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CHILD WELFARE PLACEMENT DYNAMICS

Long-Term Trends in Allegheny County's Child Welfare System

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Allegheny County Department of Human Services

The Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) is dedicated to meeting the human services needs of county residents, particularly the county's most vulnerable populations, through an extensive range of prevention, early intervention, crises management and after-care services.

This report was prepared by the Office of Data Analysis, Research and Evaluation (DARE), an office within DHS. DARE supports and publishes research related to the activities of DHS offices, including: Aging; Behavioral Health; Children, Youth and Families; Community Services and Intellectual Disability.

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Published 2011 by Allegheny County DHS

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Abbreviations & Glossary

ABBREVIATIONS

CYF	Office of Children, Youth and Families
DARE	Office of Data Analysis, Research and Evaluation
DHS	Allegheny County Department of Human Services
PLC	Permanent Legal Custodianship

GLOSSARY

Accept for Services	The individual/family becomes a client of CYF.
Congregate care	Out-of-home placement in a non-family setting, group care or residential setting
Emancipation	Emancipation from foster care occurs when young people have "aged out" of out-of-home care and left the foster care system.
Foster care	A child's temporary home and care by a trained caretaker.
Independent living	Supervised independent living is a placement arrangement for youth in foster care that may include: scattered-site or semi-supervised apartments, clustered or supervised apartments and shared homes.
Kinship care	A child's temporary home with a relative or friend of the family.
Length of stay	The amount of time a child spends in one placement spell.
Non-permanent exit	Exit to a setting expected to be temporary, such as a hospital or treatment facility.
Out-of-home placement	A temporary home for a child who, for safety reasons, must live away from his/her parent(s).
Permanent legal custodianship	Legal guardianship is established by court order and grants custody to someone who is not the child's parent. Guardianship doesn't require that parental rights are terminated, so children in a guardianship are still related to their parents.
Primary placement	Placement setting in which a child spends greater than 50 percent of his/her placement spell.
Placement setting	The type of environment in which a youth resides while in out-of-home care. Placement settings include congregate care, foster care, kinship care, and independent living.
Placement spell	Continuous period of time a child is in out-of-home care, from entry to exit. A single spell may contain multiple placement settings.
Reach Majority	See Emancipation.
Reentry	Entry into out-of-home placement after an exit from a previous placement spell.
Spell	See Placement spell.

This report offers a view of the child welfare system in Allegheny County. The goals of this report are to describe the characteristics of individuals involved in the child welfare system, to examine the paths of children in the system and to understand the dynamics of service delivery. Some of the key findings of this report are summarized below.

CASELOADS

The number of youth in out-of-home placement on the first of the year declined from 3,088 in 1996 to 1,765 in 2010, a total decrease of 43 percent. While first entries into care also declined during this period of time, the decrease in total caseloads was driven by greater numbers of youth exiting than entering care.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN PLACED OUT OF HOME

Age:

- The age distribution of youth first entering care remained fairly constant from 2000 to 2009. Since 2006, children under the age of 2 have comprised a slightly larger proportion of the population as the number of youth ages 9-14 has declined.
- Youth ages 0-5 account for about 40 percent of the total number of children first entering care. Teenagers ages 12-17 also make up 40 percent of the total population. Youth ages 6-11 enter care at much lower rates, totaling only 20 percent of the population.
- Although teenagers and infants both comprise large segments of the cohorts entering care, infants under age 1 are admitted to care at about 2.5 times the rate (per 1,000 children in the population) of teenagers ages 15-17.

Race:

- Allegheny County's population in placement is dominated by African American children, who make up about 60 percent of cases, despite the fact that African Americans comprise only 18 percent of the county's population.
- African American children enter care at about seven times the rate of their white counterparts. The rate of African American children entering care declined by 32 percent from 2003 to 2009, but the magnitude of the racial disparity remained constant as the rate for white children dropped as well.

Community:

- Out-of-home placement is particularly prevalent in some communities and neighborhoods in Allegheny County. Many of these communities are considered “severely distressed” as defined by the Annie E. Casey Foundation criteria¹ -- they are plagued by poverty, low employment, high high-school dropout rates and high numbers of female-headed households. High-service communities include McKees Rocks, Duquesne, Mount Oliver Boro, Homewood South and Perry South.

PLACEMENT TYPES

Analysis of the primary placement settings for children first placed in the years 2000-2009 suggest that, in recent years, the percentage of youth placed in kinship and foster care have been comparable at about 38 percent each. Allegheny County has emphasized kinship care as one of the least disruptive placements for children; since 2000, the use of kinship care has increased as foster care and congregate care have decreased.

Nearly all children ages birth to 5 are placed in family settings (99-100 percent in either foster or kinship care). This differs from the experiences of 6- to 12-year-olds (92 percent) and 13- to 17-year-olds (36 percent). Congregate care is used only for older children, with 63 percent of 15- to 17-year-olds experiencing it as their primary placement type. When examined by race, African Americans are more likely than whites to live in “home-like” settings (74 percent versus 69 percent).

In contrast to the trends experienced by youth in their first placement spells, the percentage of youth experiencing their second or subsequent entry into care who are primarily placed in congregate care has been increasing since 2006. Youth experiencing reentries are older than the total population in placement, but this population was slightly younger in 2006-2009 than in previous years, so age does not account for the recent increase in congregate care as the primary placement type.

¹ *Severely distressed neighborhoods are defined as census tracts with at least three of the four following characteristics:*

- 1. High poverty rate (27.4 percent or more);*
- 2. High percentage of female-headed families (37.1 percent or more);*
- 3. High percentage of high school dropouts (23.0 percent or more); and*
- 4. High percentage of working-age males unattached to the labor force (34.0 percent or more)*

In addition to finding an appropriate placement setting, great effort is made to ensure that children placed in out-of-home settings are returned home as quickly and as safely as possible: about one-quarter of youth return home in just over a month; fifty percent of all youth return home in just over six months; and, seventy-five percent of all youth return home in 26 months. These numbers remained relatively constant from 2000 to 2009. Length of stay is correlated with age, and the average number of days in care is lowest for older youth.

EXITS

The majority of youth return to their families regardless of age. Few differences in exit destinations exist by race or gender. Exit types are highly influenced by a child's age. Younger children are more likely to exit to adoption or reunification, while older children and teenagers are more likely to exit to non-permanent settings or emancipation.

Exit patterns also vary by primary placement type and length of stay. Youth in foster care experience positive exits (return to family, adoption or permanent legal custodianship (PLC)) with greater frequency (81 percent) than youth in kinship care (76 percent) or congregate care (65 percent). Youth in foster care are adopted most frequently; those in kinship care account for the majority of PLC exits; and, youth in congregate care are the most likely to return home. Most youth exiting to adoption or PLC experienced lengths of stay greater than 18 months. Nearly all youth in care for less than one year returned home or experienced a non-permanent exit.

RETURNS TO CARE

About 31 percent of youth experience a return to care after exiting, and reentry patterns do vary by demographics and placement experiences. Children who first enter care at the age of 9 or older are more likely to reenter than younger children. African American children are more likely to return to care than white children (37 percent versus 30 percent).

Youth primarily placed in congregate care are more likely to reenter care than children placed in foster or kinship care (47percent versus 29 percent). Youth experiencing placement spells of 3-11 months long reentered more frequently than youth in care for 12 months or longer. Teenagers reentered at high rates regardless of length of stay. More than half of the youth who reentered did so in under a year, though greater than one-quarter of children exiting care between the ages of 3 and 11 reentered more than 18 months after exiting.

CHILDREN WITH MULTIPLE NEEDS

Children in placement access mental health services at nearly double the rate of the overall active CYF population. They also access drug and alcohol treatment more frequently and are far more likely to be involved in juvenile probation.

CHILD WELFARE IN ALLEGHENY COUNTY

The Department of Human Services' Office of Children, Youth and Families (CYF) is the county's public office mandated by law to protect children under the age of 18 from abuse and neglect. The mission of CYF is "to protect children from abuse and neglect; to preserve families, whenever possible; and to assure permanency, that is, to provide permanent, safe homes for children either by assuring safety within the child's own family, or by finding an adoptive home or another permanent setting for those children who cannot be reunified with their family" (Department of Human Services, CYF, 2007).

In 2009, CYF received a total of 8,813 calls concerning the possible abuse or neglect of a child, representing 7,020 families. Forty-four percent of the families were referred to community-based services, and the other 56 percent were assessed for services. Forty-eight percent of investigated families were accepted for service.

CHAPIN HALL AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Chapin Hall is an independent policy research center whose mission is to build knowledge that improves policies and programs for children and youth, families, and their communities.

Within Chapin Hall, the Center for State Foster Care and Adoption Data is a valuable resource for accessing data of foster care and adoption. Chapin Hall, together with the American Public Human Services Associations, the National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators, the University of California/Berkeley, and the University of North Carolina, formed the Center for State Foster Care and Adoption Data in year.

With funding from Casey Family Programs, Chapin Hall published a report in 2007 that studied a sample of 348,695 children admitted to foster care for the first time between 2000 and 2005. The report provides a broad overview of what happens when children are placed in foster care. Using data from the Multistate Foster Care Data Archive,² such as changes in the number of children in care, chances of entering care, placement type, movement, and exit rates, the report offers a useful national baseline analysis for studying entry and exit patterns regionally.

PARTNERSHIP WITH CHAPIN HALL

The Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) works with Chapin Hall through the ongoing “Improving Outcomes for Children and Families” Initiative, also funded by Casey Family Programs. DHS exports large child welfare placement data sets to Chapin Hall for cleanup, technical assistance and analysis support. When Chapin Hall returns those data sets to DHS, the DHS Office of Data Analysis, Research, and Evaluation (DARE) is able to replicate the kind of detailed analysis conducted by Chapin Hall in their 2007 Foster Care Dynamics study.

² *The Multistate Foster Care Data Archive is a repository of administrative data provided by state child welfare agencies to Chapin Hall to support research and development in the child welfare field, with specific emphasis on children who are placed in foster care. (Source: Chapin Hall)*

LONGITUDINAL DATA

Longitudinal data is structured in a way that allows an individual's experiences over time to be tracked and analyzed. The advantage to longitudinal data is that it allows you to see trends that are not possible to observe given point-in-time data. For example, point-in-time data will provide the number of youth in care on a certain day, and in which placement settings they are residing. Longitudinal data can track this same set of data over time, allowing one to analyze how long individuals remain in care, and if this varies by placement setting. It adds a new dimension to the data.

Cohorts are used to facilitate analysis of longitudinal data. Cohorts are groups of individuals who experience an event within a specific timeframe. Entry cohorts are the primary type used throughout this report, and they contain all youth who first entered care during a given year. Exit cohorts could also be used, but this form of analysis always underestimates the population of youth with longer lengths of stay by capturing more individuals with shorter lengths of stay.

CROSS-SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT

In addition to the analysis of longitudinal child welfare data, the report also examines cross-system usage of human services by children involved in child welfare. In order to identify usage trends of services like mental health treatment or juvenile probation, DHS integrates numerous data sources in its Data Warehouse. To match data, DHS uses an algorithm to compare external data sources with DHS client data. This matching algorithm goes through a series of steps to confirm a client's presence in both data directories, looking at his or her social security number, first and last name, date of birth and gender. In cases where the data may not match exactly, this process takes further steps to confirm identity, using Soundex, a phonetic algorithm for indexing names by pronunciation, and anagrams of social security numbers. For a detailed description of the matching algorithm, please see Appendix A.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS REPORT

This report models for Allegheny County the Chapin Hall *Foster Care Dynamics 2000-2005* report³. The purpose of the Chapin Hall report is to “provide a general overview of what happens when children are placed in foster care.” To that end, Chapin Hall studied foster care⁴ caseloads, demographics of children entering foster care, placement types, stability of placements, time spent in foster care, exits from care and reentries to the foster care system. These categories help to answer the question of what a typical trajectory through the foster care system looks like.

