

# CHILD WELFARE FACT SHEET

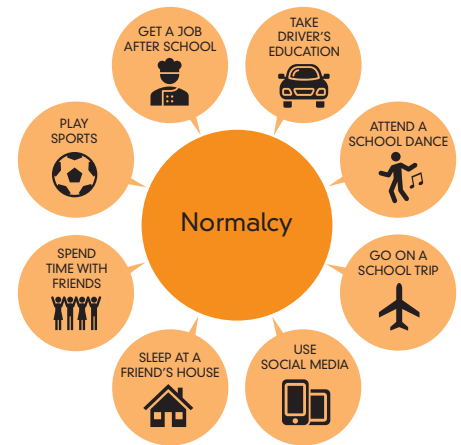
June 2019

## NORMALCY FOR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

**N**ormalcy refers to all of the age- and developmentally-appropriate extracurricular and social opportunities that should make up the daily lives of youth within the context of a caring and supportive family. Normalcy is important for the social and emotional well-being of youth, as it helps them learn decision-making and coping skills and increases the opportunity to develop healthy relationships. Youth in foster care, particularly those in a group home or residential facility, may have difficulty accessing these important everyday experiences due to their involvement in the child welfare system.<sup>1,2</sup>

Youth aging out of foster care are at increased risk of experiencing adverse well-being and psychosocial outcomes, but those with natural mentors, such as teachers or neighbors, fare better than their peers without. Youth who participate in normalcy activities are more likely to have relationships with supportive adults or naturally occurring mentors because participation in sports, clubs, organizations, and religious activities exposes youth to adult role models.<sup>3</sup>

Foster youth in group placements face additional barriers to normalcy due to the highly restrictive nature of the placement. Staff are unable to become personally close to youth in their care, and they cannot provide the same level of individual attention as other caregivers. While in group placements, youth face heightened scrutiny and a lack of decision-making opportunities.<sup>4</sup>



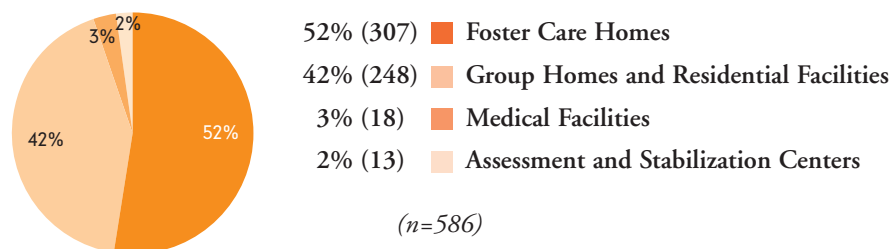
### SUPPORTING PARTICIPATION IN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Participating in extracurricular activities allows a young person to experience new things and make mistakes, which prepares them for a successful transition to adulthood while also expanding the young person's support network. Youth in foster care deserve access to developmentally-appropriate experiences and the ability to initiate supportive relationships just like their peers, but they face extensive barriers to accessing these opportunities. Barriers include restrictive child welfare policies, placement and school changes, lack of funds or transportation, and stigma around youth in foster care. Older youth in group placements face additional barriers. They often have curfews that prevent them from obtaining after-school jobs, cannot be on social media or a computer without direct supervision, and are unable to go on a sleepover without a background check of friends' family.<sup>5</sup>

### REASONABLE AND PRUDENT PARENT STANDARD

The *Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act (P.L. 113-183) of 2014* requires states to give foster parents and caregivers increased authority to make day-to-day decisions for foster youth, including decisions about participation in extracurricular, enrichment, and social activities. Agencies drawing down Title IV-E funding are required to use the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard, certify that foster parents have skills and knowledge related to the standard, require residential facilities to designate an on-site official to apply the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard, and have policies to ensure appropriate caregiver liability. The Act also requires children ages 14 and over to be involved in their own case planning.<sup>6,7</sup>

## YOUTH, AGES 14 AND OLDER, IN OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENT, BY TYPE OF SETTING, RHODE ISLAND, CALENDAR YEAR 2019\*



\*Pie chart shows data for a single point-in-time (Foster Care Homes-January 2, 2019; Group Homes and Residential Facilities, Medical Facilities, and Assessment and Stabilization Centers-December 31, 2018.)

Source: Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, Rhode Island Children's Information System (RICHIST), January 2019. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

- Nationally and in Rhode Island, adolescents are placed in congregate care settings, such as group homes and residential facilities, at a much higher rate than young children. These placements should only be used for time-limited, intensive therapeutic mental health services and not as long-term living arrangements.<sup>8,9</sup>
- On December 31, 2018, 248 youth age 14 and older were living in residential facilities or group homes, an increase from 237 on December 31, 2017.<sup>10</sup>
- Congregate care or group placements are not necessary for most children but are over utilized because there are not enough foster families available, especially for older youth. From January 1, 2017 to August 31, 2017, 145 teens who were deemed appropriate for foster care were placed into congregate care in RI.<sup>11</sup>

### Recommendations

- Minimize congregate placements to ensure young people are in families and increase access to normalcy activities for youth in congregate care.
- Raise the daily rates for foster parents to cover the cost of participating in extracurricular activities.
- Require the inclusion of normalcy activities in each child's case plan and include the child's input whenever possible.
- Develop a system for tracking participation in normalcy activities and tracking normalcy outcomes among young people in out-of-home placements.
- Cultivate natural mentors, such as teachers, coaches, or neighbors, for youth placed in group or residential facilities.

### References

<sup>1,4,5,7,8</sup> Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. (2015). *What young people need to thrive*. Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

<sup>2,6</sup> Capacity Building Center for States. (n.d.). *Having the normalcy conversation: A guide for discussing developmentally appropriate services for children, youth, and young adults in foster care*.

<sup>3</sup> Thompson, A., & Greeson, J. (2017). *Prosocial activities and natural mentoring among youth at risk of aging out of foster care*. The Society for Social Work and Research, 8(3), 421-439. Doi:2334-2315/2017/0803-0005

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. (2015). *A national look at the use of congregate care in child welfare*. Washington D.C.: Children's Bureau.

<sup>9</sup> Permanency Report entry cohort of children in foster care FY13-FY17 (July 1, 2012 – June 30, 2017). (2017). Providence, RI: Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families

<sup>10</sup> RI Department of Children, Youth and Families, RICHIST, 2018-2019.

<sup>11</sup> Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth & Families. (2017). *Level of Need Overview*. Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families. [PowerPoint]



**Rhode Island KIDS COUNT**  
One Union Station  
Providence, RI 02903

Phone: 401-351-9400  
rikids@rikidscount.org  
www.rikidscount.org

