

# 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 2001.

## SIGNIFICANCE

The uncertainty of multiple, prolonged or unstable out-of-home placements has negative effects on children's emotional well-being, identity formation, and sense of belonging, impacting behavior, academic achievement and long term self-sufficiency.<sup>1,2</sup> Youth who age out of care without finding a permanent placement or who spend significant parts of their adolescence in foster care suffer disproportionately from poverty, unemployment, academic failure, incarceration and premature parenting.<sup>3</sup>

One of the goals of the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) is 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. 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>4</sup> In addition, increasing attention is being paid to the long-term personal, social, academic and economic outcomes achieved for children who leave the child welfare system.<sup>5,6,7</sup>

National experience indicates that particular attention must be paid to populations of children for whom permanency may be more difficult to achieve. This includes older children, children with disabilities and minority children.<sup>8,9</sup> Planning for permanency requires a mix of family-centered and legal strategies designed to ensure that children and youth have safe, caring, stable and lifelong families in which to grow up.<sup>10</sup>

In Rhode Island, during federal fiscal year 2001, 29% (1,049) of the 3,615 children in out-of-home placement exited care to a permanent placement.<sup>11</sup>

## Percentage of Children in Out-of-Home Care Exiting Care to a Permanent Placement, Rhode Island, FY 2001

*Of the 3,615 children in out-of-home placement in FY 2001, twenty-nine percent (1,049) exited care to a permanent placement.*

### Children Who Exited Foster Care in FY 2001

	All Exits	With Disability	Age 12 or More at Entry
Adoption	14%	12%	N/A
Guardianship	3%	3%	2%
Reunification with Parents	69%	65%	72%
Other	14%	19%	24%
Missing	1%	<1%	2%
<i>Total Number</i>	<i>1,227</i>	<i>242</i>	<i>561</i>

◆ In FY 2001 there were 3,615 children in out-of home placements. Of these, 1,227 children exited care. Of the children who exited care, 1,049 children exited to a permanent placement such as adoption, guardianship or reunification. This was 86% of those exiting care but 29% of those in out-of-home placement.

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) Annual Foster Care Database, FY 2001. Throughout this indicator, fiscal year refers to federal fiscal year, Oct. 1 - Sept 30.

### Children Aging Out of Foster Care\*

◆ Children who do not exit care promptly may eventually "age out," never having found a permanent placement. In FY 2001, 77 Rhode Island children exited out-of-home placement to emancipation. Of these, 81% were older than age 12 at entry into care.<sup>12</sup>

◆ Successful permanency planning for older children must be individualized to the youth's situation and open to an expanded range of permanency options including adoption (both with and without continued contact with birth parents or other family members), subsidized guardianships, permanent relative placement and planned long-term foster care.<sup>13</sup>

\*Foster care refers to all out-of home placements, consistent with language used in federal reports.

## Length of Time to Adoption or Reunification, Rhode Island, FY 1998-2001

	Adoption		Reunification	
	1998	2001	1998	2001
Less than 24 months	28%	44%	75%	86%
More than 24 months	63%	55%	6%	11%
Missing data	9%	1%	19%	3%

◆ The percentage of children in the Rhode Island child welfare system who were adopted in less than 24 months increased from 28% in FY 1998 to 44% in FY 2001.

◆ The percentage of children in the Rhode Island child welfare system who were reunified with their family of origin in less than 24 months increased from 75% in FY 1998 to 86% of children in FY 2001.

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, AFCARS Annual Foster Care Database, FY 1998 and 2001.

## Children Re-Entering Foster Care after Prior Episode, FY 1998-2001

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

◆ In FY 2001, 34% of children in Rhode Island who entered out-of-home placement were re-entering after a prior episode, up from 27% in 1998.<sup>14</sup>

◆ Research indicates that adoptions are most likely to be successful when agencies provide accurate information about the circumstances of the children to be adopted, assist families with obtaining compensatory education services for the children, and offer flexible, long-term, post-adoptive services.<sup>15</sup> Specialized support is particularly critical for families adopting children with special needs, and may need to include family and child therapy and respite care.<sup>16</sup>

## Adoptions of Children in DCYF Care, 2002

◆ In calendar year 2002, 254 children in the care of DCYF were adopted in Rhode Island. Of these children, 52% were White, 20% were Black, 14% were Hispanic and 14% were other racial/ethnic groups or unknown.

◆ Of the children adopted, 54% were under age 6, 37% were between age 6 and 11 and 9% were age 12 or older.

◆ As of December 31, 2002, 207 children in the care of DCYF were awaiting adoption. Of these children, 49% were White, 25% were Black, 21% were Hispanic and 5% were other racial/ethnic groups or unknown.

Source: Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, RICHIST, 2002.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Lovejoy, A (October 2000). *A Place to Call Home: State Efforts to Increase Adoptions and Improve Foster Care Placements*. Washington, DC: National Governor's Association Center for Best Practices.
- <sup>2,10</sup> "Preface to Contemporary Issue in Permanency Planning" in *Child Welfare* (March/April, 2002). Vol. LXXXI, #2.
- <sup>3</sup> Wertheimer, R. (December 2002). "Youth who 'Age Out' of Foster Care: Troubled Lives, Troubling Prospects" in *Child Trends Research Brief*. Washington, DC: Child Trends.
- <sup>4</sup> *Child Welfare Outcomes 1998, Annual Report* (2000). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- <sup>5</sup> Billing, A. (May 2002). *Children Cared for by Relatives: What Do We Know about Well-Being?* Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- <sup>6,8</sup> Rosenau, N. (September 2000). "Do We Really Mean Families for All Children? Permanency Planning for Children with Developmental Disabilities" in *Policy Research Brief*. Vol 1, No. 2. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota.
- <sup>7,9,13</sup> Kemp, S. et al. "Beyond Termination: Length of Stay and Predictors of Permanency for Legally Free Children" in *Child Welfare* (January/February, 2002). Vol LXXXI, #1.
- <sup>12,14</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, AFCARS Annual Foster Care Database, FY 2001. Missing data in 1998 (25%) and to a lesser extent in 1999 (5%) may be responsible for some of the differential.
- <sup>15</sup> Barth, R. (2000). "What Works in Permanency Planning: Adoption" in *What Works in Child Welfare*. Washington, DC: CWLA Press.
- <sup>16</sup> McGlone, K. et al. "Psychological Stress in Adoptive Parents of Special-Needs Children" in *Child Welfare* (March/April 2002). Vol.LXXXI, #2.