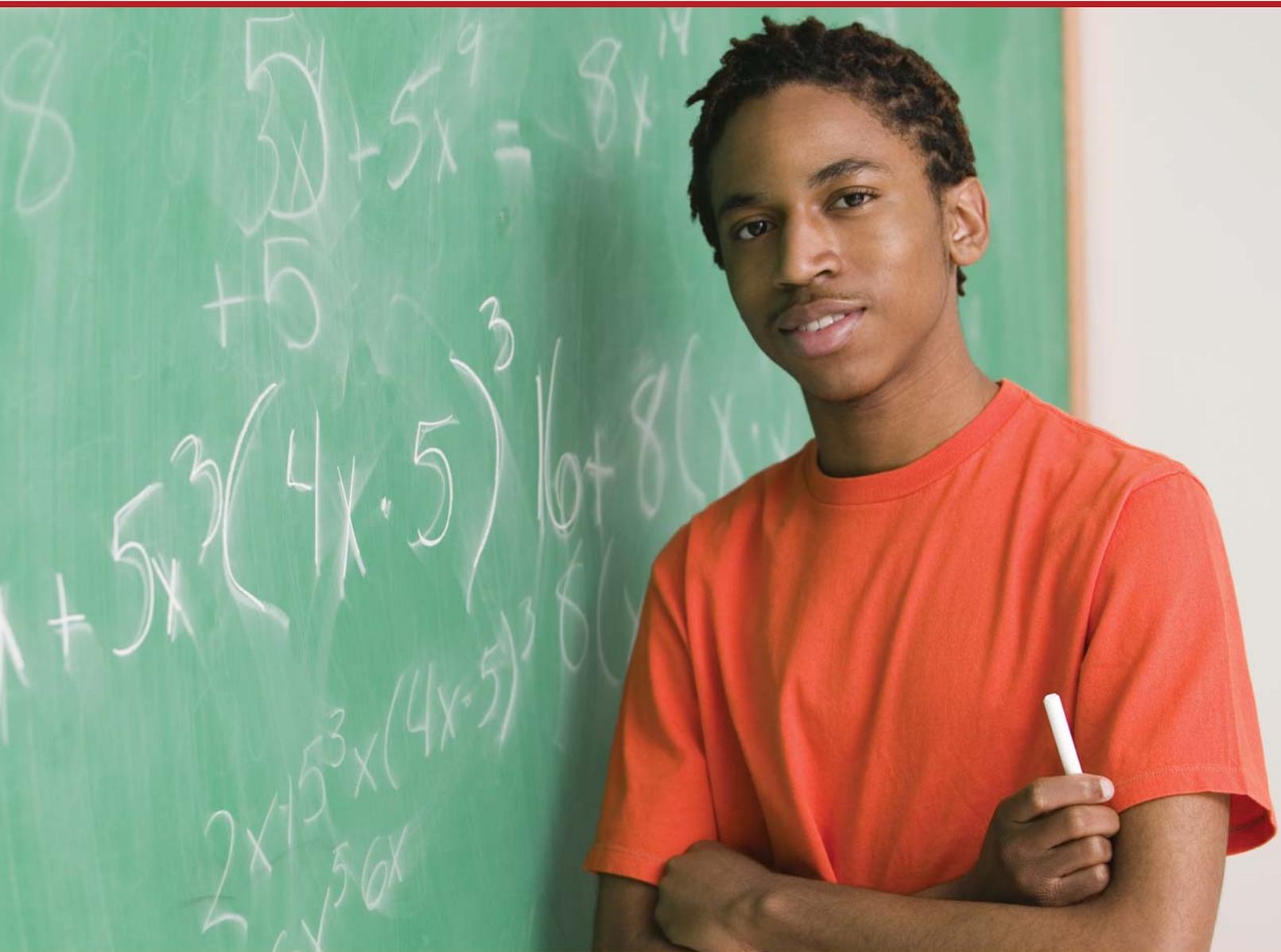


REDUCING A CHILD'S TIME IN FOSTER CARE

PART 2 OF A 3-PART SERIES



**A REPORT BY
ARKANSAS ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
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REDUCING A CHILD'S TIME IN FOSTER CARE

