



DATA SNAPSHOT ON FOSTER CARE PLACEMENT

MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION: MORE KIDS IN FAMILIES MAY 2011

All children need and deserve a strong, supportive family. But, for the nearly half-million children in foster care in the United States on any given day, the connection to a safe, loving, and nurturing family is too often lost. Federal reforms and work at the state level over the last decade have focused on increasing connections to permanent families for children in the custody of child welfare systems. New data available on the KIDS COUNT Data Center highlight the progress made by many states to increase the rates of children in foster care who are living with families and decrease the rates of those placed in institutions or group homes. The data also show, however, that the type of foster care placement varies depending on the age of the child as well as the state of residence.

WHY PLACEMENT MATTERS

When a public child welfare system brings a child into its custody, the state assumes parental responsibility and, according to federal mandates, must strive to ensure the most positive outcomes for that child. In their role as advocates, child welfare leaders and workers make countless decisions that affect the lives of children in care. The most critical of these decisions involve placement, or where a child will live while in foster care. Current law and practice suggest that children be placed in the least restrictive setting possible while maintaining the child's safety and health.

For most children, placement within a family setting is preferable. In addition, federal law requires that states consider giving

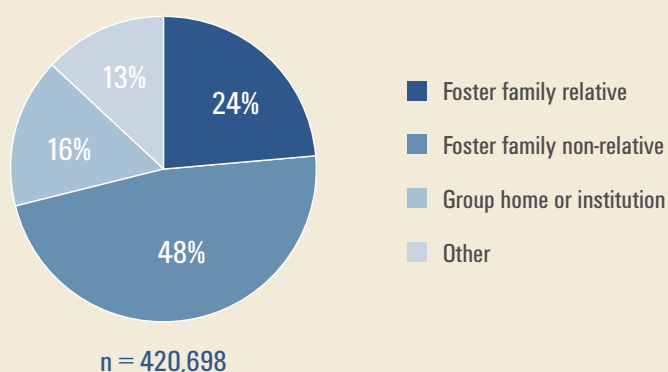
preference to relative caregivers when a child must be placed in foster care. Most experts believe that placing children with relatives or other caregivers they already know reduces the inevitable trauma of being removed from their parental homes. Nearly all states have policies that explicitly give preference to relatives. The experience of being part of a family helps children who may have suffered from abuse and neglect understand what it means to be part of a safe and supportive home. This experience makes it easier for children to maintain connections with people important to them, whether it is other siblings, relatives, or friends. Child welfare research has also shown that youth who live in institutional settings are at greater risk of developing physical, emotional, and behavioral problems that can lead to poor outcomes and are less likely to find a permanent home than those who live in foster families.

PLACEMENT TYPES FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

At the end of 2009, there were 423,773 children in foster care in the United States, according to data from the federal Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). The total number of children in foster care has declined over the last decade, with 22 percent (120,530) fewer in 2009 than in 2000. However, these numbers refer only to children who are in the custody of the state public child welfare system. There are many children living in the care of people other than their parents, often relatives or "kin," who are not counted in the AFCARS data.

Not all children have the same experiences once they enter the child welfare system. They can be placed in a variety of settings including foster homes with relatives, foster homes with non-relatives, and group homes or institutional settings. Although the numbers of children in foster care have declined substantially since 2000, the type of setting in which a child is placed has remained relatively unchanged at the national level. The majority of children in foster care in the United States lived with foster

Figure 1. Percent of Children in Foster Care by Placement Type, U.S., 2009



Source: Adoption and Foster Care Reporting System (AFCARS), 2009. Represents only those children in the foster care system on September 30, 2009 for whom data on type of placement was available. Figure does not total to 100 percent due to rounding.



families, either relative (24 percent) or non-relative (48 percent) in 2009. Sixteen percent of children in foster care were living in group homes or institutions. Between 2000 and 2009, the percent of all foster children living in relative and non-relative foster families stayed fairly consistent; the percent placed in group homes and institutions dropped slightly from 18 percent to 16 percent. It's worth noting that nearly 31,000 fewer foster children lived in group homes or institutions in 2009 than in 2000.

