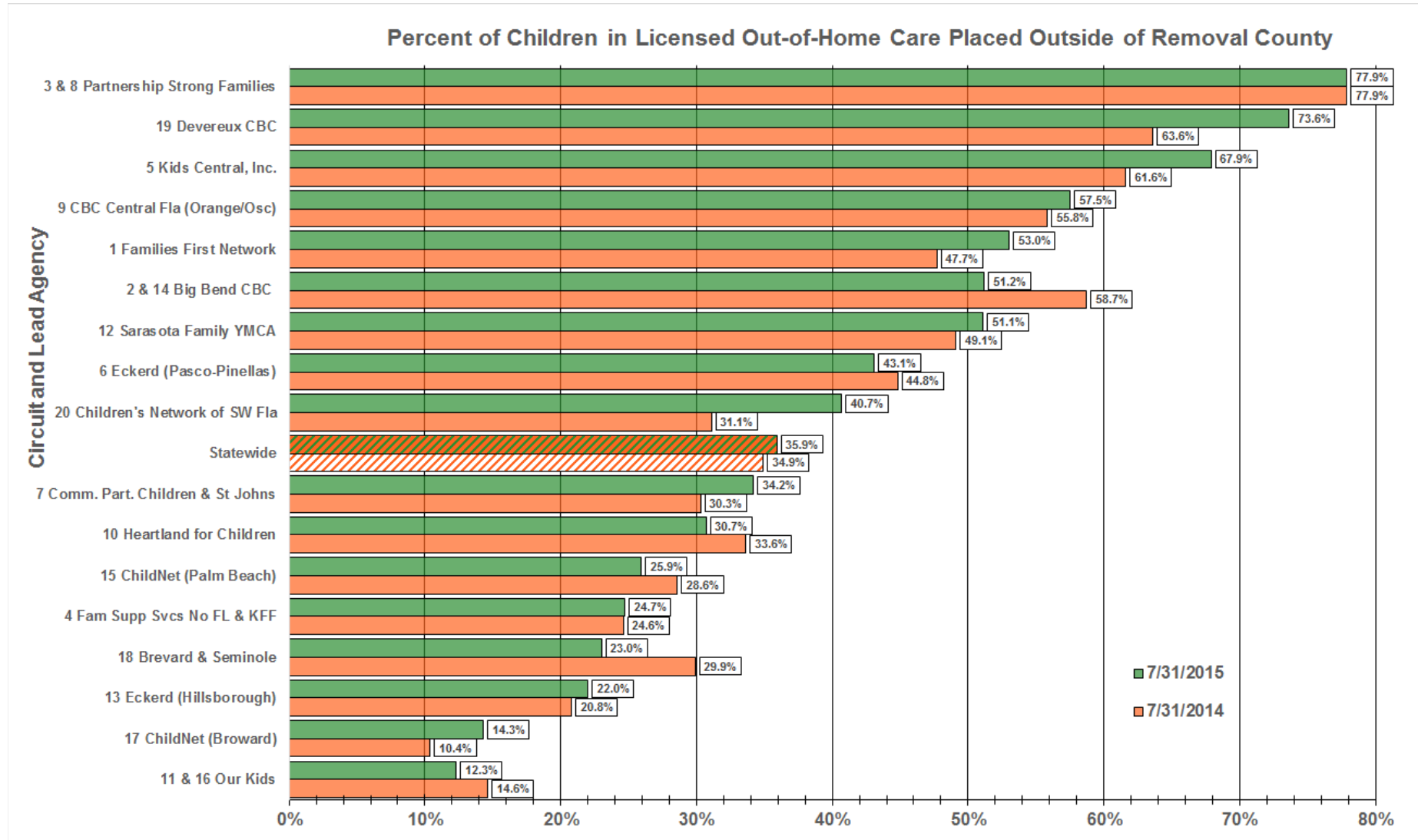
A set of well-being indicators are included on the following pages:

- Children in Licensed Out-of-Home Care Placed Outside of Removal County
- Children in Licensed Out-of-Home Care Placed Outside of Removal Circuit
- Placement of Sibling Groups Together
- Placement Stability
- Placement of Young Children in Group Care
- Placement of Adolescent Children in Group Care
- Dental Services
- Preparation for Adulthood through Education



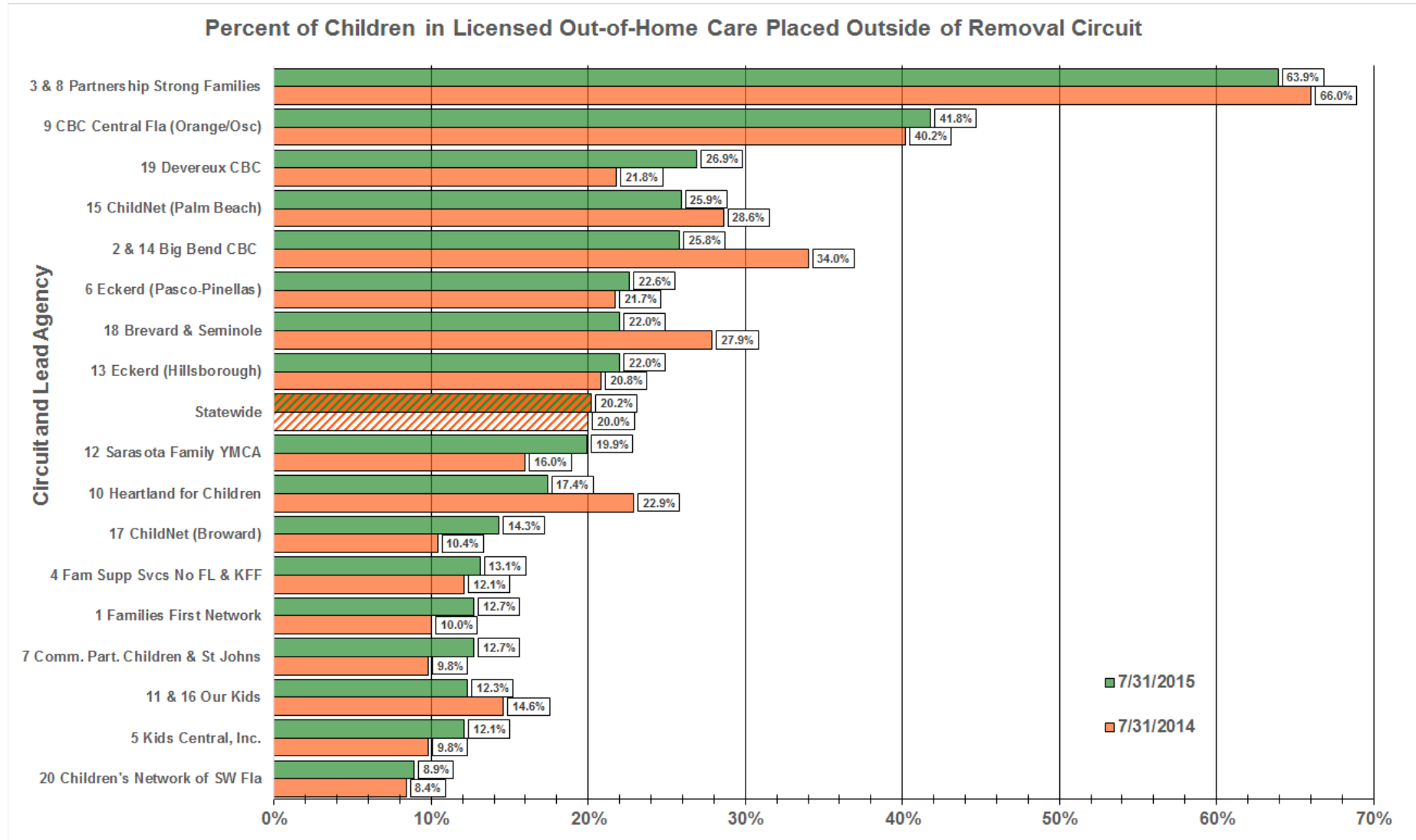
Well-Being Indicator: Children in Licensed Out-of-Home Care Placed Outside of Removal County

In order to ensure the child’s family, school and community connections – especially when the child is placed in licensed care – it is usually important to place the child near the people closest to the child. Such proximity facilitates frequent visitation, which promotes timely reunification. The following chart indicates a need for more foster family homes in each county. Although the problem is especially acute in some counties with small populations, it is not limited to those areas.



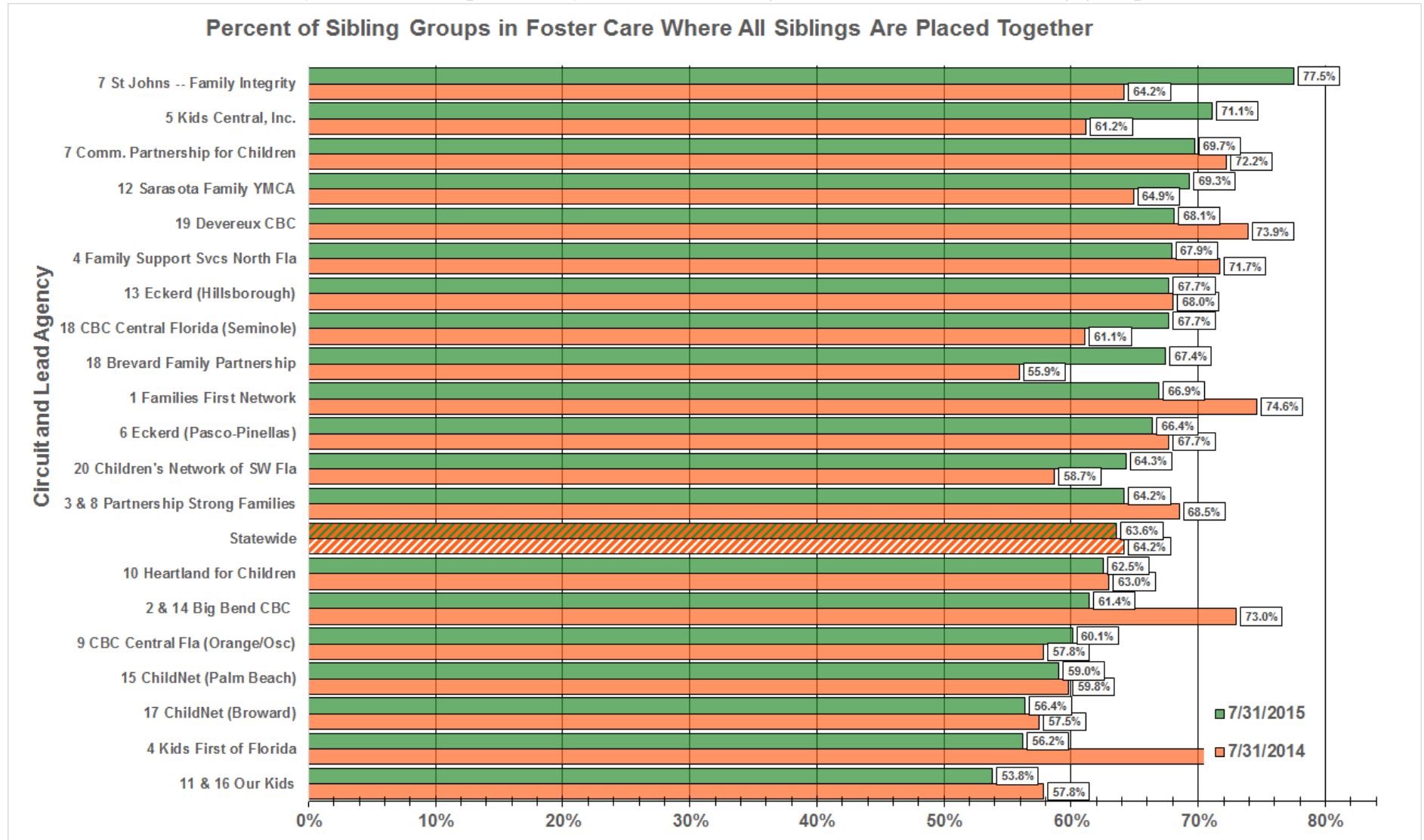
Well-Being Indicator: Children in Licensed Out-of-Home Care Placed Outside of Removal Circuit

The percentages on this indicator are lower than for the last indicator, as many children are not placed in their home county, but are placed in the same circuit. This indicator also demonstrates a need for more foster family homes closer to the child's county. As with out-of-county placements, the issue is not limited to areas with a lower population density, but is especially acute in those areas.