Part 2 of a 3-Part Series

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Executive Summary

The uncertainty and instability of foster care can take an emotional toll on children, one that grows with time. Approximately a quarter of the children who entered the foster care system over a five-year period stayed in foster care for one to three years. Arkansas is looking for ways to reduce the amount of time kids spend in the foster care system through a demonstration waiver from the federal government.

The three main goals of the IV-E demonstration waiver are to: (1) safely reduce the number of children entering foster care, (2) reduce the time spent in foster care, and (3) increase the stability of a child's placement while they are in foster care. The demonstration waiver allows the Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to redirect part of its current funding to implement new initiatives to help achieve these goals. This brief focuses on the second goal of reducing the time spent in foster care.



Our analysis of the data also shows:

- Twenty-three percent of children exited foster care after being in care for one year or more.
- Almost half of children who left foster care during a five-year period were returned home.
- Children who exited foster care between one to three months were most likely to be placed with a relative. Children who exited foster care between six months and one year were most likely to be reunified.
- Once a child turns 12, the likelihood that they will stay in care until they age out begins to increase with age.
- There are significant differences by region in the length of stay for children in foster care, and their destination when they leave the system (e.g., reunification, placement with a relative, or adoption).

DCFS is implementing the following initiatives to try to reduce the time spent in foster care: Permanency Roundtables, Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths Assessment, and a Nurturing Parenting Program. DCFS will conduct an intensive evaluation of the new initiatives as a requirement of its demonstration waiver. Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families (AACF) will monitor the progress and report on the results of the evaluation.

Introduction

When children can safely remain at home with appropriate services, it can be less traumatic on the child than being placed in foster care. But when they are not safe at home, they have to be removed from their home and placed in foster care. The longer they stay in care, the more it can take a toll on a child's well-being. Through a demonstration waiver from the federal government, Arkansas is shifting existing funding to support initiatives and services that will try to reduce the amount of time spent in foster care. This brief, the second in a three-part series, examines data provided by DCFS during a five-year period (July 2007 to June 2012) concerning the length of time children stayed in foster care, where they went when they left, who still remains in the foster care system, and what initiatives DCFS has undertaken to try to shorten the time in foster care.

Children who left foster care

How long did children stay in care for those who left care during this time period?

Of the 18,469 children who entered care from July 2007 to June 2012, 93 percent left care during this time period. As noted in our first brief, a higher number of children leave care within a short period of time (almost one-third leave within one month) as compared to other states. Twenty-three percent of Arkansas children exited foster care after one year or more. While the current brief follows the children who entered foster care during the given time period, the available national statistics are based on those who exited care during the given time period. As a result, it is difficult to compare. But the national statistics indicate that 55 percent of children exited care after one year or more.¹

23 PERCENT OF CHILDREN EXITED FOSTER CARE AFTER BEING IN CARE 1 YEAR OR MORE

Percentage of children who exited foster care by time in care

	Number of children	Percent*
All children	17,218	100%
Exited less than 1 month	5,277	31%
Exited 1 to 3 months	3,234	19%
Exited 3 to 6 months	1,839	11%
Exited 6 months to 1 year	2,833	16%
Exited 1 to 2 years	2,696	15%
Exited 2 to 3 years	1,005	6%
Exited 3 years or more	334	2%

*The sum exceeds 100% due to rounding.



For children who left care, where did they go?

For the children who left care within one month or less, they were either reunified with their parents or placed with a relative at almost the same rate. Among those who exited care within one to three months after their entry, more children were placed with relatives than reunified with parents. It was the opposite for children who left care within three to six months. The percentage of children who were reunified was the highest for those who

left during the period of six months to one year. Once a child had been in care for six months, the number of children who were adopted started to increase. Before a child can be adopted, DCFS must make efforts for reunification when appropriate and parental rights must be terminated. The longer the child had been in care, the less likely they were to be reunified and the more likely to be adopted or aged out.