Additionally, because the Chapin Hall report is an update to previous reports, longitudinal data are able to be examined to determine trends and patterns in the foster care system. Chapin Hall also focuses much of the report to the demographics of the children involved in the system to look for substantive differences in the trajectories of children based on their race/ethnicity, age, gender and urbanicity.

The Allegheny County Placement Dynamics report will cover the period from 2000 through 2009 and will focus on data similar to that of Chapin Hall. Though the Allegheny County CYF is organized into regional offices within the county, the report will examine data on a county-wide level to understand the dynamics of the county child welfare system as a whole. Similar to Chapin Hall, this report will examine caseload sizes; demographics of children receiving services; entries to, exits from, and reentries into care; placement data including type of placement, length of placement, primary placement type and number of placements; and, community data indicating the distribution of out-of-home placements in the county and communities with high child welfare usage rates.

³ Wulczyn, F., Chen, L., & Hislop, K.B. (2007) *Foster care dynamics 2000–2005: A report from the Multistate Foster Care Data Archive*. Chicago: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago

⁴ Chapin Hall uses the term “foster care” to broadly refer to all out-of-home placements.

PLACEMENT CASELOADS

Caseload Counts

One of the most basic child welfare indicators is the count of children in out-of-home placement at a given point in time. Caseload size helps to quickly identify one of the most obvious and important trends: Is the caseload growing or shrinking?

Figure 1 displays point-in-time caseload counts on the first day of each year from 1996 to 2010. Caseloads in Allegheny County declined from 3,088 in 1996 to 1,765 in 2010, a total decrease of 43 percent. Caseloads declined steadily from 1997 through 2003 before increasing slowly until 2007. The number of youth in care then dropped significantly in 2008 through 2010.

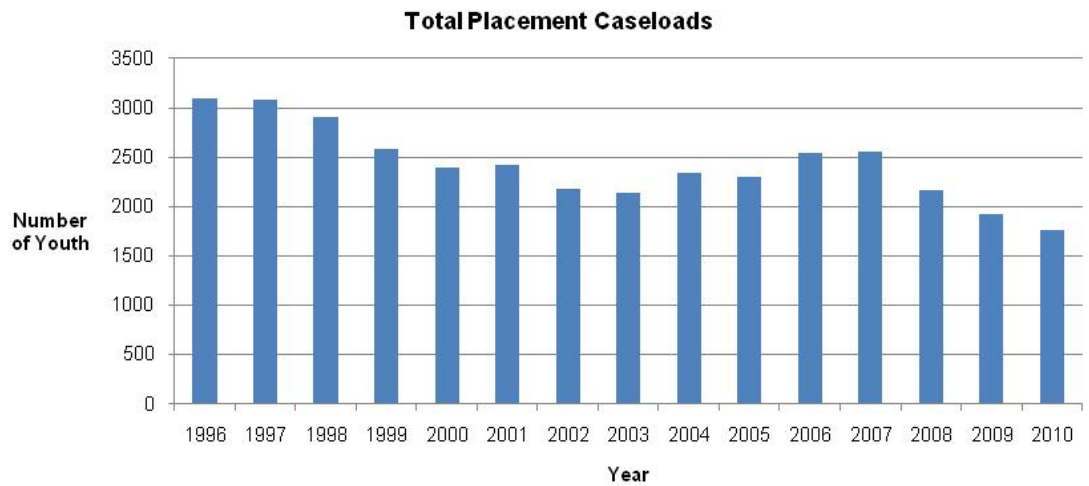


Figure 1: Total Placement Caseloads on the First Day of the Year, 1996-2010

Admissions and Discharges

Changes in the number of children in care result from a complex set of underlying processes and conditions. When the number of children in foster care is stable over time, it is because the various forces that cause children to move in and out of care are at equilibrium, whereas the caseload changes size because of an imbalance between admissions and exits. Whether admissions are rising or falling, the net population will drop as long as the number of discharges exceeds the number of children admitted. This dynamic must exist to reduce the size of the in-care population over time, as it has in Allegheny County.

The information provided by researchers from the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago suggests that the pattern of admissions and discharges in Allegheny County is characteristic of most, if not all child welfare systems. The months of all admissions and discharges occurring in 2000 through 2009 are displayed in Figures 2 and 3. Admissions drop late in the calendar year and discharges rise during the summer. The persistence of these patterns, which are present in other child welfare data dating back to the 1980s, is indicative of structural features that govern the basic behavior of the systems involved. For example, the rise in discharges in the summer reflects an effort to not disrupt a child's school year if it can be prevented. This is displayed in Figure 3 with the largest percentages of discharges occurring in June and August.

Month of Entry, All Entries 2000-2009

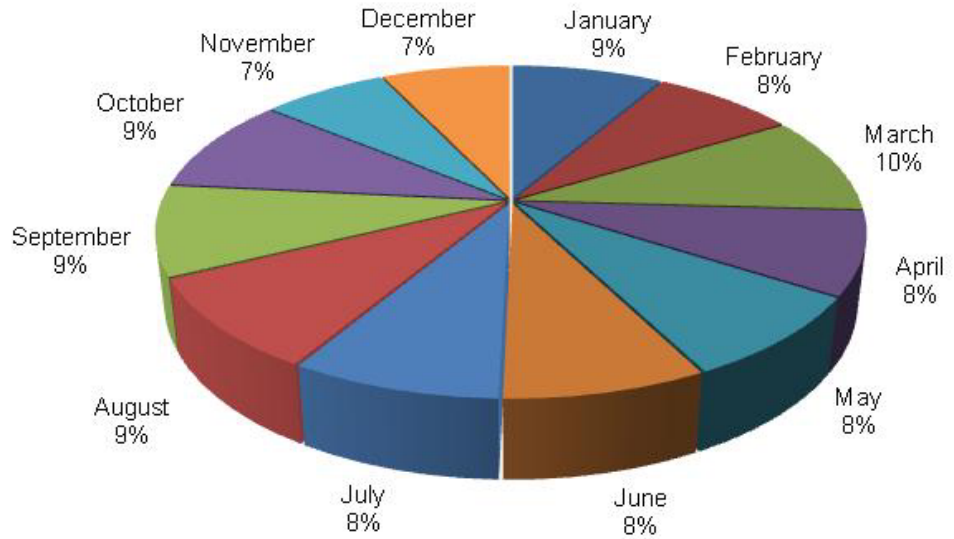


Figure 2: Placement Entry Month, 2000-2009 (n=18,954)

Month of Discharge, All Discharges 2000-2009

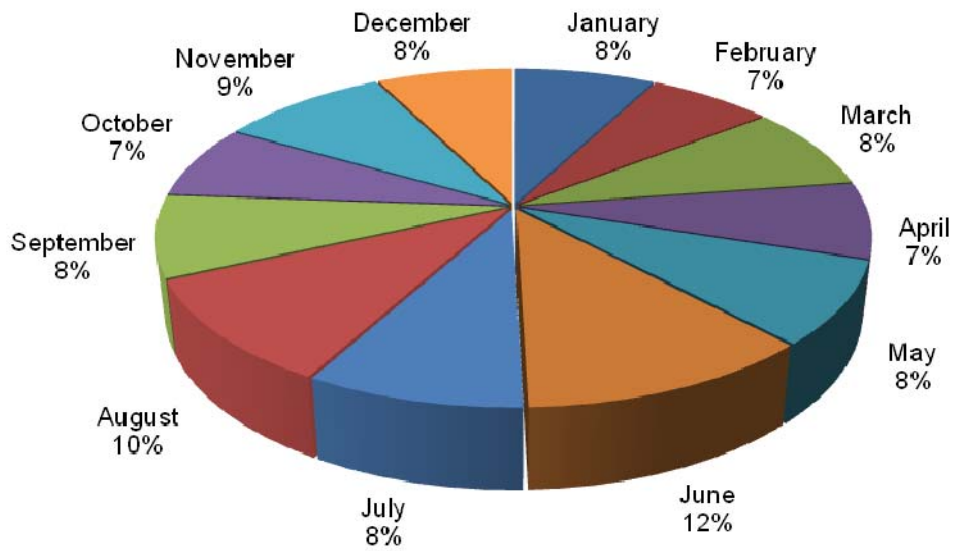


Figure 3: Placement End Month, 2000-2009 (n=19,636)

Data Analysis

The number of admissions, the number of discharges, and the net changes in caseload size are disaggregated by month, starting in January 2000 and ending in December 2009, and are displayed in Figure 4. While the data below appear somewhat sporadic, the seasonal variation is consistent. The sharp peaks in discharges occur during the summer months. Admissions drop at the end of the calendar year around the holiday season, and the net change line reflects this decline with a net decline in caseloads just prior to January of the following year, each year from 2000 to 2009.

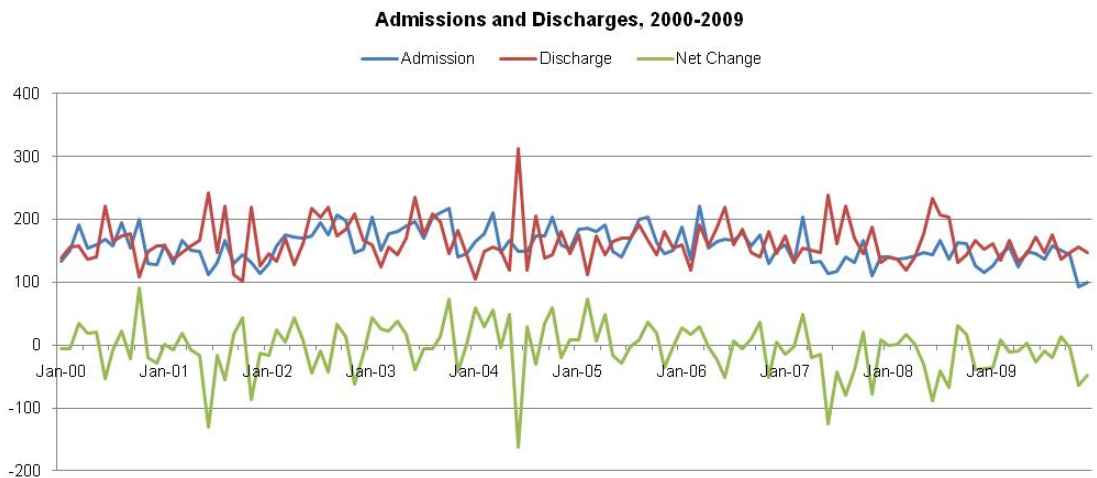


Figure 4: Admissions and Discharges, January 2000 – December 2009

FIRST ENTRIES INTO CARE

Throughout this report, we use entry cohorts to examine the placement experiences of youth in Allegheny County's child welfare system (see Methodology). The youth included in the data are those who first enter care in each year, from 2000 to 2009. These numbers vary from the numbers presented above for total caseloads because each youth is only counted once – in the year they first enter care. The point-in-time caseload counts are much higher because youth in care for multiple years will appear in the data more than once.

Figure 5 displays the number of youth entering in each cohort year, and how the numbers have changed since 1996. The number of children first entering into out-of-home placement in 2007-2009 was about 900 per year. Historically, the number declined following 1996, and then began to rise again in the early 2000s. The number peaked in 2003 and has steadily declined since that year. The number of children entering care in 2009 was 30 percent lower than the number entering care in 2003.

