

# 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 2003.

## 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, have higher rates of special education needs, unemployment, academic failure, incarceration and premature parenting.<sup>3,4</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>5</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>6,7,8</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>9,10,11</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>12,13</sup>

In 2004, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services conducted a Child and Family Services Review for the State of Rhode Island and determined that the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families needed to improve on 37 of a possible 45 items examined. Areas in which Rhode Island needed improvement included foster care placement stability, foster care reentry, and time to adoption, among others.<sup>14</sup>

## Percentage of Children in Out-of-Home Care Exiting Care to a Permanent Placement, Rhode Island, FY 2003\*

	ALL EXITS	WITH DISABILITY	OVER AGE 12 AT ENTRY
Adoption	17%	16%	1%
Guardianship	3%	3%	2%
Reunification	64%	59%	67%
Other	17%	23%	30%
<b>Total Number</b>	<b>1,347</b>	<b>351</b>	<b>648</b>

Source: The Consultation Center, Yale University School of Medicine, for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2004). *Safety, permanency, and well-being in Rhode Island: Child welfare outcomes Annual Report for 2003*. (AFCARS Annual Foster Care Database, FY 2003). May not total 100% due to rounding.

◆ In FY 2003 there were 3,649 children in out-of-home placement. Of these, 1,347 children exited care. Of the children who exited care, 83% exited to a permanent placement (adoption, guardianship or reunification). Children exiting to a permanent placement account for 31% of all children in out-of-home placement.<sup>15</sup>

## 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 2003, 85 Rhode Island children exited out-of-home placement to emancipation. Of these, 79% were older than age 12 at entry into care.<sup>16</sup>

◆ Youth who age out of foster care experience high rates of poverty, homelessness, unemployment, incarceration and poor health. Research indicates that specialized mental health services and transition systems that extend beyond the age of discharge are crucial for the success of these youth.<sup>17</sup>

◆ Youth who receive more training and services, have real work experience and have positive support systems prior to exiting foster care experience better outcomes after exiting foster care.<sup>18</sup>

\*Throughout this indicator, fiscal year refers to federal fiscal year, Oct. 1-Sept. 30. Permanent placement indicates adoption, reunification or guardianship.

\*\* 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 and 2003

	ADOPTION		REUNIFICATION	
	1998	2003	1998	2003
Less than 24 months	28%	50%	75%	86%
More than 24 months	63%	49%	6%	10%
Missing data	9%	1%	19%	4%

◆ The percentage of children in the Rhode Island child welfare system who are adopted in less than 24 months increased from 28% in FY 1998 to 50% in FY 2003.

◆ 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 2003.

Source: The Consultation Center, Yale University School of Medicine, for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2004). *Safety, permanency, and well-being in Rhode Island: Child welfare outcomes Annual Report for 2003*. (AFCARS Annual Foster Care Database, FY 1998 and FY 2003).

## Children Re-Entering Foster Care after Prior Episode, FY 1998 and 2003

◆ 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 2003, 33% of children in Rhode Island who entered out-of-home placement were re-entering after a prior episode, up from 27% in FY 1998.<sup>19</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.

◆ Parents striving for reunification with their children may also require 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>20</sup>

## Adoptions of Children in DCYF Care, 2004

◆ In calendar year 2004, 244 children in the care of DCYF were adopted in Rhode Island. Of these children, 41% were White non-Hispanic, 18% were Black non-Hispanic, 20% were Hispanic and 22% were of another racial or ethnic group or of unknown race or ethnicity.

◆ Of the children adopted, 57% were under age 6, 30% were between age 6 and 11 and 13% were age 12 or older.

◆ As of December 31, 2004, 215 children in the care of DCYF were awaiting adoption. Of these children, 45% were White, 24% were Black, 19% were Hispanic and 12% were of another racial or ethnic group or of unknown race or ethnicity.

Source: Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, RICHIST, 2004.

## References for Indicator

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- <sup>2,12</sup> Preface to contemporary issues in permanency planning. *Child Welfare* (2002). LXXXI, (2), 95-99.
- <sup>3</sup> Wertheimer, R. (2002). *Youth who 'age out' of foster care: Troubled lives, troubling prospects* (Research Brief). Washington, DC: Child Trends.
- <sup>4,13</sup> *Kids Count data book: State profiles of child well-being, 2004*. (2004). Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation.
- <sup>5,15,16,19</sup> The Consultation Center, Yale University School of Medicine, for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2004). *Safety, permanency, and well-being in Rhode Island: Child welfare outcomes Annual Report for 2003*. (AFCARS Annual Foster Care Database, FY 2003).
- <sup>6</sup> Billing, A. (2002). *Children cared for by relatives: What do we know about well-being?* (National Survey of America's Families Series). Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.
- <sup>7,9</sup> Rosenau, N. (2000). Do we really mean families for all children? Permanency planning for children with developmental disabilities. *Policy Research Brief*. 11(2), 58-86. Minneapolis, MN: The University of Minnesota.
- <sup>8,10</sup> Kemp, S. & Bodonyi, J. (2002). Beyond termination: Length of stay and predictors of permanency for legally free children. *Child Welfare*, Vol LXXXI, No.1.
- <sup>11</sup> *Who will adopt the foster care children left behind?* (Brief No. 2) (2003). Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.
- <sup>14</sup> Administration for Children and Families (2004). *Final report: Rhode Island Child and Family Services Review*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- <sup>17,18</sup> Reilly, T. (2003). Transition from care: Status and outcomes of youth who age out of foster care. *Child Welfare*, LXXXII, (6), 727-744.
- <sup>20</sup> Dawson, K. & Berry, M. (2002). Engaging families in child welfare services: An evidence-based approach to best practice. *Child Welfare*, LXXXI (2), 293-317.