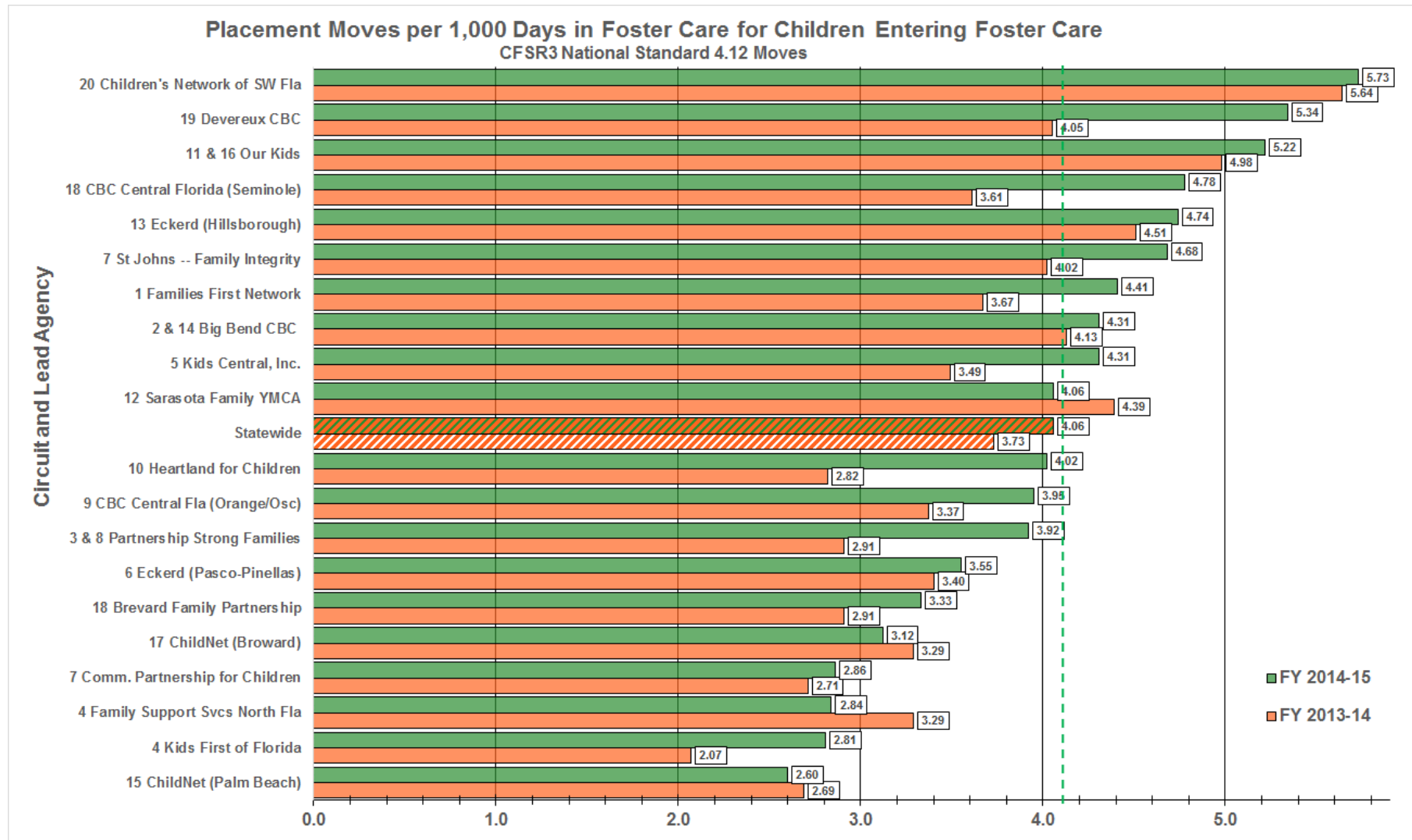
Well-Being Indicator: Percent of Sibling Groups Placed Together

One of a foster child's most important connections is to one's own siblings placed in care. This is one more indicator of the need for more foster family homes, but specifically for those willing to accommodate a sibling group.



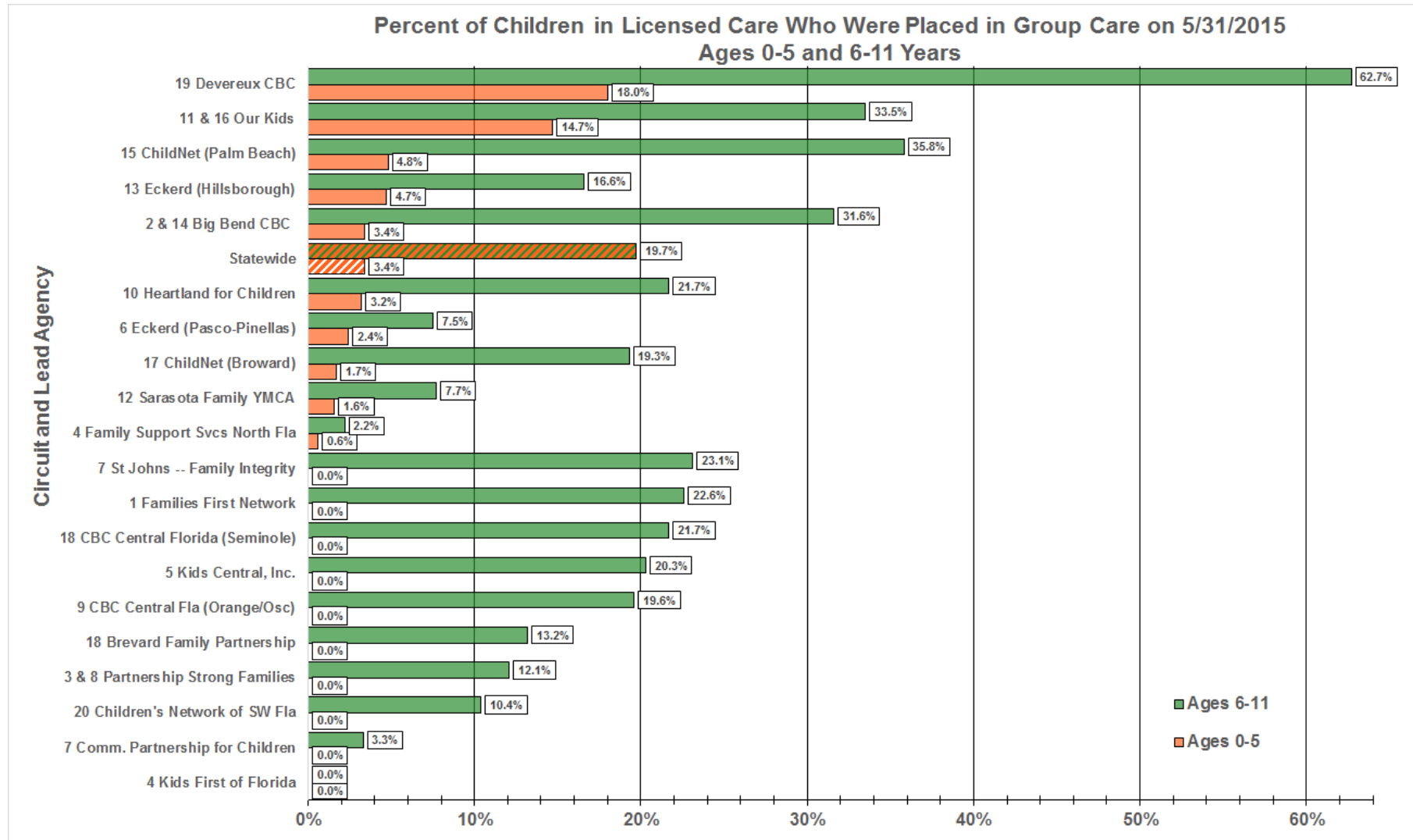
Placement Stability or Placement Changes While in Out-of-Home Care

This measure is a permanency indicator in the federal set of measures, used in CFSR Round 3. However, it is included in this group of indicators in this report, as it is related to the quality of a child’s experience in care, rather how quickly the child exits and whether the child returns. It is also a good indication of the need for recruitment of more foster family homes.



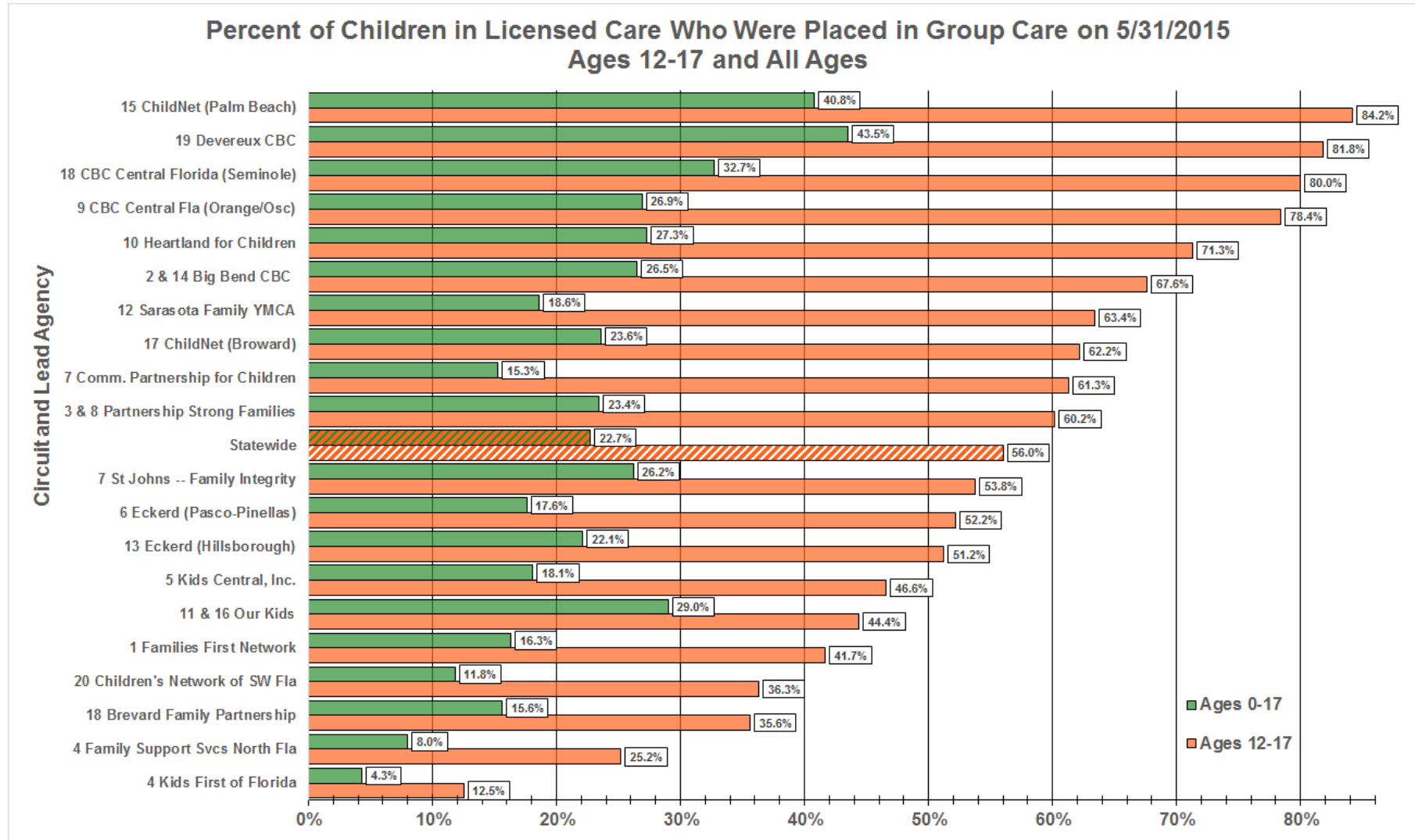
Well-Being Indicator: Percent of Young Children Placed in Group Care

