

Foster Care

INDICATORS ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH

In 2012, 397,000 children were in foster care, a 30 percent decline from the 1999 peak of 567,000, and a number lower than any seen in any of the past 25 years. In 2014, the number had increased to 415,000.

Importance

Children are placed in foster care when a child protective services worker and a court have determined that it is not safe for the child to remain at home, because of a risk of maltreatment, including neglect and physical or sexual abuse.

Because of their history, children in foster care are more likely than other children to exhibit high levels of behavioral and emotional problems. They are also more likely to be suspended or expelled from school, and to exhibit low levels of school engagement and involvement with extracurricular activities. Children in foster care are also more likely to have received mental health services in the past year, to have a limiting physical, learning, or mental health condition, or to be in poor or fair health.¹ One study found that almost 60 percent of young children (ages two months to two years) in foster care were at a high risk for a developmental delay or neurological impairment.² Nearly half of children in foster care, according to another study, had had four or more “adverse family experiences”— potentially traumatic events that are associated with multiple poor outcomes— in childhood and adulthood.³

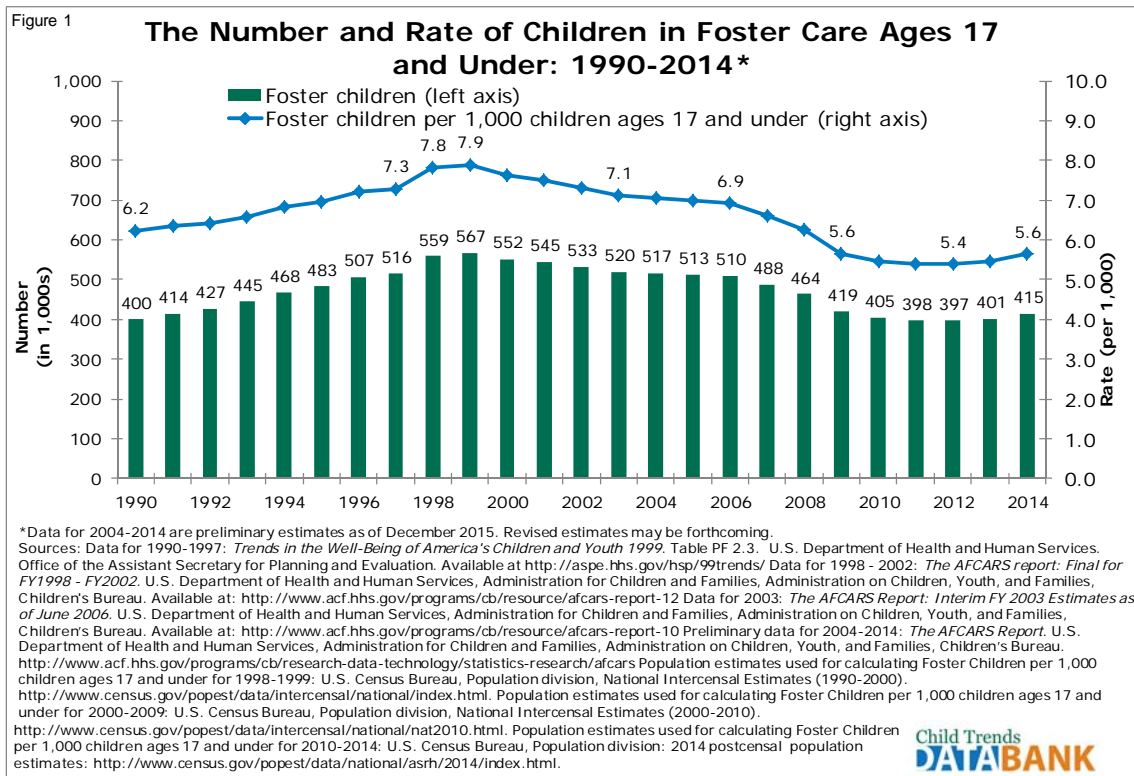
Youth who “age out” of foster care (instead of returning home or being adopted) may face challenges to making a successful transition to adulthood. According to the only national study of youth aging out of foster care, 38 percent had emotional problems, 50 percent had used illegal drugs, and 25 percent were involved with the legal system. Preparation for further education and career was also a problem for these young people. Only 48 percent of foster youth who had “aged out” of the system had graduated from high school at the time of discharge, and only 54 percent had graduated from high school two to four years after discharge. As adults, children who spent long periods of time in multiple foster care homes were more likely than other children to encounter problems such as unemployment, homelessness, and incarceration, as well as to experience early pregnancy.^{4,5} Former foster care youth may also be more likely, as young adults, to have multiple chronic health conditions (even after controlling for economic status).⁶