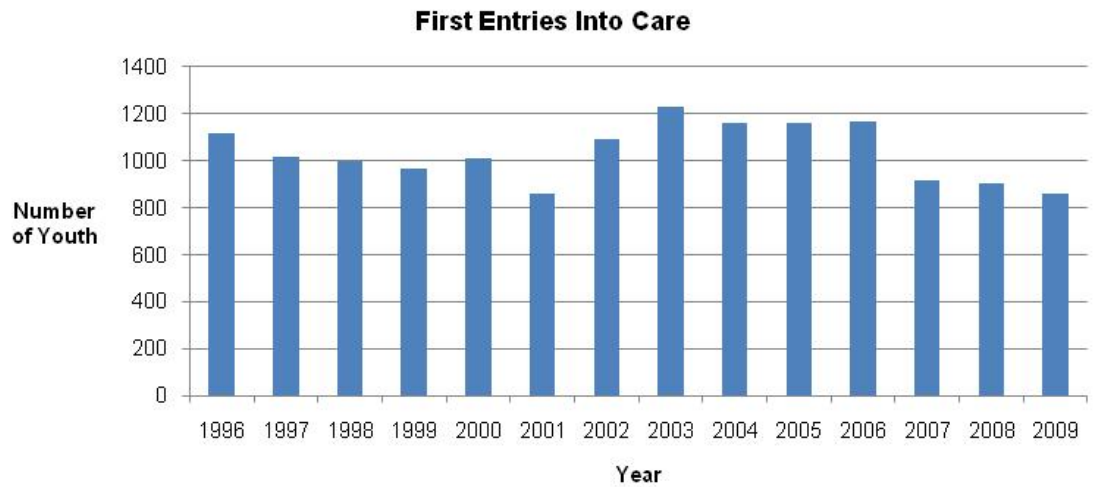


Figure 5: First Entries into Out-of-Home Care, 1996-2009

Rates of entry into care vary between demographic groups. Tables A and B display the composition of the entry cohorts each year by age, gender and race. The data indicate that:

- The youngest and the oldest youth comprise the majority of the population of youth first entering out-of-home care. About 30 percent of children are between the ages of 0-2, and another 25 percent are 15-17. Since 2007, the percentage of youth ages 0-2 has increased slightly while the percentage of youth ages 9-14 has decreased.
- African American children make up about 60 percent of children in placement, compared to only 18 percent of the total child population in Allegheny County. This number has fluctuated slightly, but still remains high. White children make up the remaining 35 to 39 percent, with children of other races and ethnicities represented in very small numbers⁵.
- The gender distribution is fairly equal and consistent, though it has changed slightly since 2000. Early in the decade, females comprised the majority by a small margin. In the last four years, males have made up a larger portion of the population in each year.

⁵ Throughout this report, only statistics for African American and white children are included and discussed because the number of youth of other races/ethnicities is too small to create a sample size large enough to discuss trends in care. These youth are still included in the data, just not discussed by their racial or ethnic identity.

Data Analysis

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Total
Age at Entry											
Less than 1 year	160	139	163	162	191	195	204	179	168	150	1711
1 to 2 years	119	84	119	118	116	110	132	109	120	103	1130
3 to 5 years	131	87	123	145	142	148	118	127	96	103	1220
6 to 8 years	121	93	102	125	119	101	113	90	95	85	1044
9 to 11 years	115	89	116	152	120	114	113	63	65	78	1025
12 to 14 years	165	161	218	246	220	220	223	149	135	130	1867
15 to 17 years	199	209	248	280	250	273	264	199	226	211	2359
Race											
African American	663	546	699	741	711	716	688	538	566	511	6379
White	333	307	380	475	427	426	460	357	327	298	3790
Gender											
Female	533	456	555	595	586	627	577	432	451	420	5232
Male	477	407	532	634	572	535	590	484	454	437	5122
Total	1010	863	1090	1229	1159	1162	1167	916	905	861	10362

Table A: Age at Entry, Race and Gender of Children First Entering Out-of-Home Care, 2000-2009

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Total
Age at Entry											
Less than 1 year	16%	16%	15%	13%	16%	17%	17%	20%	19%	17%	17%
1 to 2 years	12%	10%	11%	10%	10%	9%	11%	12%	13%	12%	11%
3 to 5 years	13%	10%	11%	12%	12%	13%	10%	14%	11%	12%	12%
6 to 8 years	12%	11%	9%	10%	10%	9%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%
9 to 11 years	11%	10%	11%	12%	10%	10%	10%	7%	7%	9%	10%
12 to 14 years	16%	19%	20%	20%	19%	19%	19%	16%	15%	15%	18%
15 to 17 years	20%	24%	23%	23%	22%	23%	23%	22%	25%	25%	23%
Race											
African American	66%	63%	64%	60%	61%	62%	59%	59%	63%	59%	62%
White	33%	36%	35%	39%	37%	37%	39%	39%	36%	35%	37%
Gender											
Female	53%	53%	51%	48%	51%	54%	49%	47%	50%	49%	50%
Male	47%	47%	49%	52%	49%	46%	51%	53%	50%	51%	49%

Table B: Age at Entry, Race and Gender of Children First Entering Out-of-Home Care, by Percentage of Total, 2000-2009

INCIDENCE RATES

In order to understand admissions into out-of-home care in context, it is necessary to consider the size and demographic composition of the entire population.

Incidence rates control for these factors by expressing the number of children who first enter placement per 1,000 children in the population. Analysis of entry rates within Allegheny County by demographics suggest several trends occurring by age and race, demonstrated by Table C and Figures 6-7. Specifically, the data suggest that:

- Rates of first entry into care (per 1,000 children) are lower in 2007-2009 than anytime from 2002-2006 across all demographic groups, except among youth below the age of 5.
- Infants and teens have the highest rates of entry. Even still, infants under age 1 are admitted into care at about 2.5 times the rate of teenagers.
- The admission rate for all age cohorts fluctuated at fairly similar rates between 2000 and 2006, with a dip in 2001. Since 2007, rates of entry have decreased across all age groups and continue to trend downward.
- African American children enter care at seven times the rate of their white counterparts. The rate of African American children entering care declined by 32 percent from 2003 to 2009, but the magnitude of the racial disparity remained constant as the rate for white children dropped as well.
- Variations in rates by age and race have compounding effects when examined together. Figure 7 illustrates the rates for entry into care by race, gender, and age. Entry rates for African American infants under the age of 1 skyrocket to 26.5 (female) and 33.7 (male) while rates for white infants fall to 4.6 (female) and 5.9 (male). Despite these large numbers, the greatest disparities in rates by race actually occur as children get older, often reaching rates of more than ten times greater for African American youth than white youth of the same gender.
- There is not much gender variation in placement rates of African American or white children. However, starting around age 13, females are placed at a slightly higher rate than males of the same race.

Data Analysis

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Age at Entry										
Less than 1	11.4	9.9	11.6	11.6	13.6	13.9	14.6	12.8	12.0	10.7
1 to 2 years	4.2	3.0	4.2	4.2	4.1	3.9	4.7	3.9	4.3	3.7
3 to 5 years	3.0	2.0	2.8	3.3	3.2	3.4	2.7	2.9	2.2	2.3
6 to 8 years	2.5	2.0	2.1	2.6	2.5	2.1	2.4	1.9	2.0	1.8
9 to 11 years	2.3	1.8	2.3	3.0	2.4	2.3	2.3	1.3	1.3	1.6
12 to 14 years	3.3	3.3	4.4	5.0	4.5	4.5	4.5	3.0	2.7	2.6
15 to 17 years	4.1	4.4	5.2	5.8	5.2	5.7	5.5	4.1	4.7	4.4
Race										
African American	13.0	10.7	13.7	14.6	14.0	14.1	13.5	10.6	11.1	10.0
White	1.5	1.4	1.7	2.2	2.0	2.0	2.1	1.6	1.5	1.4
Gender										
Female	4.1	3.5	4.2	4.5	4.5	4.8	4.4	3.3	3.4	3.2
Male	3.5	3.0	3.9	4.6	4.2	3.9	4.3	3.5	3.3	3.2
Total	3.6	3.1	3.9	4.4	4.1	4.1	4.2	3.3	3.2	3.1

Source: Tables P12A, P12B, P14. Census 2000 Summary File 1 (SF 1) 100-Percent Data. Census Bureau. <www.factfinder.census.gov>.

Table C: Rate of Children First Entering Out-of-Home Care, by Age at Entry, Gender, Race and Year of First Admission, 2000-2009

Data Analysis

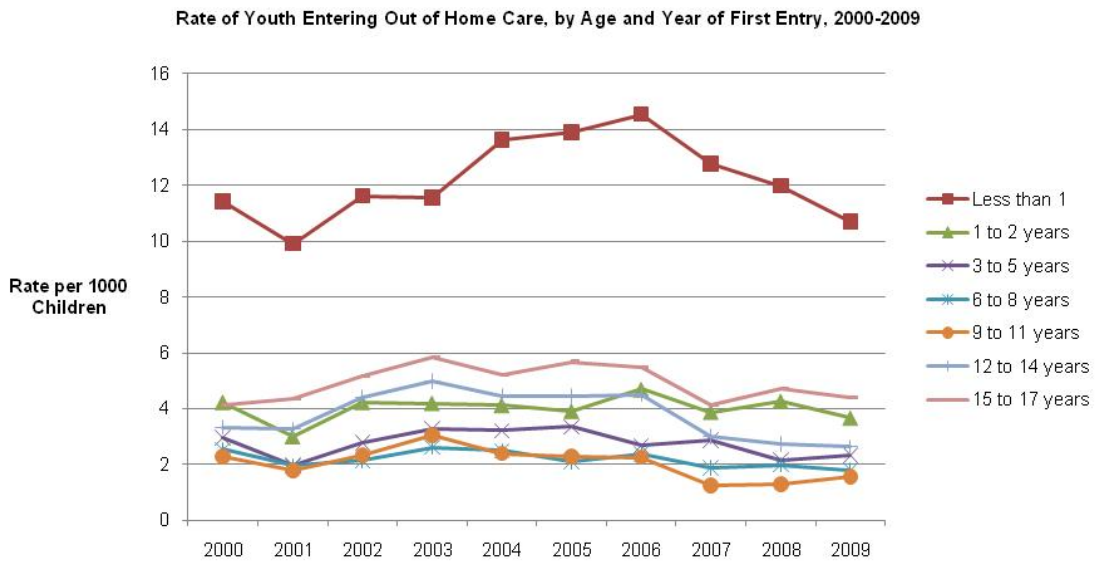


Figure 6: Rate of Children in Out-of-Home Care, by Age at Entry and Year of First Admission, 2000-2009