Young children removed from their families for licensed placement should be placed with other families. Ten areas have no children under the age of six in group care and very few children ages six to 11 in group care. Some areas have too many small children in these inappropriate placements. As with the measures of proximity, sibling placement, and stability, this a good indication of the need for recruitment of more foster family homes



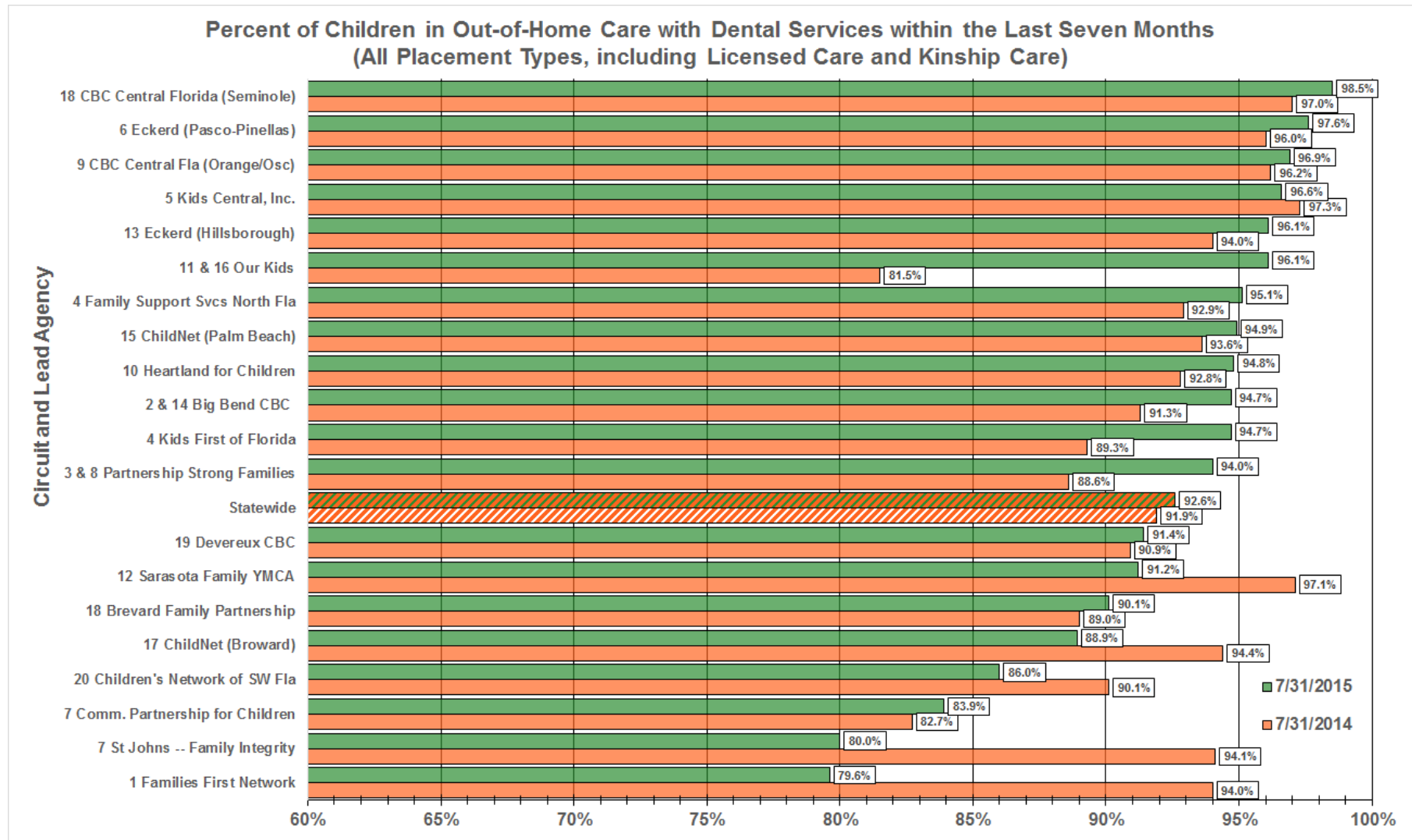
Well-Being Indicator: Percent of Children Placed in Group Care

Some adolescents are appropriately placed in group care to meet their treatment needs, but most have better outcomes in family settings. Some areas have very few adolescents in group care, but most have a majority of adolescents in this expensive type of placement. This is an area needing improvement and is another indication of the need for recruitment of more foster family homes.



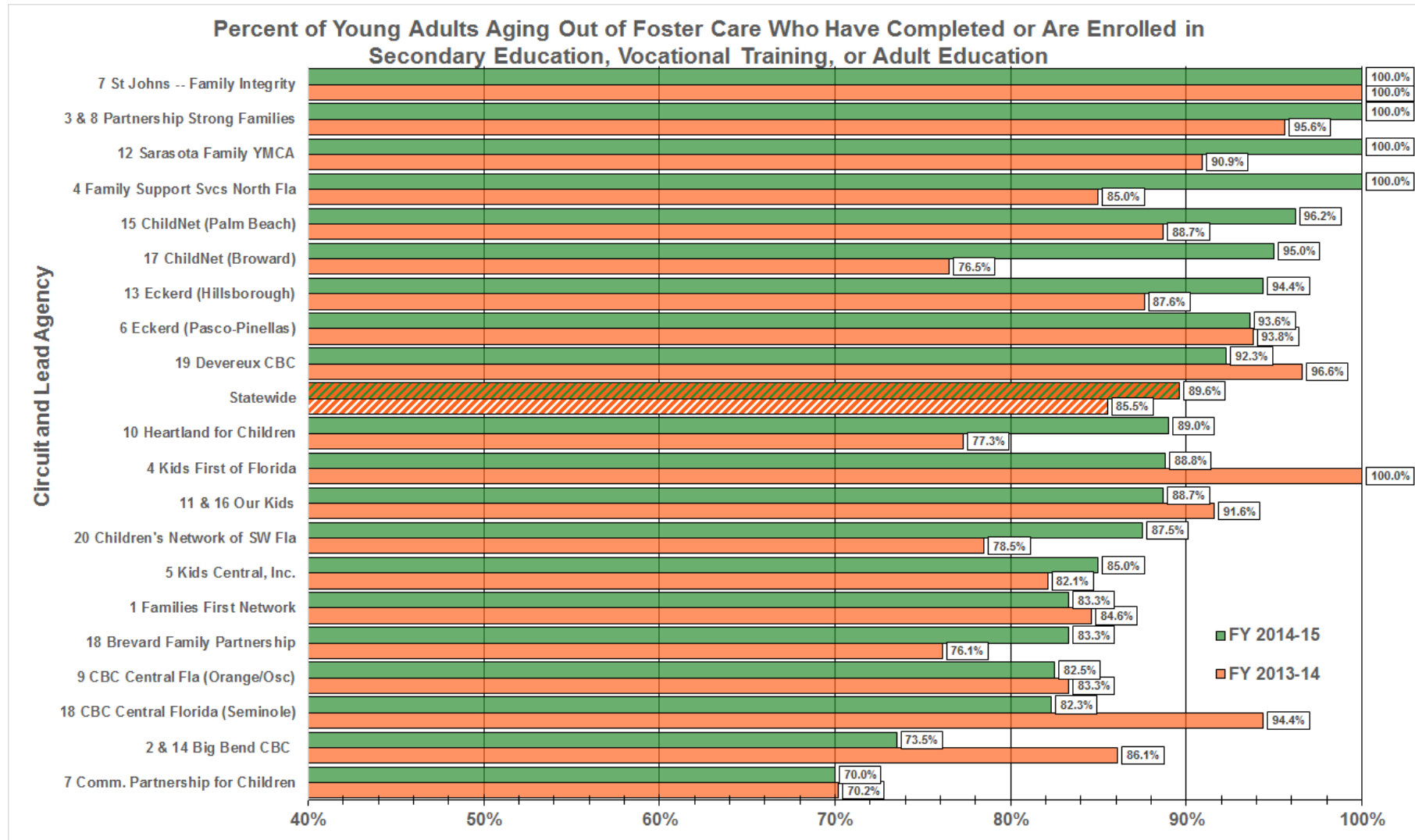
Well-Being Indicator: Percent of Children in Out-of-Home Care with Dental Services

Considerable progress has been made in the last few years with medical and dental services, but some areas have shown improvement in the last years, and some have slipped. This may indicate a need for development of more providers to serve foster children.



Well-Being Indicator: Preparation for Adulthood through Education

Some children removed from their families do not achieve permanency. For these children, it is crucial that they are prepared for life after foster care by the time they “age out” of care. This is one indicator of that preparation for adulthood. This indicator does not control for any of the many variables that influence this preparation, including time in care and the child’s education level when entering care, but we can see a wide range of preparation for independent living on this chart.



