

# FOSTERING YOUTH TRANSITIONS 2023

## STATE AND NATIONAL DATA TO DRIVE FOSTER CARE ADVOCACY

### SOURCE NOTES

THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

This source notes document provides a detailed description of the data sets and measures used for the *Fostering Youth Transitions* data analysis.

There are three primary data sets that contain information on young people (ages 14+) with foster care experience in the United States.

1. The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) Foster Care File
2. The National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) Outcomes File
3. The National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) Services File.

In this document you will find a description of each data set (what information it contains, how often it is updated, and the data source, such as administrative data or survey of young people); the population from the data set included in the current analysis; and a detailed description of the measures from the data set. The description of each measure will provide an overview of variables used to create the measure and how the findings should be interpreted.

Please note that in some instances, the numbers of young people represented within a given measure are too small to publish, given standards for ensuring confidentiality. For the purposes of this report, not applicable (N.A.) indicates a sample too small to report, or between one and 10 young people. Zero indicates that there are no young people who meet the criteria to be included for that measure.

## AFCARS

### DATA SET DESCRIPTION

AFCARS is a federally mandated data collection system that provides information on all children in foster care throughout the fiscal year (FY). The data sets, released annually, contain administrative data on each child's demographics, information about the most recent removal and details on the foster parents. This analysis uses the foster care files for fiscal years 2006, 2015, 2016, 2020 and 2021.

### POPULATION FOR ANALYSIS

This analysis restricted the data set to young people between the ages of 14 and 21 at the end of each of the fiscal years of interest (unless otherwise noted). The maximum age limit is set at 21 — the maximum age of eligibility for foster care services in most states. If a young person is missing data for a specific measure, he or she is not included in that measure.

## MEASURES

### *Demographics of transition-aged young people in foster care*

- **Race/ethnicity.** A count of young people between ages 14 and 21 in each racial/ethnic group who were in foster care at some point in FY 2021. For each state, the three largest racial/ethnic categories in foster care during FY 2006 and FY 2021 are reported. “More than one race” refers to young people of multiple racial compositions. Young people who are of more than one race and of Hispanic ethnicity are included in the Hispanic group. If a state reported fewer than 10 young people in a group, the data are labeled as N.A.
- **Sex.** The sex of young people (ages 14 to 21) in foster care as reported by the state in FY 2021.
- **Age.** Among the older teens and young adults in foster care in FY 2021, what percentage were ages 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18–21? If a state reported fewer than 10 young people in an age group, the data is labeled as N.A.

### *Experiences of transition-aged young people*

- **Total number of episodes (removals).** The total number of times young people (ages 14–21) were removed from their homes, including the most recent removal episode, for those in foster care in FY 2021. The sample showed that 90% of young people in foster care each fiscal year experienced one or two removals. Due to data available at the state level, young people with two or more removals were reported in the same category. Categories with fewer than 10 young people are labeled as N.A.
- **Number of placements.** This measure provides the number of foster care placements during the most recent removal episode for young people ages 14–21 in foster care during FY 2021. Trial home visits were not included in this measure because they are not considered placements. Placement data provided by race show young people ages 14–21 in foster care who experienced four or more placements during their most recent foster care episode, calculated as their percentage among all young people ages 14–21 in their racial group in foster care. Example: In 2021, of all Black young people ages 14–21 in foster care in the United States, 46% had 4+ placements during their most recent foster care episode. Placement categories with fewer than 10 people are labeled as N.A.
- **Entry reasons (14–17).** This measure provides the percentage of young people ages 14–17 who entered foster care for reasons reported as neglect, abuse or child behavior problems in FY 2021. In the state profiles, the category for abuse combines entries for physical and sexual abuse. A young person may have entered foster care for more than one reason. In AFCARS, other entry reasons include child or parental substance abuse, child disability, parental incarceration, caregiver unable to cope, abandonment, relinquishment and inadequate housing. Due to limited space, these are not shown in the state profiles. Entry reasons with fewer than 10 young people reported in a category are labeled as N.A.
- **Placement type.** This chart shows the most recent placement setting for young people (ages 14–21) in foster care in FY 2021. If a youth's most recent placement setting was missing from the data (<1% in each fiscal year), that youth's data was excluded from the analysis. Placement categories with fewer than 10 young people are labeled as N.A. Due to limited space in the chart, data smaller than 3% are not labeled.
  - *Family-based homes* include pre-adoptive homes and non-relative foster homes.
  - *Kinship care* includes relative foster homes.
  - *Group placements* include institutions and group homes.
  - *Runaway*, in AFCARS, reports young people who are missing or who have run away from a placement.