The age of a child greatly affects where he or she is likely to be placed when in foster care. In general, younger children are more likely to be living with families and older children more likely to be living in group homes or institutions. For example, 33 percent of children ages one to five are placed with relatives compared with only 11 percent of those 16 and older. Only one percent of children ages one to five are living in group homes or institutions compared with 36 percent of those ages 16 and older. Unfortunately, these older youth in group and institutional care are more likely to exit foster care when they reach the age of majority without the benefit of the family connections more easily developed in a family-based setting.

VARIATIONS IN FOSTER CARE PLACEMENT BY STATE

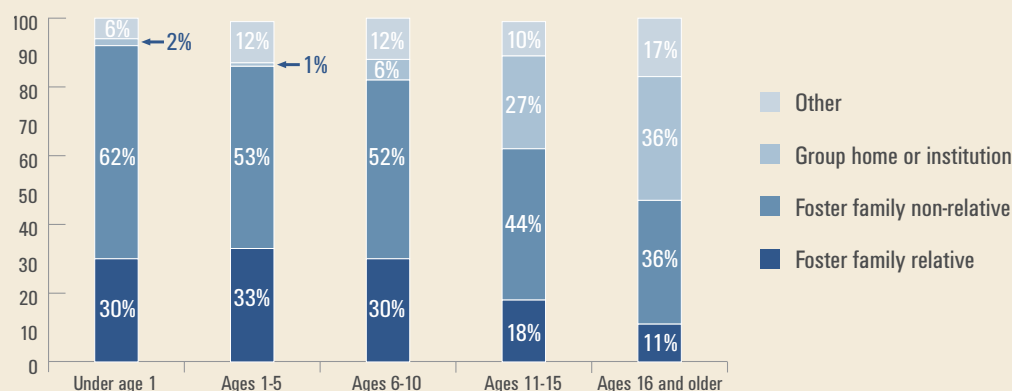
States' use of relatives to act as foster parents and their reliance on group placements varies greatly. In seven states, at least one in four foster children are in group homes and institutions. At the same time, nine states rely on group settings for less than one in 10 foster children. Similarly, eight states place at least a third of foster children with relatives while four states place less than 10 percent with relatives. These differences may be attributed to how systems view relatives as resources for children, the number and quality of available foster and adoptive parents, licensing standards for foster families, access to community-based services, and financial incentives that support one type of care over another.

FOSTER CARE PLACEMENT TYPES

- Foster family home, relative – A licensed or unlicensed home of the child's relatives regarded by the state as a foster care living arrangement for the child.
- Foster family home, non-relative – A licensed foster family home regarded by the state as a foster care living arrangement.
- Group home or Institution – A group home is a licensed or approved home providing 24-hour care for children in a small group setting that generally has from 7 to twelve children. An Institution is a facility operated by a public or private agency and providing 24-hour care and/or treatment for children who require separation from their own homes and group living experience. These facilities may include child care institutions, residential treatment facilities, or maternity homes.
- Other – Includes supervised independent living, runaways, pre-adoptive homes, and trial home visits.

Source: Definitions reported in the Adoption and Foster Care Reporting System (AFCARS).

Figure 2. Percent of Children in Foster Care by Age, by Placement Type, U.S., 2009



Source: Adoption and Foster Care Reporting System (AFCARS), 2009. Represents only those children in the foster care system on September 30, 2009 for whom data on type of placement and age was available.