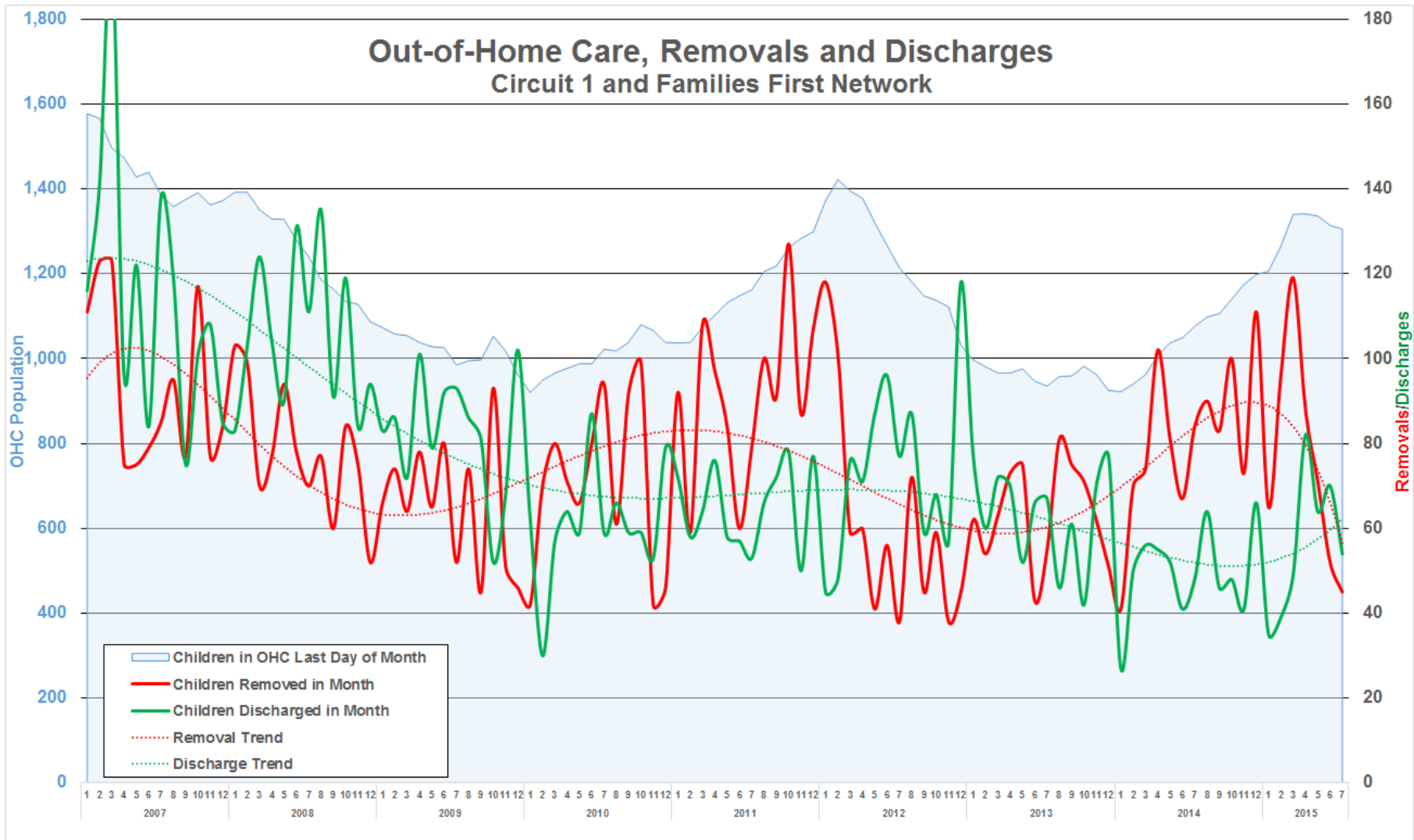
Circuit/Lead Agency Trends in Out-of-Home Care Population, Removals and Discharges

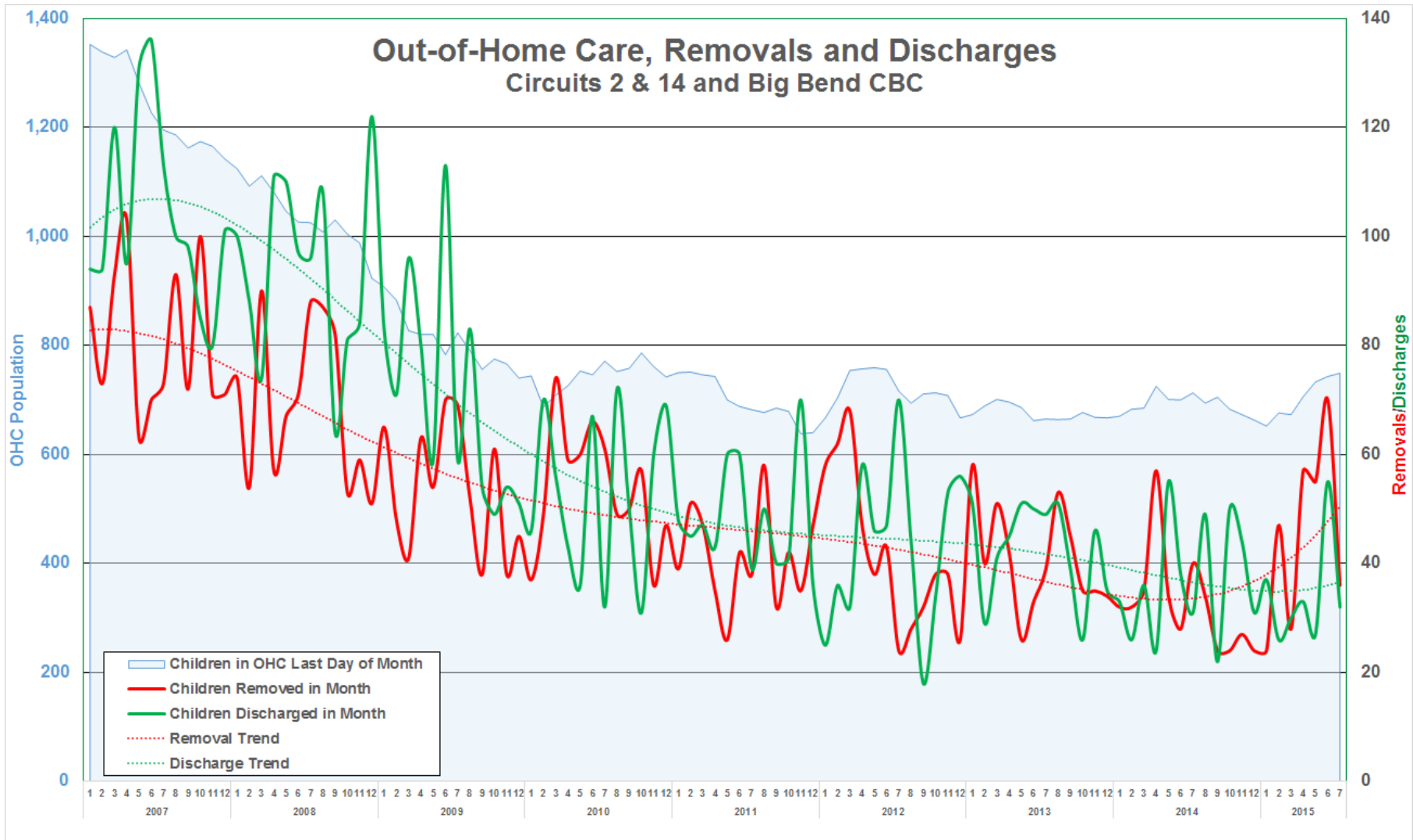
The following pages include charts that show the relationship between the size of the out-of-home care population and the numbers of removals and discharges that drive the size of that population.

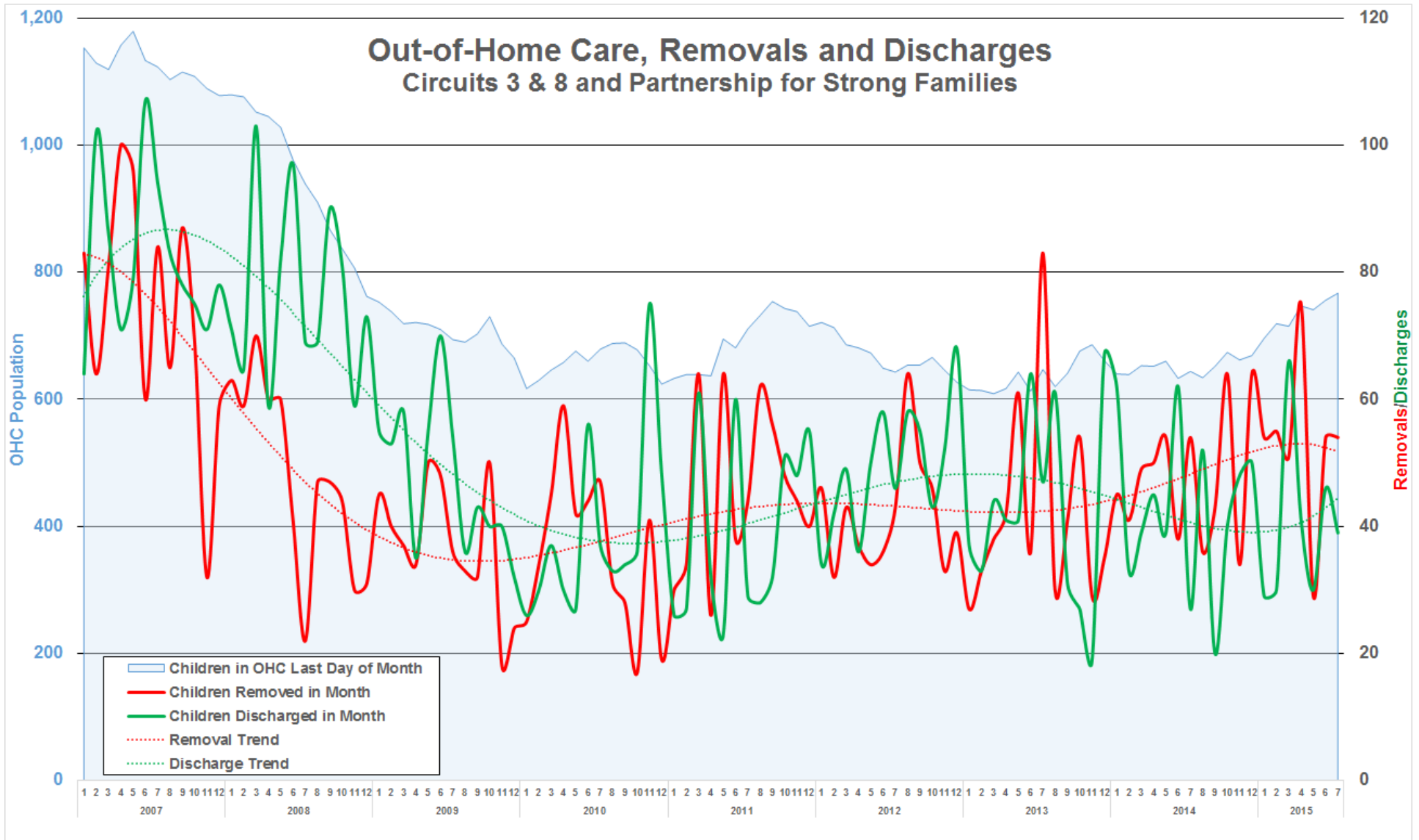
In reviewing the changes shown in the chart for your community, you may wish to compare your community to others in some of the comparison charts in this package for possible insights. You may also wish to think back over the last few years and consider what local changes may have driven removals and discharges upward or downward. Here are a few questions to get started:

