

DATA BRIEF: Youth Who Ran Away from Allegheny County Child Welfare Placements, 2016

Children in child welfare out-of-home placements run away for many reasons. National research suggests that they may be missing their family of origin or yearning for autonomy and normalcy. Other factors such as child's age, gender, race, pattern of running prior to placement, and placement type are all associated with risk of running.¹

1 Courtney, et al. "Youth Who Run Away from Out-of-Home Care." Chapin Hall, 2005, [www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/publications/ChapinHallDocument\(2\)_6.pdf](http://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/publications/ChapinHallDocument(2)_6.pdf)

2 New data entry policies were introduced in late 2016 to ensure that runaways are entered into KIDS in a more timely manner; see the final section of the report for a description of the new guidelines.

3 A separate data system, the Home and Community Services Information System (HCSIS), also offers data on runaways. Providers enter into HCSIS episodes of run longer than 30 minutes. HCSIS data is somewhat incomplete; not all providers are diligent about entering runaway data and, in addition, HCSIS does not require that providers enter the end date of the runaway episode. In 2016, 902 episodes of run were entered into HCSIS on 202 clients. Twenty-five of the 902 episodes and 19 of the 202 clients were able to be matched with KIDS data.

4 Not included in the total are 12 children who ran from their Juvenile Probation Office (JPO) placement while also having active cases with child welfare; two of these 12 children ran twice, bringing the total runaway episodes by dually adjudicated children in JPO placement to 14.

This data brief examines runaway episodes for children in Allegheny County's child welfare system. Demographics of the children involved, children's placement types prior to run, and length of runaway episodes are analyzed.

Data was pulled from DHS's child welfare Key Information and Demographics System (KIDS) on February 1, 2017. At the time of analysis, runaway episodes seven days or longer were required to be entered into KIDS; runs of shorter duration were not required to be entered, but were sometimes recorded in the data system.² Data about runaway episodes shorter than seven days are included below, but likely do not reflect the total number of short-length runaways.³

Runaway episode: A child's willful and knowing absence from his or her out-of-home placement without the knowledge or consent of the person(s) responsible for the child's welfare

RUNAWAY EPISODES

In 2016, 73 children had at least one runaway episode from a child welfare placement recorded in the KIDS system.⁴ This represents three percent of all children and nine percent of all children ages 12 through 18 who were in placement in 2016.

Most of the 73 children who ran away did so only once, though 24 ran away two times or more. The total number of runaway episodes (which adds up all runaway attempts, including those of children who ran away more than once) was 106 (or three percent of the 3,854 placements⁵ that occurred during 2016). The average number of runaway episodes per child was one and a half. The greatest number of episodes occurring in 2016 for any one child was five.

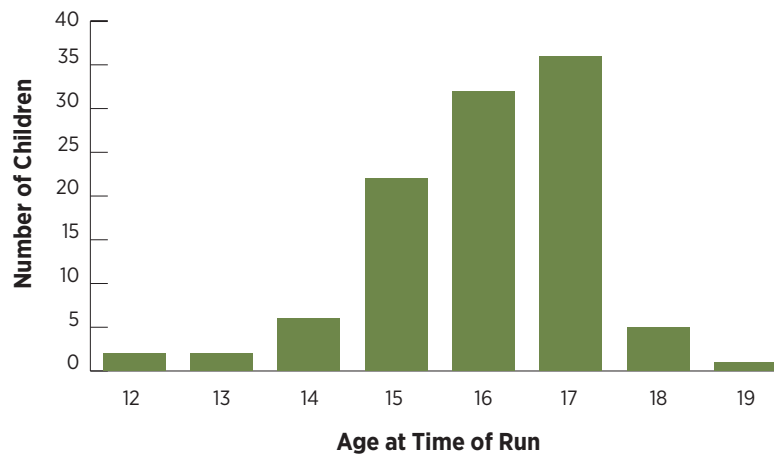
5 Total number of placements includes any placement that began prior to 2016 and continued into 2016, as well as those placements that began in 2016. It also includes multiple placements per child, if applicable (e.g., if a child was placed in home foster care in June and moved to congregate care in July, each placement would be counted separately).

6 While most youth over the age of 18 are considered adults and no longer active with child welfare, there were six runaway episodes by 18- and 19-year-olds. These youth were considered to have run away during active cases because they were either involved with Juvenile Probation or had chosen to remain active with child welfare despite being old enough to age out of the system.

Demographics

All the children who ran away from their placement in 2016 were between the ages of 12 and 19, with over half of the runs completed by children 16 or 17 years old.⁶

FIGURE 1: Number of Runaway Episodes by Age of Child (duplicated count; n=106)



Black children represented 74 percent of children involved in runaway incidents (Table 1). In contrast, black children accounted for 46 percent of all children who spent time in care during 2016.

