

INCREASING PLACEMENT STABILITY IN FOSTER CARE

PART 3 OF A 3-PART SERIES



**A REPORT BY
ARKANSAS ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
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Part 3 of a 3-Part Series

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Executive Summary

Many foster children experience multiple placements during their time in care. They move from one placement to another, whether it is a family foster home or a residential facility. It can mean being relocated to a new town, changing schools, and/or being separated from siblings. Moving from one placement to another, known as placement instability, is very unsettling for children and can create emotional distress and a sense of not belonging. It can affect a child's ability to form secure, healthy relationships.

Children in the Arkansas foster care system experience more placement instability compared to those in other states. A higher proportion of foster children in Arkansas experience three or more placements during their time in care.¹ The risk of placement instability also increases as children stay longer in foster care.

The Arkansas Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) was awarded a five-year demonstration waiver by the federal government in October 2012. One of the goals was to increase placement stability (decrease the number of placement changes) for children in foster care. This brief, the final in a three-part series that examines each goal of the waiver, analyzes the placement history of children in the Arkansas foster care system.

Our analysis of the data shows:

- In all lengths of time in foster care, the proportion of Arkansas children experiencing placement instability is higher than the national median.
- As children stay longer in foster care, the risks of placement instability tend to increase significantly.
- The likelihood of placement instability increases with a child's age.
- There was no significant difference seen in children's placement stability among different racial groups.
- There were variations in placement stability among the DCFS geographical areas.

Through the demonstration waiver, DCFS is working to improve recruitment of foster homes and to implement the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Assessment. Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families (AACF) will monitor the progress and report on the results of the evaluation.

The proportion of Arkansas children experiencing placement instability is higher than the national median.

Introduction:

This brief examines DCFS data on placement history for 17,018 children who entered the foster care system between July 2007 and June 2012. We looked at children who exited care on or before June 2013 and whose placement history was available, which gave us a sample of 15,784 children. The analysis looks at how many children experienced placement instability while in the foster care system, and breaks it out by age, gender, race, and location. It also examines the initiatives that DCFS is undertaking through the waiver to improve placement stability.

How many children experience placement instability while in care?

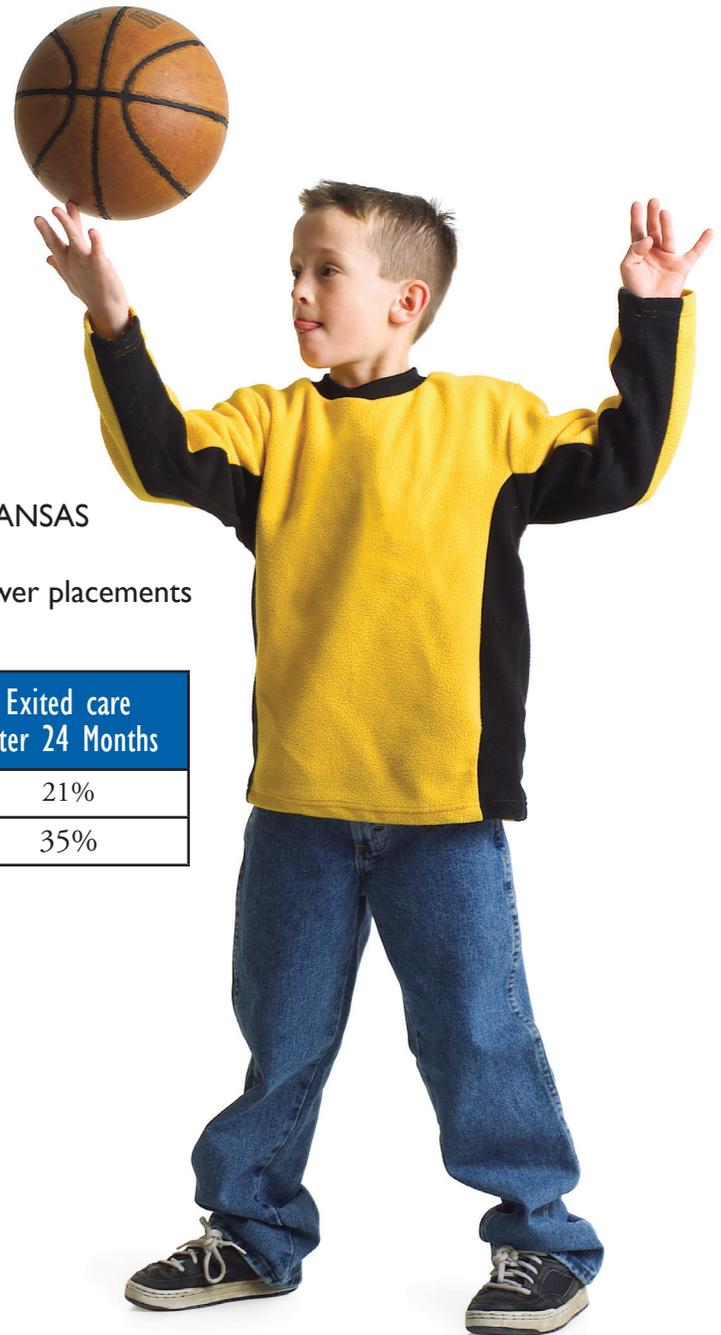
Foster children in Arkansas tend to experience more placement instability compared to other states. The federal government looks at the percentage of children who experienced two or fewer placements to evaluate states' performance. Only 77 percent of the children in Arkansas who left care within 12 months experienced two or fewer placements compared to the national median of 85 percent.²

