

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 Federal Fiscal Year 2008 (October 1, 2007 – September 30, 2008).

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, impacting behavior, academic achievement, health and long term self-sufficiency.^{1,2,3} 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 children'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.^{4,5}

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.^{6,7,8} 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.^{9,10,11}

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 health. These youth are more likely to enter the criminal justice system, become teen parents and enroll in public assistance programs.¹²

Part of permanency planning for all children and youth in care includes providing systemic, developmentally appropriate and continuous services that adequately prepare them for adulthood. 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, personal and community engagement, personal and cultural identity, physical and mental health, and access to legal information and documents, including medical and educational histories.¹³

Exits from Foster Care*, Rhode Island, FFY 2008

	ALL EXITS	WITH DISABILITY	OVER AGE 12 AT ENTRY
Adoption	17%	20%	1%
Guardianship	4%	2%	2%
Reunification	63%	56%	68%
Aged Out	10%	NA**	17%
Other	5%	23%	11%
Total Number	1,521	517	661

Source: *Safety, permanency and well-being in Rhode Island: Child welfare outcomes annual report for FY 2008 (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) 2008, 1,521 children in out-of-home placement in Rhode Island exited care. Of the children who exited care, 84% 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.¹⁴

◆ Success in reducing the duration of foster care placement must be measured in conjunction with rates of re-entry into the system (i.e., the failure rate of the permanent placement). In FFY 2008, 18% of children in Rhode Island who entered out-of-home placement were re-entering care within 12 months of a prior episode, down from 21% in FFY 2004. Despite this decrease, Rhode Island children re-enter care at more than twice the rate of the national standard (8.6%).¹⁵

Reunification

◆ The percentage of children in the Rhode Island child welfare system who were reunified with their family of origin in fewer than 12 months from the time of removal from the home decreased from 71% in FFY 2004 to 66% of children in FFY 2008. The national standard is 76% of reunifications occurring within 12 months of the child's removal.¹⁶

◆ 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, child care and specific strategies to decrease isolation and strengthen community supports.¹⁷

Adoptions of Children in DCYF Care, 2008

- ◆ In calendar year 2008, 270 children in the care of DCYF were adopted in Rhode Island. Of these children, 60% were White, 20% were Black, 19% were of another race or were multiracial, and 1% were of unknown race. Twenty-six percent of children adopted in 2008 were Hispanic (belonging to any race category).¹⁸
- ◆ Of the children adopted, 62% were under age six, 30% were ages six to 13 and 8% were ages 14 to 17.¹⁹

Rhode Island Children Waiting to be Adopted, September 30, 2008

- ◆ On September 30, 2008, there were 458 Rhode Island children in the care of DCYF who were waiting to be adopted. Of these, 8% were under age one, 27% were ages one to five, 28% were ages six to 10, 32% were ages 11 to 15, 4% were ages 16 and older, and 2% were of unknown age.²⁰
- ◆ Of all waiting children, 43% were White, non-Hispanic, 26% were Hispanic (of any race), 18% were Black, non-Hispanic, 8% were two or more races, 2% were Native American, 1% were Asian or Pacific Islander, and 2% were unknown.²¹
- ◆ Of the 458 children waiting to be adopted, 258 (56%) were children with parents whose parental rights had been legally terminated.²²
- ◆ Over the past five years, the age breakdown of children waiting to be adopted has grown increasingly younger. In 2004, half (51%) of all children waiting to be adopted were under age 11 while in 2008, almost two-thirds (63%) of waiting children were under age 11.²³
- ◆ The percentage of children in the Rhode Island child welfare system who were adopted within 24 months from the time of removal from their home decreased from 50% in FFY 2004 to 38% in FFY 2008, compared with 31% in FFY 2007. The national standard is 32% of adoptions occurring within 24 months of the child's removal.²⁴

Rhode Island Youth Aging Out of Foster Care, FFYs 1999-2008

YEAR	# WHO AGED OUT	YEAR	# WHO AGED OUT
FFY 1999	43	FFY 2004	82
FFY 2000	82	FFY 2005	103
FFY 2001	77	FFY 2006	119
FFY 2002	62	FFY 2007	145
FFY 2003	85	FFY 2008	157
Total FFY 1999-2003	349	Total FFY 2004-2008	606

Source: Safety, permanency and well-being in Rhode Island: Child welfare outcomes annual reports for FFY 1999-2008. 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 and Families.

- ◆ In Rhode Island between FFY 1999 and FFY 2003, 349 youth aged out of foster care never having gained permanent placements through reunification, adoption or guardianship. This number increased by 74% to 606 for the period between FFY 2004 and FFY 2008.²⁵
- ◆ Since 2004, between 65% and 77% of youth who aged out of foster care in Rhode Island were older than age 12 at entry into care.²⁶ In FFY 2008, 157 Rhode Island youth exited out-of-home placement to emancipation. Of these youth, 73% (115) were older than age 12 at entry into care.²⁷
- ◆ 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 21.²⁸
- ◆ Youth who age out on their 18th birthday are entitled to health insurance coverage through RIte Care until their 21st birthday and may be eligible for education assistance. Some youth between the ages of 18 and 21 are enrolled in a voluntary aftercare service network that provides limited case management support and a stipend for housing and other living expenses.²⁹

References

¹⁶ 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.

²⁹ Mallon, G. P. & Leashore, B. R. (2002). Preface to contemporary issues in permanency planning. *Child Welfare*, 81(2), 91-99.

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