

Outcomes for Children in DCYF Care

DEFINITION

Outcomes 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) and achieved permanency within 12 months.

SIGNIFICANCE

Children who are removed from their families suffer trauma leading into and including 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 meaningfully involving youth in their case planning.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 without permanency 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 FFY 2022 Entry Cohort, Children Who Achieved Permanency Within 12 Months, by Discharge Reason

DISCHARGE REASON	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE	MEDIAN DAYS IN PLACEMENT
Reunification with Parents	141	79%	258
Guardianship	25	14%	308
Adoption	6	3%	306
Adoption – Direct Consent	<6	*	263
Living with Relative(s)	<6	*	179
Total Number	178	100%	265

Source: *Permanency analytic report FFY 22 Entry Cohort* Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families. Permanency includes reunification, guardianship, living with a relative, adoption, and reunification. *Cannot be calculated because small numbers have been suppressed to protect confidentiality.

★ Of the 839 Rhode Island children in the FFY 2022 entry cohort, 21% (178) of children in out-of-home placement exited foster care to permanency (reunification, guardianship, living with other relatives, or adoption) within 12 months of removal. In part, residual COVID-19 impacts contributed to lower permanency outcomes.^{14,15}

★ Of the 178 children in the FFY 2022 entry cohort who achieved permanency within 12 months, 51% were under age six, 24% were ages six to 11, and 25% were ages 12 to 17. Ten percent of these children were Black, 31% of children were Hispanic (of any race), 15% were Multiracial or other, 44% were white, and <1% were of unknown race.¹⁶

★ Among the 178 Rhode Island children in the FFY 2022 cohort who achieved permanency within 12 months, 79% achieved permanency through reunification with their family of origin. Child welfare agencies can promote reunification by setting policies and practices that include 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 178 children in the FFY 2022 cohort who achieved permanency within 12 months, 14% achieved permanency through guardianship.^{19,20}

★ Of the 780 Rhode Island children in the FFY 2021 entry cohort, 25% (198) exited foster care to permanency within 12 months of removal, and 22% (173) exited foster care to permanency in 13 to 24 months.²¹

Outcomes for Children in DCYF Care

Voluntary Extension of Care (VEC)

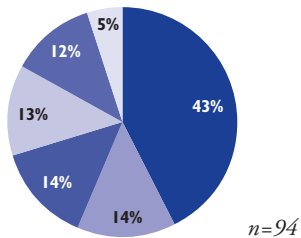
★ In 2018, Rhode Island established the VEC program, allowing youth in foster care ages 18 to 21 the option of continuing to receive services. VEC helps older youth in care transition to adulthood by supporting them in setting their own goals for housing, education, employment, health care, social services, and social activities while providing guidance in decision-making and when challenges arise. Youth must meet specific eligibility guidelines to be referred and enrolled in the program, and to remain enrolled, youth must meet education or employment requirements.²²

★ On November 30, 2023, 94 youth ages 18 to 21 were enrolled in VEC with approved court petitions. An additional four youth were in VEC case management and 12 were in transition to VEC. Of these 94 youth, 68% were female and 32% were male. Seventeen percent were age 18, 33% were age 19, 43% were age 20, and 7% were age 21. Twenty-one percent were Black, 24% were Hispanic (of any race), 10% were Multiracial/Other, and 45% were white.²³

★ Of the 94 youth in VEC on November 30, 2023, 43% were continuing their education. Additionally, 70% had some form of employment, including 24 youth who were employed full time, and 35 who were employed part time. Twenty-nine percent were not employed.²⁴

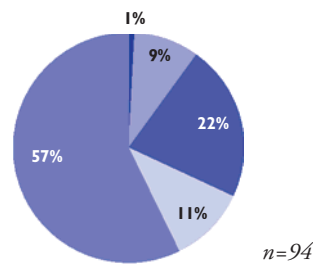
Housing for Youth in VEC

43% (40)	■ Apartment Alone
14% (13)	■ Former Foster Home
14% (13)	■ With Relative/Kin
13% (12)	■ Apartment with Others
12% (11)	■ Paid Independent Living
5% (5)	■ Dormitory



Education for Youth in VEC

1% (1)	■ Enrolled in High School
9% (8)	■ Enrolled in GED
22% (21)	■ Full-time Postsecondary
11% (10)	■ Part-time Postsecondary
57% (54)	■ Not Currently Enrolled



Source: Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, November 30, 2023.

Supports and Services for Permanency Through Reunification

★ The most common permanency outcome is reunification with the child's family of origin when it is safe to do so. Families who receive reunification services frequently have complex needs. There are several factors that impact reunification including addressing the safety concern that prompted the initial removal and healing from the trauma experienced by both the child and their family. Using trauma-informed, and culturally responsive assessments to identify strengths and needs of the child and family that engage them as experts in their lives lead to successful permanency through reunification. Additionally, wrap-around services that increase family stability, parent support and peer mentoring, and enhanced visitation are essential supports that promote reunification. After families exit care, post-reunification services are recommended to meet the ongoing needs of families.^{25,26,27}

Adoptions for Children in DCYF Care

★ During calendar year 2023, 149 children in the care of DCYF were adopted in Rhode Island, down 38% from 2022. Of these children, 60% were under age six, 34% were ages six to 13, and 6% were ages 14 or older. Three percent were Black, 32% were Hispanic (of any race), 20% were Multiracial, less than 1% were Pacific Islander, and 44% were white.²⁸

★ On January 1, 2024, there were 122 Rhode Island children in the care of DCYF who were waiting to be adopted. Of these children, 33% were under age six, 23% were ages six to 10, 34% were ages 11 to 15, and 10% were ages 16 and older. Four percent were Black, 26% were Hispanic (of any race), 21% were Multiracial or other, and 48% were white.²⁹

★ Of the 122 children waiting to be adopted, 28% (34) were children of parents whose parental rights had been legally terminated.³⁰

★ Of the 173 Rhode Island children in the FFY 2021 entry cohort who reached permanency in 13 to 24 months, 20% were adopted.³¹

References

^{1,3,5} Casey Family Programs. (2023). *Strong families strategy brief: What impacts placement stability?* Retrieved March 14, 2024, from www.casey.org

² Wedeles, J. (n.d.). *Placement stability in child welfare.* Retrieved March 14, 2024, from www.oacas.org

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