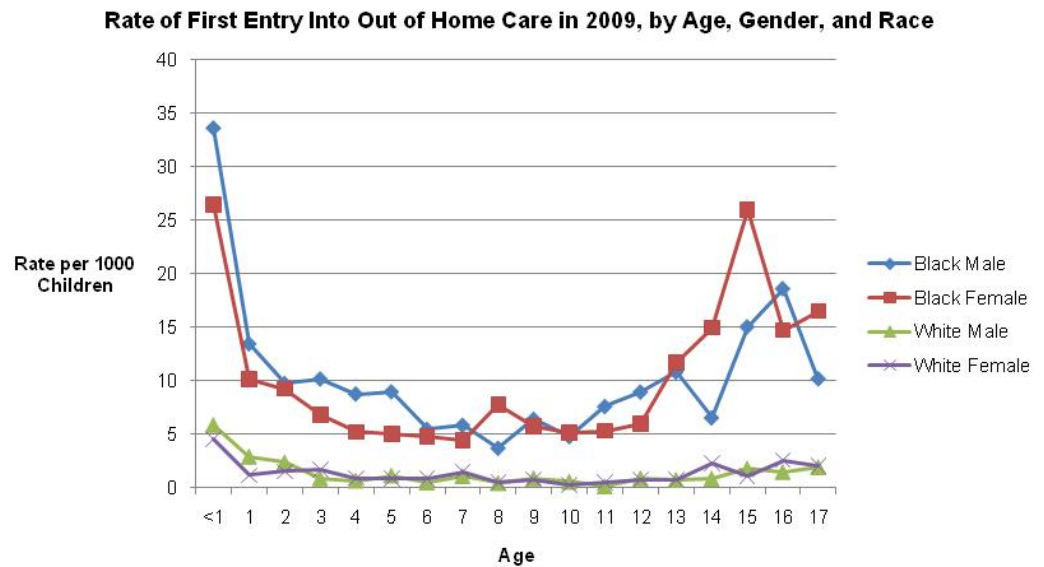


Figure 7: Rate of Children First Entering Care, by Race, Gender and Age of Entry in 2009

Community

Placement activity is particularly prevalent in specific communities and neighborhoods in Allegheny County. In the middle column of Table D, the neighborhoods and municipalities from which the highest numbers of youth were placed in 2009 are listed. Some large communities appear here because of the sheer number of people living in the geographic area, yet the prevalence of placement is quite small. For this reason, placement rates per 1,000 youth were calculated for each community, and the right-hand column ranks neighborhoods and municipalities by their rates of placement activity. The shortcoming of this list is that some communities appear even if there are few placements. This may occur because there are a very small number of children residing there, or other data irregularities⁶. However, neighborhoods appearing in both lists are truly high service neighborhoods (marked with an asterisk), with both high counts and high rates of child welfare placements. The five communities with the most activity are McKees Rocks, Duquesne, Mount Oliver Boro, Homewood South and Perry South. Many of these communities are considered "severely distressed" as defined by the Annie E. Casey Foundation criteria⁷ -- they are plagued by poverty, low employment, high high-school dropout rates, and high numbers of female-headed households. Communities considered to be severely distressed are labeled in Table D.

⁶ There are some irregularities in the data that skew results in neighborhoods with small populations. A common cause is that the addresses of provider agencies or DHS may sometimes be listed in the data as families' home addresses. For this reason, the Golden Triangle frequently appears to have the highest rate of involvement even though very few people live in the area. Similar irregularities may occur in other neighborhoods as well.

⁷ Severely distressed neighborhoods are defined as census tracts with at least three of the four following characteristics:

1. High poverty rate (27.4 percent or more);
2. High percentage of female-headed families (37.1 percent or more);
3. High percentage of high school dropouts (23.0 percent or more); and
4. High percentage of working-age males unattached to the labor force (34.0 percent or more)

Data Analysis

Rank	Ranked by Number of Children Entering Placement	Ranked by Rate Per 1,000
1	McKeesport†	Golden Triangle†
2	Penn Hills	Bluff
3	Wilkinsburg†	Glen Hazel†
4	Duquesne* †	Allegheny West
5	McKees Rocks* †	Allegheny Center
6	Perry South*	Arlington Heights†
7	East Liberty†	East Carnegie
8	Homewood North* †	Middle Hill†
9	Swissvale	Mount Oliver Boro*
10	Knoxville*	Strip District†
11	Mount Oliver Boro*	McDonald
12	Clairton	East Allegheny
13	Homewood South* †	Larimer* †
14	Garfield†	Allentown*
15	West Mifflin	McKees Rocks* †
16	Carrick	Duquesne* †
17	Allentown*	Homewood South* †
18	North Braddock	Perry South*
19	Coraopolis	Pitcairn*
20	Munhall	Fineview†
21	Sheraden	Elliott
22	East Hills†	Knoxville*
23	Stowe	Wilmerding
24	Larimer* †	Upper Lawrenceville
25	Pitcairn*	Homewood North* †

* Communities appearing in each list

† Communities classified as "severely distressed" as defined by the Annie E. Casey Foundation criteria

Table D: Neighborhoods with Highest Counts and Rates of Children Entering Out-of-Home Placement, 2009

Residence Prior to Out-of-Home Placement, 2009

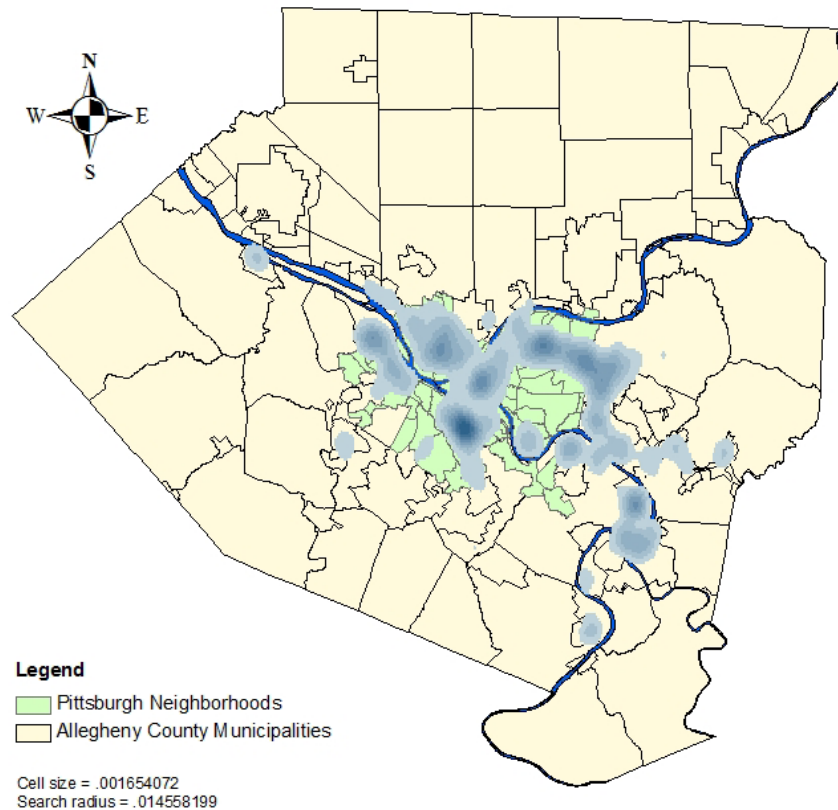


Figure 8: Locations of Child Welfare Placements, Allegheny County, 2009

PLACEMENT TYPES

When placing children in out-of-home care, caseworkers and the Court must determine which placement setting (e.g. congregate care/group homes, foster care, and kinship care) is most appropriate for a child based on his or her age, family situation, siblings, etc. If a child is unable to remain or return home, Allegheny County prefers to place him or her with kin or permanent foster parents in order to minimize the disruption to the child’s life. Permanency is extremely important when deciding where to place a child.

Primary Placements

In this report, placement settings are examined by considering children’s primary placements – the settings in which they spend 50 percent or more of their time while placed out of home. Since there are more than two potential placement settings, it is possible that a youth may not be in one setting for 50 percent of their time in care. If this is the case, the child will be classified as having “no primary placement” in the following charts and figures. Only a small percentage of youth fall into this category, but that percentage does increase with age.

Data Analysis

Table E and Figure 9 display the distribution of primary placement types experienced by youth since 2000. The distribution of primary placement types for youth does fluctuate slightly year by year, but there are consistent trends. Currently, about the same number of youth are primarily in foster care as are in kinship care. The long-term trend is that the percentage in foster care has been decreasing while the percentage experiencing mostly kinship care has been increasing. The remaining one-fourth of youth is in congregate care for the majority of their placement spell, and this number has been decreasing mildly in the last few years. These trends are most visible in Figure 9. The increase in kinship care and decline in foster and congregate care as primary placement types are consistent with DHS's policy to prioritize placement for a child with a relative or other adult with whom the child has a significant and ongoing relationship.⁸

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Total Count	1010	863	1090	1229	1159	1162	1167	916	905	861
Type of Primary Placement										
Congregate Care	22%	28%	26%	25%	25%	27%	25%	23%	25%	21%
Foster Care	41%	39%	40%	35%	35%	33%	33%	39%	36%	38%
Kinship Care	34%	28%	29%	37%	36%	38%	40%	35%	37%	38%
Independent Living	2%	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
No Primary Placement	1%	3%	2%	2%	2%	2%	1%	2%	1%	1%

Table E: Type of Primary Placement for First Spells, 2000-2009

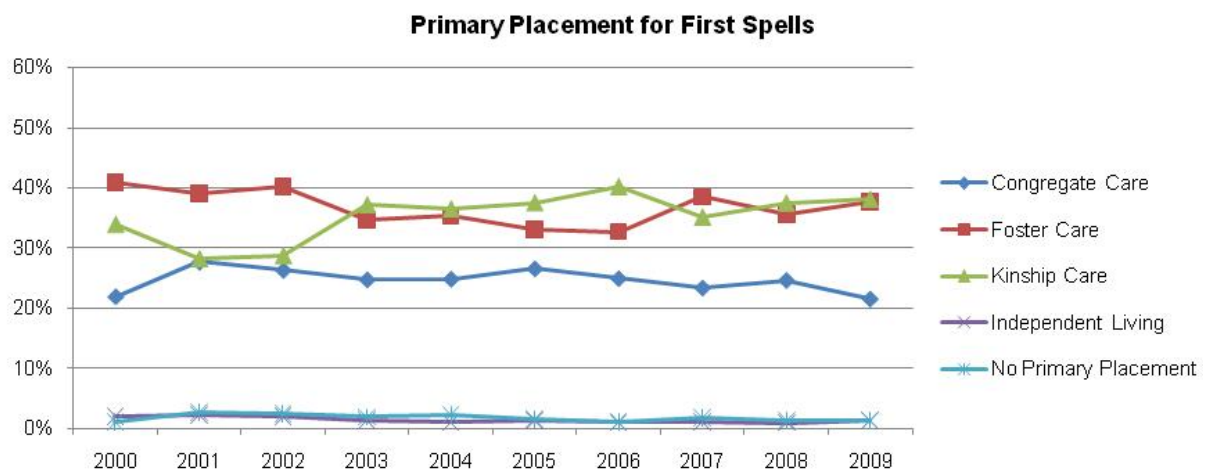


Figure 9: Type of Primary Placements for First Spells, 2000-2009

⁸ CYF "Placement of Children Policy and Procedure," effective 3/05/10

Data Analysis

It is important to look at different demographic characteristics to determine if they affect primary placement settings. Table F shows that:

- Primary placements into the different types of care change consistently with age. The percentage of youth in congregate care increases with age. The percentage in foster care is highest for infants and decreases with age. The percentage of youth in relative care increases from birth, peaks when youth are 6 to 8 years old, and then decreases as children get older.
- Congregate care is used only for older children, and the majority of adolescent youth are placed in congregate care for at least half of their placement spell, reaching a rate of 63 percent for youth ages 15-17.
- Nearly all children ages birth to 5 are placed in family settings (99-100 percent in either foster or kinship care). This differs slightly from the experiences of 6- to 11-year-olds (92 percent in family setting) and drastically from the experiences of 12- to 17-year-olds (36 percent in family setting).
- African American children are more likely to be placed in a family-like setting than white children (74 percent versus 69 percent).
- There is no real difference in the type of primary placement by gender. Females are slightly more likely to be placed in kinship care and independent living, whereas males enter foster care a little more frequently.