THE HIGHEST PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN WHO WERE REUNIFIED WERE CHILDREN WHO EXITED CARE BETWEEN 6 MONTHS AND 1 YEAR

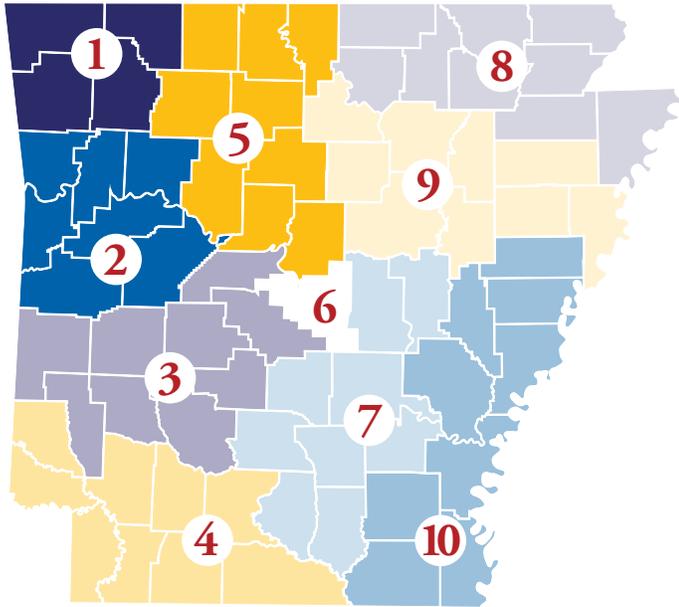
Discharge Reason by Amount of Time in Care

	Reunification			Relative			Adoption			Age Out		
	All	White	Black	All	White	Black	All	White	Black	All	White	Black
All children	45%	43%	49%	37%	39%	34%	12%	12%	10%	3%	3%	3%
Exited 1 month or less	49%	45%	56%	47%	50%	40%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Exited 1 to 3 months	41%	38%	49%	52%	55%	45%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%
Exited 3 to 6 months	55%	55%	54%	40%	40%	40%	0%	0%	0%	2%	3%	3%
Exited 6 months to 1 year	57%	57%	57%	31%	31%	32%	6%	6%	7%	4%	4%	3%
Exited 1 to 2 years	40%	38%	43%	20%	20%	22%	33%	35%	28%	5%	6%	5%
Exited 2 to 3 years	9%	9%	7%	8%	6%	12%	72%	74%	66%	10%	9%	13%

African-American children were more likely to be reunified and less likely to be adopted than white children who left care after a year.



DCFS AREAS



Looking at where children went when they left foster care by DCFS Area, Area 7 (south central Arkansas) had the highest reunification percentage (55 percent). Area 4 (southwest Arkansas) had the lowest reunification rate (31 percent) and the highest percentage of placements with a relative (51 percent). Area 6 (central Arkansas) had the highest percentage of adoptions (19 percent).

WHERE CHILDREN WENT WHEN THEY LEFT FOSTER CARE BY DCFS AREA

	# of children	Reunification	Relative	Adoption	Age Out
All children	17,218	45%	37%	12%	3%
Area 1	1,837	47%	34%	12%	3%
Area 2	2,252	48%	30%	14%	3%
Area 3	1,827	39%	46%	10%	3%
Area 4	1,369	31%	51%	8%	3%
Area 5	1,666	41%	38%	13%	4%
Area 6	1,797	46%	30%	19%	3%
Area 7	1,731	55%	33%	7%	2%
Area 8	1,971	44%	36%	13%	3%
Area 9	1,963	47%	39%	9%	3%
Area 10	805	50%	37%	6%	6%

The national statistics indicate that 51 percent of children who exited care returned to their original home and 22 percent were adopted in 2012.² Nationally, only eight percent of children exited to live with relatives and 10 percent of children experienced emancipation during this time period.³

Where did children go by age group for those who left care during this period?