Another vulnerable group in foster care is teen parents. Both before and after the birth of their child, teen mothers in foster care are less likely to have a stable home environment. Although child welfare laws permit pregnant teens to continue living with their foster families,

provided the family is willing and able to have an infant in their household, a number of state regulations may pose barriers to maintaining this continuity.⁷

Trends

The number of children in foster care increased during the 1990s, from 400,000 in 1990 to 567,000 in 1999, before dropping to 397,000 by 2012 (preliminary estimate). Since then, the number has increased, to 415,000 in 2014 (preliminary estimate). Similarly, the rate of children living in foster care increased from 6.2 per 1,000 children in 1990, to 8.1 per 1,000 children in 1999, before decreasing to 5.4 per 1,000 in 2012—the lowest figure in two decades. By 2014, the rate had increased to 5.6 per 1,000. (Figure 1)

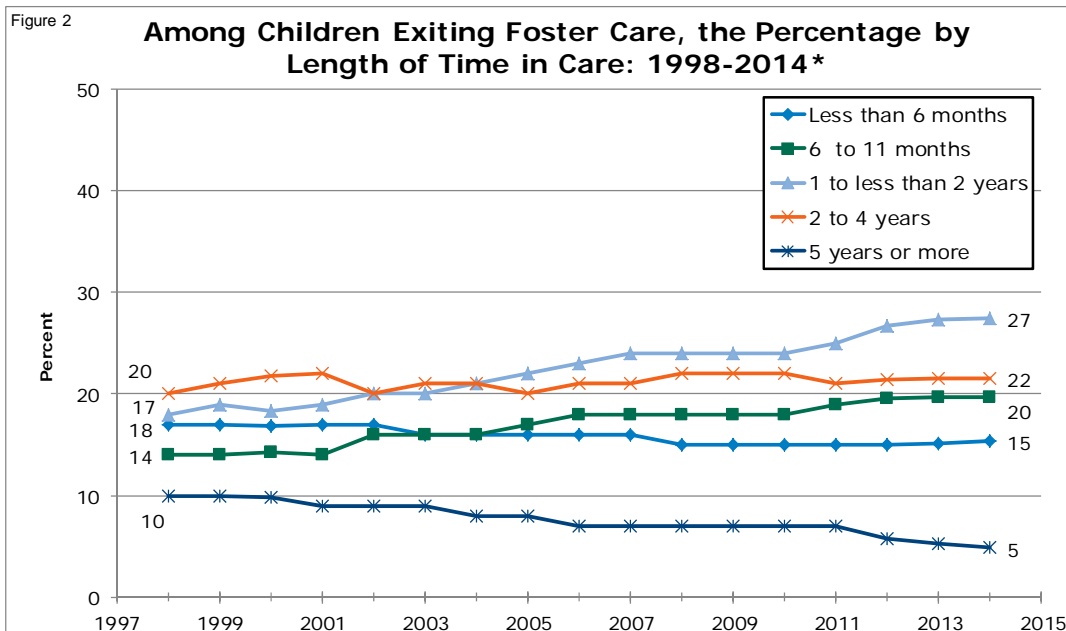


In 2014, nearly half (46 percent) of all foster children lived in the homes of non-relatives. Just over one-quarter (29 percent) lived in foster homes with relatives—often known as “kinship care.” Fourteen percent of foster children lived in group homes or institutions, four percent lived in pre-adoptive families, and the rest lived in other types of facilities (based on preliminary estimates). These are not substantially different from the proportions at the beginning of the decade, though there has been a slight decline in the number of foster

children in group homes and institutions, and a corresponding rise in the number of those in home care. (Appendix 1) There is evidence suggesting that children placed into kinship care have fewer behavioral problems than children in other types of foster care;⁸ however, their caregivers may be less likely to receive the same level of support services as non-relative foster parents.⁹