IN ALL LENGTHS OF TIME IN CARE, CHILDREN IN ARKANSAS EXPERIENCED MORE PLACEMENT INSTABILITY

Percent of children in Arkansas who experienced two or fewer placements in each time period compared to the national median

	Exited Care within 12 Months	Exited Care within 24 Months	Exited care after 24 Months
Arkansas	77%	48%	21%
National Median	85%	64%	35%

As children stay longer in foster care, the risks of placement instability tend to increase significantly. For children who exit care within a month, only 4 percent experience more than two placements. Of those who are in care for three years or more, 84 percent experience more than two placements. In addition, the actual number of placements experienced becomes significantly higher as the stay in care lengthens. The number of placements experienced while in care ranged from one to seven for children exiting care within a month, while the range was one to 46 for those who exited care three or more years after their entry.



24 PERCENT OF THE CHILDREN WHO EXITED CARE AFTER THREE OR MORE YEARS EXPERIENCED 11 OR MORE PLACEMENTS

Number of placements experienced by length of time in care based on children who entered care from July 2007 to June 2012

Number of Placements	Exited less than 1 month	Exited 1-3 months	Exited 3-6 months	Exited 6-12 months	Exited 1-2 years	Exited 2-3 years	Exited 3 years or more
1-2	4,233 (96%)	2,405 (82%)	1,210 (70%)	1,598 (59%)	1,250 (47%)	323 (33%)	53 (16%)
3-5	162 (4%)	505 (17%)	470 (27%)	936 (34%)	1,016 (38%)	426 (43%)	118 (35%)
6-10	3 (0%)	28 (1%)	59 (4%)	182 (7%)	317 (12%)	191 (19%)	84 (25%)
11 or more	0	0	2 (0%)	13 (0%)	67 (3%)	54 (5%)	79 (24%)
Total	4,398	2,938	1,741	2,729	2,650	994	334

Note: All percentages were rounded. The summed percentage may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

Breakdown by Age

The likelihood of placement instability increases with a child’s age. Among those who exited care within 12 months of their entry, 86 percent of children aged 0 to 1 experienced one or two placements while the comparable percentage was 72 percent for children aged 16 or older. Older children who stay longer in care were at the highest risk of experiencing placement instability.

Older children who stay longer in care were at the highest risk of placement instability.