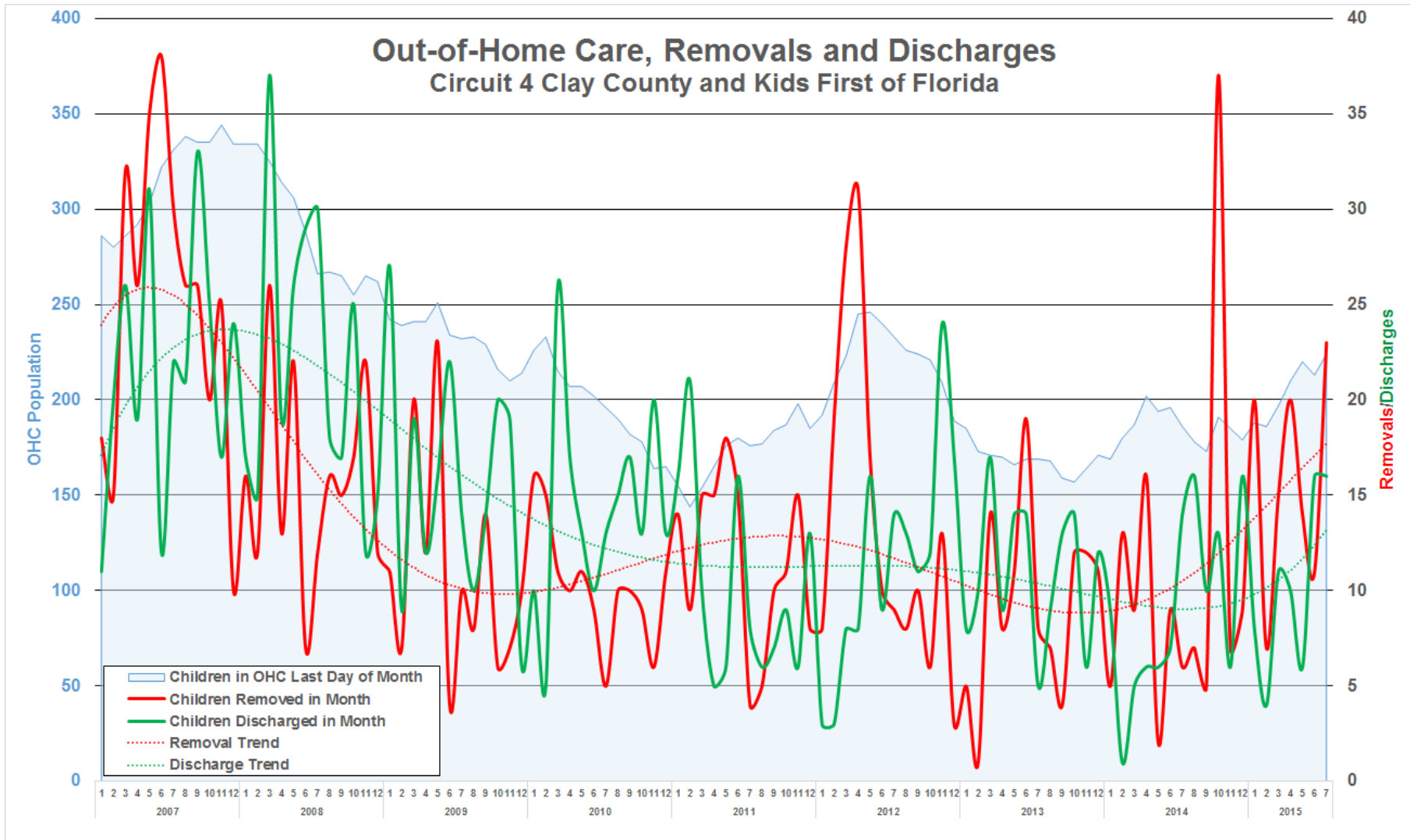
- Were the changes in removals and discharges driven by changes in the needs of the children and families, by changes in resources, by changes in local practices, or by some external factors over which the child welfare system has little control?
- If the number of removals is increasing and/or the removal rate is relatively high, is there a sufficient array of services to prevent unnecessary removal and placement? How does our community mix of safety management services, family support services, in-home family preservation services, and out-of-home care compare to other communities? Do child protective investigators, children's legal services and the courts see family preservation services as a realistic alternative to removal and placement? If not, what specific types of services should be developed to meet the needs of our children and families?
- If the number of discharges is decreasing and/or the discharge rate is relatively low, is it simply a matter of timing, i.e., the number of discharges cannot keep up with the recent influx of removals? If there is a recent decline in permanency performance and/or permanency performance is relatively low, is there an issue with provision of reunification services?

