

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

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, children of color, 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

Children Achieving Permanency, by Discharge Reason, Rhode Island, Entry Cohort FY 2017*

DISCHARGE REASON	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE	MEDIAN DAYS IN PLACEMENT
Reunification with Parents	366	91%	179.5
Guardianship	20	5%	259
Adoption – Direct Consent	9	2.2%	228
Living with Relative(s)	6	1.5%	171
Adoption	1	.3%	338
Total Number	402	100%	187

Source: *Permanency Report: Children in Foster Care FY16 - FY18*. (n.d.) Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families. *Data cannot be compared to Factbooks prior to 2018. The data are now reported by entry cohort and represent children who achieved permanency within 12 months of entering out-of-home placement, excluding children who entered care at age 18 or older. Permanency includes reunification, guardianship, living with relative, adoption, and reunification.

◆ Of the 1,156 Rhode Island children in entry cohort FY 2017, 35% (402) 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 entering out-of-home placement. Children who were over age 12 when they were removed were more likely to exit care without achieving permanency.¹⁷

◆ Among Rhode Island children in entry cohort FY 2017 who achieved permanency, 38.3% entered congregate care as a first placement. Children who were over age 12 when they entered out-of-home placement were more likely to enter congregate care as a first placement.¹⁸

Reunification, Entry Cohort FY 2017

◆ Of children in entry cohort FY 2017, 91% of children under age 18 achieved permanency through reunification with their family of origin within 12 months of entering out-of-home placement.¹⁹

◆ 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.²⁰

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Subsidized Guardianship, Entry Cohort FY 2017

◆ 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.²¹ The number of children who achieved permanency through guardianship in Rhode Island decreased from 6.8% in entry cohort FY 2016 to 5% in entry cohort FY 2017.²²

Adoptions of Children in DCYF Care, 2018

◆ During Calendar Year 2018, 255 children in the care of DCYF were adopted in Rhode Island, similar to the 261 children adopted in 2017. Of these children, 67% were White, 22% were multiracial, 11% were Black, and 1% were of Unknown race. Thirty-three percent of children adopted in 2018 were Hispanic (belonging to any race category).²³

◆ Of the 255 children adopted in 2018, 70% were under age six, 25% were ages six to 13, and 5% were age 14 or older.²⁴

Rhode Island Children Waiting to be Adopted, March 25, 2019

◆ On March 25, 2019, there were 252 Rhode Island children in the care of DCYF who were waiting to be adopted. Of these, 39% of children were ages zero to five, 30% were ages six to 10, 22% were ages 11 to 15, and 8% were ages 16 and over.^{25,26}

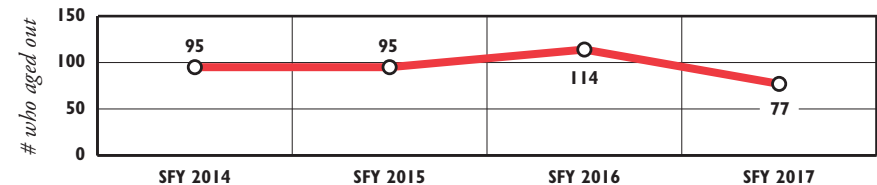
◆ Of all waiting children, 46% were White Non-Hispanic, 28% were Hispanic (any race), 11% were Black Non-Hispanic, and 14% were Multiracial or other Non-Hispanic.²⁷

◆ Of the 252 children waiting to be adopted, 19% (49) were children of parents whose parental rights had been legally terminated.²⁸

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. The *Voluntary Extension of Care Act (VEC)* passed in Rhode Island in 2018, provides a legal entitlement to voluntary extended foster care services until age 21. 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. DCYF began the implementation process for VEC program in July 2018. As a result, data reporting the number of Rhode Island youth aging out of foster care is in transition while the program is implemented and SFY 2018 data were not yet provided.^{29,30}

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



Source: Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, RICHIST 2014-2017.

◆ 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, and then decreased to 77 in SFY 2017.³¹

◆ 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 26.³²

◆ States that extend foster care to age 21, an option encouraged in the *Fostering Connections Act*, will more than offset the costs for the potential benefits in terms of increased educational attainment, reduced reliance on public assistance, and increased earnings.³³

References

¹ Wedeles, J. (n.d.). *Placement stability in child welfare*. Retrieved March 14, 2019, 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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