

The State of Child Welfare



Child safety is mission central for the child welfare system. In recent years Pennsylvania state government officials and their county partners who are responsible for the child welfare system have built on their commitment to child safety with a visionary and aggressive goal: to safely reduce the number of children in foster care and ensure that every child benefits from a safe, stable and permanent family. In our inaugural issue of the *State of Child Welfare* published last year we posed some fundamental questions about how well Pennsylvania state and county governments were doing to meet this goal. Now we have the data to assess our progress.

Are counties keeping children safe in their homes so fewer children ever have to enter foster care? Are they decreasing the likelihood of repeat abuse or re-entry into foster care placement? Are they placing children in foster care settings that increase the likelihood of a permanent family for every child? Are they taking steps to ensure children who will not be reunited with their birth family achieve permanency through adoption or guardianship? These are the questions that warrant annual review to assess our progress and pinpoint

areas that need attention to realize our state's commitment to a "forever family for every child."

The news is very promising. *Pennsylvania is making significant progress in safely reducing the number of children living in foster care.* There has been a nearly 12 percent drop in children living in foster care and a decline of more than 16 percent of children entering foster care placement over the last year. It is important to note that repeat child abuse did not measurably increase and re-entry into foster care also declined providing us important assurances that the reduction in foster care placement is safe and stable for Pennsylvania's children.

These are very promising signs but alone they don't tell the full story. Child safety is the first goal of the child welfare system but a permanent family that a child can call their own and rely on to support them through adulthood is our shared vision for every child. The data indicates positive trends on this front as well.

Pennsylvania is a state that has relied heavily on placing children in congregate care (group homes and institutions) rather than foster family homes but this trend is changing —

there was a decrease of nearly eight percent in placement of children in congregate care settings over the past year. Research indicates that children who live in congregate settings while in foster care have less contact with their birth families, poorer relationships with their siblings, more behavioral problems, and are less likely to end their journey living in a permanent family than children who are placed in foster family settings.

There was a 10 percent increase in children reunifying with their birth families in a timely manner over the past year. And, for children who didn't benefit from reunification, many left the system because they were adopted or went to live with a legal guardian.

Our work in Pennsylvania is clearly not done and all the news isn't good. We have to strengthen our efforts to reduce the disproportionate number of children of color in foster care placement as an African American child is still six times more likely than a white child to be in foster care. We need to take more aggressive steps to ensure that youth don't end their child welfare experience through emancipation instead of a permanent family as was the case for nearly 900 young people in the last year. But we are on a solid pathway to realize our goals.

Policymakers and the public should take note of the positive trends that are evident in counties across the Commonwealth — large and small, urban, rural and suburban. A strong commitment to use best practices such as family finding, family group conferencing, expedited court reviews, safety assessment, continuous quality improvement and others are driving our progress and helping to ensure that every child is safe and benefits from a family they can call their own. *We need to stay the course.*



The Porch Light Project
Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children

116 Pine Street, Suite 430
Harrisburg, PA • 17101-1244

www.porchlightproject.org
717.236.5680 • 800.257.2030

SIGNIFICANCE

INDICATOR

Child maltreatment is a serious problem that has grave and costly consequences for the child, his or her family and the community at-large.

A child who has experienced abuse and neglect is more likely to have social, emotional and physical health problems and perform poorly in school.

Child Abuse Reports

Reported incidents of suspected child abuse through the ChildLine and Abuse Registry. Does not include General Protective Service reports which include less severe general neglect reports.

(Number and rate per 1,000 children age 0-17)

STATE		STATUS	RURAL		RURAL MIX		URBAN MIX		URBAN	
2009	2010		2009	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010
25,655	25,342	NO SIGNIFICANT CHANGE	3,673	3,276	2,915	2,914	6,109	5,866	12,958	13,286
9.3	9.2		11.8	10.5	9.6	9.6	8.5	9.0	8.7	8.9

Child Abuse Substantiations

Founded or indicated reports of child abuse. Does not include the number of children determined to need General Protective Services.

STATE		STATUS	RURAL		RURAL MIX		URBAN MIX		URBAN	
2009	2010		2009	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010
16.4%	15.6%	—	19.8%	19.7%	17.4%	16.3%	15.5%	15.9%	15.6%	14.2%

Repeated Child Abuse

Children with another substantiated incident of abuse following the first reported incident. (Data may be overstated.)

STATE		STATUS	RURAL		RURAL MIX		URBAN MIX		URBAN	
2009	2010		2009	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010
8.6%	8.9%	NO SIGNIFICANT CHANGE	9.6%	12.8%	9.5%	8.4%	6.4%	6.4%	9.1%	7.8%
1 in 11	1 in 11		1 in 10	1 in 8	1 in 11	1 in 12	1 in 16	1 in 16	1 in 11	1 in 13

In-home services are designed to strengthen families by addressing the root causes of abuse and neglect. The provision of in-home services helps a child to remain safely in his or her home.

In-home Services

Children whose families received services in their homes to address concerns related to child safety and well-being on any given day.

STATE		STATUS	RURAL		RURAL MIX		URBAN MIX		URBAN	
2009	2010		2009	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010
NO RELIABLE DATA IS AVAILABLE										

Foster care is meant to be a temporary intervention to assure the safety and well-being of a child. A child who spends long periods of time in foster care is more likely than other children to drop out of school, have mental health challenges, experience unemployment and be homeless as an adult.