	Total Count	Congregate Care	Foster Care	Kinship Care	Independent Living	No Primary Placement
Age at Entry						
Less than 1	1711	0%	63%	37%	0%	0.5%
1 to 2 years	1130	0%	56%	44%	0%	0.7%
3 to 5 years	1220	0%	51%	48%	0%	0.7%
6 to 8 years	1044	2%	48%	49%	0%	1.3%
9 to 11 years	1025	11%	40%	47%	0%	1.9%
12 to 14 years	1867	50%	18%	28%	0.9%	3.1%
15 to 17 years	2359	63%	9%	20%	5.6%	2.9%
Race						
African American	5232	23%	38%	36%	1.6%	1.8%
White	5122	28%	34%	35%	1.3%	1.8%
Gender						
Female	6379	24%	36%	36%	2.5%	1.7%
Male	3790	25%	38%	35%	0.4%	1.9%

Table F: Type of Primary Placement for First Placements, by Age, Race and Gender, 2000-2009

Data Analysis

Figure 10 illustrates graphically how primary placement type changes as children age. Each bar represents the percentage of children primarily placed in each type of care, listed by their age at the time they entered that placement spell. As discussed earlier, the percentage of youth in foster care is highest among infants and declines with age. The percentage in kinship care increases until the age of six before slowly declining, and then leveling off in the teenage years. Congregate care increases significantly once youth reach the age of 13. Finally, a proportion of teenagers are in independent living, reaching over ten percent of primary placements for youth age 17.

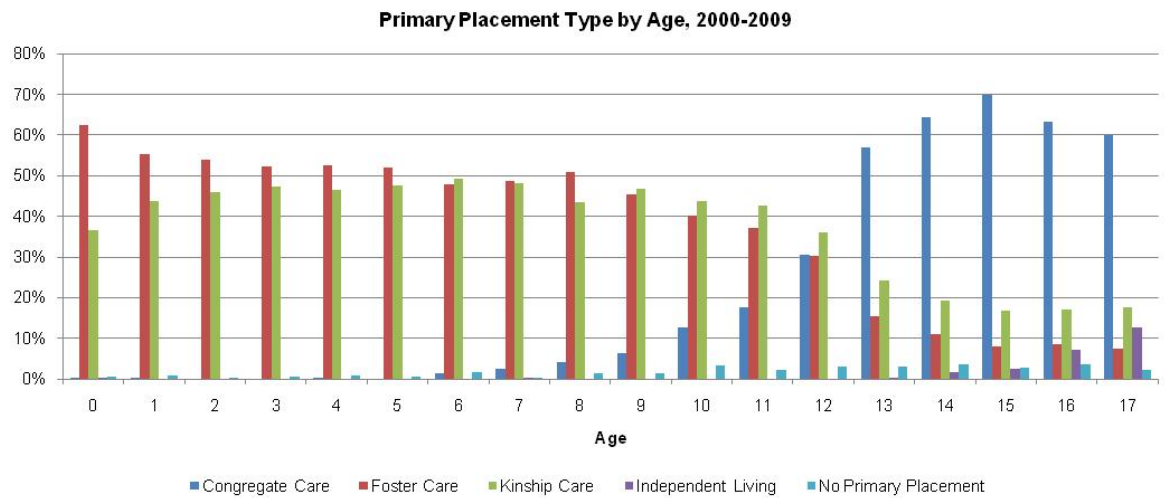


Figure 10: Type of Primary Placement for All Spells, by Age at Beginning of Spell, 2000-2009

Figure 10 illustrates graphically how primary placement type changes as children age. Each bar represents the percentage of children primarily placed in each type of care, listed by their age at the time they entered that placement spell. As discussed earlier, the percentage of youth in foster care is highest among infants and declines with age. The percentage in kinship care increases until the age of six before slowly declining, and then leveling off in the teenage years. Congregate care increases significantly once youth reach the age of 13. Finally, a proportion of teenagers are in independent living, reaching over ten percent of primary placements for youth age 17.

Data Analysis

All figures above, with the exception of the age distribution chart, provide statistics based on only the first out-of-home placement experiences of youth. Figure 11, below, charts the distribution of primary placement types experienced by youth if they reenter care after exiting their first placement spell. These placement experiences are examined separately because children experiencing multiple entries and exits to and from placement may have particularly challenging circumstances, suggesting that their placement experiences may differ from the whole population of youth entering care. Only 30 percent of children experiencing out-of-home placement exit and then reenter into care.

The distribution of primary placement types experienced by youth reentering care confirms that their placement experiences do differ (compare to Figure 9). About half of reentries into care are primarily placed in congregate care. This is double the percentage of youth primarily residing in congregate care during their first placements. This percentage has also been increasing in the last several years. Consequently, the percentage of youth experiencing primary placement in kinship or foster care decreases by about fifteen percentage points each, with kinship care falling particularly sharply since 2007. This information indicates that youth who exit and then reenter care are increasingly less likely to spend the majority of their time in a family setting.

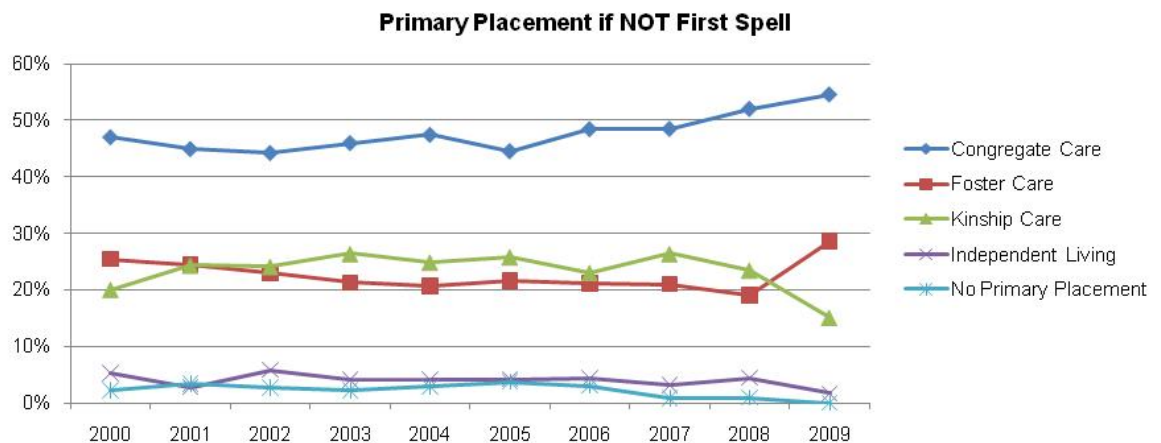


Figure 11: Primary Placements for Spells after the First Spell, 2000-2009

Some of these differences between the first and subsequent spells exist because the population of youth is different. Youth experiencing multiple placement spells tend to be older. The percentage of the population ages 12-14 is 18 percentage points higher for youth experiencing a subsequent placement spell. At the same time, the percentage of the population ages 0-5 is 18 percentage points lower. Since older youth are more likely to be placed in congregate care, this shift accounts for part of the difference. However, the demographics of the population do not explain the recent increase in congregate care as the primary placement type. From 2007 to 2009, the use of congregate care as a primary placement type increased while the percentage of youth ages 12-17 dropped and remained below the ten year average. At the same time, the proportion of youth ages 0-2 increased.

Time in Placement

DHS strives to reunify children with their families, or find another permanent home, as quickly and as safely as possible. Table G provides the number of months that passed before the corresponding proportion of youth exited care. Time frames are provided for different age groups and for the total population⁹. Between 2000 and 2009, 25 percent of all youth entering care for the first time exited in just over a month. Half of all children exited care in just over six months. After this, the rate at which youth exited care began to slow, and another 20 months passed before the next quarter of the population exited. The last segment of the population experienced much longer stays in care.

Figure 12 illustrates this declining rate of exit for two segments of the population: children ages 0-5 and 13-17. The steepness of the curve varies by age group, but the general shape of the chart reflects the overall trend described above. The number on the vertical axis reflects the percentage of youth still in care, and the horizontal axis represents the passage of time. The steeper the curve, the more quickly youth are exiting care. The curve for adolescents ages 13-17 is much steeper than the curve for children ages 0-5, meaning they exit care more quickly. The values in Table G confirm this finding. Half of adolescents have left care within 3 months, while a year passes before half of children ages 0-5 have left care.

These findings are consistent with what should be expected. The last 25 percent of youth to exit care are in more difficult circumstances, so these youth will not exit as quickly as the first half of the population. Similarly, children under the age of five are particularly vulnerable, so the fact that they exit care more slowly than older children is also not unexpected.

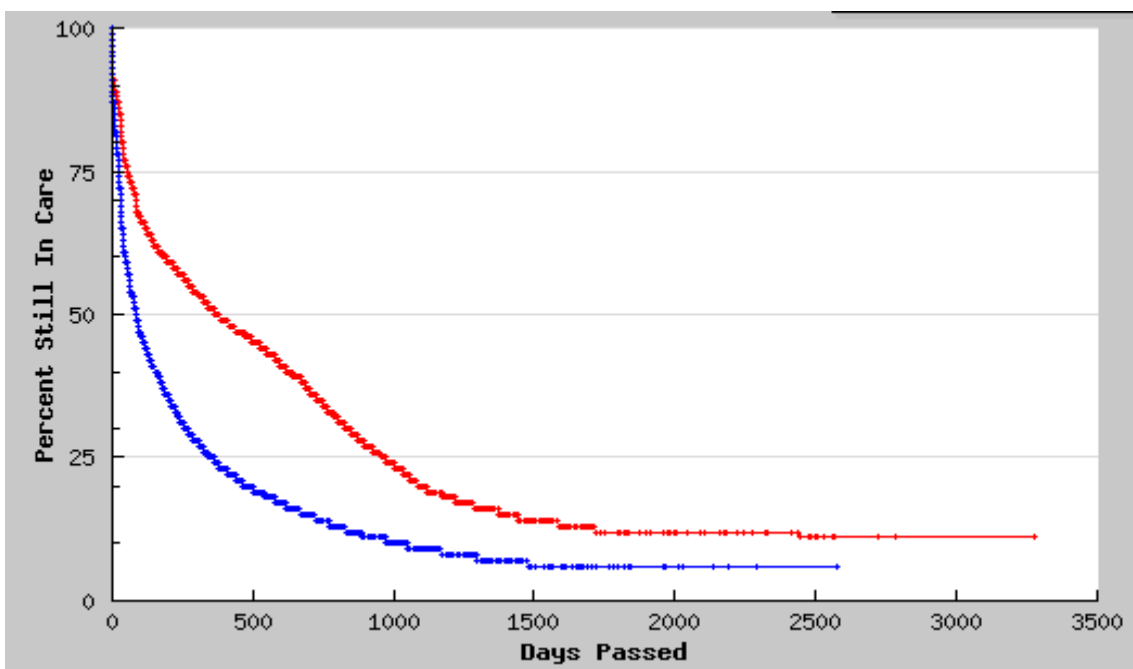
⁹ *Lengths of stay reported by Chapin Hall in comparable reports are longer because Chapin Hall excludes youth in care for less than five days, while those with short-stays have been included in this data.*

Data Analysis

Percent of Youth Exiting Care	Age			Total Population n= 10362
	0-5 years n=4061	6-12 years n=2520	13-17 years n=3775	
25%	1.8	1.4	0.9	1.2
50%	12.3	9.1	3.0	6.3
75%	31.6	31.7	11.7	26.0
100%	.	.	.	.