The data show that younger children are more likely to be adopted. If they enter care after age 2, the percentage adopted decreased, and most were either reunified with their parent or placed with a relative. Twenty-nine percent of children who entered care at 16 or older aged out instead of finding a permanent home.



CHILDREN WHO ENTERED CARE AFTER AGE 2 ARE LESS LIKELY TO BE ADOPTED

Discharge reason by age*

Age	Reunification	Adoption	Relative	Age Out
0 to 1	40%	25%	31%	0%
2 to 5	46%	11%	40%	0%
6 to 11	48%	7%	42%	0%
12 to 15	49%	3%	38%	5%
16 & up	38%	0%	26%	29%

*Represents the age they entered foster care

Of the children who entered into care during this time period, how many stayed in care for more than two years?

The data show that 11 percent of children (1,949) stayed in care for more than two years. Nationally, 30 percent of children stayed in foster care for more than two years.⁴ There were a larger percentage of children who stayed in care for more than two years in Area 2 and Area 6. Area 6 (central Arkansas) has a larger population area. Area 1 is also a larger population area (northwest Arkansas), but had a smaller percentage of children who stayed in care for more than two years. Area 2, which is the Fort Smith area, had the highest percentage of children who spent more than two years in out-of-home care.

AREA 2 AND AREA 6 HAD THE HIGHEST PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN WHO STAYED IN CARE FOR MORE THAN 2 YEARS

Proportion of children who stayed in care for more than 2 years

Area 1	8%
Area 2	17%
Area 3	6%
Area 4	7%
Area 5	11%
Area 6	15%
Area 7	7%
Area 8	12%
Area 9	9%
Area 10	11%
Total	11%

If the child had been in foster care more than once, were they more likely to stay in foster care longer?

Children who had been removed more than once were slightly more likely to stay longer in care. Of the children who had been in the foster care system for two years or less, 7 percent had been removed twice, compared to 10 percent of the children who had been in the foster care system more than two years.

CHILDREN WHO HAD BEEN REMOVED MORE THAN ONCE WERE SLIGHTLY MORE LIKELY TO STAY LONGER IN CARE
Length of time in care and the number of times removed from home

	Once	Twice	Three or More Times
All children	91%	7%	2%
Those that have been in the foster care system for 2 or fewer years	92%	7%	1%
Those that have been in the foster care system more than 2 years	87%	10%	3%

