

# Youth Aging Out of the Child Welfare System: Analysis of Outcomes



*January 2020*



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## DEFINITIONS

**DHS:** [Allegheny County] Department of Human Services

**Child Welfare Placement:** Where a child lives when removed from home of origin by the child welfare system; also known as out-of-home placement. Placement settings include kinship foster care (living with family members or friends of the family), traditional foster care, group care, residential treatment and independent living. Placement ends when a youth ages out (exits without a permanent living arrangement) or exits placement to legal permanency in one of the following ways:

- Adoption
- Permanent Legal Custodianship: When a caregiver makes a commitment to accept legal responsibility to raise the child but does not adopt the child, either because the caregiver is unwilling/unable or because the youth does not consent to adoption<sup>1</sup>
- Permanent placement with a fit and willing relative
- Reunification with biological parent(s)

Non-permanent exits include (but are not limited to):

- Exit to a Juvenile Probation placement
- Exit to live with relatives or kin
- Reach age of majority/adulthood
- Run away

**Homelessness:** The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) defines a homeless individual as someone who “lacks housing (without regard to whether the individual is a member of a family), including an individual whose primary residence during the night is a supervised public or private facility (e.g., shelters) that provides temporary living accommodations, and an individual who is a resident in transitional housing.” Youth were considered homeless if they accessed one of the following:

- *Emergency Shelter:* Offers temporary shelter (lodging) for those who are in immediate need of housing and are literally homeless
- *Street outreach:* Provides services related to reaching out to unsheltered homeless individuals and families who are unable or unwilling to access shelter or an appropriate health facility; connecting them with emergency shelter, housing or critical services; and providing them with urgent, non-facility-based care

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<sup>1</sup> [Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center](#)

- *Transitional housing*: Provides short- to longer-term housing, with a time limit of 12, 18 or 24 months depending upon the funding source for the program

**Substance Use Disorder:** A problematic pattern of substance use leading to clinically significant impairment or distress, such as health problems, disability, and/or failure to meet major responsibilities at work, school or home.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.samhsa.gov/disorders/substance-use>

## INTRODUCTION

Research shows that young adults transitioning out of foster care into adulthood fare poorly compared to their peers. The reasons are complex; a history of trauma, unstable education, unpredictable housing and lack of family support during their time in the child welfare system can all contribute to making the transition from childhood to adulthood even more difficult than it would otherwise be. National studies have shown that once youth are out of the child welfare system, they face disparities in a number of areas, including education, employment, homelessness, early parenthood, mental illness, substance use and criminal justice.<sup>3</sup> To support this population, and to improve these outcomes, Allegheny County has invested in programs and services specifically tailored to youth who are transitioning out of foster care.

This report examines outcomes for older youth who had been in a child welfare placement and exited the system during the 11-year period from 2006 through 2016. Outcomes examined include achievement of legal permanency, education, employment, early parenting, homelessness, involvement in mental health and/or substance use disorder treatment, unexpected violent deaths (homicides, overdoses and suicides) and criminal justice involvement. The goal of the analysis was to provide a barometer of those outcomes that affect transition-aged youth, both internal and external to DHS systems, and to record the County resources that have been directed toward this population.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/96101/planning\\_a\\_next\\_generation\\_evaluation\\_agenda\\_for\\_the\\_john\\_h\\_chafee\\_foster\\_care\\_independence\\_program.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/96101/planning_a_next_generation_evaluation_agenda_for_the_john_h_chafee_foster_care_independence_program.pdf). According to the studies discussed in this evaluation, former foster youth are three times more likely to not have a high school diploma or GED by age 26 and also experience higher rates of substance

use disorders. In addition, 12%–22% are homeless for at least one night after emancipating from care, 56% of women and 30% of men were parents by age 21 (more than twice the rate in the general population), and more than half of women and 80% of men had been arrested at least once between ages 17 and 26.

## KEY FINDINGS

The percentage of youth achieving permanency increased from 49% in 2012 to 71% in 2016. For those who did not achieve permanency, length of stay increased, likely due to the fact that in Pennsylvania, youth in child welfare out-of-home placements may choose to stay in the system until age 21. This represents a clear reversal from a decade ago when the vast majority of youth ended their child welfare involvement on their 18th birthday.

The percentage of young women who gave birth decreased by more than half (56% to 39%) from 2006 to 2012, comparing favorably to national data.

The percentage of youth accessing homeless services increased from 2% in 2010 to a high of 16% in 2015, possibly due to an increase in available services.

