

## Facts About Children in Foster Care

**Total Population:** 513,000 children were in the U.S. foster care system on September 30, 2005. Most children are placed temporarily in foster care due to parental abuse or neglect.<sup>1</sup>

**Age:**<sup>1</sup> Average Age: 10.0 years

- 6% < 1 year
- 26% 1-5 years
- 20% 6-10 years
- 28% 11-15 years
- 18% 16-18 years
- 2% ≥19 years

**Gender:**<sup>1</sup> Male: 52% Female: 48%

**Race and Ethnicity:** As a percentage, there are more children of color in the foster care system than in the general U.S. population. However, child abuse and neglect occur at about the same rate in all racial/ethnic groups.

<u>Race/Ethnicity</u> <sup>1</sup>	<u>In out-of-home care</u>	<u>In general population</u> <sup>2</sup>
Black ( <i>non-Hispanic</i> )	32%	15%
White ( <i>non-Hispanic</i> )	41%	61%
Hispanic	18%	17%
Am. Indian/Alaska Native ( <i>non-Hispanic</i> )	2%	1%
Asian/Pacific Islander ( <i>non-Hispanic</i> )	1%	3%
Unknown	2%	N/A
2 or More Races ( <i>non-Hispanic</i> )	3%	4%

**Length of Stay:** For the children in foster care on September 30, 2005, the average amount of time they had been in the system was 28.6 months. Half of those leaving care that year had been away from home for a year or longer. 54% of the young people leaving the system were reunified with their birth parents or primary caregivers.<sup>1</sup>

**Foster Homes:** In 2004, there was a total of 153,000 licensed/certified/approved kinship and non-relative foster homes nationwide.<sup>3</sup> In 2005, 24% of youth living foster care were residing with their relatives.<sup>1</sup>

**Adoptions:** In 2005, 60% of adopted children were adopted by their foster parent(s). The “foster parent” category excludes anyone identified as a relative of the child. 25% of children adopted in FY 2005 were adopted by a relative. A “relative” includes a step-parent or other relative of the child.

**Siblings and Extended Families:** Over 2 million American children live with grandparents or other relatives because their parents cannot care for them. When relatives provide foster care (known as *kinship care*), siblings can often stay together. Kinship care also improves stability by keeping displaced children closer to their extended families, their neighborhoods, and their schools.<sup>4</sup>

**Youth in Transition:** Each year, an estimated 20,000 young people “age out” of the U.S. foster care system. Many are only 18 years old and still need support and services. Several foster care alumni studies show that without a lifelong connection to a caring adult, these older youth are often left vulnerable to a host of adverse situations:

<u>Outcome</u>	<u>National</u> <sup>5</sup>	<u>Regional or Local</u>
Earned a high school diploma	54%	50% - 63% <sup>6</sup>
Obtained a Bachelor's degree or higher	2%	2% <sup>7</sup>
Became a parent	84%	42% <sup>a,8</sup>
Were unemployed	51%	30% <sup>9</sup>
Had no health insurance	30% <sup>b</sup>	29% <sup>10</sup>
Had been homeless	25%	36% <sup>11</sup>
Were receiving public assistance	30%	26% <sup>12</sup>

<sup>a</sup> 12-18 months after discharge.

<sup>b</sup> Unable to obtain health care because they lacked health insurance or sufficient money.

## Sources:

- <sup>1</sup> Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS)  
[http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb/stats\\_research/afcars/tar/report13.htm](http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/afcars/tar/report13.htm)
- <sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, special tabulation. Characteristics of Children Under 18 Years by Age, Race, and Hispanic or Latino Origin, for the United States: 2000. <http://www.census.gov/>
- <sup>3</sup> Child Welfare League of America - National Data Analysis System <http://ndas.cwla.org/>
- <sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau (2004). Children and the Households They Live In: 2000. <http://census.gov/prod/2004pubs/censr-14.pdf>
- <sup>5</sup> Young adults ages 18-24 years old 2.5 to 4 years after leaving foster care: Cook, R. (1992). Are we helping foster care youth prepare for the future? *Children and Youth Services Review*, 16(3/4), 213-229. Cook, R.; Fleishman, E., & Grimes, V. (1989). *A National Evaluation of Title IV-E Foster Care Independent Living Programs for Youth* (Phase 2 Final Report, Volume 1). Rockville: Westat, Inc.
- <sup>6</sup> Brandford, C. & English, D. (2004). *Foster youth transition to independence study*. Seattle, WA: Office of Children's Administration Research, Washington Department of Social and Health Services.
- <sup>7</sup> Pecora, P. J., Kessler, R. K., Williams, J., O'Brien, K., Downs, A. C., English, D., White, J., Hiripi, E., White, C.R., Wiggins, T. & Holmes, K. (2005). *Improving family foster care: Findings from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study*. Seattle, WA: Casey Family Programs. <http://www.casey.org>
- <sup>8</sup> Courtney, M., Piliavin, I., Grogan-Kaylor, A. & Nesmith, A. (2001). Foster youth transitions to adulthood: A longitudinal view of youth leaving care, *Child Welfare*, 80, 685-717.
- <sup>9</sup> Unemployed for all 13 quarters since leaving foster care in Illinois at age 18: Goerge, R., Bilaver, L., Lee, B.L.; Needell, B., Brookhart, A., & Jackman, W. (2002). *Employment Outcomes for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care – Final Report*. Chicago, IL and Berkeley, CA: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, and Center for Social Services Research, University of California Berkeley. <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/fostercare-agingout02/>
- <sup>10</sup> Pecora, P.J., Williams, J., Kessler, R.J., Downs, A.C., O'Brien, K. Hiripi, E., & Morello, S. (2003). *Assessing the effects of foster care: Early results from the Casey National Alumni Study*. Seattle, WA: Casey Family Programs. <http://www.casey.org/>
- <sup>11</sup> Reilly, T. (2003). Transition from care: Status and outcomes of youth who age out of foster care. *Child Welfare*, 82(6), 727-746.
- <sup>12</sup> Kerman, B., Wildfire, J., & Barth, R.P. (2002). Outcomes for young adults who experienced foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 24(1/2), 79-104.