

# 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 living arrangement through reunification, adoption, or guardianship. Data are for all children under age 18 who entered out-of-home placement with the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) during a 12-month period.

## SIGNIFICANCE

Children who are removed from their families often suffer trauma leading into removal. This trauma compounds when children remain in foster care for years and are moved to different placements.<sup>1</sup> Multiple, prolonged, and unstable placements can negatively affect children's academic achievement, mental health, ability to develop healthy connections, and future earnings.<sup>2,3,4</sup> Many of these factors can also affect these children's likelihood of reaching permanency.<sup>5</sup>

Planning for permanency begins with increasing placement stability so children are living in safe, caring foster families that can support them in exiting to permanency as soon as possible. Strategies to improve permanency include prioritizing kinship care, placement matching to ensure that first placements are successful, improving supports for children and foster families,

and increasing caseworker training and retention efforts.<sup>6</sup>

Reunification with parents is the most common permanency outcome. When reunification is not possible, child welfare agencies focus on placing children in another permanent family through adoption or guardianship, a legal arrangement where an adult is named a child's caregiver and given custody and legal authority to make decisions about the child, often without terminating parental rights.<sup>7,8,9</sup>

Children and youth who live with families while in the child welfare system are better prepared to thrive in permanent homes. To promote permanency through placements with family members, federal law requires states to notify relatives when a child is placed in foster care, provides funding for states offering kinship guardianship assistance, provides incentive payments for adoptions of older children and children with special needs, and requires that states inform families about the availability of the federal adoption tax credit.<sup>10,11</sup>

Older youth who age out of foster care are at risk for low educational attainment, homelessness, unemployment, and unintended pregnancy. Extending foster care to age 21 helps youth in foster care transition to independent living with better outcomes into adulthood.<sup>12,13</sup>



## Children Achieving Permanency Within 12 Months, by Discharge Reason, Rhode Island, Entry Cohort FY 2019\*

DISCHARGE REASON	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE	MEDIAN DAYS IN PLACEMENT
Reunification with Parents	202	91%	221
Guardianship	11	5%	315
Adoption – Direct Consent	4	2%	303
Living with Relative(s)	2	1%	133
Adoption	2	1%	348
<b>Total Number</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>235</b>

Source: *Permanency analytic report FY20 (n.d.)* Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families. \*Data cannot be compared to Factbooks prior to 2018 because of differences in reporting methodology.

- ◆ Of the 1,122 Rhode Island children in the FY 2019 entry cohort, 20% (221) of children in out-of-home placement in Rhode Island exited foster care to permanency (reunification, guardianship, living with other relatives, or adoption) within 12 months of removal. The COVID-19 pandemic contributed to lower permanency numbers during 2020 as DCYF and Family Court procedures were adjusted to ensure safety.<sup>14,15</sup>
- ◆ Of the 221 children in the FY 2019 entry cohort who achieved permanency within 12 months, 44% were under age six, 24% were ages six to 11, and 32% were ages 12 and older. Seventeen percent of these children were Black, 30% of children were Hispanic (of any race), 9% were Multiracial or other, 42% were white, and 1% were of unknown race.<sup>16</sup>
- ◆ Of the 221 children in the FY 2019 cohort who achieved permanency within 12 months, 91% achieved permanency through reunification with their family of origin. Child welfare agencies can promote reunification through comprehensive family assessment, active case management, and reunification and post-reunification services tailored to families' needs.<sup>17,18</sup>
- ◆ Rhode Island's guardianship assistance program defines kin as any adult who has a close and caring relationship with the child, including godparents, caretakers, close family friends, neighbors, and clergy. Among the 221 children in the FY 2019 cohort who achieved permanency within 12 months, 5% achieved permanency through guardianship.<sup>19,20</sup>
- ◆ Of the 1,381 Rhode Island children in the FY 2018 entry cohort, 34% (469) exited foster care to permanency within 12 months of removal, and 21% (295) exited foster care to permanency in 13 to 24 months.<sup>21,22</sup>