TABLE 1: Race of Children Who Ran Away from Their Placement

RACE	COUNT OF CHILDREN WHO RAN AWAY (UNDUPLICATED)	PERCENT OF RUNAWAY POPULATION	COUNT OF CHILDREN IN CARE IN 2016 (UNDUPLICATED)	PERCENT OF POPULATION IN PLACEMENT
Black	54	74%	1,156	46%
White	10	14%	837	33%
Unknown Race	4	6%	206	8%
Two or More Races	4	6%	148	6%
Other Single Race	1	1%	162	6%
Total	73	100%	2,509	100%

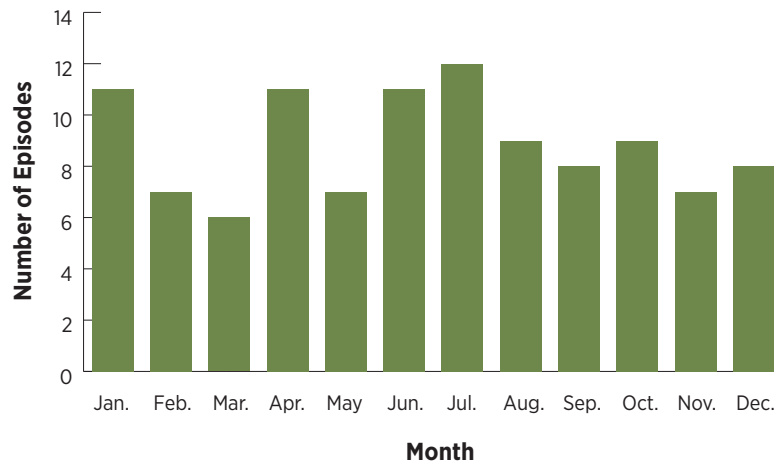
Fifty-eight percent of the children who ran away were female. Among all children who spent time in placement in 2016, 49 percent were female, making females slightly overrepresented in the group of children who ran from placement in 2016.

Combining race and gender, the largest groups of children who ran away were black females (29 children, 40%) and black males (25 children, 34%). Overall, black females and males also represented the largest groups in placement (553 females, 22%; 601 males, 24%), though both groups were overrepresented in the group of children who ran away.

Month of Runaway Episodes

From June through August, there were 32 episodes, compared to 24 for January through March. For each individual month, the runaway rate was less than one percent of all current placements.

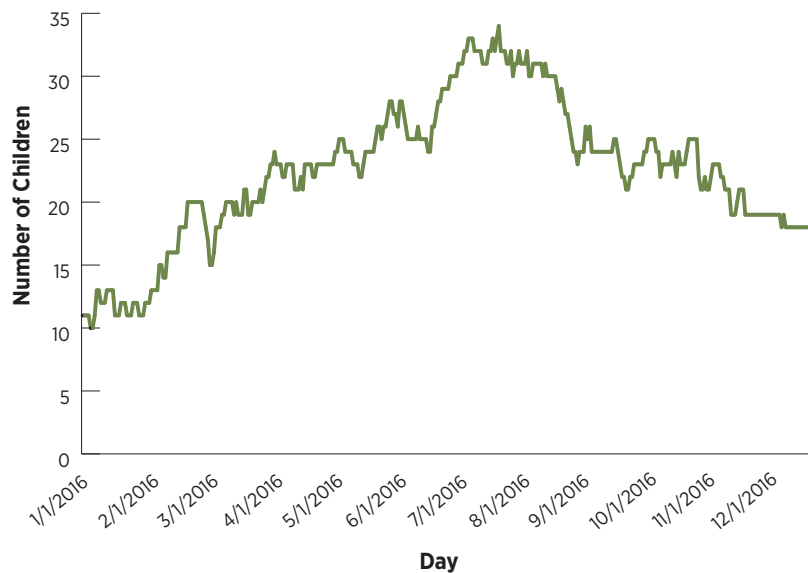
FIGURE 2: Runaway Episodes by Month in Which They Began



Total Number of Children on the Run per Day

The average number of children on the run on a given day during 2016 was 22, with a minimum of 10 and a maximum of 34. These data include children who ran away prior to January 1, 2016, and were still on the run as of that date.

FIGURE 3: Children on the Run per Day



Placement Type Prior to Runaway Episode

Children placed in congregate care had the highest number of runaway episodes (52 episodes of 106 total; see **Table 2**, below). This is striking because congregate care is among the less utilized placement types (37% of teen placements in 2016 were in congregate care) but had nearly half of all run episodes. Among the 643 congregate care placements, there were 52 run episodes, or eight runs for every 100 placements. Although a few children in congregate care ran away repeatedly, generally the rate of multiple incidents for children running from congregate care is comparable to the overall profile.

