

# Adoption and Permanency

## DEFINITION

*Adoption and permanency* is the percentage of children in out-of-home care who transition to a permanent placement through adoption, reunification or guardianship. Data are for all children who were in out-of-home placement during federal Fiscal Year 2007 (October 1, 2006 – September 30, 2007).

## SIGNIFICANCE

The uncertainty of multiple, prolonged or unstable out-of-home placements can negatively effect children's emotional well-being, identity formation and sense of belonging, impacting behavior, academic achievement, health and long term self-sufficiency.<sup>1,2,3</sup> One of the goals of the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) was to ensure that children exit out-of-home placement to permanent placement, (i.e. reunification, adoption or guardianship) as quickly as possible without jeopardizing the child's safety.<sup>4</sup> Effectiveness in achieving permanency must include the interrelated measures of how quickly permanency is achieved, the proportion of children for whom it is achieved, and the lasting success of the permanent placements.<sup>5</sup> Long-term personal, social, medical, academic and economic outcomes for children who leave the

child welfare system should also be included in permanency planning.<sup>6,7</sup>

Particular attention must be paid to populations of children for whom permanency may be more difficult to achieve. This includes older children, males, children with disabilities and minority children.<sup>8,9,10</sup> Planning for permanency requires a mix of family-centered and legal strategies designed to ensure that children and youth have safe, stable and lifelong connections with caring adults.<sup>11,12,13</sup>

In order to provide coordination and support to achieve timely and meaningful permanency outcomes for all children and youth in out-of-home care, the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) created Permanency Support Teams (PST) in each region. PSTs are comprised of state and local community partners and consult with the Family Service Unit to improve the timeliness of establishing permanency goals. Permanency goals include: children reunified safely with their families, children adopted by relative or non-relative families, or children in permanent living arrangements with legal guardians. In other cases, children are connected to permanent resources through connections with caring adults in their lives, adoption networks, or visiting resource programs.<sup>14</sup>

## Exits from Foster Care\*, Rhode Island, FFY 2007

	ALL EXITS	WITH DISABILITY	OVER AGE 12 AT ENTRY
Adoption	15%	22%	1%
Guardianship	3%	2%	2%
Reunification	68%	56%	72%
Aged Out	9%	NA**	15%
Other	6%	20%	11%
<b>Total Number</b>	<b>1,576</b>	<b>509</b>	<b>757</b>

Source: *Safety, permanency and well-being in Rhode Island: Child welfare outcomes annual report for FY 2007 (Draft)*. (2008). New Haven, CT: Prepared by The Consultation Center, Yale University School of Medicine for the Data Analytic Center of the Rhode Island Department of Children Youth & Families. Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding. \*Foster Care refers to all out-of-home placements, consistent with language used in federal reports. \*\*Children with a disability who age out are included in the other category.

◆ **In federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2007, 1,576 children in out-of-home placement in Rhode Island exited care. Of the children who exited care, 86% exited to a permanent placement (adoption, guardianship or reunification). Children who entered care after age 12 or who had disabilities were less likely to exit to adoption or guardianship in FFY 2007.**<sup>15</sup>

## Children Re-Entering Foster Care after Prior Episode, FFY 2003-2007

◆ **Success in reducing the duration of foster care placements must be measured in conjunction with rates of re-entry into the system (i.e., the failure rate of the permanent placement).**

◆ **In FFY 2007, 18.2% of children in Rhode Island who entered out-of-home placement were re-entering care within 12 months of a prior episode, down from 20.3% in FFY 2003. Despite this decrease, Rhode Island children re-enter care at more than twice the rate of the national standard (8.6%).**<sup>16</sup>

◆ **The majority of child maltreatment cases involve neglect. The greatest contributors to neglect are poverty, parental substance abuse and/or mental illness. Achieving timely and successful reunification requires access to substance abuse and mental health treatment, in-home services, parenting skills training, assistance in meeting basic needs (e.g., food, housing, income), child care and specific strategies to decrease isolation and strengthen community supports.**<sup>17,18</sup>