Differences by Length of Stay in Foster Care

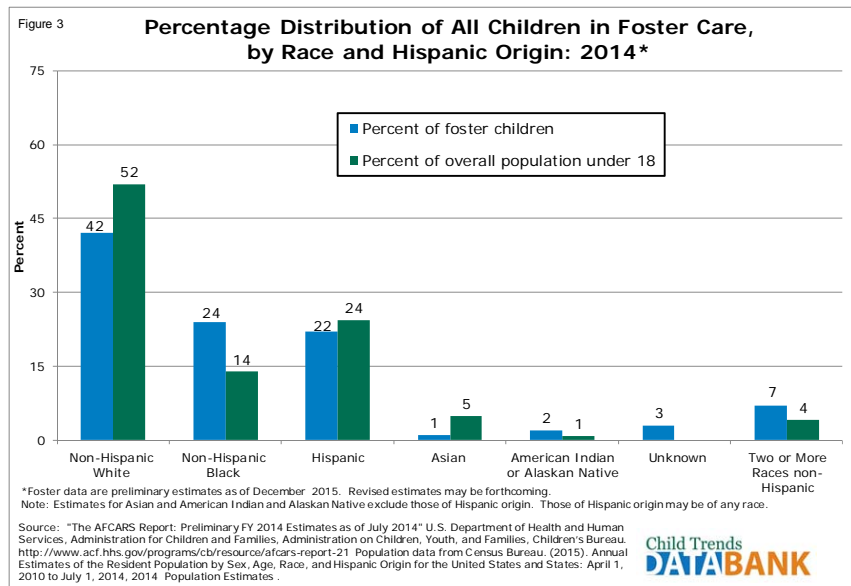
One-quarter (26 percent) of all children who exited foster care in 2014 were in foster care for less than six months, and another 20 percent spent six to eleven months in care. Twenty-eight percent spent one to two years in care, 21 percent spent two to four years in care, and five percent spent more than five years in care (preliminary estimates). Proportions of both very long, and very short, stays in foster care have been decreasing. Between 2000 and 2014, the proportion of stays shorter than six months decreased by 26 percent, and the proportion of stays five years or longer decreased by half. (Figure 2) Length-of-stay data refer only to the most recent removal from the home.



* Data for 2004-2014 are preliminary estimates as of December 2015. Revised estimates may be forthcoming.
 Source: Data for 1998 - 2002: *The AFCARS report: Final for FY1998 - FY2002*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, Children's Bureau. Available at: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/resource/afcars-report-12> Data for 2003: *The AFCARS Report: Interim FY 2003 Estimates as of June 2006*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, Children's Bureau.
 Preliminary data for 2004-2014: *The AFCARS Report*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, Children's Bureau.
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/research-data-technology/statistics-research/afcars>

Differences by Race and Hispanic Origin

Non-Hispanic white children, who made up about 52 percent of American children under age 18, accounted for 42 percent of foster children in 2014. Black children, who made up around 14 percent of all children, accounted for 24 percent of foster children in that year. Hispanics (who can be of any race), who were 24 percent of U.S. children, accounted for 22 percent of foster children in 2014.¹⁰ (Figure 3)



State and Local Estimates

- 2005-2014 state-level estimates on the number of children in foster care are available from the U.S. Health and Human Services' Children's Bureau at:
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/resource/fy2005-2014-foster-care-entries-exits>
- A number of state-level foster care indicators are also available at the KIDS COUNT Data Center: <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data#USA/2/35/38,40>

International Estimates

None available.

National Goals

In 2004, The Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care issued recommendations in the areas of system financing, accountability, and court procedures. See the report, "Fostering the Future: Safety, Permanence, and Well-Being for Children in Foster Care":

<http://www.kidsarewaiting.org/>

What Works to Make Progress on This Indicator

See Child Trends' LINKS database ("Lifecourse Interventions to Nurture Kids Successfully") for reviews of many rigorously evaluated programs, including the following which have been shown to be effective at improving outcomes for foster children:

- Attachment and Biobehavioral Catch-up:
www.childtrends.org/?programs=attachment-and-biobehavioral-catch-up-abc
- Enhanced Services and Stipends for Foster Parents:
www.childtrends.org/?programs=enhanced-services-and-stipends-for-foster-parents
- Homebuilders: www.childtrends.org/?programs=homebuilders
- Family-Centered Intensive Case Management: www.childtrends.org/?programs=family-centered-intensive-case-management

- Fostering Individualized Assistance Program: www.childtrends.org/?programs=fostering-individualized-assistance-program-fiap
- Fostering Healthy Futures: www.childtrends.org/?programs=fostering-healthy-futures
- KEEP Program: www.childtrends.org/?programs=keep-program
- Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care: www.childtrends.org/?programs=multidimensional-treatment-foster-care-mtfc
- Wendy’s Wonderful Kids: www.childtrends.org/?programs=wendys-wonderful-kids

Related Indicators

- Child Maltreatment: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=child-maltreatment
- Adopted Children: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=adopted-children
- Adverse Experiences: <http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=adverse-experiences>

Definition

Foster care is a living arrangement for children who a child protective services worker or a court has decided cannot live safely at home. Foster care arrangements include non-relative foster homes, relative foster homes (also known as “kinship care”), group homes, institutions, and pre-adoptive homes.

