

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 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 and for youth ages 18 to 21 who enroll in voluntary aftercare services.

SIGNIFICANCE

Children who are removed from their families suffer trauma leading up to and including removal. This trauma compounds when children remain in foster care for years and experience multiple 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 live in safe, caring foster families that support them in exiting to permanency. Strategies to improve permanency include prioritizing kinship care, placement matching so 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, and unemployment. 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 2023 Entry Cohort, Children Who Achieved Permanency Within 12 Months, by Discharge Reason

DISCHARGE REASON	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE	MEDIAN DAYS IN PLACEMENT
Reunification with Parents	124	79%	286
Guardianship	18	12%	248
Adoption (including direct consent)	10	6%	301
Living with Relative(s)	<6	*	106
<i>Total Number</i>	<i>*</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>276</i>

Source: *Permanency analytic report FFY23 Entry Cohort* Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families. Since the 2024 Factbook, cohorts are reported in Federal Fiscal Years (FFY). *Percentage cannot be calculated due to suppressed numbers.

◆ Of the 735 Rhode Island children in the FFY 2023 entry cohort, 21% 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.¹⁴

◆ Among children in the FFY 2023 entry cohort who achieved permanency within 12 months, 49% were under age six, 21% were ages six to 11, and 30% were ages 12 to 17. Ten percent of these children were Black, 34% of children were Hispanic (of any race), 14% were Multiracial or other, 41% were white, and <1% were of unknown race.¹⁵

◆ Among the Rhode Island children in the FFY 2023 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.^{16,17}

◆ Children in kinship care are more likely to achieve permanency through guardianship with their relative caregivers and maintain family and community ties. Rhode Island regulations define 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 children in the FFY 2023 cohort who achieved permanency within 12 months, 12% achieved permanency through guardianship.^{18,19,20}

◆ Among children in the FFY 2023 entry cohort who achieved permanency within 12 months, 8% (12) have a diagnosed disability.²¹

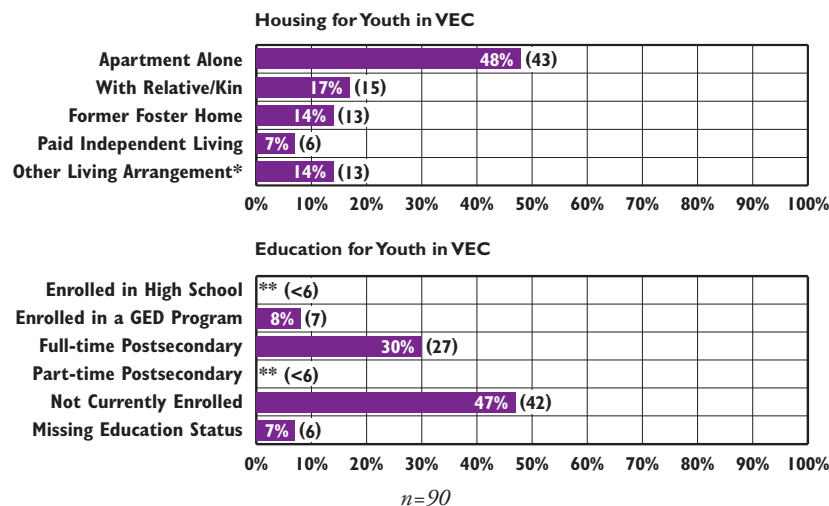
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Voluntary Extension of Care (VEC)

◆ 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 to and enrolled in the program, and to remain enrolled youth must meet education or employment requirements.²²

◆ On December 31, 2024, 90 youth ages 18 to 21 were enrolled in VEC with approved court petitions. Of these 90 youth, 62% were female and 38% were male. Eight percent were age 18, 40% were age 19, 48% were age 20, and <5% were age 21. Nineteen percent were Black, 33% were Hispanic (of any race), 10% were Multiracial/Other, and 38% were white. An additional nine youth were in VEC case management and nine were in transition to VEC.²³

◆ Of the 90 youth in VEC on December 31, 2024, 47% were continuing their education. Additionally, 62% had some form of employment, including 30 youth who were employed full time and 20 who were employed part time. Twenty-nine percent were not employed.²⁴



Source: Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, December 31, 2024. *Other Living Arrangements include apartment with roommates or a partner, unfunded independent living, dormitory, apartment as a single parent with children, semi-independent living. ** Percentages cannot be calculated due to suppressed numbers.

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 2024, 118 children in the care of DCYF were adopted in Rhode Island, down 21% from 2023. Of these children, 48% were under age six, 38% were ages six to 13, and 10% were age 14 or older. Nine percent were Black, 28% were Hispanic (of any race), 20% were Multiracial, and 42% were white.²⁸

◆ On January 1, 2025, there were 95 Rhode Island children in the care of DCYF who were waiting to be adopted. Of these children, 24% were under age six, 27% were ages six to 10, 31% were ages 11 to 15, and 18% were ages 16 and older. Five percent were Black, 36% were Hispanic (of any race), 17% were Multiracial or other, and 42% were white.²⁹

◆ Of the 95 children waiting to be adopted, 29% (28) were children of parents whose parental rights had been legally terminated.³⁰

◆ Of the 103 children in the FFY 2023 entry cohort who were removed from home at age three or older and achieved permanency within 12 months of entry, 6% (6) were adopted within 12 months of entry.³¹

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