Mental health issues and substance use are challenges for transition-aged youth. More than half of the youth had accessed substance use disorder services and more than 25% used crisis or inpatient mental health services.

Twenty-six percent of youth were booked in the Allegheny County Jail by age 21 and half were convicted of a crime. The majority of charges were for non-violent offenses often related to substance use.

## METHODOLOGY

The group included in this analysis consists of youth who were in an Allegheny County child welfare placement for at least 30 days at age 16 or older, exited the system from 2006 through 2016, and turned 21 by the time of this analysis (March 28, 2018).<sup>4</sup> In Pennsylvania, youth may choose to leave the child welfare system at age 18 or opt to stay in the system until age 21.<sup>5</sup>

Two data limitations are worth noting. Much of this analysis was conducted using data from the Allegheny County Data Warehouse and is restricted to data about publicly funded services in Allegheny County. Data about private pay- or private insurance-accessed services are not available. Additionally, the youth may be accessing systems and services outside of Allegheny County. As a result, the data almost certainly undercounts involvement in systems such as behavioral health, criminal justice and birth records. Limitations also affect the data that DHS receives from external partners. For example, only those clients active in a system that shares data with DHS are submitted to the PA Department of Labor and Industry to match against unemployment insurance records. The employment analysis is limited to youth active in our Data Warehouse in 2017. For information about the Data Warehouse, go to [Allegheny County Data Warehouse](#).

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<sup>4</sup> Youth still in placement at the time of this analysis were not included. All youth who exited the system from 2006 through 2012 are now age 21 or older; the cohort will grow as the remaining youth turn 21 from 2013 through 2016. Placement records are from Allegheny County child welfare data systems (both the current Key Information and

Demographics System [KIDS] and the prior mainframe) in an extract through 2016 processed by Chapin Hall in accordance with its national data standards and definitions.

<sup>5</sup> The option for youth to remain in the child welfare system past age 18 is provided by Act 91. Source [here](#).

## ANALYSIS

The total number of youth in the group analyzed, older youth who exited a child welfare placement from 2006 through 2016, is 3,029. The group is more female (54%) than male (46%) and is disproportionately Black (62%). This is compared to Allegheny County's population, which is only 13% Black,<sup>6</sup> and the total population of youth in out-of-home placement, which is 44% Black.<sup>7</sup>

**TABLE 1: Number of Youth Who Exited Child Welfare Placement, 2006 through 2016**

YEAR OF CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM EXIT	NUMBER OF YOUTH IN GROUP
2006	399
2007	364
2008	372
2009	332
2010	365
2011	294
2012	255
2013*	260
2014*	203
2015*	115
2016*	70
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,029</b>

\*Youth in the group who exited from 2006 through 2012 had all turned age 21 by the time of analysis. For 2013 through 2016, the cohort will grow as the remaining youth turn 21.

Data were analyzed to measure outcomes in seven areas:

1. Child welfare: legal permanency and length of stay
2. Education
3. Employment
4. Young Parenting
5. Involvement in homeless services

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/>

<sup>7</sup> On July 25, 2018, 44% of the 1,511 children in care were Black.



6. Involvement in behavioral health services (mental health and/or drug & alcohol services)
7. Criminal justice charges and incarcerations
8. Violent deaths (homicides, overdose and suicides)

### Child Welfare: Permanency/Length of Stay

Data were analyzed to examine the number of all youth who exited child welfare placement from 2006 through 2016 with and without achieving legal permanency for the young person. Youth were included in the analysis only if they had been in child welfare placement at age 16 or older and had exited the child welfare system. For this measure only, the group was expanded to include youth who had not yet turned 21 (3,420 instead of 3,029). As is the case with child welfare placement in general, the number of youth in this group has decreased pretty significantly (from 401 in 2006 to 261 in 2016). The decrease could be tied to a programmatic focus on reducing short stays through other interventions, but many other factors could be at play, such as the Pennsylvania law that allows youth to remain in care until the age of 21, and therefore may lead to fewer youth exiting the system without achieving permanency.

**Table 2** shows that 1,251 youth (37% of all youth who exited) left without achieving permanency. For the 2,169 youth who did achieve permanency, the largest percentage reunified with their family. Since 2012, the percentage of youth who achieved permanency has increased from 49% to 71%.