Children Entering Foster Care

All entries into foster care during the year
First time entries during the year

STATE		STATUS	RURAL		RURAL MIX		URBAN MIX		URBAN	
2009	2010		2009	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010
12,307	10,293	MADE PROGRESS	1,462	1,166	1,515	1,101	2,403	1,921	6,927	6,105
67.4%	66.8%		71.3%	73.9%	72.7%	68.7%	75.9%	74.4%	62.4%	62.8%

This report was made possible in collaboration with Casey Family Programs, whose mission is to provide and improve – and ultimately prevent the need for – foster care. To learn more, visit www.casey.org. The findings and conclusions presented in this report are those of Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children and do not necessarily reflect the views of Casey Family Programs.

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For more information on data reporting periods, citations and sources, visit: www.porchlightproject.org/reports/socw10/StateofChildWelfare10.pdf



SIGNIFICANCE

A child relies on his or her family for an array of supports from early childhood through adulthood. Without a permanent family, a child fails to have a sense of security and suffers from a lack of belonging.

INDICATOR

Children Leaving Foster Care

Children who exited foster care by discharge reason and how long they were in foster care. Also includes the median length of stay for children remaining in foster care.

Total Children Leaving Foster Care

Percent of Children Leaving Foster Care [number of months until leaving]

Exit to Permanency

Reunification [number of months until reunification]

Adoption [number of months until adoption]

Guardianship [number of months until guardianship]

Live with Other Relatives [number of months until living with relatives]

Emancipation [number of months until emancipation]

Transfer to Another Agency [number of months until transfer]

Runaway [number of months until running away]

Death of Child [number of months until death of a child]

Total Children Remaining in Foster Care [number of months children have been in care]

STATE		STATUS	RURAL		RURAL MIX		URBAN MIX		URBAN	
2009	2010		2009	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010
14,027	12,940	MADE PROGRESS	1,550	1,407	1,570	1,362	2,806	2,496	8,101	7,675
44.5%	46.6%		49.0%	50.3%	51.9%	53.5%	46.3%	48.6%	42.0%	44.4%
10.7	12.0		7.4	8.4	5.6	7.6	12.1	12.6	12.3	13.3
85.5%	87.2%	MADE PROGRESS	89.2%	88.6%	91.1%	93.4%	90.1%	88.3%	82.1%	85.5%
57.8%	55.7%		64.6%	60.6%	70.5%	70.3%	56.4%	52.9%	54.5%	53.1%
5.9	7.0		3.7	4.8	3.0	4.2	5.4	6.2	7.6	8.7
15.7%	17.3%		13.3%	15.3%	10.0%	11.4%	24.1%	24.7%	14.4%	16.4%
31.7	31.8		33.5	34.8	26.9	30.6	28.8	27.6	33.8	33.1
5.9%	8.1%		4.8%	6.4%	4.7%	4.7%	3.7%	4.9%	7.1%	10.0%
24.1	23.5		17.8	18.1	18.6	25.5	23.6	21.6	24.7	24.1
6.1%	6.1%		6.5%	6.3%	5.9%	7.0%	6.0%	5.8%	6.0%	6.0%
2.8	3.5		1.9	2.4	1.9	5.0	4.3	6.4	2.5	3.2
6.6%	6.9%		LOST GROUND	8.8%	9.4%	6.2%	6.2%	6.9%	8.5%	6.1%
37.7	36.3	26.8		22.9	32.4	27	38.5	37.3	41.2	41.9
4.0%	3.5%	MADE PROGRESS	1.7%	1.2%	2.4%	0.5%	2.1%	2.6%	5.4%	4.8%
4.9	5.4		0.9	1.8	3.9	5.5	5.0	5.5	5.6	6.1
3.8%	2.3%	MADE PROGRESS	0.2%	0.7%	0.3%	0.0%	0.6%	0.7%	6.3%	3.5%
7.5	8.3		21.2	9.8	14.7	—	17.8	8.0	6.9	8.3
0.1%	0.1%	NO CHANGE	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.2%	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%
9.6	4.5		8.3	7.0	—	—	6.8	3.9	13.5	4.1
18,380	15,920	MADE PROGRESS	1,731	1,498	1,577	1,316	3,367	2,768	11,705	10,338
15.7	15.6		13.0	15.4	13.3	15.9	14.5	14.1	16.7	15.7

Every time a child moves the traumatic experience of separation and lack of continuity in his/her life grows. A child who experiences multiple placements while in foster care struggles to build and maintain healthy relationships and is disadvantaged academically due to repeated school changes.

Foster Care Placement Stability

Children who were in foster care for 12 to 23 months and had three or more placement settings.

STATE		STATUS	RURAL		RURAL MIX		URBAN MIX		URBAN	
2009	2010		2009	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010
33.3%	35.9%	LOST GROUND	37.7%	38.6%	33.0%	36.8%	35.5%	37.0%	32.0%	35.0%

The frequency and quality of visitation between the caseworker and a child is a key component to assuring safety, permanency planning and related service delivery.

Caseworker Visits

Children who were in foster care and visited on a monthly basis by a county or private agency child welfare worker.

STATE		STATUS	RURAL		RURAL MIX		URBAN MIX		URBAN	
2009	2010		2009	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010
81%	92%	MADE PROGRESS	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

