

CHILD WELFARE FACT SHEET

December 2017

FAMILIES CARING FOR TEENS

There is a critical need to increase and diversify the pool of foster families for children and youth in out-of-home placements. Currently, an additional 250 foster families are needed to care for children and youth in the care of the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF). Because of this shortage of foster families and because many families are only willing to foster younger children, teens are currently more likely to be placed in congregate care settings, such as group homes or residential treatment facilities, as their first placements. It is critical that child welfare agencies and community providers recruit and retain foster parents, both relative and non-relative, who can provide stable and nurturing settings for teens in the foster care system.^{1,2,3}

The federal *Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act*

of 1980 details the importance of family-based settings for children who cannot safely live at home. The federal *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act* of 2008 requires that child welfare agencies explore first placements with relatives before considering non-relative or congregate care placements for children and teens who are removed from their homes due to abuse and neglect. Placements with relatives can minimize the trauma of being separated from parents, maintain cultural and family connections, provide healthy boundaries to learn how to be independent, and in some cases, keep siblings together. Of the 269 adolescents age 12 and older in out-of-home placements on September 22, 2017, 48% (129) were in placements with relatives.^{4,5,6,7}

Foster Families Providing Care for Children Age 12 and Older in RI, September 22, 2017

Relative kinship foster families caring for children age 12+	129
Non-relative kinship foster families caring for children age 12+	53
Non-kinship foster families caring for children age 12+	83
Foster families caring for more than one child 12+ where children are both non-relative kinship and non-kinship	4
Total	269

Source: Rhode Island DCYF, Rhode Island Children's Information System (RICHIST) September 22, 2017.

All children involved in the child welfare system, including teens and young adults, benefit from the care and support of stable adults. When placements with relatives are not an option, non-relative foster parents can provide quality care and support for teens who are unable to live at home. In order to meet the unique needs of teens with a history of trauma, both relative and non-relative caregivers need ongoing education, training, and support.⁸

In Rhode Island in FY 2017, there were 307 youth age 12 to 17 who were removed from their homes. Of these youth, Black Non-Hispanic (17.4%) and Hispanic (26.9%) youth were less likely to be placed with relatives as their first placements, compared to Multiracial (37%) or White (29.1%) youth. Child welfare agencies should prioritize recruitment for kinship placements for teens of color and provide appropriate licensing and financial supports to ensure success.^{9,10}

FOSTER FAMILIES NEEDED FOR TEENS

Of the 171 children assessed by DCYF from January 1, 2017 to August 31, 2017, who were deemed appropriate for foster care but then placed into congregate care, 85% (145) were teens. To ensure healthy development for teens in child welfare, Rhode Island needs to expedite and expand efforts to identify more foster families and support them in opening their homes to teens.¹¹

A survey of foster parents conducted by DCYF in 2013 through a federal Diligent Recruitment Grant found that 38.7% of foster parents responding indicated they would be willing to provide care to adolescents ages 12 to 18 with some type of extra support or help.^{12,13}

Individuals who are interested in becoming a foster parent in Rhode Island must be age 21 or older, be physically and emotionally able to care for a child or teen, be economically stable without reliance on a foster care payment, pass a child abuse/neglect and criminal background check, have reliable transportation, live in a home that can pass fire and lead inspections, and participate in a 10-week, 30-hour training program. For information on how to become a foster parent, go to dcyf.ri.gov and click on **Be An Anchor**.

Recommendations

- Accelerate statewide efforts to increase and diversify the pool of foster families for teens and provide them with the education, training, resources, respite, and services needed to be successful.
- Ramp up efforts to retain foster families who are already licensed.
- Ensure teens are placed in congregate care only when clinically necessary and eliminate inappropriate placements of teens in congregate care.
- Increase targeted recruitment in communities with high numbers of teen removals and low numbers of family-based placements.
- Increase funding to offer competitive foster board payments that align with the needs of youth in foster care.
- Implement innovative recruitment strategies to support teens in achieving permanency through kinship connections.
- Engage current and prospective foster parents in ongoing survey and focus group research to better understand their experiences as foster parents and the supports needed for them to care for foster children in their homes, with a special focus on the supports needed to foster teens.

References

¹ *User's guide to essential kinship data*. (2013). Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

² Mooney, T. & Bogdan, J. (2017). Foster homes are R.I.'s best refuges for children – so why aren't there more? *The Providence Journal*. Retrieved December 6, 2017, from www.providencejournal.com

³ Chadwick Center and Chapin Hall. (2016). *Using evidence to accelerate the safe and effective reduction of congregate care for youth involved with child welfare*. San Diego, CA: Collaborating at the Intersection of Research and Policy.

^{4,6,8,10} KIDS COUNT. (2015). *Every kid needs a family*. Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

⁵ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau. (2012). *Working with kinship caregivers*. Washington DC: Child Welfare Information Gateway.

⁷ Rhode Island DCYF, Rhode Island Children's Information System (RICHIST), September 22, 2017.

^{9,12} *Children 12 and older removed from home in FY 2017 as of July 21, 2017*. Providence, RI: Department of Children, Youth and Families.

¹¹ Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth & Families. (2017) *Level of Need Overview*. Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families. [PowerPoint]

¹³ *Resource parent willingness to provide care for specific populations*. New Haven, CT: Prepared by the Consultation Center, Yale University School of Medicine for the 2016 Diligent Recruitment Brief #3 for the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth & Families.



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