

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.¹ Multiple, prolonged, and unstable placements can negatively affect children's academic achievement, mental health, ability to develop healthy connections, and future earnings.^{2,3,4} Many of these factors can also affect these children's likelihood of reaching permanency.⁵

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.⁶

Reunification with parents is both the primary goal and 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.^{7,8,9}

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.^{10,11}

Older youth who age out of foster care are at risk for low educational attainment, homelessness, unemployment, and unintended pregnancy. *The Families First Prevention Services Act* allows states to extend eligibility for services up to age 23 to help youth transition to independent living with better outcomes into adulthood.^{12,13}

Among Rhode Island FY 2020 Entry Cohort, Children Who Achieved Permanency Within 12 Months, by Discharge Reason

DISCHARGE REASON	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE	MEDIAN DAYS IN PLACEMENT
Reunification with Parents	177	98%	292
Guardianship	1	1%	48
Adoption – Direct Consent	1	1%	329
Living with Relative(s)	1	1%	144
Adoption	1	1%	230
Total Number	181	100%	292

Source: *Permanency analytic report FY21* Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families. Data cannot be compared to Factbooks prior to 2018 because of differences in reporting methodology. The FY 2020 cohort includes a total of 924 children, 181 of whom achieved permanency within 12 months.

- ◆ Of the 924 Rhode Island children in the FY 2020 entry cohort, 20% (181) 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 as DCYF and Court procedures were adjusted.^{14,15}
- ◆ Of the 181 children in the FY 2020 entry cohort who achieved permanency within 12 months, 54% were under age six, 23% were ages six to 11, and 23% were ages 12 and older. Nineteen percent of these children were Black, 30% of children were Hispanic (of any race), 11% were Multiracial or other, 38% were white, and 2% were of unknown race.¹⁶
- ◆ Of the 181 children in the FY 2020 cohort who achieved permanency within 12 months, 98% achieved permanency through reunification with their family of origin. Child welfare agencies can promote reunification comprehensive family assessment, active case management, and reunification and post-reunification services tailored to the family's needs.^{17,18}
- ◆ 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 181 children in the FY 2020 cohort who achieved permanency within 12 months, 1% achieved permanency through guardianship.^{19,20}
- ◆ Of the 1,122 children in the FY 2019 entry cohort, 20% (221) exited foster care to permanency within 12 months of removal and 29% (323) within 13 to 24 months.²¹

Permanency for Children in DCYF Care

Voluntary Extension of Care (VEC)

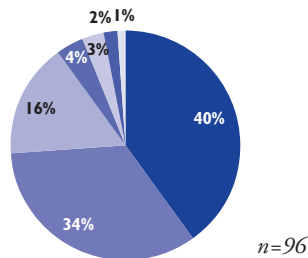
◆ In 2018, Rhode Island established the VEC program, allowing youth ages 18 to 21 who were in foster care the option of continuing to receive services. VEC helps older youth in care transition to adulthood by supporting them in making life decisions about housing, education, employment, health care, social services, and social activities while providing guidance in decision-making and when challenges arise. To remain enrolled, youth must meet education or employment requirements.²²

◆ On December 31, 2021, 96 youth ages 18 to 21 were enrolled in VEC with approved court petitions. An additional 12 youth were in VEC case management and 11 were in transition to VEC. Of these 96 youth, 68% were female and 32% were male. Twelve percent were age 18, 25% were age 19, and 64% were age 20. Eight percent were Black, 28% were Hispanic (of any race), 10% were Multiracial/Other, and 53% were white.²³

◆ Of the 96 youth in VEC on December 31, 2021, 43% were continuing their education. Additionally, 33% were employed full time, 26% were employed part time, and 31% were not employed.²⁴

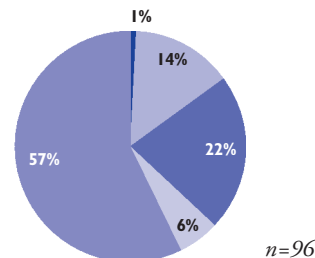
Housing for Youth in VEC

- 40% (38) ■ With Relative/Kin
- 34% (33) ■ Apartment Alone
- 16% (15) ■ Apartment with Others
- 4% (4) ■ Paid Independent Living
- 3% (3) ■ Homeless
- 2% (2) ■ Temporary Housing
- 1% (1) ■ Dormitory



Education for Youth in VEC

- 1% (1) ■ Enrolled in High School
- 14% (13) ■ Enrolled in GED
- 22% (21) ■ Full-time Post-Secondary
- 6% (6) ■ Part-time Post-Secondary
- 57% (55) ■ Not Currently Enrolled



Source: Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, December 31, 2021.

Effects of COVID-19 on Youth in VEC

◆ During the COVID-19 pandemic, youth were navigating the transition to adulthood with record unemployment, housing instability, and educational disruption. In December 2020, the *Consolidated Appropriations Act (CAA)* was passed, which increased federal funding for extended foster care, education/training, and housing to support older youth in foster care during the ongoing pandemic. It also created a moratorium on youth aging out of foster care and required states to engage youth who may have left foster care. The *CAA* also provided funding to states to provide extended foster care through a youth's 26th year, funding which normally would have covered youth up to age 21 (or 23 in some states). These provisions were in effect until September 30, 2021. On October 1, 2021, Rhode Island extended eligibility to age 23 until September 20, 2022.^{25,26,27}

Adoptions for Children in DCYF Care

◆ During calendar year 2021, 240 children in the care of DCYF were adopted in Rhode Island, up 89% from 2020. Of these children, 60% were under age six, 33% were ages six to 13, and 7% were age 14 or older. Thirteen percent were Black, 24% were Hispanic (of any race), 15% were Multiracial, 1% were Pacific Islander, 45% were white, and less than 1% were of unknown race.^{28,29}

◆ On January 11, 2022, there were 207 Rhode Island children in the care of DCYF who were waiting to be adopted. Of these children, 42% were under age six, 24% were ages six to 10, 29% were ages 11 to 15, and 5% were ages 16 and older. Fifteen percent were Black, 30% were Hispanic (of any race), 13% were Multiracial or other, and 43% were white.³⁰

◆ Of the 207 children waiting to be adopted, 21% (43) were children of parents whose parental rights had been legally terminated.³¹

◆ Of the 323 Rhode Island children in the FY 2019 entry cohort who achieved permanency in 13 to 24 months, 10% were adopted.³²

References

^{1,3,5} Casey Family Programs. (2018). *Strong families strategy brief: What impacts placement stability?* Retrieved April 19, 2022, from www.casey.org

² Wedeles, J. (n.d.). *Placement stability in child welfare.* Retrieved April 19, 2022, from www.oacas.org

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