86 PERCENT OF THE CHILDREN AGED 1 OR YOUNGER EXPERIENCED TWO OR FEWER PLACEMENTS COMPARED TO 72 PERCENT OF CHILDREN 16 OR OLDER

Proportion of children experiencing 2 or fewer placements by age group

	Age 0 to 1	Age 2 to 5	Age 6 to 11	Age 12 to 15	Age 16 or older
Exited less than 12 months	86%	82%	79%	76%	72%
Exited 1-2 years	65%	44%	37%	34%	28%
Exited 2 years or more	47%	25%	23%	9%	10%

Breakdown by Gender

The likelihood of placement instability was slightly higher for male children than for female children: among those who exited care within 12 months of their entry, 79 percent of male children experienced one or two placements while the comparable percentage was 82 percent for female children.

PLACEMENT INSTABILITY WAS SLIGHTLY HIGHER FOR MALES

Proportion of children experiencing two or fewer placements by gender group

	Male	Female
Exited less than 12 months	79%	82%
Exited 1-2 years	45%	49%
Exited 2 years or more	28%	29%

Breakdown by Race

No significant differences were seen in children’s placement stability among different racial groups. The majority of research supports this finding. These studies report no significant effects of race/ethnicity on placement stability.³ However, some variations were noted in the Arkansas data depending on a child’s race and her/his length of time in care. For example, non-white, non-African American children (those in the “other” category, including Hispanic children) are more likely to experience placement instability when the comparison is made among short stayers. On the other hand, more white children appear to experience placement instability among long stayers.



NO SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES AMONG RACIAL GROUPS IN THEIR PLACEMENT STABILITY

Proportion of children experiencing two or fewer placements by racial group

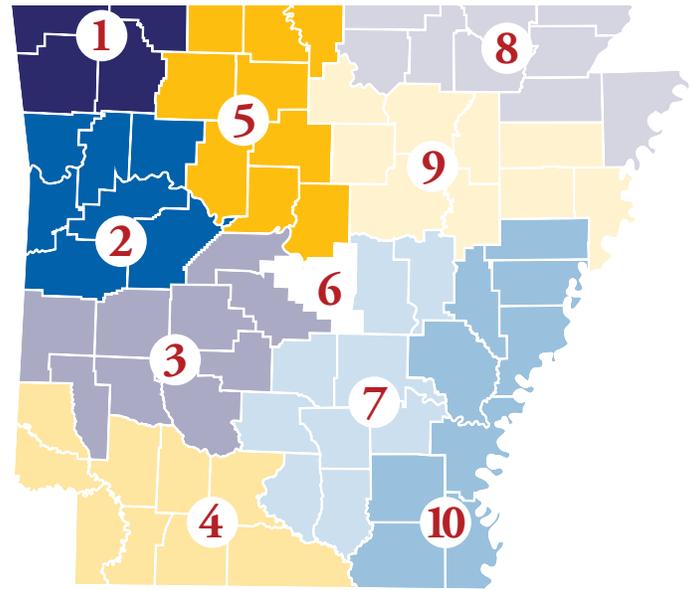
	White	African American	Other
Exited less than 12 months	81%	81%	77%
Exited 1-2 years	47%	46%	51%
Exited 2 years or more	26%	33%	31%

Breakdown by Region

The variations in placement stability are noted among the DCFS areas. The areas' performance also slightly varies depending on the length of time children spend in care. For example, children in areas 1 (northwest Arkansas) and 4 (southwest Arkansas) seem to be more likely to experience placement stability compared to the other areas when the comparison is made among those who stayed in care for less than a year. However, they are more likely to experience placement instability when the comparison is made for long stayers (exited three years after entry into care).

Only area 1 performed above the national median, which was 85 percent in 2012, in the measure of the proportion of children with two or fewer placements among those who stayed in care less than a year. But their performance was below the national median when the observation was made for children who stayed in care for more than a year. Similarly, the performance of area 6 (central Arkansas) was above the national median of 35 percent on the measure of the percentage of children with two or fewer placements out of those who stayed in care more than two years. However, their performance was below the national median for children who stayed in care for less than two years. The performance of the other areas was below the national median for all three groups of children: those who stayed in care for less than a year, one to two years, and more than two years.

