

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 placement through reunification, adoption or guardianship. Data are for all children who were in out-of-home placement during the Federal Fiscal Year.

SIGNIFICANCE

The uncertainty of multiple, prolonged or unstable out-of-home placements can negatively affect children's emotional well-being, identity formation and sense of belonging, which have an impact on behavior, academic achievement, health and long-term self-sufficiency.^{1,2,3} Particular attention must be paid to populations of children for whom permanency may be more difficult to achieve, including older children, males, children with disabilities and minority children.^{4,5,6} 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.^{7,8,9}

One of the goals of the federal *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008* is to promote permanency through relative or kinship guardianship and adoption. The *Fostering Connections Act* requires states to notify relatives when a child is

placed in foster care, provides funding for states offering kinship guardianship assistance payments, provides incentive payments for adoptions of older children and children with special needs, and requires that states inform families considering adopting a foster child about the availability of the adoption tax credit.^{10,11}

Youth who age out of foster care experience high rates of economic hardship (inability to pay rent, utilities, etc.), low educational attainment, hunger, homelessness, unemployment, and poor physical and mental health. These youth are more likely to enter the criminal justice system, become teen parents and enroll in public assistance programs.¹²

Child welfare agencies can develop systems that ensure that they are making progress in achieving youth outcomes in the areas of employment, education, housing, life skills, community connections, personal and cultural identity, physical and mental health, and access to legal information and documents, including medical and educational histories.¹³ The *Fostering Connections Act* encourages states to extend foster care beyond age 18 by providing federal reimbursement for foster care, adoption, and guardianship assistance payments for youth up to the age of 21.^{14,15}

Exits from Foster Care*, Rhode Island, FFY 2009

	ALL EXITS	WITH DISABILITY	OVER AGE 12 AT ENTRY
Adoption	19%	23%	1%
Guardianship	6%	2%	2%
Reunification	60%	50%	70%
Aged Out	10%	NA**	16%
Other	5%	24%	12%
Total Number	1,493	470	628

Source: *Safety, permanency, and well-being in Rhode Island: Child welfare outcomes annual report for FY 2009 (Draft)*. (2009). 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. Percentages 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) 2009, 1,493 children in out-of-home placement in Rhode Island exited care. Of these, 85% exited to a permanent placement (adoption, guardianship or reunification). Children with disabilities were somewhat more likely than other children to exit to adoption and less likely to exit to reunification with their biological family.¹⁶

◆ In FFY 2009, 16% of children in Rhode Island who entered out-of-home placement re-entered care within 12 months of a prior episode, the same as the rate in FFY 2005. Rhode Island children re-enter care at almost twice the rate of the national standard (8.6%).¹⁷

Reunification

◆ The percentage of children in the Rhode Island child welfare system who were reunified with their family of origin in less than 12 months from the time of removal from the home decreased from 74% in FFY 2005 to 68% of children in FFY 2009. The national standard is 76% of reunifications occurring within 12 months of the child's removal.¹⁸

◆ In FFY 2009, the vast majority (87%) of child maltreatment cases in Rhode Island involved neglect.¹⁹ 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, child care and specific strategies to decrease isolation and strengthen community supports.²⁰

Subsidized Guardianship, 2009

◆ 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.²¹ In FFY 2009, 6% of children in foster care exited care to guardianship, up from 2% in FFY 2005.²²

Adoptions of Children in DCYF Care, 2009

◆ In calendar year 2009, 278 children in the care of DCYF were adopted in Rhode Island. Of these children, 60% were White, 21% were Black, 17% were of another race or were multiracial, and 2% were of unknown race. Twenty-four percent of children adopted in 2009 were Hispanic (belonging to any race category).²³

◆ Of the children adopted, 62% were under age six, 33% were ages six to 13 and 5% were ages 14 to 17.²⁴

Rhode Island Children Waiting to be Adopted, September 30, 2009

◆ On September 30, 2009, there were 360 Rhode Island children in the care of DCYF who were waiting to be adopted, 6% under age one, 22% ages one to five, 31% ages six to 10, 32% ages 11 to 15, 3% ages 16 and older, and 2% of unknown age.²⁵

◆ Of all waiting children, 44% were White, non-Hispanic, 27% were Hispanic (of any race), 17% were Black, non-Hispanic, 9% were two or more races, 1% were Native American, 2% were Asian, and 1% were of unknown race/ethnicity.²⁶

◆ Of the 360 children waiting to be adopted, 229 (64%) were children with parents whose parental rights had been legally terminated.²⁷

◆ In FFY 2009, 43% of children in the Rhode Island child welfare system were adopted within 24 months from the time of removal from their home, down from 49% in FFY 2005 but up from 38% in FFY 2008. The national standard is 32% of adoptions occurring within 24 months of the child's removal.²⁸

Rhode Island Youth Aging Out of Foster Care, FFYs 2000-2009

YEAR	# WHO AGED OUT	YEAR	# WHO AGED OUT
FFY 2000	82	FFY 2005	103
FFY 2001	77	FFY 2006	119
FFY 2002	62	FFY 2007	145
FFY 2003	85	FFY 2008	157
FFY 2004	82	FFY 2009	151
Total FFY 2000-2004	388	Total FFY 2005-2009	675

Source: *Safety, permanency, and well-being in Rhode Island: Child welfare outcomes annual reports for FY 2000-2009*. 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.

◆ Between FFY 2005 and FFY 2009, there were 675 Rhode Island youth who aged out of foster care with no permanent placement. This was a 74% increase from the previous five year period when 388 youth aged out of care.^{29,30}

◆ In FFY 2009, 151 Rhode Island youth exited out-of-home placement to emancipation, never having gained permanent placement through reunification, adoption or guardianship.³¹

◆ As of July 1, 2007, youth in Rhode Island age out of the foster care system at age 18, a change from age 21 in previous years. Youth with serious emotional disturbances, autism or a functional developmental disability continue to have their cases managed by DCYF and remain legally entitled to services through age 21.³²

◆ A recent cost-benefit analysis found that if states extend foster care beyond age 18, an option that the *Fostering Connections Act* encourages, the potential benefits in terms of increased educational attainment, reduced reliance on public assistance and increased earnings will more than offset the costs to states.³³

References

¹ 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.

²⁸ Mallon, G. P. & Leashore, B. R. (2002). Preface to special issue: Contemporary issues in permanency planning. *Child Welfare*, 81(2), 91-99.

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