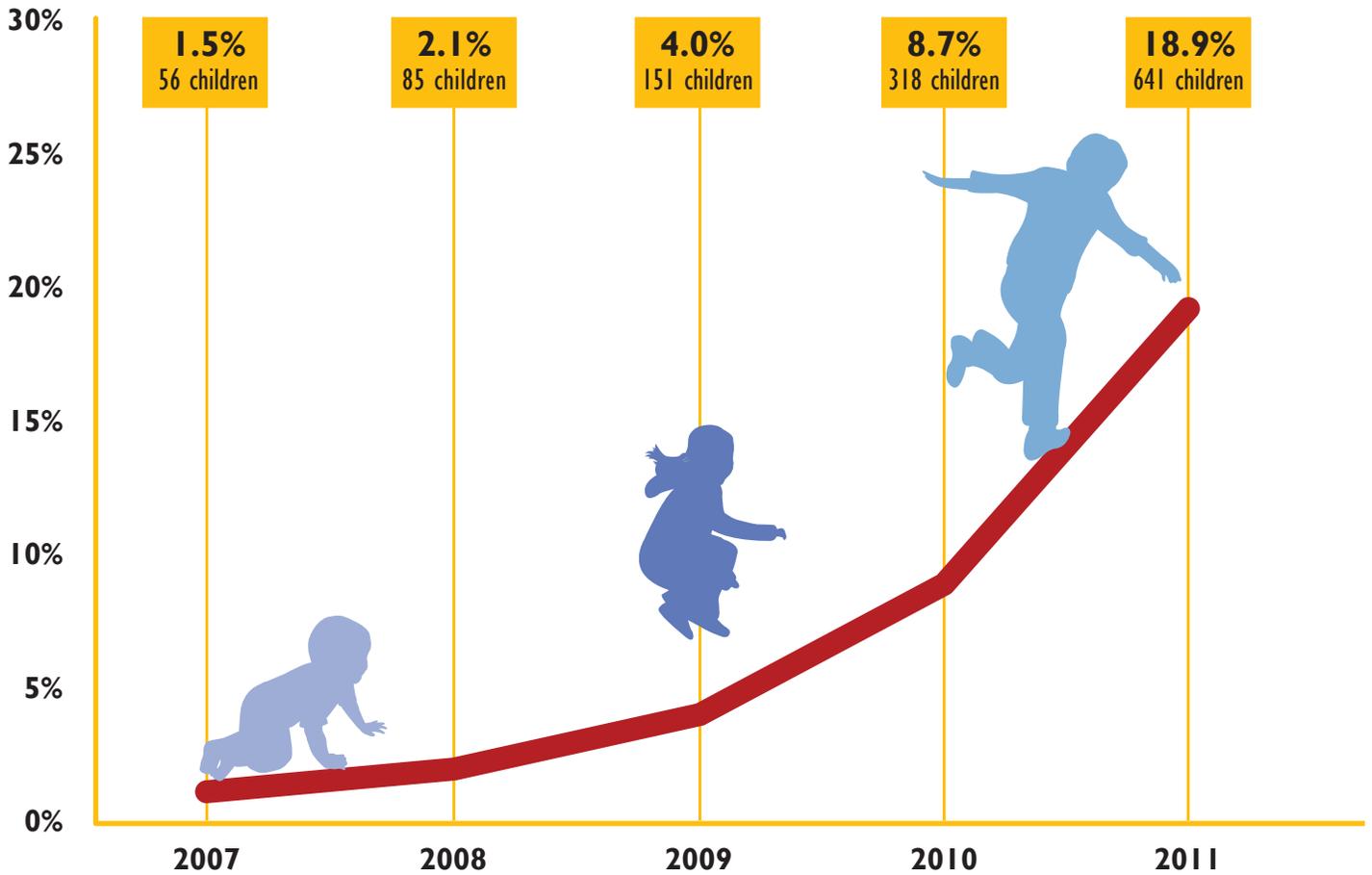
Children who Remained in Care as of June 30, 2013

The graph represents the year a child came into care and the percentage of children who were still in care as of June 30, 2013 for each given year. For children who entered in 2007, 56 still remained in care. As expected, that number increases each year, and for the children who entered in 2011, 641 children were still in care as of June 30, 2013.



THERE ARE STILL 56 CHILDREN IN CARE WHO ENTERED CARE IN 2007

The number of children still in care as of June 30, 2013 for each year they entered care



Also, it is noted that older children are more likely to remain in foster care. For children still in care in 2013, 13 percent were 12 years of age and over. Children who are 16 years of age and older are least likely to remain in care, as they age out of the system.

CHILDREN WHO ENTERED CARE BETWEEN 12 TO 15 YEARS OLD ARE MORE LIKELY TO STILL BE IN CARE
Children still in care as of June 2013

0 to 1	6%
2 to 5	6%
5 to 11	7%
12 to 15	9%
16 or older	4%



How did the DCFS Areas compare to the statewide average for the length of stay for children still in care as of June 30, 2013?

The average length of stay for children still in care as of June 30, 2013 was 28 months state-wide. Area 6 (central Arkansas) and Area 10 (southeast Arkansas) had the highest length of stay of 30 and 31 months, respectively, for children still in care. Areas 1 and 7 had the lowest average (24 months).