**TABLE 2: Youth Who Aged Out Without Achieving Permanency, 2006 through 2016**

YEAR OF CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM EXIT	NUMBER OF YOUTH WITH PLACEMENT HISTORY AT AGE 16+ WHO EXITED CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM	NUMBER OF YOUTH WHO EXITED CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM WITHOUT PERMANENCY	PERCENTAGE OF YOUTH WHO EXITED CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM WITHOUT PERMANENCY
2006	401	118	29%
2007	371	86	23%
2008	372	82	22%
2009	330	127	38%
2010	361	189	52%
2011	298	129	43%
2012	248	127	51%
2013	280	118	42%
2014	267	113	42%
2015	231	86	37%
2016	261	76	29%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,420</b>	<b>1,251</b>	<b>37%</b>

**Table 3** looks at the 1,251 youth who left without achieving permanency. For that group, the median length of stay was 727 days (or more than two years). The median and mean lengths of stay have fluctuated since 2010, although both showed an overall upward trend, while the total number of youth who aged out has declined by 60% from a high of 189 in 2010 to 76 in 2016. This is likely caused by a focused reduction in the number of short-stayers. Those clients who are being placed are facing more difficult roads to permanency.

**TABLE 3: Length of Stay for Youth Who Aged Out Without Achieving Permanency, 2006 through 2016**

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	FULL PERIOD
Length of Stay (days)	(n=118)	(n=86)	(n=82)	(n=127)	(n=189)	(n=129)	(n=127)	(n=118)	(n=113)	(n=86)	(n=76)	(n=1,251)
Median	698	617	502	580	693	650	1,029	823	711	830	1,027	727
Mean	1,031	898	823	845	967	921	1,204	1,295	1,002	1,067	1,459	1,036

DHS is pleased with the increase in the percentage of youth who achieve permanency but is concerned about the length of stay for those youth who age out without achieving permanency. This continues to be an area of focus for DHS.

### Education

Of the 3,029 clients, 1,661 (55%) were matched in the school data in the Allegheny County Data Warehouse, which covers Pittsburgh Public Schools (2004–2018), Clairton (2012–2018), Penn Hills (2012–2018), Sto-Rox (2013–2018) and Woodland Hills (2013–2018).

**Graduation:** Nationally, youth in foster care are less likely than their peers to graduate from high school.

In Pennsylvania, the rate at which the overall population of 21-year-old youth achieves a high school diploma or GED is 92%. Of the 646 youth who were over age 18 and were in 12th grade, 372 (58%) of them graduated. However, we cannot be sure that the other 42% did not graduate. They might have left school prior to 12th grade or moved to a school district that doesn't have a data-sharing agreement with DHS; it is also possible that they graduated from a juvenile probation school program or cyber school, or earned a GED. The data should be considered within this context.

**Attendance:** We looked at the attendance for all school years on record for each client, and only included those youth that had at least 30 enrollment days (1,500). Of those 1,500 clients, 1,087 (72%) were chronically absent in at least one school year, at age 16 or above, across the multiple school years of available data. This means they missed at least 10% of all enrolled days (about 18 days in an entire school year), including excused absences, unexcused absences and out-of-school suspensions.

**Suspensions:** Of the 1,661 youth with disciplinary data, 1,227 (74%) had experienced a suspension of any length and 1,017 (61%) had experienced at least one suspension of three or more days.

### Post-Secondary Education

About half of the youth (1,510) were included in data about post-secondary education and career-technical training programs from the National Student Clearinghouse. Of those 1,510 matched clients, 551 (36%) had at least one semester of college enrollment, and 66 had graduated from college (4%).

## Employment

Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry data for 2017 were available for 80% (2,421) of the cohort. Sixty-five percent of the group (1,576) reported earnings in one or more quarters of 2017; only 30% of the group (745) had earnings reported in every quarter of 2017 (**Table 4**). These data also represent only those former clients who worked in Pennsylvania in an industry that is required to submit wage data to the Commonwealth. Less than 5% of the group received Pennsylvania unemployment benefits in 2017.

In general, youth tend to have higher unemployment rates than adults (16.2% for workers 16–24 nationally compared to the overall unemployment rate of 7.6%<sup>8</sup>) and to work in part-time jobs and in lower-paying jobs/industries. Because they are older, we would expect youth who exited earlier to have higher average and median wages. The findings loosely support that hypothesis and also speak to the overall difficulty for system-involved youth to find well-paying jobs, as the average yearly wage was \$19,931 and the median was \$17,346.

