

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

When children are removed from their families, the trauma they experienced preceding removal is compounded by the trauma of removal, long lengths of stay in care, and multiple placement changes.¹ Multiple, prolonged, and unstable placements can negatively impact children’s academic achievement, mental health, ability to develop healthy connections, and future earnings.¹⁻³ Many of these factors can also affect these children’s likelihood of reaching permanency.¹

If a child needs to be removed from their home for safety concerns, planning for permanency begins with the first placement. Strategies to improve permanency include prioritizing kinship care, placement matching so first placements are successful, improving supports for children and foster families,

and authentically engaging youth in decisions about their case.⁴

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.⁵⁻⁷

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.^{8,9}

Older youth who age out of foster care without permanency are at risk for low educational attainment, homelessness, and unemployment. The *Family 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.^{10,11}



Among Rhode Island FFY 2024 Entry Cohort, Children Who Achieved Permanency Within 12 Months, by Discharge Reason

DISCHARGE REASON	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE	MEDIAN DAYS IN PLACEMENT
Reunification with Parents	164	91%	167
Adoption, Guardianship, Living with a relative(s)	17	9%	292
Total Number	181	100%	180

Source: *Permanency analytic report FFY24 Entry Cohort* Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families. Starting with the 2024 Factbook, cohorts are reported in Federal Fiscal Years (FFY).

- ◆ Of the 630 Rhode Island children in the FFY 2024 entry cohort, 29% 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.¹²
- ◆ Among children in the FFY 2024 entry cohort who achieved permanency within 12 months, 41% were under age six, 29% were ages six to 11, and 30% were ages 12 to 17. Seven percent of these children were Black, 28% of children were Hispanic (of any race), 14% were Multiracial or other, and 51% were white.¹²
- ◆ Among the Rhode Island children in the FFY 2024 cohort who achieved permanency within 12 months, 91% 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, parent support partners, and reunification and post-reunification services tailored to the family’s needs.^{12,13}
- ◆ Children in kinship care are more likely to achieve permanency through guardianship and are more likely to stay with siblings and keep community and family 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 2024 cohort who achieved permanency within 12 months, 9% achieved permanency through guardianship, living with a relative, or adoption.^{12,14,15}
- ◆ Among children in the FFY 2024 entry cohort who achieved permanency within 12 months, 15% (27) have a diagnosed disability.¹²

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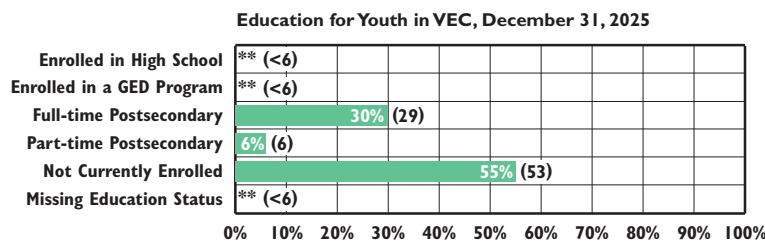
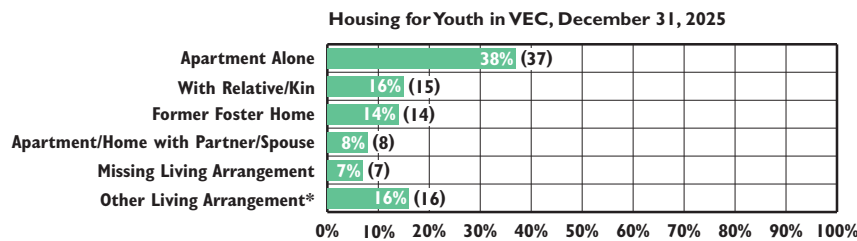


Voluntary Extension of Care (VEC)

◆ 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 supports older youth 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.¹⁶ Youth who enroll in extended foster care are more likely to complete their education and less likely to be disconnected from school and work.¹⁷

◆ On December 31, 2025, 97 youth ages 18 to 21 were enrolled in VEC with approved court petitions. Of these 97 youth, 58% were female and 42% were male. Ten percent were age 18, 34% were age 19, 56% were age 20 or age 21. Nineteen percent were Black, 33% were Hispanic (of any race), 8% were Multiracial/Other, and 40% were white.¹⁸

◆ Of the 97 youth in VEC on December 31, 2025, about 45% were continuing their education, and about 60% had some form of employment.¹⁸



n=97

Source: Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, December 31, 2025. *Other Living Arrangements include contracted independent living, dormitory, apartment/home with children, semi-independent living, and apartment/home with roommates. ** 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 determined to be safe. Families who receive reunification services frequently have complex needs. Coordinated efforts to address the safety concern that prompted the initial removal and healing from the trauma experienced by both the child and their family can support reunification. Using trauma-informed and culturally responsive assessments to identify needs and incorporate strengths of the child and family that engage them as experts in their lives lead to successful permanency through reunification. Wrap-around services that increase family stability, parent support and peer mentoring, and enhanced visitation also are essential supports needed to promote reunification. After families exit care, post reunification services are recommended to meet the ongoing needs of families.¹⁹⁻²¹



Adoptions for Children in DCYF Care

◆ During calendar year 2025, 102 children in the care of DCYF were adopted in Rhode Island, down 14% from 2024. Of these children, 53% were under age six, 32% were ages six to 13, and 15% were age 14 or older. Nine percent were Black, 26% were Hispanic (of any race), 22% were Multiracial, and 43% were white.²²

◆ On December 31, 2025, there were 111 Rhode Island children in the care of DCYF who were waiting to be adopted. Of these children, 28% were under age six, 30% were ages six to 10, 34% were ages 11 to 15, and 8% were ages 16 and older. Ten percent were Black, 28% were Hispanic (of any race), 17% were Multiracial or other, and 45% were white.²³

◆ Of the 111 children waiting to be adopted, 28% (31) were children of parents whose parental rights had been legally terminated.²³

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