Source: Allegheny County Data on Chapin Hall Web Tool

Table G: Duration Quartiles (in Months) of First Placement Spell, by Age, 2000-2009



Source: Allegheny County data on Chapin Hall Web Tool

Figure 12: Survival Curve Demonstrating Length of Stay in First Spell for Youth Ages 0-5 and 13-17, 2000-2009

Table H breaks down the values discussed above for the whole population of youth in placement by year. Each value represents the number of months that pass before the corresponding percentage of youth who entered placement in a given year exit placement. There are no drastic changes in length of stay over the last ten years. Length of stay did increase in the beginning of the decade, but peaked in 2004 and 2005 before declining to values in 2008 and 2009 that are comparable to those at the beginning of the decade.

Data Analysis

Quartiles	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
25%	1.0	1.0	0.9	1.3	1.4	1.6	1.5	1.1	1.1	1.0
50%	5.6	4.8	4.1	6.7	8.1	8.5	8.5	4.6	5.3	4.5
75%	25.0	20.2	23.5	23.4	27.2	25.8	24.7	20.2	23.0	-

Source: Chapin Hall

Note: "-" indicates that there are not enough completed placement spells for calculation of the value.

Table H: Duration Quartiles (in Months) of First Foster Care Spells by Year of Entry, 2000-2009

The trends identified above for longer lengths of stay for younger children and the peak in lengths of stay in 2004-2005 are both reflected in Table I, which looks at changes in the median length of stay for youth of different ages from 2002-2009. No age groups experienced unusual changes in their median length of stay.

Age	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Less than 1 year	18.4	13.2	19.2	19.1	20.0	15.6	17.8	.
1-5 years	11.1	9.9	21.5	14.0	14.3	10.9	11.4	.
6-12 years	10.3	14.8	14.1	17.4	14.2	6.7	8.4	.
13-17 years	3.4	5.6	4.3	5.3	4.4	3.1	3.7	3.2
Total	7.9	8.4	10.6	10.2	10.3	6.7	6.7	7.1

Source: Chapin Hall

"." represents values for which no data was available

Table I: Median Duration (in months) of First Spell of Out-of-Home Placement, by Age and Year of Entry, 2002-2009

Finally, length of stay is examined among youth by race and gender (Table J). Length of stay does not vary based on race. About 40 percent of both African American and white children exit within 90 days, and the rates exiting as time passes remain consistent. Lengths of stay for females and males are also very similar. There appears to be a slight inclination for females to exit care a little more quickly than their male counterparts. Within six months, 51 percent of females have exited care, compared to 48 percent of males.

Data Analysis

	Less than 90 Days	3 to 6 months	6 to 12 months	1 to 2 years	2 to 5 years	More than 5 years	Still in Care
Race							
African American	39%	10%	11%	13%	18%	1%	9%
White	41%	9%	11%	13%	17%	1%	9%
Gender							
Male	39%	9%	10%	13%	17%	1%	10%
Female	41%	10%	11%	12%	17%	1%	9%

Source: Allegheny County data on Chapin Hall Web Tool

Table J: Duration of First Spell by Race and Gender, 2000-2009

EXITS AND REENTRIES

Up to this point, the analysis has been focused on entries into placement and describing the out-of-home experience for youth. The focus now shifts to the end of the placement experience. The key attribute to the exit is where the child goes when he/she exits care. Whenever possible, the goal is to reunite the child with his or her family. If this is not possible, other permanent options are sought, such as living with relatives, adoption or PLC.

The data in this section continue to be examined by entry cohort, even though not all youth who entered care in 2000-2009 experienced an exit. This method is chosen because exit cohorts provide a distorted picture of discharge patterns because youth with shorter stays in care will be overrepresented: the shorter a stay in care is, the more likely a child is to exit before the time window expires, and the opposite is true for youth with longer stays in care.

Another methodological issue related to exits is the fact that exit information is unobserved for all children remaining in care at the end of the period of observation (March 16, 2010). There is no valid way to predict the destination at discharge for censored spells. When analyzing spell duration, the Kaplan-Meier methodology is utilized in order to allow the already-elapsed portion of a censored case to contribute to estimates of duration patterns.

Table K summarizes the exit destinations of all youth experiencing their first placement in 2000-2009. Of the 10,362 entries, 945 youth were still in their first placement spell and the remaining 91 percent had exited. Of the total number of youth who entered, 58 percent exited to their families and another 13 percent exited to adoption. From first placements, a total of 75 percent experienced a positive exit from their first spell as of March 2010.

Exits

First Entry 2000-2009	Still in Care*	Exits	Exit Type						
			Return to Family	Adoption	PLC	Non- Permanent	Reach Majority	Run- away	Other
10,362	945	9,417	5,967	1,304	395	555	204	464	528
100%	9%	91%	58%	13%	4%	5%	2%	4%	5%

*

*Still in care as of March 16, 2010

Table K: Exits from First Spell as a Percent of Entries, 2000-2009

Exit types are highly influenced by a child's age, as shown by Table L. Younger children are more likely to exit to adoption or reunification, while older children and teenagers are more likely to run away or age out of care. Figure 13 displays these trends by charting the exits for youth of each age. Few differences exit by race and gender. Females are slightly more likely to experience a non-permanent exit than males.

	Still in Care	Return to Family	Adoption	PLC	Non- Permanent	Reach Majority	Runaway	Other
Age at Entry								
Less than 1 year	11%	48%	33%	2%	2%	0%	0%	4%
1 to 2 years	12%	61%	18%	5%	2%	0%	0%	3%
3 to 5 years	11%	62%	17%	6%	1%	0%	0%	3%
6 to 8 years	11%	63%	13%	7%	3%	0%	0%	2%
9 to 11 years	12%	61%	10%	9%	3%	0%	1%	3%
12 to 14 years	7%	60%	3%	3%	10%	2%	8%	7%
15 to 17 years	5%	55%	1%	0%	10%	7%	12%	9%
Race								
African American	9%	57%	13%	4%	5%	2%	5%	5%
White	9%	58%	12%	4%	6%	2%	4%	5%
Gender								
Female	9%	57%	12%	4%	6%	2%	5%	5%
Male	10%	58%	13%	4%	5%	2%	4%	5%
Total	9%	58%	13%	4%	5%	2%	5%	5%

Table L: Exits Destinations from First Spell, by Age, Race and Gender, 2000-2009

Data Analysis

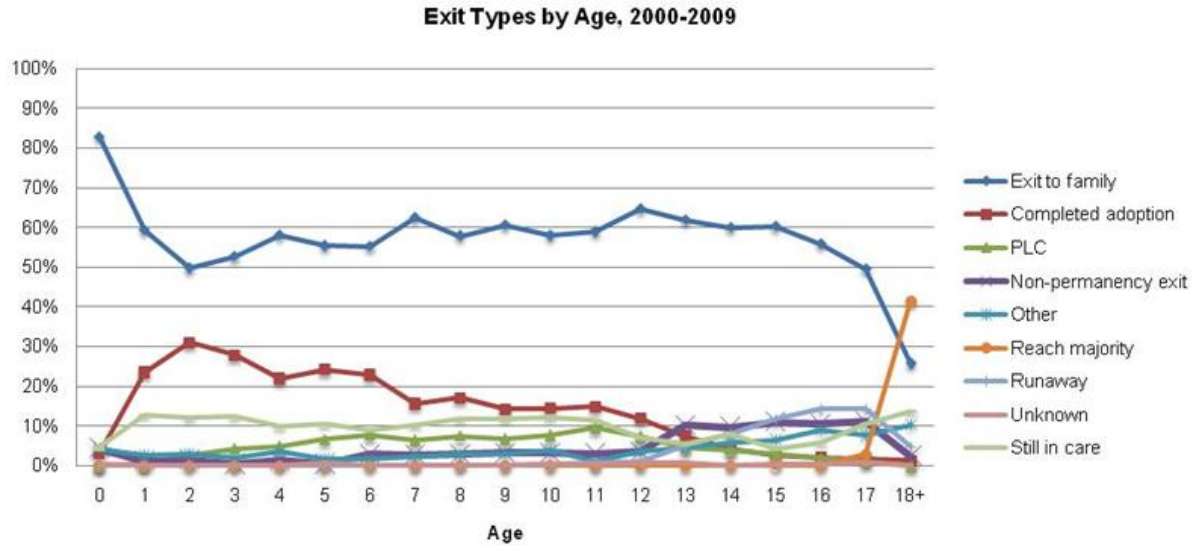


Figure 13: Exit Types as a Percentage of Exits from Last Spells, by Age at Entry, 2000-2009

Thirty percent of youth reentered care after exiting their first placement spell. For these youth, the exit destination following their first spell may differ from the exit destination following their last stay in out-of-home care. Examining the distribution of exits from last spells more accurately captures where youth may reside after their experiences in out-of-home placement truly end. Table M compares overall exit destinations from first spells to overall exits from last spells.

Table M also reveals that the percentage of youth still in care increases by almost 6 percent. This decreases the potential number of youth exiting to all other destinations. The largest decline is in the percentage of youth returning to their families. This decreases by 9 percentage points to 49 percent of youth. In contrast, the percentage of youth exiting to adoption increases by 3 percentage points, and the percent exiting to PLC increases as well. The number of youth aging out also increases, while the number exiting to non-permanent exits decreases. These numbers indicate that as children experience multiple placements, they are less likely to exit to their families and more likely to exit to other permanent exits or age out.

Data Analysis

	Still in Care	Return to Family	Adoption	PLC	Non-Permanent	Reach Majority	Runaway	Other
Exits from First Spell	9%	58%	13%	4%	5%	2%	5%	5%
Exits from Last Spell	15%	49%	16%	5%	3%	4%	4%	5%

Table M: Exit Destinations from Last Spell, 2000-2009

Tables N and O are designed to examine the impact of placement experience on exit destination. These charts answer questions such as: do youth placed in kinship care return to their families more or less frequently than youth not placed in foster care with a relative or kin?

If the percent of youth exiting to positive exits (return to family, adoption and PLC) are combined for each placement type, youth primarily placed in foster care exit to positive placements most frequently (81 percent), with high numbers both exiting to their family and adoption. Youth primarily placed in kinship care also have high rates of positive exits (76 percent), but many more youth are also still in care. Youth primarily in congregate care have the highest percentage returning to their family, but very few youth exit into other positive exits. Many of these youth have non-permanent exits and run away. The highest rates of runaway and reaching majority are among youth primarily in independent living and youth who have no primary placement.

	Still in Care	Return to Family	Adoption	PLC	Non-Permanent	Reach Majority	Runaway	Other
Congregate Care	3%	64%	2%	0%	12%	2%	11%	8%
Foster Care	10%	60%	20%	1%	3%	1%	1%	4%
Kinship Care	13%	53%	13%	10%	2%	2%	3%	4%
Independent Living	3%	47%	3%	0%	10%	15%	14%	8%
No Primary Placement	11%	40%	7%	0%	9%	12%	13%	10%
Total	9%	58%	13%	4%	5%	2%	5%	5%

Table N: Exit Destinations from First Spell, by Primary Placement Type, 2000-2009

Data Analysis

Another factor that may impact a child's exit is the amount of time spent in care. Table O displays the percentage of youth exiting to each destination based on the amount of time spent in care. The percentages are a bit skewed since a larger percentage of youth in care greater than six months are still in care. Nevertheless, there are distinct differences in exit destination based on how long a child was in care. Children with lengths of stay less than six months return home at very high rates. At the same time, many of the short term exits are also to non-permanent exits or runaways.

