Permanency for Children in DCYF Care

DEFINITION

Permanency for children in DCYF care is the percentage of children in out-of-home care who transition to a permanent living arrangement through reunification, adoption, or guardianship. Data are for all children under age 18 who entered out-of-home placement with the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) during a 12-month period.

SIGNIFICANCE

Children who are removed from their families often suffer trauma leading into removal. This trauma compounds when children remain in foster care for years and are moved to different placements.[1] Multiple, prolonged, and unstable placements can negatively affect children's academic achievement, mental health, ability to develop healthy connections, and future earnings.[2,3,4] Many of these factors can also affect these children's likelihood of reaching permanency.[5]

Planning for permanency begins with increasing placement stability so children are living in safe, caring foster families that can support them in exiting to permanency as soon as possible. Strategies to improve permanency include prioritizing kinship care, placement matching to ensure that first placements are successful, improving supports for children and foster families,

and increasing caseworker training and retention efforts.[6]

Reunification with parents is the most common permanency outcome. When reunification is not possible, child welfare agencies focus on placing children in another permanent family through adoption or guardianship, a legal arrangement where an adult is named a child's caregiver and given custody and legal authority to make decisions about the child often without terminating parental rights.[7,8,9]

Children and youth who live with families while in the child welfare system are better prepared to thrive in permanent homes.[10] To promote permanency through placements with family members, federal law requires states to notify relatives when a child is placed in foster care, provides funding for states offering kinship guardianship assistance, provides incentive payments for adoptions of older children and children with special needs, and requires that states inform families about the availability of the federal adoption tax credit.[11]

Older youth who age out of foster care are at risk for low educational attainment, homelessness, unemployment, and unintended pregnancy. Extending foster care to age 21 helps youth in foster care transition to independent living with better outcomes into adulthood.[12,13]

Children Achieving Permanency, by Discharge Reason, Rhode Island, Entry Cohort FY 2018*

DISCHARGE REASON	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE	MEDIAN DAYS IN PLACEMENT
Reunification with Parents	418	89%	183
Guardianship	26	6%	271
Adoption – Direct Consent	11	2%	306
Living with Relative(s)	8	2%	54
Adoption	6	1%	275
Total Number	*469*	*100%*	*195*

Source: *Permanency analytic report FY19* (n.d.) Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families. *Data cannot be compared to Factbooks prior to 2018. The data are now reported by entry cohort and represent children who achieved permanency within 12 months of entering out-of-home placement, excluding children who entered care at age 18 or older. Permanency includes reunification, guardianship, living with relative, adoption, and reunification.

◆ Of the 1,368 Rhode Island children in the FY 2018 entry cohort, 34% (469) of children in out-of-home placement in Rhode Island exited foster care to permanency (reunification, guardianship, living with other relatives, or adoption) within 12 months of removal. In the FY 2018 entry cohort, 47% of children under age six, 22% of children ages six to 11, and 31% of children ages 12 and older achieved permanency within 12 months.[14]

◆ Among the 469 Rhode Island children who achieved permanency within 12 months, 83% lived in one out-of-home placement, 11% lived in two placements, and 6% had three or more placements.[15]

Reunification, Entry Cohort FY 2018

◆ Among the 469 Rhode Island children who achieved permanency within 12 months, 89% achieved permanency through reunification with their family of origin within 12 months of entering out-of-home placement.[16]

◆ Poverty, parental mental health issues, substance use, and domestic violence are leading contributors to neglect. Achieving successful reunification requires access to substance abuse and mental health treatment, as well as interventions designed to improve the economic status of families.[17]

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Subsidized Guardianship, Entry Cohort FY 2018

◆ The federal *Fostering Connections Act* provides funding for states offering kinship guardianship assistance payments. Rhode Island's guardianship assistance program defines kin broadly as any adult who has a close and caring relationship with the child, including godparents, caretakers, close family friends, neighbors, and clergy.[18] The percent of children who achieved permanency through guardianship in Rhode Island increased slightly from 5% in entry cohort FY 2017 to 5.5% in entry cohort FY 2018.[19]

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Adoptions of Children in DCYF Care, 2019

◆ During calendar year 2019, 182 children in the care of DCYF were adopted in Rhode Island, down 29% from the 255 children adopted in 2018. Of these children, 66% were White, 21% were Multiracial, 10% were Black, 2% were American Indian, less than 1% were Asian, and less than 1% were of unknown race. Twenty-nine percent of children adopted in 2019 were Hispanic (belonging to any race category).[20,21]

◆ Of the 182 children adopted in 2019, 64% were under age six, 32% were ages six to 13, and 4% were age 14 or older.[22]

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Rhode Island Children Waiting to be Adopted, January 6, 2020

◆ On January 6, 2020, there were 276 Rhode Island children in the care of DCYF who were waiting to be adopted. Of these, less than 1% of children were under age one, 41% were ages one to five, 28% were ages six to 10, 25% were ages 11 to 15, and 6% were ages 16 and older.[23]
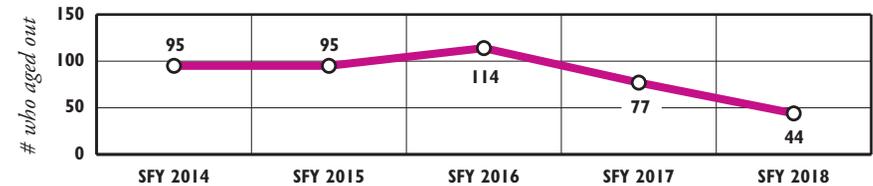
◆ Of all children waiting to be adopted, 42% were White Non-Hispanic, 34% were Hispanic (any race), 12% were Black Non-Hispanic, 12% were Multiracial or other Non-Hispanic, and less than 1% were of unknown race/ethnicity.[24]

◆ Of the 276 children waiting to be adopted, 20% (55) were children of parents whose parental rights had been legally terminated.[25]

◆ Of the 317 Rhode Island children in entry cohort 2017 who achieved permanency in 13 to 24 months, 26.5% were adopted.[26]

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Rhode Island Youth Aging Out of Foster Care, SFY 2014-2018

Source: Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, RICHIST 2014-2018.

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Extending Foster Care to Age 21

◆ Youth who exit foster care to adulthood without permanency through adoption, guardianship, or reunification are considered to have "aged out" of foster care. It is crucial that youth continue to receive supports to achieve permanency, including help locating relatives, ongoing visits with family, youth voice in permanency planning, and supports for caregivers.[27,28]

◆ In 2018, Rhode Island established the Voluntary Extension of Care (VEC) program, allowing youth in foster care to voluntarily extend their support services until age 21. The goal of the VEC program, administered through the Youth Development Services (YDS) division, is to support youth in transitioning to independence by providing an opportunity to begin making life decisions about housing, education, employment, and social activities while providing support for decision-making and when challenges arise.[29]

◆ As of October 31, 2019, of the 184 young people assigned to the YDS, 42% (78) had approved court petitions securing enrollment in the VEC program.[30]

◆ As the VEC program is implemented, it is important that Rhode Island continues to track and publicly report the number of youth eligible for VEC, the number who enroll, and their educational, employment, and housing outcomes.

References

[1,3,5] Casey Family Programs. (2018). *Strong families strategy brief: What impacts placement stability?* Retrieved March 2, 2020, from www.casey.org

[2] Wedeles, J. (n.d.). *Placement stability in child welfare.* Retrieved March 2, 2020, from www.oacas.org