AREA 10 HAD THE LONGEST LENGTH OF STAY FOR CHILDREN STILL IN CARE
Length of stay for those still in care by DCFS area

Area 1	24 months
Area 2	29 months
Area 3	29 months
Area 4	29 months
Area 5	28 months
Area 6	30 months
Area 7	24 months
Area 8	27 months
Area 9	25 months
Area 10	31 months
State-wide	28 months



Initiatives by DCFS to reduce the time spent in foster care

The initiatives that DCFS has identified as part of its IV-E demonstration waiver to reduce the time spent in foster care are: Permanency Roundtables, Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths Assessment, and Nurturing Parenting Program. The last two were also identified as initiatives to help reduce the number of children entering foster care as discussed in our first brief in this series.

Permanency Roundtable: This is a structured professional case consultation of a team of child welfare professionals in order to speed up permanency for a child or sibling group. The professionals who participate in the roundtable include a facilitator, the caseworker, the caseworker's supervisor, experts who have experience in placing children who leave foster care, and others who may be helpful in the process. The child and family are not involved in the initial roundtable meeting. During the Permanency Roundtables, the group develops an action plan to be implemented within three to six months.

This initiative was started in 2010 throughout the state to focus on children who had been in the foster care system for 24 months or longer. Those roundtables were conducted in 2010 and 2011. A specific evaluation process for those roundtables was not put into place at that time. However, with the demonstration waiver, the roundtables are being implemented again, and their focus will be on children who have been in foster care for 18 months or longer. An evaluation process will be in place for the roundtables that occurred after July 2013. A full-time permanency specialist was hired in January 2014 to coordinate these efforts. Casey Family Programs is working with Arkansas to implement the roundtables.

Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Assessment: DCFS is implementing this functional assessment tool, used by 25 other states, to better determine what services should be provided to the children and their families. It helps prioritize the needs of the families and identify the needs earlier in the case to address the issues that brought them into the child welfare system. It also allows them to better monitor the outcomes of the services. If the services are appropriate, the child should be able to leave the foster care system sooner. This tool has not been implemented yet.

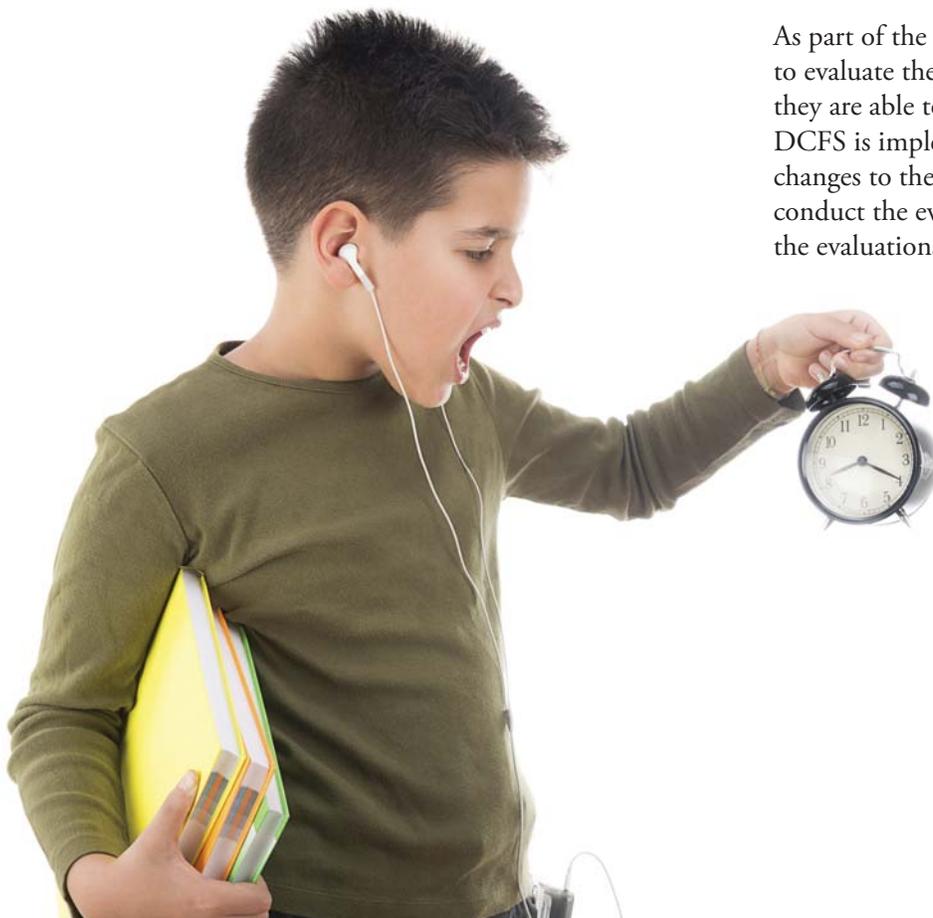
Nurturing Parenting Program: This is an evidence-based parenting education program. It has built-in assessments during the process for before, during, and after the program to see if parenting skills have improved. If parents are able to improve their skills, children should be able to return home. It has not been implemented yet.