DCFS AREAS



PROPORTION OF CHILDREN EXPERIENCING 2 OR FEWER PLACEMENTS BY DCFS AREA

	Area 1	Area 2	Area 3	Area 4	Area 5	Area 6	Area 7	Area 8	Area 9	Area 10	National Median
Exited less than 12 months	86%	74%	83%	85%	79%	80%	84%	76%	75%	81%	85%
Exited 1-2 years	54%	37%	56%	37%	44%	56%	52%	42%	42%	45%	64%
Exited 2 years or more	21%	27%	33%	19%	18%	42%	31%	28%	32%	25%	35%

Initiatives to Improve Placement Stability

The initiatives that DCFS has identified as part of its demonstration waiver to increase placement stability include improving recruitment efforts of foster homes and the implementation of the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths Assessment. These programs are described below and are in various stages of being implemented.

Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS)

Assessment: This new assessment tool, used by 25 other states, will better determine what services should be provided to children and their families. It helps prioritize the needs of the families – and identify the needs earlier – to address the issues that brought them into foster care. It also allows DCFS to better monitor the outcomes of the services. This tool was implemented statewide in February 2015. A new case plan document has also been implemented, and the services identified in CANS are placed in the case plan along with the expected outcome. CANS and the new case plan are being used in all new cases, and a process has been implemented to update the older cases with the new assessment and new case plan.

Arkansas was one of seven states awarded a grant by the federal government to help recruit and retain foster parents and volunteers.

Recruitment of Foster Homes: In 2013, Arkansas was one of seven states awarded a diligent recruitment grant by the federal government (\$400,000 for five years). The project, Arkansas's Creating Connections for Children (ARCCC), focuses on the recruitment and retention of foster parents and volunteers. The program is based on the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Family to Family model. DCFS activities have included hiring ARCCC program staff, beginning the training of the new staff, developing recruitment tools, developing an internal communication plan to facilitate information sharing between local staff and the central office, and implementing the UALR Geographic Information Systems (GIS).

The GIS system will allow data from DCFS to be mapped by zip code so that it can be visually presented to determine where the greatest needs are. Each DCFS area will have one Community Engagement Specialist who will identify community resources, establish partnerships in the community, and conduct community outreach to recruit foster parents. DCFS has also created the Centralized Inquiry Process, which has four staff members to process inquiries and one administrative assistant to process background checks. DCFS can now respond to most inquiries within one week, and the goal is to respond within three days.



Recommendations:

- 1) It's important to find foster families in a child's community so that they can remain there, especially in their school. It can add more stress when children not only have to adjust to a new family, but also to new teachers and friends. In rural areas, when a child is not placed in their community, this means greater distances from their communities, which makes it harder for them to have regular visits with their families. Since the GIS system can map by zip code, hopefully this tool can better identify the areas where recruitment needs to be focused.
- 2) It is important to find a good match depending on the child's needs. For example, some children may need to be the only child in a home, depending on their past experiences and current needs. Also, an appropriate level of care should be determined for each child. For example, some children would benefit more from treatment foster homes rather than regular foster homes. The new CANS assessment has the capability to better identify the needs of children, which can help DCFS find a good match.
- 3) As part of the recruitment process, appropriate training for foster parents is essential so that they can understand the trauma foster children experience and respond to their needs appropriately.

As part of the demonstration waiver, DCFS is required to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs and whether or not they are able to increase placement stability. They are 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 (2014). Child welfare outcomes 2009–2012: Report to Congress. Available at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/cwo09_12.pdf
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Chamberlain, P., Price, J. M., Reid, J. B., Landsverk, J., Fisher, P. A., & Stoolmiller, M. (2006). Who disrupts from placement in foster and kinship care? *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 30(4), 409-424.
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