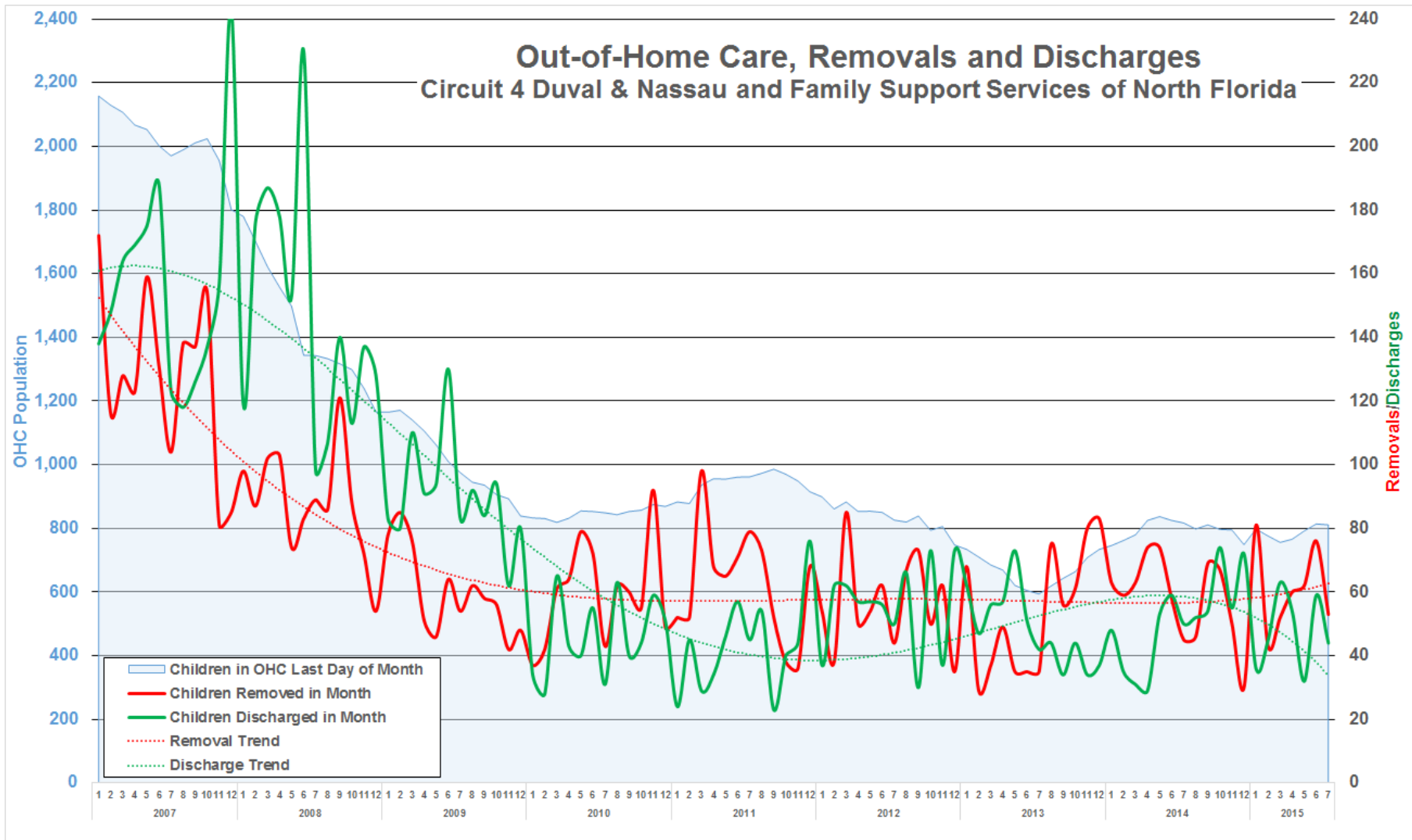


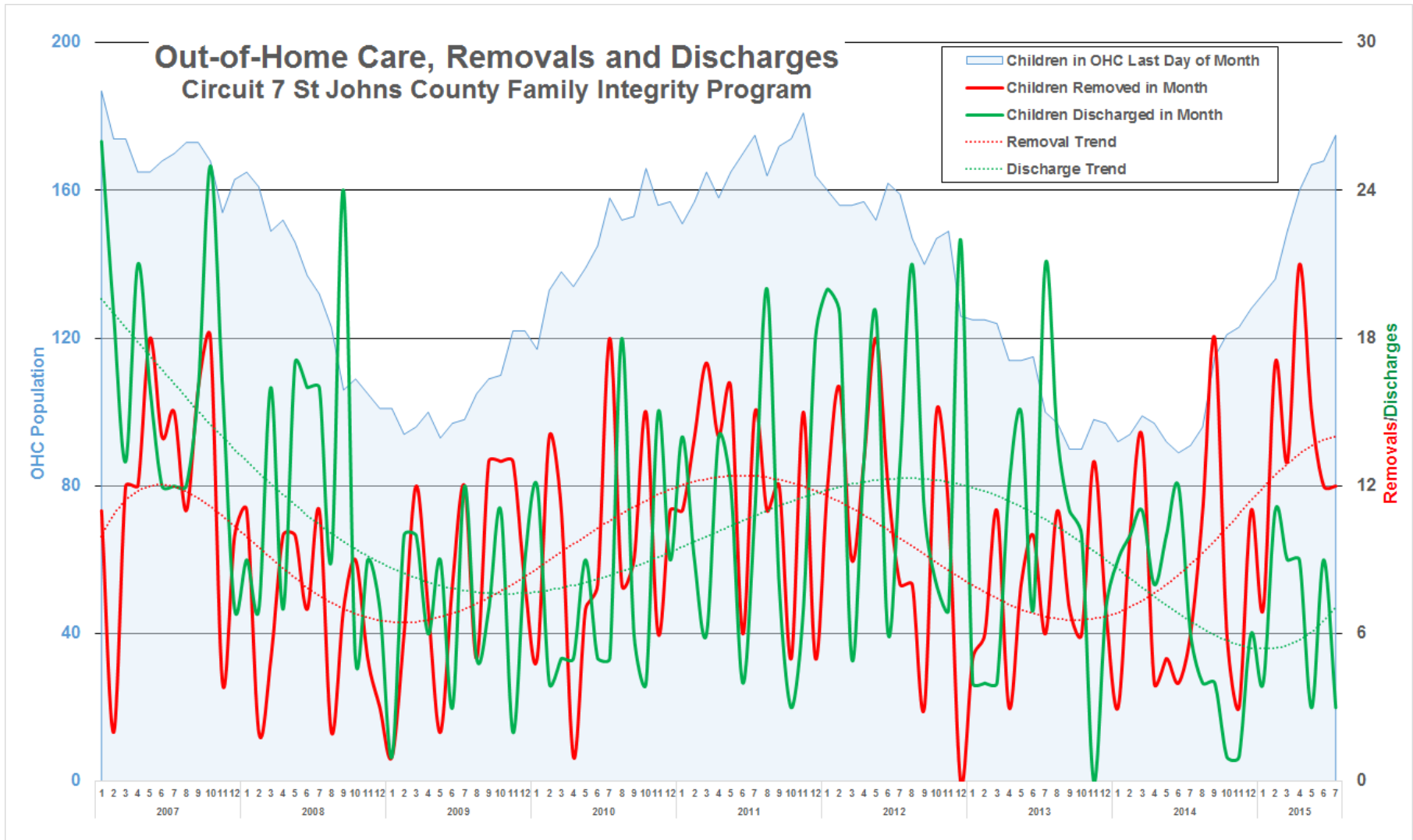


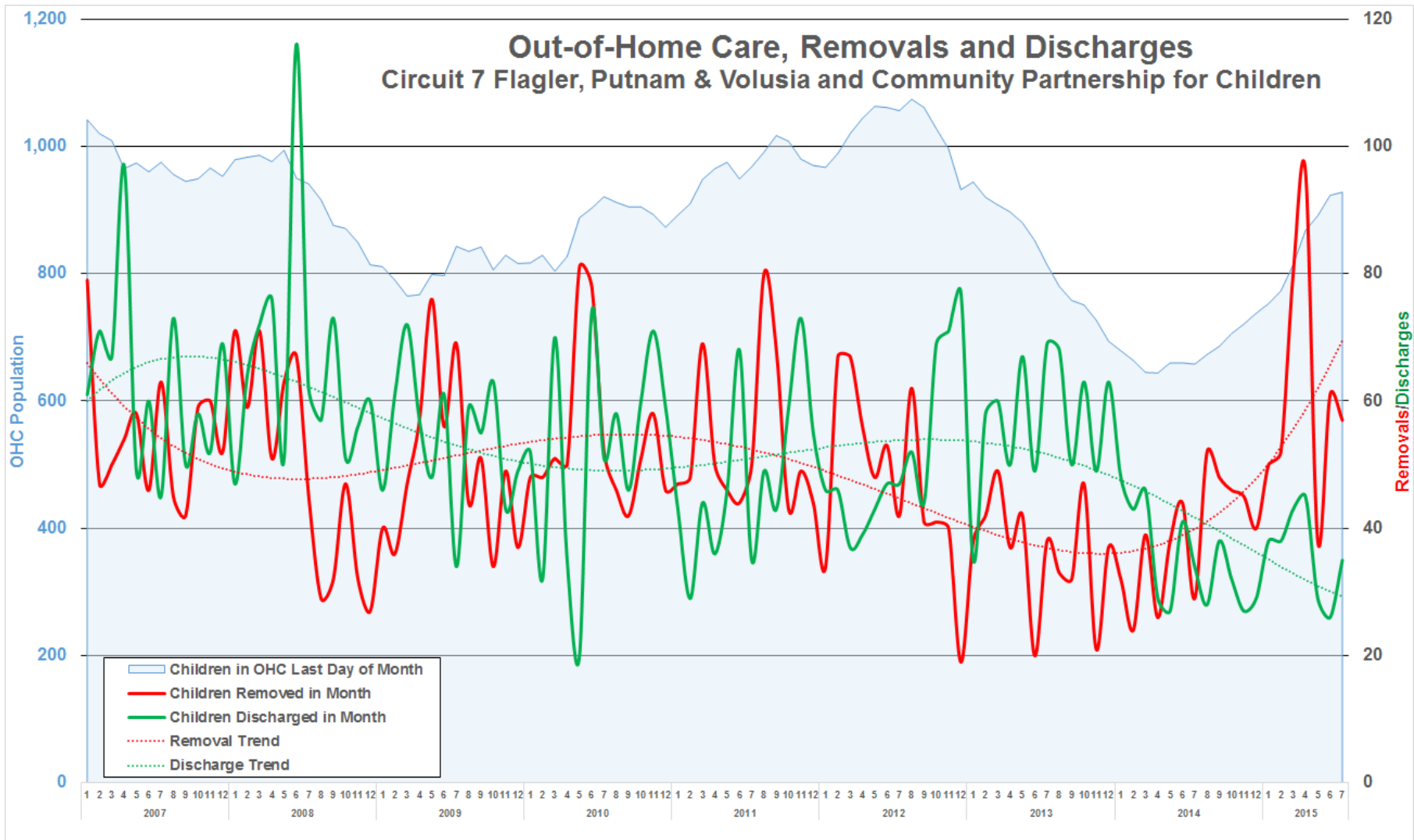


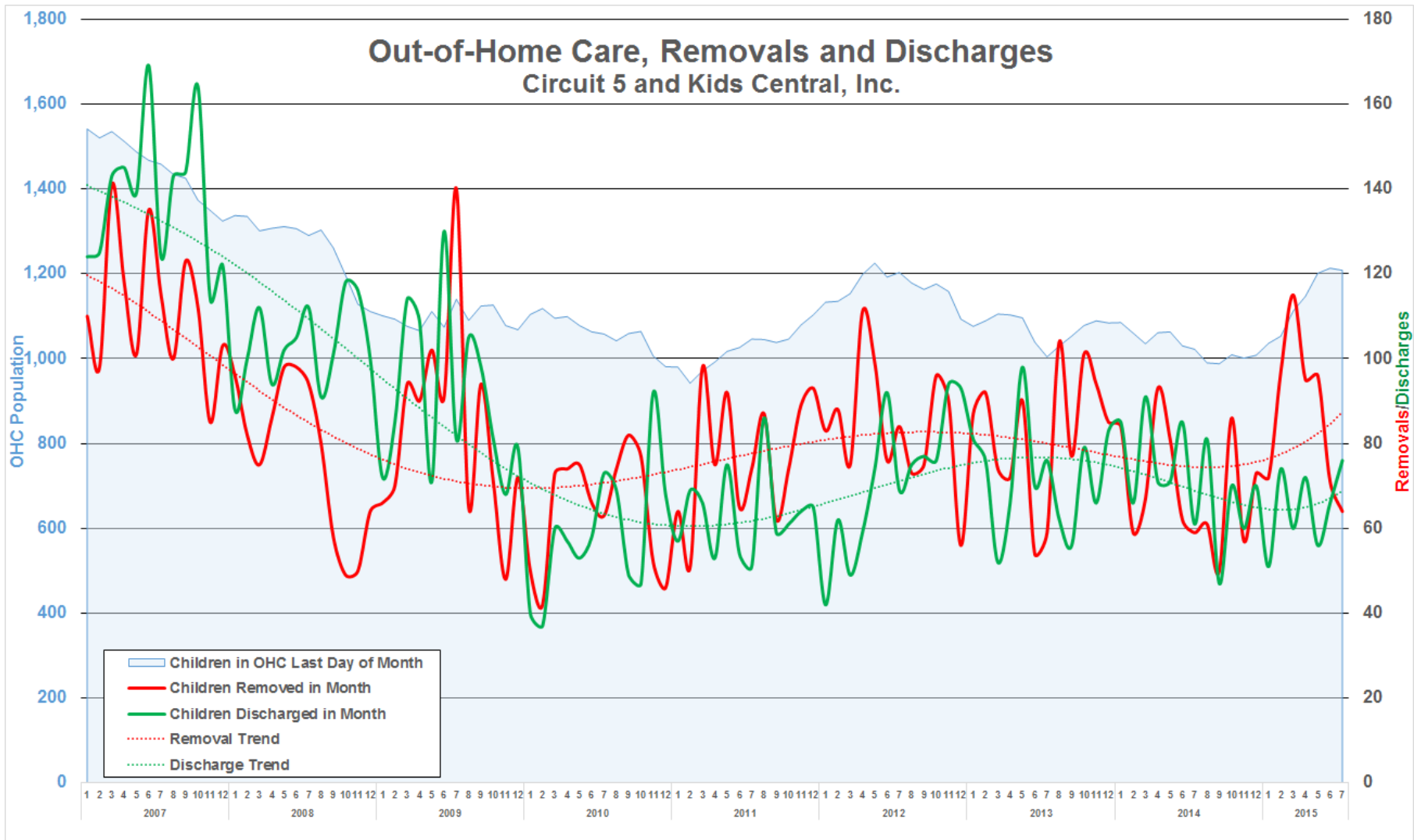


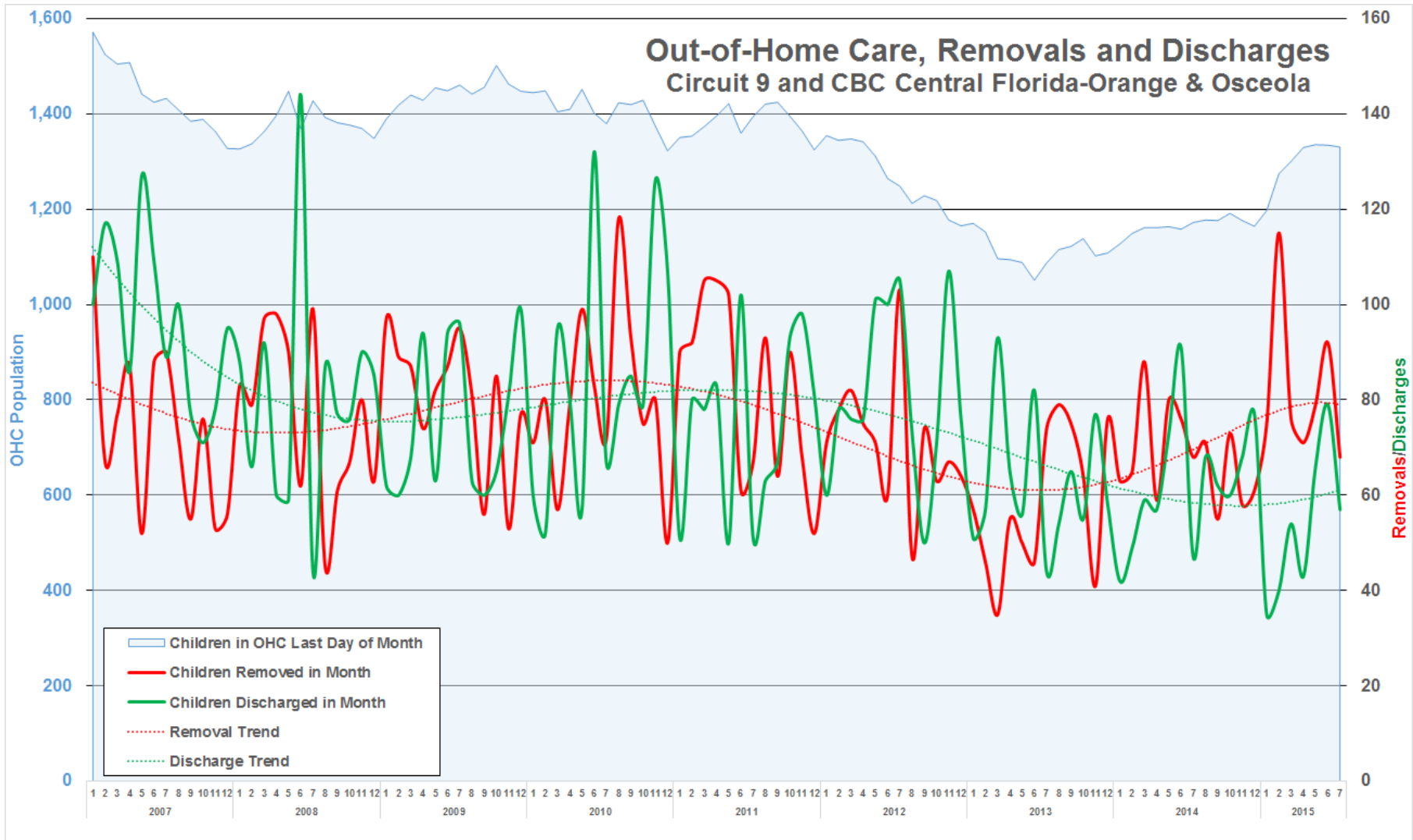