# Permanency for Children in DCYF Care

## Voluntary Extension of Care (VEC)

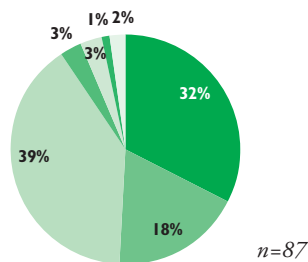
◆ In 2018, Rhode Island established the VEC program, allowing youth ages 18 to 21 who were in foster care on their eighteenth birthday the option of continuing to receive services until age 21. VEC helps older youth in care transition to adulthood by helping them make decisions about housing, education, employment, health care, social services, and social activities while providing guidance when challenges arise. To remain enrolled, youth must meet education or employment requirements.<sup>23</sup>

◆ On December 31, 2020, 87 youth ages 18-21 were enrolled in VEC with approved court petitions. An additional 12 youth were in VEC case management pending court approval, and six youth were in transition to VEC. Of these 87 youth, 64% were female, 34% were male, and 1% were non-binary. Five percent were age 18, 45% were age 19, and 51% were age 20. Thirteen percent were Black, 29% were Hispanic (of any race), 13% were Multiracial/Other, and 46% were white.<sup>24,25</sup>

### Youth in the VEC Program, Rhode Island, December 31, 2020

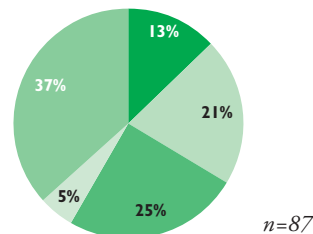
#### Housing for Youth in VEC

- 32% (28) ■ With Relative/Kin
- 18% (16) ■ Apartment Alone
- 39% (34) ■ Apartment with Others
- 3% (3) ■ Dormitory
- 3% (3) ■ Paid Independent Living
- 1% (1) ■ Out of State
- 2% (2) ■ Homeless/Couchsurfing



#### Education for Youth in VEC

- 13% (11) ■ Enrolled in High School
- 21% (18) ■ Enrolled in GED
- 25% (22) ■ Full-time Post-Secondary
- 5% (4) ■ Part-time Post-Secondary
- 37% (32) ■ Not Currently Enrolled



Source: Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, December 31, 2020. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

## Effects of COVID-19 on Youth in VEC

◆ During the COVID-19 pandemic, youth in extended foster care are navigating the transition to adulthood with record unemployment, housing instability, and educational disruption. To support older youth, Governor Gina Raimondo issued executive orders that allowed youth in extended foster care to remain in care beyond age 21 and waived work and education requirements during the pandemic. These executive orders lapsed on August 28, 2020. The *Consolidated Appropriations Act* passed in December 2020 increased federal funding for extended foster care, education and training, and housing to support older youth in foster care as the pandemic resolves. It also requires states to engage youth who aged out during the pandemic to determine if they want to re-enroll.<sup>26,27,28</sup>

## Adoptions for Children in DCYF Care

◆ During 2020, 127 children in the care of DCYF were adopted in Rhode Island, down 30% from 2019. Of these children, 61% were under age six, 27% were ages six to 13, and 12% were age 14 or older. Six percent were Black, 30% were Hispanic (of any race), 17% were Multiracial, 46% were white, and 1% were of unknown race.<sup>29,30</sup>

◆ On January 5, 2021, there were 291 Rhode Island children in the care of DCYF who were waiting to be adopted. Of these children, 41% were under age six, 25% were ages six to 10, 28% were ages 11 to 15, and 6% were ages 16 and older. Fifteen percent were Black, 31% were Hispanic (of any race), 12% were Multiracial or other, 42% were white, and 1% were of unknown race/ethnicity.<sup>31</sup>

◆ Of the 291 children waiting to be adopted, 20% (57) were children of parents whose parental rights had been legally terminated.<sup>32</sup>

◆ Of the 295 Rhode Island children in the FY 2018 entry cohort who achieved permanency in 13 to 24 months, 20% were adopted.<sup>33</sup>

#### References

<sup>1,3,5</sup> Casey Family Programs. (2018). *Strong Families strategy brief: What impacts placement stability?* Retrieved April 14, 2021, from www.casey.org

<sup>2</sup> Wedeles, J. (n.d.). *Placement stability in child welfare.* Retrieved April 14, 2021, from www.oacas.org

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