DATA SNAPSHOT

	TOTAL IN FOSTER CARE		FOSTER FAMILY RELATIVE		FOSTER FAMILY NON-RELATIVE		GROUP HOME OR INSTITUTION		OTHER	
	#		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Alabama	5,137		579	11	2,754	54	1,008	20	796	15
Alaska	2,166		474	22	815	38	181	8	696	32
Arizona	10,095		3,477	34	4,735	47	1,255	12	628	6
Arkansas	3,654		462	13	2,122	58	719	20	351	10
California	60,198		16,225	27	28,272	47	6,654	11	9,047	15
Colorado	7,874		1,110	14	3,153	40	2,818	36	793	10
Connecticut	4,636		635	14	2,004	43	1,295	28	702	15
Delaware	797		101	13	506	63	112	14	78	10
District of Columbia	2,066		322	16	960	46	293	14	491	24
Florida	19,155		8,008	42	7,939	41	2,541	13	667	3
Georgia	7,995		1,205	15	4,705	59	1,588	20	497	6
Hawaii	1,436		641	45	629	44	132	9	34	2
Idaho	1,446		334	23	860	59	124	9	128	9
Illinois	17,079		5,990	35	7,073	41	1,823	11	2,193	13
Indiana	12,404		2,980	24	7,326	59	1,956	16	142	1
Iowa	6,564		1,334	20	2,226	34	1,411	21	1,593	24
Kansas	5,688		1,317	23	2,876	51	439	8	1,056	19
Kentucky	6,872		598	9	4,300	63	1,442	21	532	8
Louisiana	4,786		1,059	22	2,721	57	478	10	528	11
Maine	1,615		397	25	774	48	171	11	273	17
Maryland	6,905		2,162	31	3,095	45	1,039	15	609	9
Massachusetts	9,645		1,712	18	4,356	45	1,773	18	1,804	19
Michigan	17,723		6,198	35	5,758	32	2,836	16	2,931	17
Minnesota	5,410		893	17	2,372	44	1,335	25	810	15
Mississippi	3,307		570	17	1,526	46	762	23	449	14
Missouri	9,912		1,757	18	3,709	37	1,760	18	2,686	27
Montana	1,639		473	29	786	48	242	15	138	8
Nebraska	5,343		1,065	20	2,099	39	1,200	22	979	18
Nevada	4,776		1,572	33	1,983	42	317	7	904	19
New Hampshire	895		176	20	541	60	178	20	0	0
New Jersey	7,809		2,761	35	3,840	49	871	11	337	4
New Mexico	2,009		377	19	1,034	51	110	5	488	24
New York	27,909		5,603	20	12,664	45	5,152	18	4,490	16
North Carolina	9,419		2,239	24	4,927	52	1,184	13	1,069	11
North Dakota	1,218		156	13	522	43	304	25	236	19
Ohio	12,197		1,591	13	8,210	67	1,643	13	753	6
Oklahoma	8,691		2,431	28	3,829	44	798	9	1,633	19
Oregon	8,646		1,789	21	4,781	55	411	5	1,665	19
Pennsylvania	16,878		3,826	23	7,854	47	3,978	24	1,220	7
Rhode Island	2,112		501	24	765	36	725	34	121	6
South Carolina	4,938		339	7	3,058	62	1,142	23	399	8
South Dakota	1,484		252	17	712	48	329	22	191	13
Tennessee	6,723		505	8	4,007	60	1,383	21	828	12
Texas	26,309		6,767	26	11,836	45	4,609	18	3,097	12
Utah	2,757		435	16	1,443	52	463	17	416	15
Vermont	1,062		120	11	571	54	200	19	171	16
Virginia	5,896		341	6	3,582	61	1,041	18	932	16
Washington	9,922		3,485	35	4,999	50	453	5	985	10
West Virginia	4,211		549	13	1,986	47	1,167	28	509	12
Wisconsin	6,784		2,033	30	3,555	52	962	14	234	3
Wyoming	1,155		165	14	432	37	417	36	141	12
Puerto Rico	5,351		1,597	30	2,597	49	580	11	577	11
United States	420,698		101,688	24	200,179	48	65,804	16	53,027	13

Source: Adoption and Foster Care Reporting System (AFCARS), 2009. Represents children in the foster care system on September 30, 2009 for whom data on type of placement was available. State policies vary so comparisons across states should be made with caution. Percents may not total to 100 percent due to rounding.