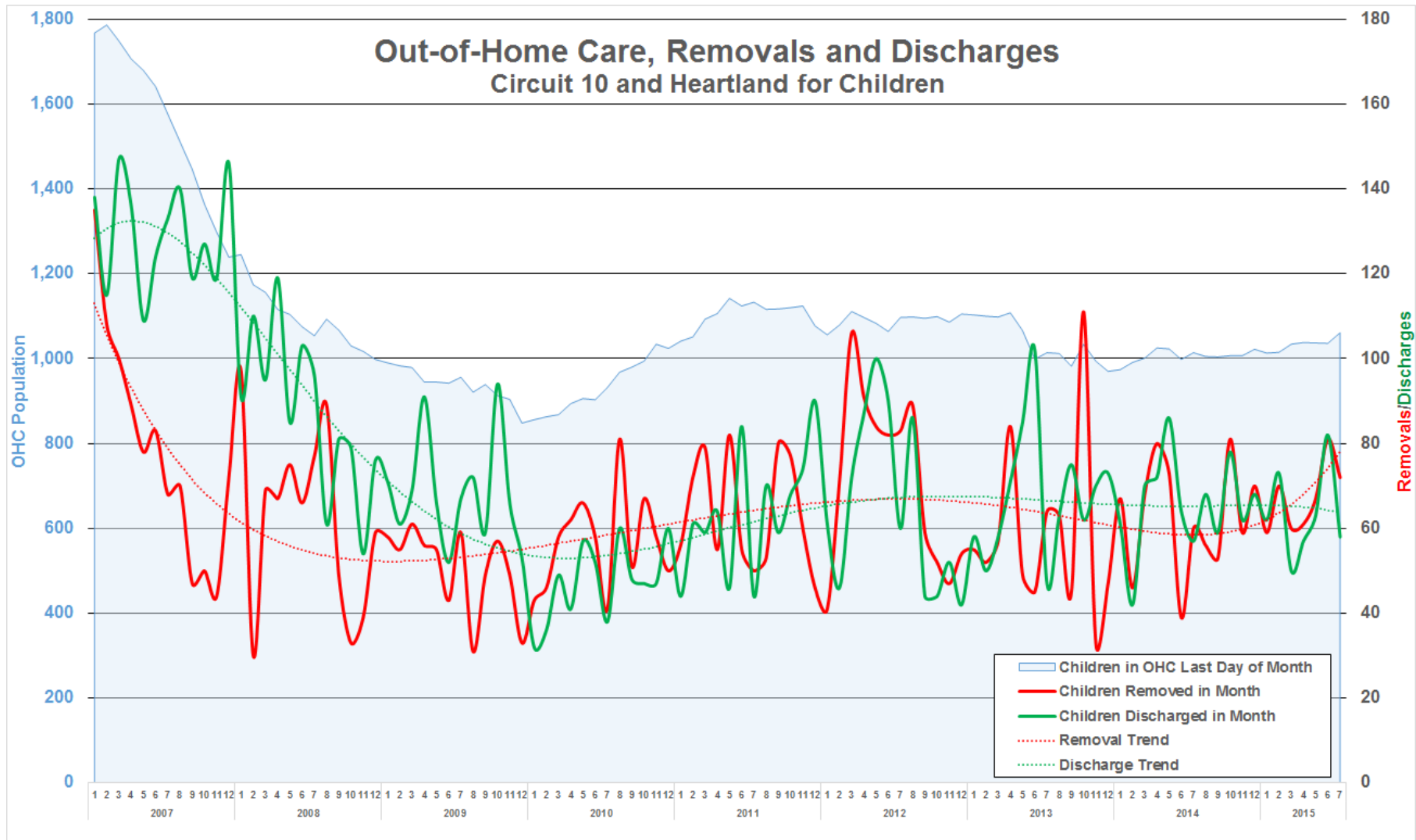


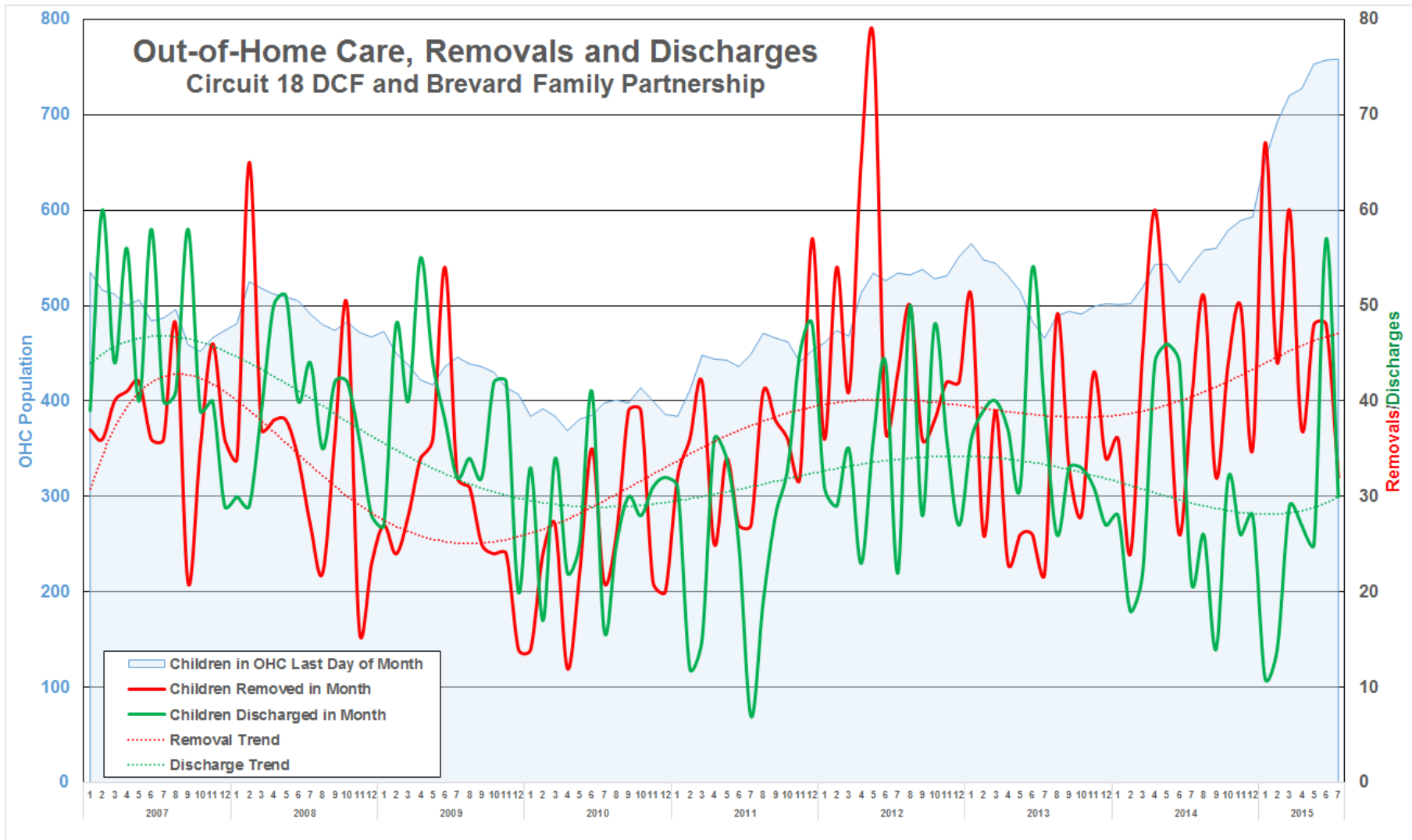


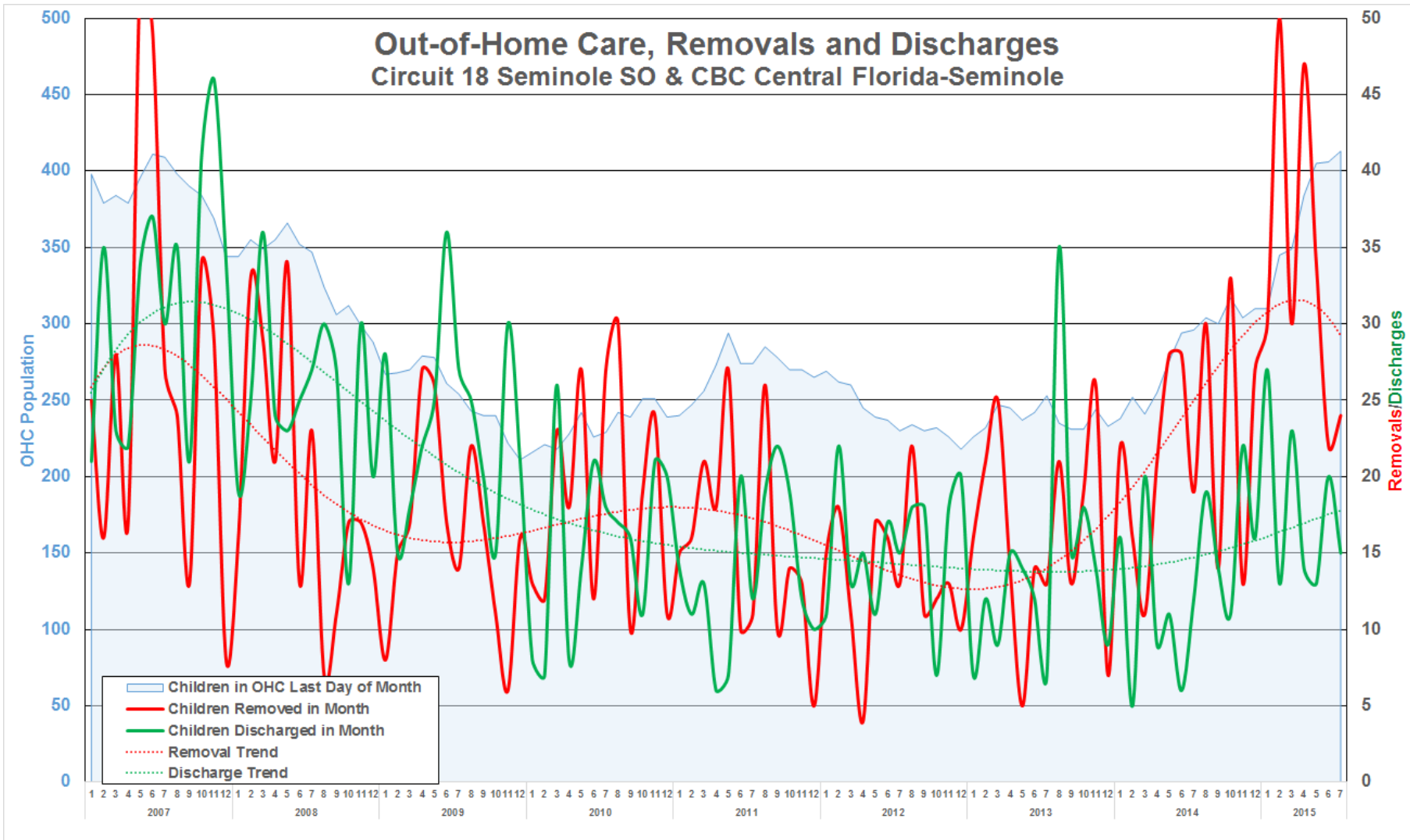


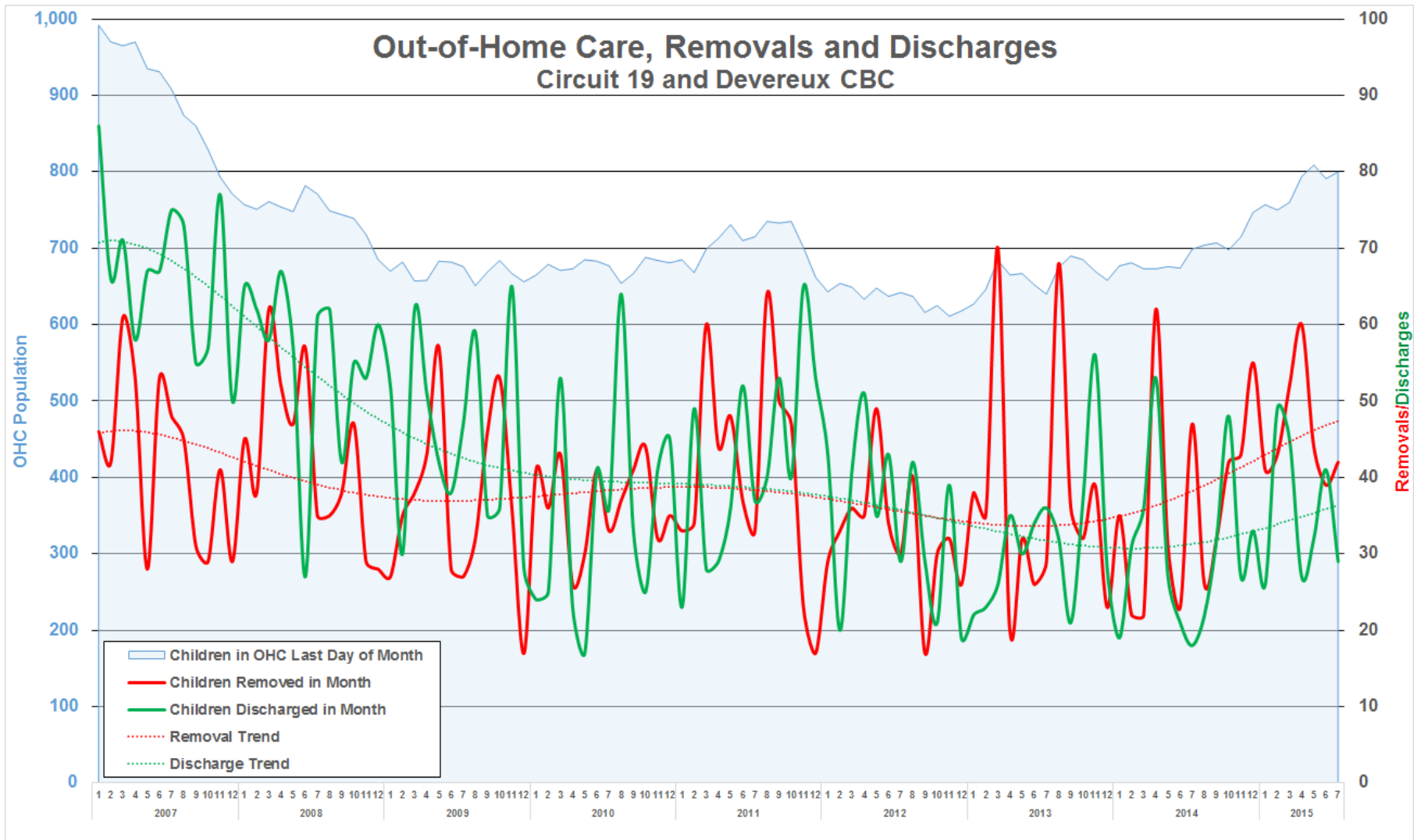


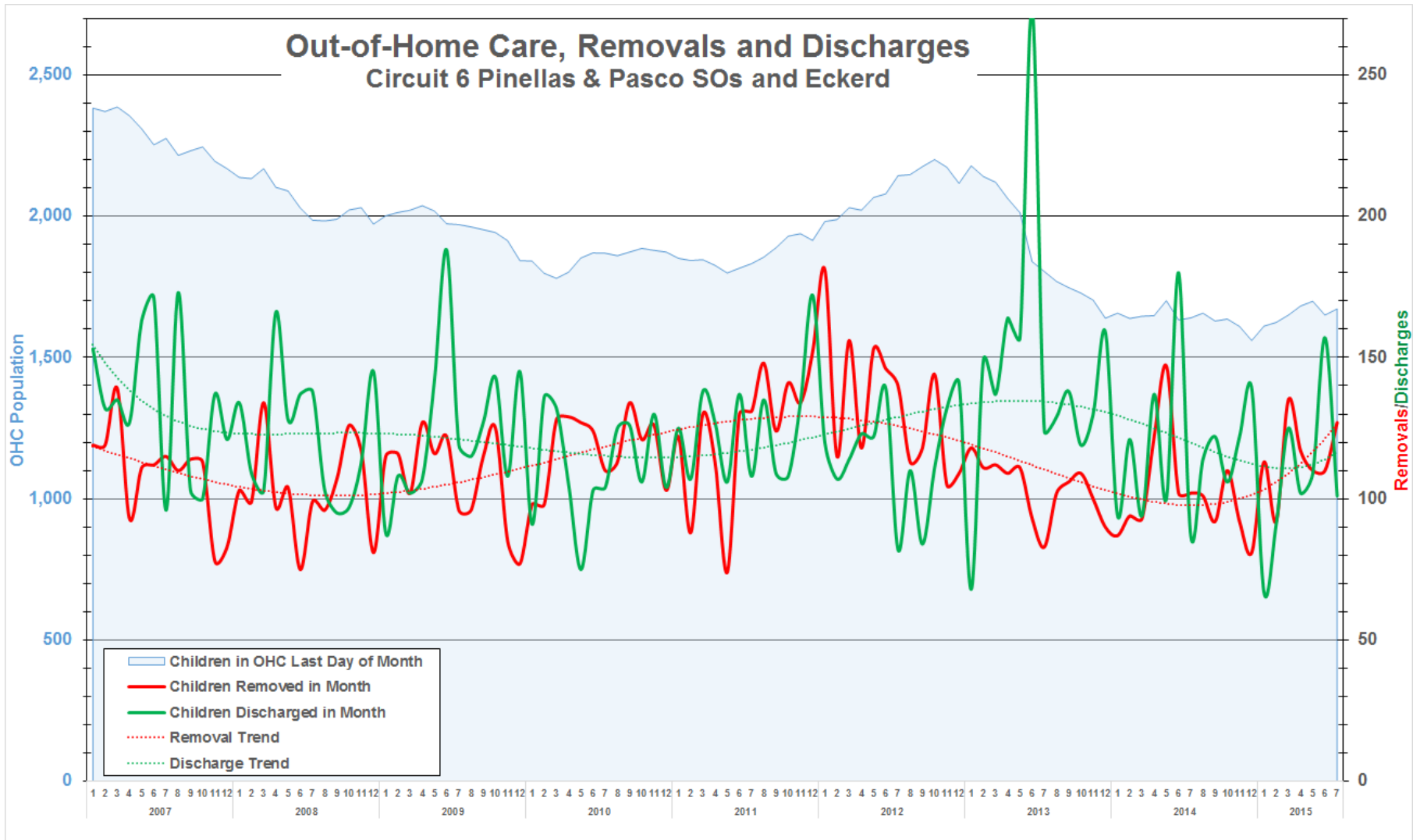




