

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 who were in out-of-home placement with the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) during the Federal Fiscal Year.

SIGNIFICANCE

The uncertainty of multiple, prolonged, or unstable out-of-home placements can negatively affect children's emotional well-being, which has an impact on behavior, academic achievement, and the formation of secure relationships.^{1,2} Particular attention must be paid to populations of children for whom permanency may be more difficult to achieve, including older children, minority children, sibling groups, and children with mental, emotional, or behavioral health needs.^{3,4,5} 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.^{6,7,8}

Reunification with parents is the most common permanency outcome for children who have been in foster care.⁹ When reunification is not possible, child welfare agencies focus on placing children

in another permanent family through adoption or guardianship.¹⁰ Federal law requires states to notify relatives when a child is placed in foster care, provides funding for states offering kinship guardianship assistance payments, provides incentive payments for adoptions of older children and children with special needs, and requires that states inform families considering adopting a child in foster care about the availability of the federal adoption tax credit.^{11,12}

Children and youth who live in families (kinship or non-kinship) while in the child welfare system are better prepared to thrive in permanent homes, whether through reunification, adoption, or guardianship.¹³ Youth who age out of foster care experience high rates of economic hardship (inability to pay rent, utilities, etc.), low educational attainment, homelessness, unemployment, and poor physical and mental health. They are more likely to enter the criminal justice system, become young parents, and enroll in public assistance programs.¹⁴

The federal *Fostering Connections Act* of 2008 and *Strengthening Families Act* of 2014 provide a wide range of incentives and strategies for states to support children and youth while in foster care as well as permanency.¹⁵ The *Family First Prevention Services Act*, enacted February 2018, will provide federal funds for prevention services for children at risk of entering foster care and their families.¹⁶

Exits from Foster Care*, Rhode Island, FFY 2017

	ALL EXITS	OVER AGE 12 AT ENTRY
Adoption	23%	3%
Guardianship	10%	7%
Reunification	55%	59%
Aged Out	7%	17%
Other**	5%	14%
TOTAL	1,048	357

Source: RICHIST RPT406D. 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.

**Other includes discharge reason of absent from care, detained at the Rhode Island Training School, living with other relatives, or transfer to another agency.

Note: Percentages include some children over age 18 who are still in the care of DCYF.

◆ In Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2017, 65% of children under age 18 in the care of DCYF exited foster care. Of the children who exited, 97% exited to permanency (reunification, guardianship, living with other relatives, or adoption). Children who were over age 12 when they entered foster care were more likely to age out of care without achieving permanency.¹⁷

◆ Among Rhode Island children who entered foster care during State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2015, 22% re-entered care within 12 months of achieving permanency (exited to guardianship, reunification, or living with a relative).¹⁸

Reunification, FFY 2016

◆ In FFY 2017, 65% of children under age 18 in the care of DCYF were reunified with their family of origin in less than 12 months from the time of removal from their home.¹⁹

◆ In FFY 2017, 57% of indicated child maltreatment in Rhode Island involved neglect.²⁰ Poverty, parental substance abuse, and mental health problems are leading contributors to neglect. Achieving timely and successful reunification requires access to substance abuse and mental health treatment, as well as interventions designed to improve the economic status of families.²¹

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Subsidized Guardianship, FFY 2016

◆ The federal *Fostering Connections Act* provides funding for states offering kinship guardianship assistance payments. Rhode Island's guardianship assistance program defines kin broadly as any adult who has a close and caring relationship with the child, including godparents, caretakers, close family friends, neighbors, and clergy.²² Rates of children exiting foster care to guardianship in Rhode Island increased from 10.8% in FFY 2015 to 11.3% in FFY 2016. In FFY 2017, 11.7% of children under 18 in the care of DCYF exited foster care to guardianship.^{23,24}

Adoptions of Children in DCYF Care, 2017

◆ During Calendar Year 2017, 261 children in the care of DCYF were adopted in Rhode Island, similar to the 265 children adopted in 2016. Of these children, 50% were White, 31% were multiracial, 19% were Black, <1% were American Indian or of unknown race. Twenty-five percent of children adopted in 2017 were Hispanic (belonging to any race category).²⁵

◆ Of the 261 children adopted, 68% were under age six, 26% were ages six to 13, and 6% were age 14 or older.²⁶

Rhode Island Children Waiting to be Adopted, March 19, 2018

◆ On March 19, 2018, there were 249 Rhode Island children in the care of DCYF who were waiting to be adopted. Of these, 1% of children were under age one, 43% were ages one to five, 25% were ages six to 10, 23% were ages 11 to 15, and 8% were ages 16 to 17.²⁷

◆ Of all waiting children, 50% were White Non-Hispanic, 32% were Hispanic (any race), 8% were Black Non-Hispanic, 10% were Multiracial or other Non-Hispanic, and 1% were of unknown race/ethnicity.²⁸

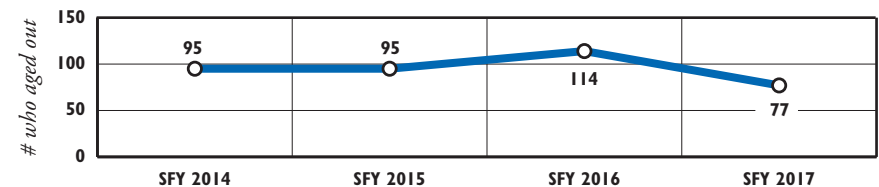
◆ Of the 249 children waiting to be adopted, 21% (52) were children of parents whose parental rights had been legally terminated.²⁹

◆ In FFY 2017, 40% of children under age 18 exiting foster care to adoption were adopted within 24 months from the time of removal from their home.³⁰

Youth Aging Out of Foster Care

◆ Youth who exit foster care to adulthood never having gained permanency through adoption, guardianship, or reunification are considered to have "aged out" of foster care. As of July 1, 2007, youth in Rhode Island age out of the foster care system at age 18, a change from age 21 in previous years. Youth with serious emotional disturbances, autism, or a functional developmental disability continue to have their cases managed by DCYF and remain legally entitled to services through age 21. On June 9, 2017, DCYF instituted a memorandum to all staff stating that children in DCYF care working on a GED or enrolled in high school can only be terminated from foster care at the age of 18 with approval from the Director of DCYF or a designee.^{31,32}

Rhode Island Youth Aging Out of Foster Care, SFY 2014-2017



Source: Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, RICHIST 2013-2017.

◆ The number of Rhode Island youth who exited foster care never having gained permanency through reunification, adoption, or guardianship increased from 95 during SFY 2015 to 114 during SFY 2016, then decreased to 77 in SFY 2017.³³

◆ Beginning January 1, 2014, the federal Affordable Care Act (ACA) allows youth who have aged out of foster care to have Medicaid coverage until age 26, regardless of their income. This provides former foster youth the same access to health coverage as other young adults, who are allowed to remain on their parents' commercial health coverage until age 26.³⁴

◆ If states extend foster care to age 21, an option that the federal *Fostering Connections Act* encourages, the potential benefits in terms of increased educational attainment, reduced reliance on public assistance, and increased earnings will more than offset the costs to states.³⁵

References

¹ Wedeles, J. (n.d.). *Placement stability in child welfare*. Retrieved March 5, 2018, from www.oacas.org

²³ Walsh, W. A. & Mattingly, M. J. (2011). *Long-term foster care – Different needs, different outcomes*. Durham, NH: The Carsey Institute.

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