The longer a child is in care, the less likely they are to return home. After 18 months, over one-third of youth exit to adoption, and the percentage of youth exiting to PLC increases significantly as well. As time increases, the percentage of exits to non-permanency and runaways falls.

	Still in Care	Return to Family	Adoption	PLC	Non-Permanent	Reach Majority	Runaway	Other
Under 1 month	0%	76%	1%	0%	8%	0%	8%	6%
1 to 2 months	1%	82%	1%	0%	7%	0%	4%	5%
3 to 5 months	7%	74%	1%	0%	7%	1%	5%	6%
6 to 11 months	15%	67%	3%	0%	5%	2%	4%	5%
12 to 17 months	19%	52%	12%	2%	4%	3%	4%	5%
18 to 35 months	13%	23%	37%	13%	3%	4%	3%	4%
3 years or longer	23%	14%	36%	11%	2%	6%	3%	4%
Total	9%	58%	13%	4%	5%	2%	5%	5%

Table O: Exit Destinations from First Spell, by Duration of Spell, 2000-2009

Figure 14 displays the percentage of youth exiting to the three positive exit destinations by months in care as a percentage of all exits occurring within 36 months. The chart reflects the figures listed above, with the percentage returning to family beginning to decline at about 12 months – the same time that adoptions begin to increase. Adoptions outpace returns to home for youth exiting care after 21 months. Exits to PLC begin to increase at 21 months as well.

Data Analysis

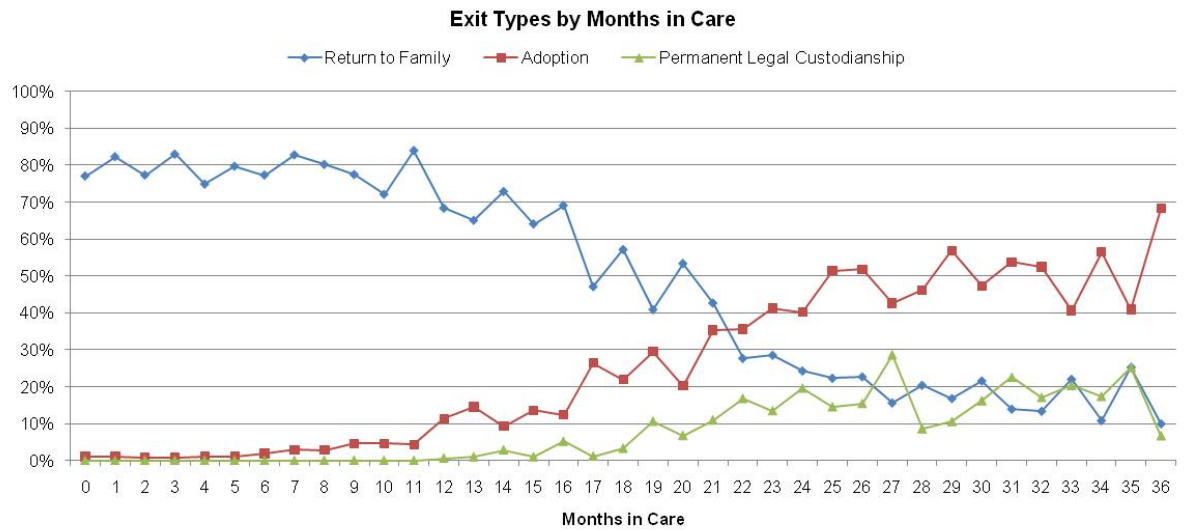


Figure 14: Exit Destinations from First Spell, by Months in Care, 2000-2009

Reentry

While every effort is made to ensure a safe homecoming for a child leaving care, sometimes children do return to care again. Figure 15 displays the percentage of youth experiencing each number of total placement spells. Each spell number represents the number of separate times a child enters out-of-home placement. It does not represent moves between placement settings. Nearly 70 percent of children first entering an out-of-home placement in 2000-2009 exited to a permanent setting and did not reenter care. Ninety-five percent of youth experienced three entries into placement or fewer. Only rarely are children placed more than four times.

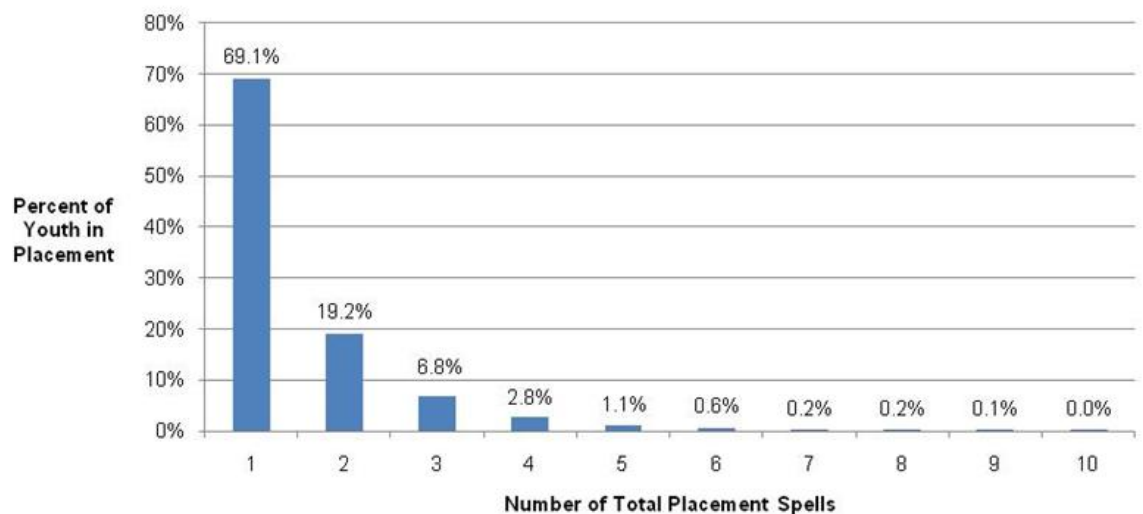


Figure 15: Number of Total Placement Spells Experienced by Youth, 2000-2009

Data Analysis

Table P shows the total number of placement spells experienced by youth by their demographic breakdowns. Very few youth first entering care under the age of 8 had more than three placement spells. Older youth experienced the most spells: half of children entering care between the ages of 12 and 14 had more than one placement spell, and 14 percent experienced four or more placements.

A higher percentage of African American youth than white youth experienced multiple placement spells, with about six percent fewer youth experiencing only one spell. Males and females experienced two and three spells at about the same rate. However, females were more likely than males to experience four or more placements.

	Number of Total Placement Spells					
	1	2	3	4	5	6+
Age at Entry						
Less than 1 year	77%	17%	4%	1.4%	0.4%	0.1%
1 to 2 years	76%	19%	4%	0.4%	0.3%	0.1%
3 to 5 years	78%	17%	4%	0.7%	0.0%	0.2%
6 to 8 years	77%	16%	4%	1.4%	0.6%	0.5%
9 to 11 years	69%	19%	6%	3.6%	0.7%	1.2%
12 to 14 years	51%	22%	13%	7.3%	3.4%	3.4%
15 to 17 years	66%	21%	8%	2.8%	1.0%	0.8%
Race						
African American	66%	20%	8%	3.2%	1.2%	1.2%
White	73%	18%	5%	2.2%	0.9%	0.8%
Gender						
Female	68%	19%	7%	3.2%	1.3%	1.4%
Male	70%	19%	7%	2.4%	0.8%	0.6%

Table P: Total Number of Placement Spells, by Age, Race and Gender, 2000-2009

Table Q examines the percentage of youth who reenter care by the number of placement spells experienced. Thirty-one percent of the total population exit their first spell, and then reenter. All of these youth experience a second spell of placement. Of these, 38 percent exit and reenter to a third spell, and so on.

As the number of placement spells experienced by a youth increases, so does his/her chances of experiencing another reentry following an exit from care. The 31 percent of youth who reenter after their first spell are a particularly vulnerable subset of the population, as their chances for permanency and stability decrease with each reentry. The percent of youth returning to care peaks at the seventh spell, with over half of youth returning to an eighth placement spell. Despite this tendency, it is important to remember that the number of youth experiencing greater than three placements is a very small segment of the population in care.

Data Analysis

Spell Number ¹⁰	Count	Reenter
1	10362	31%
2	6400	38%
3	3633	42%
4	2020	42%
5	1065	49%
6	624	43%
7	315	58%
8	208	27%
9	63	14%
10	10	0%

Table Q: Number and Percent of Reentries by Spell, 2000-2009

The rest of this section examines trends in reentry patterns for the 31 percent of youth who reentered care at some point between 2000 and 2009, focusing on the initial reentry after exiting from their first placement spell. Tables R-U each display several reentry statistics. The statistics are based on entry cohorts, so not all youth exited during the observation period. For this reason, percentages of reentries are provided based on both entries and exits.

The percentages of youth reentering from positive exits are provided in each table. This statistic is important because a reentry from a positive exit (return to family, adoption or PLC) is less desirable than a reentry from a non-permanent exit. For example, if a youth runs away from care, a return to care is viewed as a positive reentry. In contrast, a youth returning from a positive exit is coming back into care after exiting to what is intended to be a permanent exit for the child into a safe environment. Such a reentry is of greater concern to child welfare professionals because it may indicate that there was a need for continued or more powerful services, or that the family was not yet ready to ensure the continued safety of the child.

¹⁰ Figures include new placement spells experienced by youth whose first, and possibly subsequent, placement spell(s) occurred prior to the year 2000. For this reason, the percentage of youth reentering from spell one may not equal the number of youth experiencing a second spell, and so on.

Data Analysis

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Entries to First Spell	1010	863	1090	1229	1159	1162	1167	916	905	861
Total Exits	1004	861	1076	1217	1132	1127	1063	797	654	486
As percent of all entries	99%	100%	99%	99%	98%	97%	91%	87%	72%	56%
Total Reentries	357	331	400	444	383	381	347	248	212	97
As percent of all entries	35%	38%	37%	36%	33%	33%	30%	27%	23%	11%
As percent of all exits	36%	38%	37%	36%	34%	34%	33%	31%	32%	20%
Reenter Within 1 Year	258	251	287	346	293	297	283	208	201	97
As percent of all entries	26%	29%	26%	28%	25%	26%	24%	23%	22%	11%
As percent of all exits	26%	29%	27%	28%	26%	26%	27%	26%	31%	20%
As percent of positive exits	20%	19%	20%	28%	23%	23%	23%	18%	16%	6%

Table R: Reentries into Care after First Spell, by Year, 2000-2009

Tables S-U examine these same figures, but by age, race and primary placement type. The percentage of youth reentering care after exit is highest among older youth, including the percentage that reenters within one year. The percentage of children less than one year old reentering care within one year is higher than the percentage for other young children, even though the overall percentage reentering care is similar to that of other children under age eight.

Table T shows that there are small racial differences between African American and white children in reentries; African American children who have exited care reenter placement in higher numbers than their white counterparts (37 percent vs. 30 percent); this trend is even more pronounced for African American children whose first spell duration was one to five months long.

Children who were primarily placed in congregate care are more likely to reenter care than children placed in foster or kinship care (see Table U). Youth primarily placed in congregate care exited and then reentered care within one year at double the rate of youth in foster or kinship care (39 percent versus 19 percent). Youth without a primary placement also reentered in very high numbers.