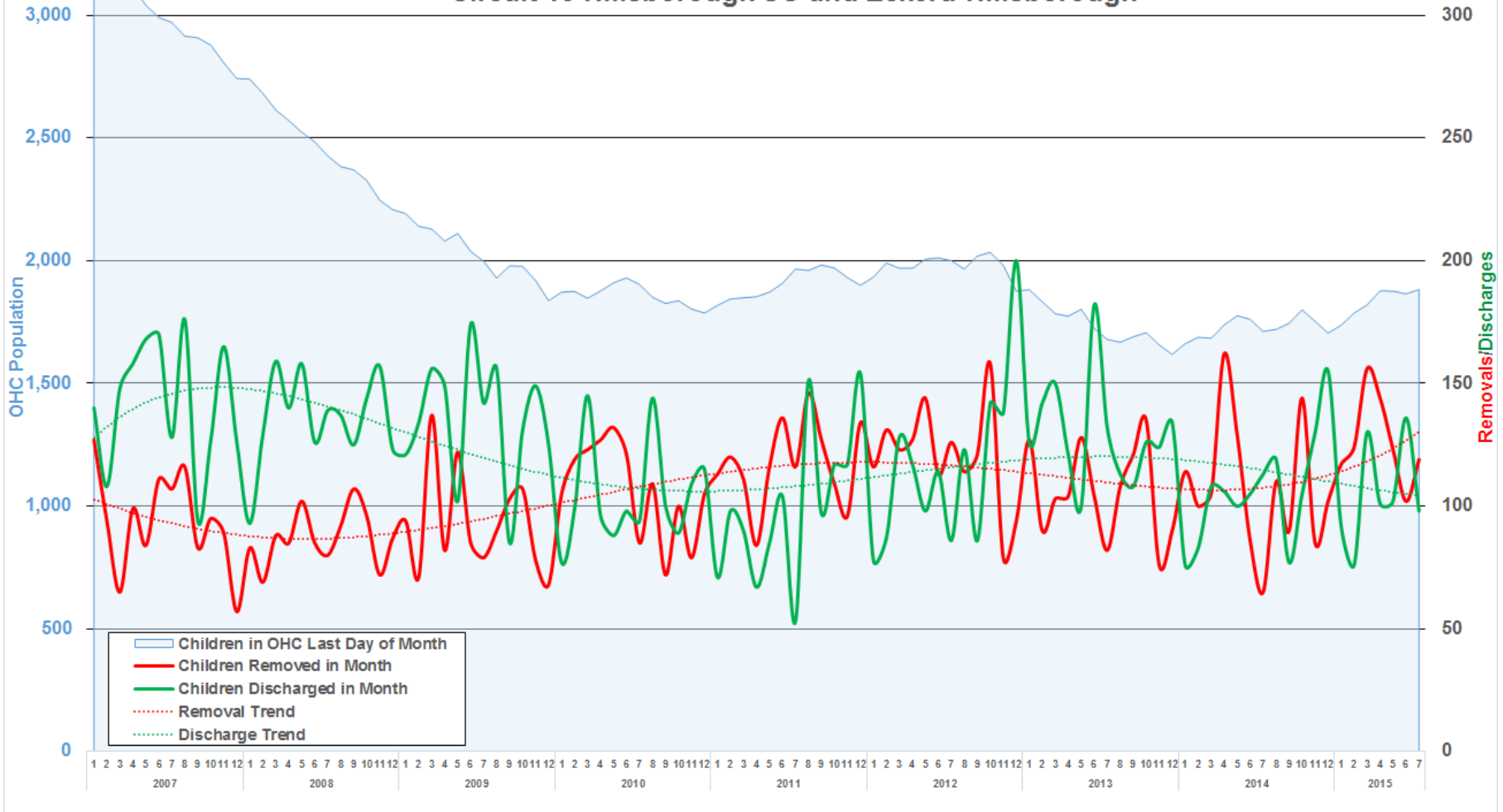








Out-of-Home Care, Removals and Discharges Circuit 13 Hillsborough SO and Eckerd-Hillsborough



Out-of-Home Care, Removals and Discharges Circuit 12 (DCF & Manatee SO) and Sarasota Family YMCA