**TABLE 4: PA Earnings in 2017, by Year of Exit, 2006 through 2016**

EXIT YEAR	COUNT	AVERAGE AGE AT END OF 2017	AVERAGE	MEDIAN	MAX	MIN
2006	98	29.0	\$21,302	\$18,894	\$56,032	\$1,499
2007	81	27.8	\$19,567	\$18,087	\$93,816	\$242
2008	84	27.0	\$23,696	\$21,639	\$86,172	\$4,831
2009	88	26.0	\$21,773	\$18,644	\$102,998	\$1,212
2010	90	25.2	\$21,480	\$17,914	\$77,822	\$1,622
2011	55	24.5	\$18,620	\$16,026	\$97,554	\$1,832
2012	72	23.5	\$17,271	\$13,888	\$82,410	\$814
2013*	73	22.5	\$19,508	\$17,188	\$78,984	\$306
2014*	48	22.1	\$15,445	\$13,806	\$42,517	\$1,323
2015*	34	21.8	\$15,621	\$13,630	\$38,370	\$648
2016*	22	21.5	\$16,909	\$13,841	\$42,536	\$3,687
<b>Total</b>	<b>745</b>	<b>25.3</b>	<b>\$19,931</b>	<b>\$17,346</b>	<b>\$102,998</b>	<b>\$242</b>

\*Youth in the group who exited from 2006 through 2012 had all turned age 21 by the time of analysis. For 2013 through 2016, the cohort will grow as the remaining youth turn 21.

8 <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/economy/reports/2013/04/05/59428/the-high-cost-of-youth-unemployment/>.

Note that this does not include discouraged workers (people who are no longer looking). “[A] study by the Center for Labor Market Studies estimated that in 2009 there were 2.8 million teens who wanted to work but who

were not currently looking or were employed part time but wanted full-time work. This is in addition to the 1.5 million teens who were counted as unemployed[.]”

## Young Parenting

Birth records were analyzed to determine the number of youth who became parents (**Table 5**). The percentage of women in the group who gave birth decreased by more than half from 2006 through 2012 (from 56% to 39%). The percentage of men, while much lower, also decreased (from 7% in 2006 to 3% in 2012). We would expect the percentage of men to be lower, because the father's name is not required on a birth certificate.

Because youth from the 2013–2016 cohort are still turning 21, the percentages for those years are likely to change. These numbers are included for a fuller, if still incomplete, picture.

These data compare favorably to national research, which shows that foster youth are significantly more likely to become young parents than their peers. In the Midwest Study, nearly half of the women had given birth by age 19, compared to only one-fifth of their peers.<sup>9</sup> By age 21, 56% of women and 30% of men were parents — more than twice the rate of their peers.

**TABLE 5: Births Prior to Age 21, Women and Men in Group, 2006 through 2016**

YEAR OF SYSTEM EXIT	# OF YOUTH IN GROUP	WOMEN AGE 21+	# OF WOMEN WHO GAVE BIRTH BEFORE AGE 21	% OF WOMEN WHO GAVE BIRTH BEFORE AGE 21	MEN AGE 21+	# OF MEN LISTED AS FATHER ON A BIRTH CERTIFICATE BEFORE AGE 21	% OF MEN LISTED AS FATHER ON A BIRTH CERTIFICATE BEFORE AGE 21
2006	399	224	125	56%	175	13	7%
2007	364	189	95	50%	175	11	6%
2008	372	203	92	45%	169	11	7%
2009	332	176	78	44%	156	3	2%
2010	365	196	100	51%	169	3	2%
2011	294	151	54	36%	143	6	4%
2012	255	145	57	39%	110	3	3%
2013*	260	140	40	29%	120	3	3%
2014*	203	118	44	37%	85	4	5%
2015*	115	60	19	32%	55	1	2%
2016*	70	34	7	21%	36	1	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,029</b>	<b>1,636</b>	<b>711</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>1,393</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>4%</b>

\*Youth in the group who exited from 2006 through 2012 had all turned age 21 by the time of analysis. For 2013 through 2016, the cohort will grow as the remaining youth turn 21.

9 Courtney, Mark E., and Amy Dworsky. 2006. "Early Outcomes for Young Adults Transitioning from Out-of-Home Care in the USA." *Child and Family Social Work* 11 (3): 209–19.

## Homelessness

Youth were considered homeless if they accessed one of three types of services: emergency shelter, street homeless outreach or transitional housing. Homeless youth who were “couch surfing” or “doubling up” (staying temporarily with friends/family because they do not have a safe place to stay) are not captured in this data. As a result, the count of homeless youth may be underrepresented and should be considered a lower bound estimate. Important to consider when analyzing data on homelessness is the fact that usage of services for the homeless is based on supply; as additional beds become available, utilization increases.