- **Exit reason by race (16+).** The age range was limited to 16 and older to avoid skewing the data with younger children who are not able to exit by aging out (emancipation). Exit reasons and racial groups with fewer than 10 young people are labeled as N.A.
  - *Permanence* includes reunification with parent(s), living with a relative, adoption and guardianship.
  - *Emancipation* only includes young people with a discharge reason of emancipation (aging out).
  - *Other* includes young people with a discharge reason of death, runaway or transfer to another agency.

#### *Extended foster care utilization*

- **In foster care on 18th and 19th birthday.** Day of birth is set to the 15th of the month for all young people in the data set for confidentiality purposes. As a result, young people are considered to be in foster care on their 18th birthday if they are still in care at any point during the month of their 18th birthday. This cohort is created using the AFCARS Foster Care File from FY 2015 for the FY 2016 cohort and the FY 2020 file for the FY 2021 cohort so foster care status at age 19 could be examined. Differences in data reporting practices at the state level likely result in a conservative national estimate for extended foster care utilization and unreliable numbers at the state level. Some states choose to create a new case in AFCARS when the young person reaches the age of majority, making it difficult to track individuals over time. Other states choose not to report to AFCARS the young people who remain in care beyond age 18. When fewer than 10 young people are reported, the data are labeled N.A.
- **Still in care on 19th birthday, by race.** Young people are considered to be in foster care on their 19th birthday if they are included in the data file for the year of interest (FY 2016 and FY 2021), meaning they spent time in care during that fiscal year. Also included are young people who have no discharge date (meaning they have not left foster care) and those who are in care the month following their 19th birthday. When an age group or racial group has fewer than 10 young people, the group is labeled as N.A. If no young people are reported by a state, zero is used.

## NYTD Services

### DATA SET DESCRIPTION

States report semiannually on all young people receiving any federally funded, Chafee Independent Living Service (ILS). This administrative data set is released annually. This analysis uses the NYTD Services files for FY 2016, FY 2018 and FY 2021. Because the data sets only include information on Chafee-funded services, they will not capture any ILS funded through other sources.

### POPULATION FOR ANALYSIS

This analysis restricted the data set to young people ages 14 years and older. Because data are collected semiannually, young people can be included twice in the same fiscal year. To avoid duplicated counts in this analysis, only the most recent record for young people who were receiving services is included. When service uptake represents 10 or fewer young people, data are labeled as N.A.

### MEASURES

- **Transition services received.** This data analysis estimates the number and percentage of young people ages 14–21 who received Chafee-funded transition services during all their years in foster care and, if eligible, after foster care, between FY 2013 and FY 2021. To count young people who received one or more services, this analysis used eight years of AFCARS data to determine the number of all Chafee-eligible young people in foster care ages 14–21 (between FY 2013 and FY 2021). Eight years of NYTD services data (FY 2013 through FY 2021) were used to

determine which young people received one or more Chafee-funded services. These results were merged to estimate the total number and proportion of eligible young people ages 14–21 who received one or more services. Note: For Illinois, NYTD data reported that 2,149 young people ages 14–21 received services. For this data analysis, however, 1,615 of them could not be matched to a record in the AFCARS data, so they were not included in the measure.