TRENDS IN FOSTER CARE PLACEMENT BY STATE

A review of the AFCARS data reflects that the majority of state child welfare systems have reduced their reliance on group and institutional foster care settings over the last decade. Thirty-seven states have reduced the proportion of their foster care population placed in group or institutional settings since 2000. Arizona, Louisiana, New Jersey, New Mexico and Oklahoma have reduced their rates by over 50 percent. Over the same time period, the percentage of the foster care population in group homes has increased in only nine states: Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Montana, South Carolina, Vermont, and Wisconsin.

Thirty-one states have increased the percentage of their foster care population placed in relative foster care between 2000 and 2009. Idaho, Iowa, Maine, New Hampshire, Nevada, New Jersey, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia, and West Virginia have increased the proportion of their foster care caseload that is placed in relative foster care by 100 percent or more. In contrast, Alaska, California, Connecticut, Mississippi, and Missouri have experienced large declines in the percentage of their foster care caseload placed in relative foster care since 2000.

MOVING FORWARD: BETTER PLACEMENTS, BETTER OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN

When systems fail to make good placement decisions for children, the work of either maintaining existing family connections or achieving new permanent families for these youth becomes more difficult. In these cases, children suffer, and the likelihood that they will age out of the system to an adulthood marked by poor outcomes increases. In addition, when systems rely too heavily on less appropriate placement types, such as group or congregate care, jurisdictions are forced to pay more for services that are not meeting the needs of those in care, letting down both children and taxpayers.

With the passage of the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, and more recently, the Fostering Connections Act of 2008, child welfare systems across the country refocused efforts to promote the use of relatives as placement resources for children in custody and to connect children in foster care with permanent families, whether through reunification with birth parents or adoption by foster parents or other adults. Although many states have made dramatic strides, as a nation we have not yet witnessed significant increases in child welfare agencies' use of relatives to care for foster children or agencies' over-reliance on restrictive group homes and institutions. Jurisdictions across the country are proving that ensuring children in foster care have lifelong family connections is possible. It is our national imperative to build on these examples and make them the norm.

RESOURCES

AFCARS provides useful information about children in the foster care system at the state level and serves as an important tool in

advocating for permanent family connections for these children and adolescents. The following resources include newly available data on the KIDS COUNT Data Center from AFCARS. This data can be used to create rankings, maps, and graphs over time and exported for use in publications and on websites.

- **Find data for your state at the KIDS COUNT Data Center**
<http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/acrossstates/Default.aspx?cat=38>

Learn more about the latest research and policy developments related to foster care placement through the following resources:

- **Annie E. Casey Foundation Knowledge Center: Foster Care Permanence.aspx**
<http://www.aecf.org/KnowledgeCenter/ChildWelfarePermanence.aspx>

These resources, published or funded by the Casey Foundation, explore foster care, permanence, adoption, and reducing disparities in the child welfare system.

- **Fostering Connections Resource Center**
<http://www.fosteringconnections.org>

FosteringConnections.org is a gathering place of information, training, and tools related to furthering the implementation of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act, which became public law in 2008.

- **Rightsizing Congregate Care: A Powerful First Step in Transforming Child Welfare Systems**
<http://www.aecf.org/KnowledgeCenter/Publications.aspx?pubguid={746CoE30-2578-49CA-AE60-CB07CB6E02F9>

This report illustrates how the Annie E. Casey Foundation collaborated with New York City, Louisiana, Maine, and Virginia to identify five levers of change, reduce the use of congregate care, and improve other performance indicators. The report also includes data on key improvements in each jurisdiction.

- **State Kinship Care Policies for Children that Come to the Attention of Child Welfare Agencies: Findings from the 2007 Casey Kinship Foster Care Policy Survey**
http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child_Trends-2009_02_24_FR_KinshipCare.pdf

This paper reports the findings from a 2007 survey of state kinship foster care policies. The data from the survey show that states continue to see kin as a valuable resource and encourage the use of kinship care as both a temporary placement and a permanency option for children.

The Data Snapshot series highlights specific indicators of child well-being contained in the KIDS COUNT Data Center (datacenter.kidscount.org.) KIDS COUNT, a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, is a national and state-by-state effort to track the status of children in the United States. The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization, dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States.