

The State of Child Welfare



Pennsylvania has taken a comprehensive, family-focused approach in recent years to reduce the number of children in foster care and provide more services to keep children in their homes. There is growing evidence that strategy is working.

The latest data on Pennsylvania's child welfare system shows the number of families receiving in-home services — intervention efforts that allow children to stay safely in their homes and out of foster care placement — has risen markedly in the past year, serving more than 4,700 additional children. These in-home services help strengthen families, curb the root causes of abuse and neglect, and reduce costly foster care placements. We know outcomes for children are better when they remain in their own homes.

The broader use of in-home services to keep families intact also has helped keep the number of children placed in foster care relatively stable over the past year and fueled a sharp decline in the foster care population in recent years. Today, about 14,000 Pennsylvania children remain in foster care, compared to about 21,000 children in 2006 — a 33 percent decline.

Even among children placed in foster care, there is a positive trend toward keeping children within their extended families when possible.

Historically, Pennsylvania has relied heavily on group homes or institutions to care for foster children (often termed “congregate care”) rather than placing foster children in family settings. State and county officials have been working to reverse this trend, recognizing that when children are placed in family settings versus congregate care, they are more likely to move out of foster care and into permanent families.

These efforts are working. The percentage of foster care children placed in family settings has been increasing, while the percentage placed in congregate care has seen a closely corresponding decrease. The significance of this cannot be understated, because a child who transitions to adulthood with the emotional and social supports a family setting can provide is more likely to become a self-sufficient adult.

Foster placement in a family setting also increases the likelihood a child will be able to leave foster care permanently, rather than re-enter foster care. This is important, because repeated

placement in foster care often means multiple changes in a child's school and community, making it harder to succeed academically and more difficult to create lasting relationships.

The number of children re-entering foster care continues to decline, dropping by more than 300 children in the past year. This indicates efforts to reduce foster care have been safely managed and is yet another positive benefit of the commonwealth's strategy.

Despite these achievements, Pennsylvania can do more to help children — particularly teenagers — in need of a safe, nurturing home. Children 13 and older often face the greatest challenges finding a “forever family” and end up “aging out” of the foster care system, making the challenging transition to adulthood without the support a loving family provides.

Nearly half the children in foster care are 13 and older. While that percentage decreased in the past year, this age group needs greater focus from the child welfare community and policymakers. Looking ahead, the commonwealth should act to extend foster care services from age 18 to age 21 and better promote adoption and legal guardianship for youth. This common-sense step is cost-effective, good for families and — most importantly — immeasurably beneficial to youths who will gain the support of a family at a critical transition point in their lives.

Overall, Pennsylvania should stay on track with its successful efforts to reduce the number of children in foster care and promote a permanent family for every child. By emphasizing in-home services and keeping children safely in their homes and communities, we can give children a stronger chance of having a permanent family and a more solid path to adulthood.



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	
2010	2011		2010	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011
25,342	24,615	—	3,276	3,326	2,914	2,724	5,866	5,922	13,286	12,643
9.2	9.0		10.5	10.9	9.6	9.1	9.0	9.1	8.9	8.5

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	
2010	2011		2010	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011
15.6%	14.9%	—	19.7%	18.3%	16.3%	16.8%	15.9%	13.6%	14.2%	14.1%

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	
2010	2011		2010	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011
8.9%	9.0%	—	12.8%	10.3%	8.4%	6.6%	6.4%	7.3%	7.8%	10.0%
1 in 11	1 in 11		1 in 8	1 in 10	1 in 12	1 in 15	1 in 16	1 in 14	1 in 13	1 in 10

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 during the year.

STATE		STATUS	RURAL		RURAL MIX		URBAN MIX		URBAN	
2010	2011		2010	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011
164,099	168,821	MADE PROGRESS	32,965	31,258	19,055	24,891	33,139	33,669	78,940	79,003

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	
2010	2011		2010	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011
10,293	10,496	NO SIGNIFICANT CHANGE	1,166	1,323	1,101	1,257	1,921	1,805	6,105	6,111
66.8%	68.7%		73.9%	74.8%	68.7%	73.0%	74.4%	75.2%	62.8%	64.6%

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/socw11.shtml



SIGNIFICANCE

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Children in Foster Care

All Children in Foster Care
(Rate per 1,000 children age 0-18)

Age

0-1	10.2%	11.6%
2-5	19.8%	21.1%
6-12	22.7%	22.5%
13+	47.3%	44.8%

Race and Ethnicity

White	48.7%	52.2%
African-American	46.9%	46.0%
Other	5.3%	3.5%
Latino	10.8%	11.8%

Placement Setting

Family Setting	68.6%	71.4%
Pre-adoptive Home	4.4%	4.7%
Foster Family Home — Relative	21.5%	22.4%
Foster Family Home — Non-relative	42.7%	44.3%
Congregate Care	25.1%	22.4%
Group Home	12.3%	11.7%
Institution	12.8%	10.7%
Supervised Independent Living	1.8%	1.9%
Runaway	1.4%	1.8%
Trial Home Visit	3.0%	2.5%

STATE	STATUS	RURAL		RURAL MIX		URBAN MIX		URBAN	
		2010	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011
27,776	27,681	2,799	3,217	2,545	2,812	5,137	4,895	17,295	16,757
9.2	9.3	8.0	9.3	7.6	8.5	7.1	6.8	10.7	10.6
NO SIGNIFICANT CHANGE									
MADE PROGRESS									
MADE PROGRESS									

A child's separation from his or her parents or relatives is traumatic for all involved. Minimizing the time a child spends in foster care without compromising safety is key to healthy child development.