An average of 8% (124) of youth who exited a child welfare placement from 2010 through 2016 accessed services for the homeless by the time of analysis. Youth who exited in 2014 and 2015 had higher percentages of homelessness, despite having less time to access those services (this measure is not restricted by accessing those services prior to turning 21).<sup>10</sup> As the cohort grows, we are likely to continue to see an increased percentage of homeless youth.

**TABLE 6: Youth Accessing Services for the Homeless, 2010 through 2016**

YEAR OF EXIT	NUMBER OF YOUTH IN COHORT	NUMBER OF YOUTH WHO ACCESSED HOMELESS SERVICES	PERCENTAGE OF YOUTH WHO ACCESSED HOMELESS SERVICES
2010	365	8	2%
2011	294	10	3%
2012	255	22	9%
2013*	260	27	10%
2014*	203	33	16%
2015*	115	18	16%
2016*	70	6	9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,562</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>8%</b>

\*Youth in the group who exited from 2010 through 2012 had all turned age 21 by the time of analysis. For 2013 through 2016, the group will grow as the remaining youth turn 21.

## Behavioral Health

Behavioral health treatment information is available for youth insured through HealthChoices, Pennsylvania’s Medicaid managed care program,<sup>11</sup> which accounted for 93% of youth in the group. The rest of the group was either uninsured, received services through private insurance, or received services outside of Allegheny County, and those data are not included.

<sup>10</sup> Changes in youth homelessness may be related, in part, to changes in the County’s homeless intake system. Beginning in 2015, the Allegheny Link was established as the coordinated entry point for people experiencing housing instability. This centralized access point, while providing better coordination, may also cause youth

to stay with friends/family rather than contacting the Link.

<sup>11</sup> Data from HealthChoices: <http://www.healthchoices.pa.gov/info/about/>

### Mental Health Services and Treatment

Mental health services and/or treatment were utilized by approximately 80% of the eligible group who were ages 16 through 21. These data include both clinical services, such as individual and group therapy, and non-clinical services, such as case management.

**TABLE 7: Mental Health Services, 2006 through 2016**

YEAR OF SYSTEM EXIT	NUMBER OF YOUTH ENROLLED IN HEALTHCHOICES	NUMBER OF YOUTH WHO HAD ACCESSED ANY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES AT AGES 16-21	PERCENTAGE OF YOUTH WHO HAD ACCESSED ANY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES AT AGES 16-21
2006	388	303	78%
2007	352	273	78%
2008	360	278	77%
2009	314	251	80%
2010	350	275	79%
2011	267	225	84%
2012	228	184	81%
2013*	234	186	79%
2014*	192	161	84%
2015*	107	87	81%
2016*	64	53	83%
<b>Total:</b>	<b>2856</b>	<b>2276</b>	<b>80%</b>

\*Youth who exited from 2006 through 2012 had all turned age 21 by the time of analysis. For 2013 through 2016, the cohort will grow as the remaining youth turn 21.

### Mental Health Crisis and Inpatient Treatment Encounters

Of the 2,856 youth enrolled in HealthChoices (HC), 813 (28%) used crisis or inpatient services from the ages of 16 through 21. This has ranged from a low of 15% in 2006 to a high of 55% in 2015, although the higher percentages in later years may be due to the smaller denominators and may decrease as additional youth who exited in those years turn 21.

**Table 8** and **Figure 1** show the number and percentages of youth who used inpatient and/or crisis services between the ages of 16 and 21. The figures display the difference in usage by exit year. The most frequently used were crisis services, which were utilized by 24% of the group, with 13% of the group using those services after their exit from child welfare. Inpatient services were used by 15% of the group, 7% after exit.