## Adoptions of Children in DCYF Care, 2007

- ◆ In calendar year 2007, 256 children in the care of DCYF were adopted in Rhode Island. Of these children, 55% were White, 23% were Black, 2% were Asian, 18% were of another race or were multiracial, and 1% were of unknown race. Twenty-six percent of children adopted in 2007 were Hispanic (belonging to any race category).<sup>19</sup>
- ◆ Of the children adopted, 61% were under age 6, 29% were between ages 6 and 13 and 10% were between ages 14 and 18.<sup>20</sup>
- ◆ During 2007, 188 children in the care of DCYF were awaiting adoption. Of these children, 61% were White, 23% were Black, 2% were Asian, 11% were of another race or were multiracial, and 4% were of unknown race. Thirty-one percent of children awaiting adoption in 2007 were Hispanic (belonging to any race category).<sup>21</sup>

## Length of Time to Adoption or Reunification, Rhode Island, FFY 2003 and 2007

	ADOPTION		REUNIFICATION	
	2003	2007	2003	2007
Less than 12 Months	10%	3%	68%	73%
Between 12-24 Months	41%	28%	20%	19%
More than 24 Months	50%	69%	11%	8%

Source: Safety, permanency and well-being in Rhode Island: Child welfare outcomes annual report for FY 2007 (Draft). (2008). New Haven, CT: Prepared by The Consultation Center, Yale University School of Medicine for the Data Analytic Center of the Rhode Island Department of Children Youth & Families.

- ◆ The percentage of children in the Rhode Island child welfare system who were adopted in 24 months or less decreased from 51% in FFY 2003 to 31% in FFY 2007. The national standard is 32% of adoptions occurring within 24 months of the child's removal.<sup>22</sup>
- ◆ The percentage of children in the Rhode Island child welfare system who were reunified with their family of origin in less than 12 months increased from 68% in FFY 2003 to 73% of children in FFY 2007. The national standard is 76% of reunifications occurring within 12 months of the child's removal.<sup>23</sup>

## Rhode Island Youth Aging Out of Foster Care

- ◆ Children who do not exit care promptly may eventually "age out," never having gained a permanent placement. In FFY 2007, 145 Rhode Island youth exited out-of-home placement to emancipation. Of these youth, 77% (111) were older than age 12 at entry into care.<sup>24</sup>
- ◆ Youth who age out of foster care experience high rates of economic hardship (inability to pay rent, utilities, etc.), low educational attainment, homelessness, food insecurity, unemployment, and poor health. These youth are more likely to enter the criminal justice system, become teen parents and enroll in public assistance programs.<sup>25</sup>
- ◆ As of July 1, 2007, youth in Rhode Island age out of the foster care system at 18 years old, a change from age 21 in previous years. Youth with serious emotional disturbances, autism or a functional developmental disability will continue to have their cases managed by DCYF and remain legally entitled to services through age 21.<sup>26</sup>
- ◆ Youth who age out on their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday are entitled to health insurance coverage until their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday and may be eligible for education assistance. Some youth between the ages of 18 and 21 will be enrolled in a voluntary aftercare service network that will provide limited case management support and a stipend for housing and other living expenses.<sup>27</sup>
- ◆ As of July 1, 2007, 312 motions to terminate Family Court involvement were filed involving young adults ages 18 and older. Of these, 266 motions were granted, with 97 becoming effective upon the youth's enrollment in after care services. As of February 2008, there were 51 young adults enrolled in after care services and 142 referrals had been made to the program (including those who turned age 18 after July 1st).<sup>28</sup>

### References

<sup>1,18</sup> Haskins, R., Wulczyn, F. & Webb, M. B. (2007). Using high-quality research to improve child protection practice: An overview. In R. Haskins, F. Wulczyn & M. B. Webb (Eds.), *Child protection: Using research to improve policy and practice*. (Chapter 1, 1-33). Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.

<sup>2,12</sup> Mallon, G. P. & Leashore, B. R. (2002). Preface to contemporary issues in permanency planning. *Child Welfare*, 81(2), 91-99.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2006). *Postadoption services: A factsheet for families*. Washington, DC: Child Welfare Information Gateway.

<sup>4</sup> *Concept and history of permanency in U.S. child welfare*. (n.d.). Retrieved February 4, 2008 from the Child Welfare Information Gateway at [www.childwelfare.gov/permanency/overview/history.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/permanency/overview/history.cfm)

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