Data Sources

- Preliminary data for 2004-2014: *The AFCARS Report*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, Children’s Bureau. <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/research-data-technology/statistics-research/afcars>
- Data for 2003: *The AFCARS Report: Interim FY 2003 Estimates as of June 2006*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families,

Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, Children's Bureau. Available at:

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/resource/afcars-report-10>

- Data for 1998 - 2002: *The AFCARS report: Final for FY1998 - FY2002*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, Children's Bureau. Available at: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/resource/afcars-report-12>
- Population estimates used for calculating Foster Children per 1,000 children ages 17 and under for 2010-2014, and by race for 2014: U.S. Census Bureau, Population division: 2014 postcensal population estimates: <http://www.census.gov/popest/data/national/asrh/2014/index.html>.
- Population estimates used for calculating Foster Children per 1,000 children ages 17 and under for 2000-2009: U.S. Census Bureau, Population division, National Intercensal Estimates (2000-2010). <http://www.census.gov/popest/data/intercensal/national/nat2010.html>.
- Population estimates used for calculating Foster Children per 1,000 children ages 17 and under for 1998-1999: U.S. Census Bureau, Population division, National Intercensal Estimates (1990-2000). <http://www.census.gov/popest/data/intercensal/national/index.html>.
- Data for 1990-1997: *Trends in the Well-Being of America's Children and Youth 1999*. Table PF 2.3. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. Available at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/99/trends/>

Raw Data Source

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS).

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/systems/index.htm>



Appendix 1 – Number and Percentage of Children in Foster Care: Selected years, 1990-2014*

1990 1995 2000 2001 2002 2003 2004* 2005* 2006* 2007* 2008* 2009* 2010* 2011* 2012* 2013* 2014*

	1990	1995	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004*	2005*	2006*	2007*	2008*	2009*	2010*	2011*	2012*	2013*	2014*
Number of Foster Children (in thousands)	400	483	552	545	533	520	517	513	510	488	464	419	405	398	397	401	415
Foster Children per 1,000 Children, Ages 17 and Under (Rate per 1,000)	6.2	7.1	7.6	7.5	7.3	7.1	7.1	7.0	6.9	6.6	6.3	5.6	5.5	5.4	5.4	5.4	5.6
Age (% of total)																	
Less than 1 year	-	-	4	4	5	5	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	7	7
1- 5 years	-	-	25	24	24	25	26	26	28	28	29	30	30	32	32	33	33
6 - 10 years	-	-	25	24	22	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	21	21	22	23
11 - 15 years	-	-	29	29	30	30	30	28	27	26	25	24	23	23	22	22	21
16- 18 years	-	-	16	16	18	18	18	19	19	18	20	20	19	18	17	16	15
19 years or more	-	-	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1
Gender (% of total)																	
Male	-	-	52	52	53	53	53	52	52	52	53	53	52	52	52	52	52
Female	-	-	48	48	47	47	47	48	48	48	47	47	48	48	48	48	48
Placement Type (% of Total)																	
Pre-adoptive Home	-	-	4	4	5	5	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Foster Family Home (relative)	-	-	25	24	24	23	24	24	24	25	24	24	26	27	28	28	29
Foster Family Home (non-relative)	-	-	47	47	46	46	46	46	46	46	47	48	48	47	47	47	46
Group Home	-	-	8	8	9	9	9	8	7	7	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
Institution	-	-	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	9	9	9	8	8
Other	-	-	6	7	7	7	7	7	8	8	8	8	8	7	8	7	7



1990 1995 2000 2001 2002 2003 2004* 2005* 2006* 2007* 2008* 2009* 2010* 2011* 2012* 2013* 2014*