Timely Reunification with Parents or Relatives

Children who entered foster care for the first time who were reunified with their parents or discharged to relatives within the next 12 months.

STATE	STATUS	RURAL		RURAL MIX		URBAN MIX		URBAN	
		2010	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011
53.5%	53.8%	59.8%	59.0%	65.0%	66.4%	53.9%	49.5%	49.4%	52.0%

A child re-entering foster care following a return to his or her family signals a breakdown in the part of the child welfare system to appropriately address family needs.

Re-entry into Foster Care

Children who re-entered foster care in fewer than 12 months following reunification with parents or relatives. (Data may be overstated.)

STATE	STATUS	RURAL		RURAL MIX		URBAN MIX		URBAN	
		2010	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011
27.0%	26.9%	21.0%	20.3%	21.3%	20.1%	20.8%	20.1%	31.6%	32.1%



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.

STATE		STATUS	RURAL		RURAL MIX		URBAN MIX		URBAN			
2010	2011		2010	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011		
Total Children Leaving Foster Care			12,940	13,545	1,407	1,780	1,362	1,640	2,496	2,501	7,675	7,624
Percent of Children Leaving Foster Care [number of months until leaving]			46.6%	48.9%	50.3%	55.3%	53.5%	58.3%	48.6%	51.1%	44.4%	45.5%
Exit to Permanent Arrangements			12.0	12.5	8.4	10.2	7.6	7.6	12.6	12.8	13.3	13.8
Reunification [number of months until reunification]			87.2%	88.7%	8.6%	94.1%	93.4%	92.8%	88.3%	87.9%	85.5%	86.8%
Adoption [number of months until adoption]			55.7%	61.1%	60.6%	72.8%	70.3%	70.1%	52.9%	57.3%	53.1%	57.7%
Guardianship [number of months until guardianship]			7.0	7.6	4.8	6.3	4.2	4.7	6.2	7.4	8.7	8.9
Live with Other Relatives [number of months until living with relatives]			17.3%	16.9%	15.3%	12.4%	11.4%	12.8%	24.7%	21.7%	16.4%	17.3%
Exit to Non-permanent Arrangements			31.8	30.0	34.8	31.5	30.6	28.4	27.6	24.8	33.1	32.2
Emancipation [number of months until emancipation]			8.1%	6.1%	6.4%	4.2%	4.7%	4.7%	4.9%	3.9%	10.0%	7.5%
Transfer to Another Agency [number of months until transfer]			23.5	22.8	18.1	20.8	25.5	20.5	21.6	21.1	24.1	24.2
Runaway [number of months until running away]			6.1%	4.6%	6.3%	4.7%	7.0%	5.2%	5.8%	5.0%	6.0%	4.3%
Death of Child [number of months until death of a child]			3.5	3.0	2.4	1.3	5.0	0.9	6.4	6.4	3.2	3.1
Total Children Remaining in Foster Care [number of months children have been in care]			12.7%	11.1%	11.3%	6.0%	6.7%	7.1%	11.7%	12.1%	14.4%	12.9%
Emancipation [number of months until emancipation]			6.9%	6.5%	9.4%	5.0%	6.2%	5.2%	8.5%	6.9%	6.1%	7.0%
Transfer to Another Agency [number of months until transfer]			36.3	34.0	22.9	25.4	27.0	33.0	37.3	35.8	41.9	35.5
Runaway [number of months until running away]			3.5%	4.1%	1.2%	0.8%	0.5%	1.6%	2.6%	4.6%	4.8%	5.2%
Death of Child [number of months until death of a child]			5.4	6.4	1.8	0.9	5.5	3.3	5.5	4.4	6.1	8.4
Total Children Remaining in Foster Care [number of months children have been in care]			2.3%	0.6%	0.7%	0.2%	0.0%	0.2%	0.7%	0.6%	3.5%	0.7%
Death of Child [number of months until death of a child]			8.3	18.5	9.8	24	—	28.4	8.0	17.6	8.3	18.0
Total Children Remaining in Foster Care [number of months children have been in care]			0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%
Death of Child [number of months until death of a child]			4.5	12.7	7.0	11.0	—	79.1	3.9	142.5	4.1	9.1
Total Children Remaining in Foster Care [number of months children have been in care]			15,920	14,136	1,498	1,437	1,316	1,172	2,768	2,394	10,338	9,133
Death of Child [number of months until death of a child]			15.6	13.5	15.4	12.8	15.9	12.2	14.1	12.9	15.7	14.0

Every time a child moves, the trauma caused by separation and lack of continuity grows. A child who faces multiple placements struggles to build and maintain healthy relationships and faces academic challenges due to 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	
2010	2011		2010	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011
35.9%	33.8%	MADE PROGRESS	38.6%	35.3%	36.8%	35.4%	37.0%	34.1%	35.0%	33.2%

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	
2010	2011		2010	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011
92%	92%	NO CHANGE	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