Recommendations/Conclusion

- 1) The permanency roundtables have the potential to be one of the most important initiatives to reduce the amount of time spent in foster care because they focus on the children who have been in care longer. DCFS has attempted this initiative before, but was not able to sustain it at the appropriate level needed. It will be very important to monitor the action plan that is created for each case and how much of the plan is completed.
- 2) Many youth aged 16 or older did not achieve any permanency during their stay in foster care and then left care at the age of maturation. Considering the challenges these young people experience upon their transition into adulthood, it is very important for them to establish a stable, permanent relationship through permanency. It will be important to monitor whether these initiatives improve the permanency outcomes for this age group.
- 3) Children aged 12 to 15 are less likely to achieve permanency and have a higher likelihood of remaining in care. More efforts will be needed for these children in order to reduce their time in care and achieve permanency.
- 4) Children who experienced multiple removals and who are older are more likely to stay longer in foster care. These children may pose more challenges for foster caregivers or potential permanent caregivers, and will require more support, services and care.
- 5) As also seen in the first brief, variations among the areas are noted in relation to children's permanency outcomes or their length of stay in care. Each area's policies and practices should be more thoroughly examined that may contribute to such variations.
- 6) It is reasonable to believe that reunification rates would decline as children's stay in foster care increases. However, in the first brief we noted that many children were removed from their original home due to parental substance abuse or incarceration, and these families may need additional time before children return to their original home. Furthermore, many children experienced multiple maltreatment types, which may require extensive time for the families to be reunified. For these families, it should be more thoroughly examined whether reunification is likely with additional support, services and time and, therefore, additional time in foster care is necessary.

As part of the demonstration waiver, DCFS is required to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs and whether they are able to reduce the length of stay in foster care. DCFS is implementing evaluation tools and making changes to their database in order to capture key data to conduct the evaluations. AACF will monitor the data and the evaluations and report on their results.





Endnotes

- 1 Children's Bureau (2013) The AFCARS report: Preliminary FY 2012 estimates as of November 2013. Retrieved from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/afcarsreport20.pdf>
- 2 Children's Bureau (2013). The AFCARS report: Preliminary FY 2012 estimates as of November 2013. Retrieved from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/afcarsreport20.pdf>
- 3 Children's Bureau (2013). The AFCARS report: Preliminary FY 2012 estimates as of November 2013. Retrieved from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/afcarsreport20.pdf>
- 4 Children's Bureau (2013) The AFCARS report: Preliminary FY 2012 estimates as of November 2013. Retrieved from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/afcarsreport20.pdf>



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