Race/Hispanic Origin (% of Total)	1990	1995	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004*	2005*	2006*	2007*	2008*	2009*	2010*	2011*	2012*	2013*	2014*
White (Non-Hispanic)	-	-	38	38	39	39	40	41	40	40	40	40	41	41	42	42	42
Black (Non-Hispanic)	-	-	39	38	37	35	34	32	32	31	31	30	29	27	26	24	24
Asian (Non-Hispanic)	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
American Indian or Alaskan Native (Non-Hispanic)	-	-	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Hispanic	-	-	15	17	17	17	18	18	19	20	20	20	21	21	21	22	22
Unknown	-	-	4	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	3
Two or More Races (Non-Hispanic)	-	-	1	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	5	5	5	5	6	6	7
Length of Stay (% among children who exited foster care during the year)																	
Less than 1 month	-	-	19	20	19	18	18	17	15	14	13	13	13	12	12	11	11
1 to 5 months	-	-	17	17	17	16	16	16	16	16	15	15	15	15	15	15	15
6 to 11 months	-	-	14	14	16	16	16	17	18	18	18	18	18	19	20	20	20
1 to less than 2 years	-	-	19	19	20	20	21	22	23	24	24	24	24	25	27	27	27
2 to less than 3 years	-	-	11	11	10	11	11	11	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	13	13
3 to 4 years	-	-	11	11	10	10	10	9	9	9	10	10	10	9	9	9	8
5 years or more	-	-	10	9	9	9	8	8	7	7	7	7	7	7	6	5	5



*Data for 2004 through 2014 are preliminary estimates. Revised estimates may be forthcoming.

Note: Estimate of total is the number of children in foster care on the last day of the fiscal year. 1996 is the last year in which data on foster care are collected through the Voluntary Cooperative Information System (VCIS). The Administration on Children and Families (ACF) has implemented the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) as a replacement for VCIS. While VCIS was a voluntary reporting system, states are required to participate in AFCARS and must use uniform definitions. Most importantly, AFCARS collects case-level foster care data.

Some percentages do not total 100% due to rounding. Estimates for Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian and Alaskan Native exclude those of Hispanic origin. Those of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

Sources: Data for 1990-1997: *Trends in the Well-Being of America's Children and Youth 1999*. Table PF 2.3. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. Available at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/99/trends/> Data for 1998 - 2002: *The AFCARS report: Final for FY1998 - FY2002*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, Children's Bureau. Available at: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/resource/afcars-report-12> Data for 2003: *The AFCARS Report: Interim FY 2003 Estimates as of June 2006*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, Children's Bureau. Available at: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/resource/afcars-report-10> Preliminary data for 2004-2014: *The AFCARS Report*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, Children's Bureau. <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/research-data-technology/statistics-research/afcars> Population estimates used for calculating Foster Children per 1,000 children ages 17 and under for 1998-1999: U.S. Census Bureau, Population division, National Intercensal Estimates (1990-2000). <http://www.census.gov/popest/data/intercensal/national/index.html>. Population estimates used for calculating Foster Children per 1,000 children ages 17 and under for 2000-2009: U.S. Census Bureau, Population division, National Intercensal Estimates (2000-2010). <http://www.census.gov/popest/data/intercensal/national/nat2010.html>. Population estimates used for calculating Foster Children per 1,000 children ages 17 and under for 2010-2014: U.S. Census Bureau, Population division: 2014 postcensal population estimates: <http://www.census.gov/popest/data/national/asrh/2014/index.html>.

Endnotes

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⁵ Reilly, T. (2003). Transition from care: Status and outcomes of youth who age out of foster care. *Child Welfare*, 82(6), 727-746.

⁶ Ahrens, K. R., Garrison, M. M., & Courtney, M. E. (2014). Health outcomes in young adults from foster care and economically diverse backgrounds. *Pediatrics*, published online November 3, 2014.

⁷ Manlove, J., Welti, K, McCoy-Roth, M., Berger, A., and Malm, K. (2011). Teen parents in foster care: Risk factors and outcomes for teens and their children. *Child Trends Research Brief*. Available at http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child_Trends_2011_05_31_DS_FosterCare.pdf

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⁹ Walsh, W. A. & Mattingly, M. J. (2014). Related foster parents less likely to receive support services compared with nonrelative foster parents. Carsey Research National Issue Brief #74. <http://scholars.unh.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1216&context=carsey>

¹⁰ Child population percentages are available at Kids Count State Level Data Online. http://www.aecf.org/kidscount/sld/compare_results.jsp?i=710