Data Analysis

	Less than 1 year	1 to 2 years	3 to 5 years	6 to 8 years	9 to 11 years	12 to 14 years	15 to 17 years
Entries to first spell	1711	1130	1220	1044	1025	1867	2359
Total Exits	1524	990	1091	925	907	1736	2239
As percent of all entries	89%	88%	89%	89%	89%	93%	95%
Total Reentries	402	267	267	239	313	917	794
As percent of all exits	26%	27%	25%	26%	35%	53%	36%
Reentry Within 1 Year	312	191	185	161	206	735	730
As percent of all entries	18%	17%	15%	15%	20%	39%	31%
As percent of all exits	21%	19%	17%	17%	23%	42%	33%
As percent of positive exits	18%	19%	16%	15%	19%	33%	26%

Table S: Reentries into Care after First Spell, by Age at Entry, 2000-2009

	African American	White
Entries to first spell	6379	3790
Total Exits	5805	3450
As percent of all entries	91%	91%
Total Reentries	2138	1032
As percent of all exits	37%	30%
Reenter Within 1 Year	1653	841
As percent of all entries	26%	22%
As percent of all exits	29%	24%
As percent of positive exits	23%	19%

Table T: Reentries into Care after First Spell, by Race, 2000-2009

	Congregate Care	Foster Care	Kinship Care	Independent Living	No Primary Placement
Entries to first spell	2561	3790	3675	151	185
Total Exits	2496	3424	3186	146	165
As percent of all entries	98%	90%	87%	97%	89%
Total Reentries	1175	1007	915	33	70
As percent of all exits	47%	29%	29%	23%	42%
Reenter Within 1 Year	1005	718	713	27	58
As percent of all entries	39%	19%	19%	18%	31%
As percent of all exits	40%	21%	22%	19%	35%
As percent of positive exits	32%	18%	19%	15%	25%

Table U: Reentries into Care after First Spell, by Primary Placement Type, 2000-2009

The amount of time a child spends in care may relate to their likelihood of reentering care. Tables V-X examine the percentage of youth within each category of length of stay who reenter care. The first table examines how overall reentry patterns changed from 2000-2009. Reentries are then broken out by age and race.

Unlike previous tables, Table V utilizes exit cohorts to capture the years in which youth exited from care. The data is represented this way here to better capture the population at risk of reentering care, and how the permanency of exits has changed over time. Despite this approach, the 2009 data remains partially censored because youth exiting care after March 16, 2009 did not have a full year to reenter before the window of observation closed. This table also demonstrates how permanency varies with the length of stay in care.

Overall, reentries within one year of exit have been lower in recent years than they were in 2000-2005. The percentage of youth reentering care based on their length of stay fluctuates year by year. On average, the highest rates of reentry often occur for youth experiencing a length of stay of three to five months. Rates for youth in care 6-11 months are also relatively high, and have been higher since 2004 than in 2000-2003. At the same time, no rates for any group have exceeded 40 percent since 2007, as they did from 2001-2006.

Youth of all ages reenter care most frequently if their first placement spell was three to eleven months long. For children exiting care before they are 12 months old, reentry rates are particularly high if the length of stay was less than five months. The same is true for youth ages 12 to 14 years old. Youth ages 15 to 17 years old are unique in that their rates of reentry do not decline with longer stays in care. Greater than one-third of 15- to 17-year-olds reenter regardless of how long they were in care.

The percentage of youth reentering care is greater for African Americans than whites, regardless of the duration of the first spell. The disparity is greatest at a length of stay of three to five months, when the percentage reentering peaks for African American youth at 54 percent. The percentage reentering care is highest for white children who were in care for one to two months, at 40 percent.

Data Analysis

Duration	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009*
Under 1 month	33%	34%	34%	34%	28%	32%	23%	32%	36%	24%
1 to 2 months	33%	33%	40%	41%	37%	39%	34%	32%	36%	22%
3 to 5 months	38%	52%	37%	43%	44%	35%	48%	30%	38%	21%
6 to 11 months	31%	28%	31%	29%	37%	45%	37%	36%	39%	17%
12 to 17 months	37%	25%	18%	16%	25%	24%	25%	19%	22%	13%
18 to 35 months	11%	12%	12%	15%	11%	11%	9%	11%	11%	10%
3 years or longer	12%	11%	10%	12%	9%	14%	7%	16%	8%	13%
Total	26%	26%	26%	29%	28%	28%	24%	24%	25%	17%

* 2009 data is partially censored because youth exiting care after March 16, 2009 did not have a full year to reenter before the window of observation closed.

Table V: Reentries within One Year of Exit from First Spell, by Duration of Spell and Exit Year, 2000-2009 (exit cohort)

Duration	Less than 1 year	1 to 2 years	3 to 5 years	6 to 8 years	9 to 11 years	12 to 14 years	15 to 17 years	18 and over
Under 1 month	45%	30%	29%	27%	35%	55%	38%	20%
1 to 2 months	48%	43%	32%	30%	41%	59%	44%	0%
3 to 5 months	49%	45%	39%	45%	42%	61%	48%	0%
6 to 11 months	33%	45%	29%	36%	46%	53%	45%	2%
12 to 17 months	.	17%	25%	21%	25%	38%	40%	2%
18 to 35 months	.	8%	9%	14%	17%	27%	42%	6%
3 years or longer	.	.	2%	4%	5%	20%	36%	6%
Total	45%	26%	20%	24%	30%	50%	42%	5%

Table W: Total Reentries into Care, by Age at Exit and Duration of First Spell, 2000-2009

Duration	African American	White
Under 1 month	42%	36%
1 to 2 months	48%	40%
3 to 5 months	54%	38%
6 to 11 months	43%	38%
12 to 17 months	30%	21%
18 to 35 months	18%	13%
3 years or longer	12%	10%
Total	37%	30%

Table X: Total Reentries into Care, by Race and Duration of First Spell, 2000-2009

Data Analysis

Table Y illustrates not only reentry rates, but also how the length of time between exit and reentry varies with the age of a child at the time of exit. It examines how age impacts how quickly a child may reenter care. Most youth reenter care rather quickly. Over one-fourth of youth reentering care do so in less than two months. For older youth, half reenter in less than two months. The percentage of youth reentering care over 18 months after exit shows that children are still susceptible to reentry even after a significant amount of time passes. This is particularly true for youth exiting between the ages of three and eleven, with well over ten percent of reentries occurring over three years after exit from the first placement spell.

	Less than 1 year	1 to 2 years	3 to 5 years	6 to 8 years	9 to 11 years	12 to 14 years	15 to 17 years
Exits	658	1234	1286	985	881	1588	2404
Reentries	296	323	263	235	261	793	1010
As percent of exits	45%	26%	20%	24%	30%	50%	42%
Time Between Exit and Reentry, as percent of reentries							
Under 1 month	6%	2%	3%	10%	8%	17%	23%
1 to 2 months	28%	28%	20%	23%	23%	25%	31%
3 to 5 months	21%	23%	28%	21%	15%	19%	21%
6 to 11 months	22%	21%	19%	16%	16%	17%	16%
12 to 17 months	7%	8%	5%	8%	7%	9%	6%
18 to 35 months	8%	11%	14%	9%	15%	12%	3%
3 years or longer	7%	7%	11%	13%	17%	2%	0%

Table Y: Reentries and Time to Reentry by Exit Age, 2000-2009

Table Z examines the percentage of youth who exited to each type of care that reenter. The three positive exit types that provide permanency for children include returning to their family, adoption and PLC. Figures for reentry from adoption are unavailable due to the way youth are identified in the data. Once a child is adopted, any future return to care appears as a new entry since he/she is part of a new family unit. For this reason, their reentry rates cannot be examined here, but of the remaining positive exits, PLC is more permanent for youth than returning home. However, the majority of youth do return home, and of those, 36 percent reenter into out-of-home care. Expectedly, youth who ran away or exited to other non-permanent destinations reentered care at very high rates. Overall, 31 percent of youth who first entered care in 2000-2009 exited and then reentered into care.

Data Analysis

	Total Exits	Reenter
Return to Family	5967	36%
Adoption	1304	-
PLC	395	7%
Non-permanency exit	555	76%
Reach majority	204	3%
Runaway	464	67%
Other/Unknown	528	44%
Still in Care	945	
Total	10362	31%

Table Z: Exit Destinations from First Spell and Percent Reentering Care, 2000-2009

As with many placement experiences, the chances of a child reentering care from each type of placement varies with age. Table AA displays the percentage of youth who exited to each destination that reenter care. Youth who return home reenter care most frequently if they returned home as an infant or as a 12- to 14-year-old. Youth reenter from non-permanent exits at high rates across all ages.

	Less than 1 year	1 to 2 years	3 to 5 years	6 to 8 years	9 to 11 years	12 to 14 years	15 to 17 years
<i>Return to Family</i>	45%	39%	30%	30%	35%	48%	32%
Adoption	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
PLC	.	0%	4%	6%	8%	11%	11%
Non-permanent	83%	67%	73%	90%	78%	89%	70%
Reach Majority	.	.	.	.	.	.	5%
Runaway	.	.	.	.	100%	88%	64%
Other/Unknown	48%	29%	26%	26%	43%	66%	51%

Table AA: Total Reentries into Care from First Spell, by Exit Type and Exit Age, 2000-2009

CHILDREN WITH MULTIPLE NEEDS

In order to holistically serve the needs of children in out-of-home care, it is useful to examine what other services they access (e.g. mental health services, government entitlement programs, juvenile probation services, etc.), and to what degree their service utilization differs from youth not experiencing an out-of-home placement. In Table BB, cross-system service usage is illustrated for all children active in CYF in 2009 and for children in an out-of-home placement in 2009.

There are distinct differences in service utilization and eligibility between the two groups of youth. The numbers reveal that children in placement accessed mental health services at nearly double the rate of the overall active CYF population. They also accessed drug and alcohol treatment more frequently and were far more likely to be involved with juvenile probation.

Youth in placement were enrolled in most entitlement programs through the Department of Public Welfare at lower rates than those of other youth served by CYF. The difference was greatest for food stamps but was also present for Supplemental Security Income and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. The exception is utilization of Medical services, for which youth in placement had an enrollment rate 33 percentage points higher than the total child welfare population, at 79 percent.

	All Children Active in CYF	Children in Placement
Mental Health	21%	41%
Early Intervention	3%	7%
Drug and Alcohol*	6%	19%
Family Support Centers	5%	7%
Housing & Homelessness	2%	3%
Intellectual Disability	0.6%	1%
Department of Public Welfare Assistance		
Food Stamps	43%	32%
Other Medical	46%	79%
Supplemental Security Income	15%	12%
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families	20%	16%
Juvenile Probation*	14%	22%
Juvenile Probation Placement*	6%	10%

* Percentages of youth ages 12 and older

Table BB: Involvement in Other Systems for CYF-Active Youth, 2009

Conclusions

This report examined the dynamics of the foster care system in Allegheny County between 2000 through 2009, examining caseload sizes; demographics of children receiving services; entries to, exits from, and reentries into care; placement data including type of placement, length of placement, primary placement type and number of placements; and, community data indicating the distribution of out-of-home placements in the county and communities with high child welfare usage rates.

Future reports will update this analysis as well as dig deeper into particular aspects of the child welfare system in Allegheny County. For example, future work will examine the placement dynamics at the Regional Office level and at the contracted placement provider level. Forthcoming work will document and provide data to describe how often and in what situations referrals to the child welfare system become active cases. Another series of reports will describe what efforts are in place to prevent child injury and fatality. Finally, future work will examine the impact of the child welfare system on educational outcomes. All of these reports will be available on our website.