Congregate care: Out-of-home placement in a non-family setting such as a group home or residential facility

Kinship care: Home-based placement with a relative or friend of the family

Independent living: Scattered site or semi-supervised apartments or shared homes for older youth

Foster care: Home-based placement by a trained caregiver

Kinship care had the second highest number of run episodes with 27 (25% of total runs), but it was also the care type with the largest total number of placements. Kinship placements accounted for 56 percent of all placements in 2016. Among the 1,862 placements in kinship care, the 27 runaways represented only one percent of kinship placements.

There were 11 runaway episodes from foster care out of 1,120 foster care placements in 2016, a rate of only one run per 100 placements.

Independent living settings, which had only nine run episodes, had the highest rate of runs from the placement type (nine runs per 100 placements) due to the relatively small number of youth in that placement type.

Run episodes per 100 placements were also calculated for only those children ages 12–18 (rather than looking at children of all ages in placement, who are described in the paragraphs above). When looking only at children who were 12–18 when their placement ended (or at the end of 2016 if their placement had not ended), children in independent living and congregate care had the highest rates of run (12 and nine run episodes, respectively, per 100 placements). Children ages 12–18 in kinship care and foster care had fewer run episodes per 100 placements (five per 100 in kinship care and four per 100 in foster care).

6 Table includes only those placement types for which sufficient data was available. Not included in Table 2 are run episodes from hospital intake physicals (three runs) and runs for which placement type could not be determined (four runs). Placement types from which there were no runs have also been omitted (alternative placements, medical facilities, secure residential facilities and residential treatment facilities). As a result, total run episodes and total placements in table are not equal to totals reported above.

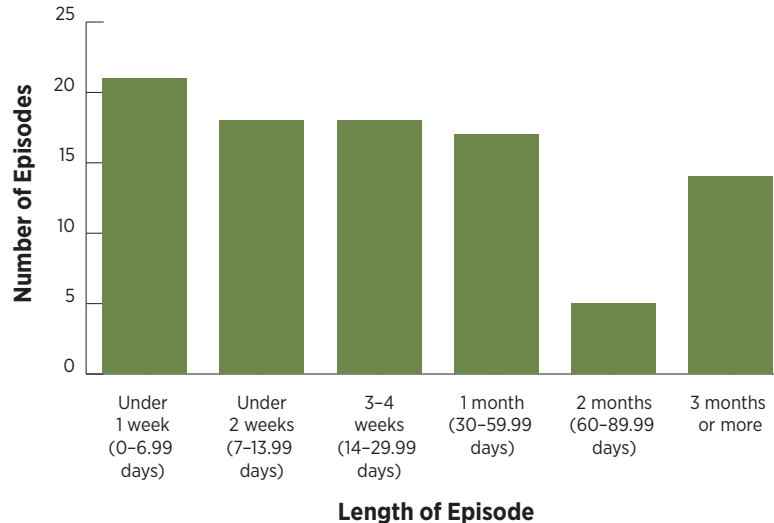
TABLE 2: Runaway Episodes by Placement Type⁶

PLACEMENT TYPE	NUMBER OF RUNAWAY EPISODES	NUMBER OF PLACEMENTS	RUN EPISODES PER 100 PLACEMENTS	NUMBER OF PLACEMENTS AGES 12-18	RUN EPISODES PER 100 PLACEMENTS, AGES 12-18
Congregate Care	52	643	8	586	9
Kinship Care	27	1,862	1	525	5
Foster Care	11	1,120	1	261	4
Independent Living	9	101	9	74	12
Total	99	3,726	3	1,446	7

Length of Runaway Episodes

Of the 106 runaway episodes during 2016, 93 had ended by February 1, 2017 and 13 were ongoing. The following chart illustrates the distribution of runaway episode lengths for the 93 instances that had ended. As described above, placement providers are required to terminate a placement in the KIDS system when a child has been gone for seven or more days; however, caseworkers or providers will sometimes enter a runaway into KIDS prior to the seventh day. Because there is no requirement to terminate a placement until the seventh day, it is likely that the count of runaway episodes lasting under one week is artificially low.

FIGURE 4: Length of Runaway Episodes



Among those children who ran away in 2016 and were still on the run as of February 1, 2017, 11 had been gone for at least three months.

POLICY UPDATE

New policies and procedures for missing and runaway youth were enacted in late 2016. Under the new policy, runaway episodes entered into the KIDS system are now referred to a private investigator. In addition, when the child returns, he or she completes the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) screening tool, which helps identify runaways who may be victims of sexual trafficking.

Changes were also made in the KIDS system to ensure that runaway episodes are entered in a timely manner. A child is now considered to be missing or on the run when they are gone for at least four hours or when evidence suggests that they have run away. Because of the time limit of four hours, some runaway episodes may still not be entered immediately, but any child missing for over four hours must have a CSEC screening completed upon return. Initial analyses since this policy change have indicated that there has been an increase in the number of episodes of runaway episodes entered into the data system. DHS will continue to improve data collection related to youth victims of sexual trafficking and evaluate its response when sexual trafficking crimes are suspected.

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