- **Life skills training.** Includes young peoples' participation in Chafee-funded budget and financial management assistance, training in locating and maintaining housing, health education and risk prevention, and family support and healthy marriage education programs. These programs include but are not limited to: learning to open and use a checking and savings account, filling out a rental application, substance abuse prevention and intervention, and domestic and family violence prevention.
- **Employment programs or vocational training.** Includes young peoples' participation in Chafee-funded apprenticeships, internships or summer training programs. It also covers vocational training, such as classes or other participation in occupational training (e.g., cosmetology, auto mechanics, nursing and welding).
- **Educational financial assistance.** Payments made by the state to help support educational necessities. These payments may include textbooks, uniforms, computers, tuition, scholarships, tutoring, ACT/SAT, General Educational Development (GED) and other educational tests.
- **Room and board assistance.** Includes payments made by the state to help support room and board. These payments may include rent deposits, utilities or other start-up household expenses.
- **Academic support (K–12)** Includes payments made by the state to help support completion of a high school diploma or GED test. These payments may include academic counseling, GED preparation and tutoring.
- **Mentoring.** Payments made by the state to facilitate a mentor relationship. A young person is matched with a trained adult and the two will meet regularly.

## NYTD Outcomes

### DATA SET DESCRIPTION

Young people who are in foster care within 45 days following their 17th birthday are eligible to complete the NYTD Outcomes baseline survey. Those who complete the survey at age 17 are eligible to complete follow-up surveys at 19 and 21. Some states choose to sample from their baseline cohort (those who completed the survey at 17) for the follow-up waves. Outcomes data in this file are self-reported, and young people may choose to decline to answer any question in the survey.

### POPULATION FOR ANALYSIS

This analysis examines outcomes for the first cohort (age 21 in 2015), second cohort (age 21 in 2018) and third cohort (age 21 in 2021) in the NYTD Outcomes data set. The numbers reflect outcomes reported by these young people at age 21. When outcomes represent 10 or fewer young people, labels will read as N.A.

### MEASURES

- **Young parents.** This table provides the number and percentage of respondents who reported having a child by age 21. The survey asks 17-year-olds if they have ever had a child. Follow-up surveys at ages 19 and 21 ask if they

have had a child within the past two years. Young people were included in this measure only if they had completed all three surveys.

- **Employment.** Young people are considered employed if they reported working part time or full time at the time they completed the survey (age 21).
- **Stable housing.** Young people are considered to have stable housing if they did not report experiencing homelessness on the surveys taken at ages 19 and 21. In those surveys, respondents are asked if they've been homeless in the past two years. Limiting this report's scope to those surveys captures experiences related to the time these young people spend transitioning out of the foster care system.
- **High school diploma/GED.** This reflects the young person's highest educational achievement at the time they take the survey (age 21). Young people are considered to have earned their high school diploma or GED if they indicated they earned one of those certifications or a higher certification, such as a vocational certificate or associate degree.
- **Health insurance.** Young people are considered insured if they reported participating in a Medicaid-funded state program or having health coverage from a third party that helps pay for all or part of health-related costs (including medical care, mental health care or prescription drugs) at the time they completed the survey (age 21).
- **Incarceration.** This reflects whether a young person reported being confined in a jail, prison, correctional facility or juvenile/community detention center in connection with an alleged misdemeanor or felony or conviction at any point in their life. At age 17, the survey asks about lifetime experience. At 19 and 21, the survey asks about the previous two years. For this measure, the analysis included only young people who responded to all three surveys.
- **Postsecondary enrollment.** Young people are considered enrolled in postsecondary education if they reported having more than a high school diploma or GED, and being enrolled in or attending high school, GED classes or postsecondary vocational training or college at the time they completed the survey (age 21).

## Data Collection During the Pandemic

*Fostering Youth Transitions 2023* contains data collected for AFCARS and NYTD during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Undercounts in data for this period are possible. Nationally, foster care entry and exit numbers fell to record lows while child welfare agencies experienced pandemic-related disruptions. Tracking older youth, especially those who had aged out of foster care but were eligible for services, became more challenging.

Data show that 19,897 young people exited foster care by emancipation (aging out without permanent families) in FY 2020. During FY 2021, 19,143 aged out of foster care, AFCARS reported. Some states and the federal government had enacted moratoriums on aging out and had given young people ages 18 to 21 the option of returning to foster care. The federal moratorium was in place September 2020 through September 2021.

Differences in data collection by states for this population likely produce a conservative estimate of their numbers. A clearer picture of their experiences and needs is emerging. Greater consistency in data collection and further research are necessary, however, to illuminate the full effect of the pandemic on teenagers and young adults in and transitioning from foster care.

## Quick References for More Information

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