

The Department of Human Services (DHS) is mandated by law to protect children under the age of 18 from abuse and neglect. If DHS finds that the child cannot continue to reside safely in the home, an out-of-home placement may be necessary. Whenever possible, out-of-home placements are in homes of relatives or friends of the family (known as kinship care) or in foster homes. Less often, children are placed in congregate care (group homes or residential treatment facilities). At the end of an out-of-home placement, DHS aims to reunite children with their families whenever possible. If a child cannot return home, DHS works to identify other permanent options.

DHS conducted an analysis to examine long-term child welfare placement trends in Allegheny County from 2008 through 2017,¹ representing the most recent 10-year period of longitudinal data available. Key findings from this period are presented here.

Number of Children in Placement

↓ 38%



The number of children in Allegheny County child welfare out-of-home placements **declined by 38%, from 2,165 children to 1,340**. This means that, over the 10-year period, **discharges from care were higher on average than admissions into care**, although both admissions and discharges have declined.

Use of Kinship Care ↑ 113%

The rate of use of kinship care **doubled from 30% of first placements to 64%**.



Proportion of Black Children in Placement

↓ 13%

The proportion of children entering their first placement who were Black **declined from 48% to 42%**. Despite the decrease, Black children are still disproportionately represented in placement — Black children comprised only 18% of Allegheny County's under-18 population in 2017.²

¹ For an interactive dashboard of child welfare trends, see [here](#). For analysis of child welfare system trends in 2000–2009, see [here](#).

² American Community Survey 2017 5-year Estimate.



Time in Placement ↑ 122%

There was a **122% increase in the median value of time spent in placement** — from 4.6 months in 2008 to 10.2 months for entries taking place in 2016 (the most recent year for which exits could be followed for an entire year). This is likely related to the system's trend toward higher rates of entry for younger children as compared to teenagers. The threshold for household safety prior to reunification is higher for younger children, leading to longer placement lengths. Additionally, younger children are more likely to be adopted or to exit to Permanent Legal Custodianship (PLC) than teenagers; adoption and PLC require a lengthy legal process and contribute to the increase in time spent in placement.

Exits from Care to a Non-Permanent Destination ↓ 38%

The proportion of children who exited placement to a non-permanent setting (such as juvenile probation, living with relatives or running away) **decreased by 38%, from 29% of exits to 18% of exits**.

EXIT

Re-Entries into Care ↓ 43%

The proportion of children who exited placement to a permanent setting, and re-entered care within a year, **decreased by 43%, from 37% of exits in 2008, to 21% of exits in 2016** (the most recent year for which exits could be followed for an entire year).