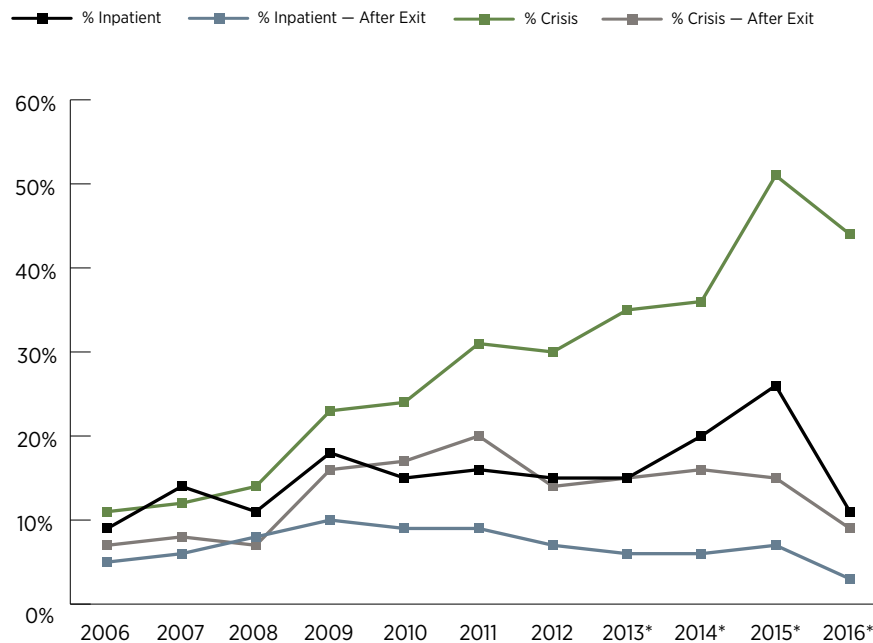
Though the percentage of youth using crisis services has increased: the actual number of clients has declined since 2013. Many mental illnesses manifest themselves during young adulthood and the young adults have not yet learned how to manage their symptoms. The newly independent youth may continue to struggle with the trauma that resulted in the out-of-home placement and the many challenges related to self-sufficiency, either of which may result in the need for crisis services. In addition, these youth may not have a support system around their mental health challenges and/or have not yet received the consistent and appropriate treatment and medications necessary to manage these challenges.

**TABLE 8: Utilization of Crisis and/or Inpatient Services, Ages 16 through 21, by Year of Exit**

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013*	2014*	2015*	2016*	TOTAL	PERCENT
<b>Inpatient or Crisis Services</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>813</b>	<b>28%</b>
Inpatient Services	33	49	38	56	53	43	35	35	39	28	7	416	15%
Crisis Services	43	43	49	72	83	83	69	81	69	55	28	675	24%
<b>Inpatient or Crisis Services After Exit</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>434</b>	<b>15%</b>
Inpatient Services After Exit	18	21	28	32	32	23	16	15	11	8	2	206	7%
Crisis Services After Exit	26	27	25	51	59	53	31	36	30	16	6	360	13%
<b>Youth Enrolled in Health Choices</b>	<b>388</b>	<b>352</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>314</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>2,856</b>	<b>100%</b>

\*Youth in the group who exited in years 2006 through 2012 had all turned age 21 by the time of analysis. For 2013 through 2016, the cohort will grow as the remaining youth turn 21.

**FIGURE 1: Percentage of Clients with Crisis and/or Inpatient Services, by Year of Exit\*\***  
Services used from ages 16 through 21



\*Youth in the group who exited in years 2006 through 2012 had all turned age 21 by the time of analysis. For 2013 through 2016, the cohort will grow as the remaining youth turn 21.

\*\*Percentages are of HC enrolled (n=2,856)

The top mental health diagnoses for this subset are shown in **Table 9**. The most common diagnoses for inpatient clients were major depression, bipolar disorder and depressive disorder. Nearly 90% of the clients who received crisis services did not have a diagnosis (DX Deferred), but of the 10% who did have a diagnosis, depression, depressive disorder and adjustment disorder were the most frequently cited. Note that a client may have multiple diagnoses, so the percentages do not total 100%.

**TABLE 9: Mental Health Diagnoses of Youth Who Accessed Inpatient or Crisis Mental Health Services**

INPATIENT			CRISIS		
CATEGORY	COUNT	PERCENT	CATEGORY	COUNT	PERCENT
Major Depression	133	57%	Diagnosis Deferred	383	88%
Bipolar Disorder	67	29%	Major Depression	49	11%
Depressive Disorder	65	28%	Depressive Disorder	38	9%
Conduct Disorder	38	16%	Adjustment Disorders	38	9%
Adjustment Disorders	24	10%	Conduct Disorder	16	4%
Unspecified Psychosis	17	7%	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder	13	3%
All Inpatient	235	100%	All Crisis	436	100%

### Substance Use Disorder Treatment

More than half of the youth in the eligible group (n=2,888) accessed substance use disorder (SUD) services (n=1,574). Cannabis use disorder was by far the most frequently reported diagnosis. A youth may have multiple diagnoses, so the percentages do not total 100%.

**TABLE 10: Substance Use Disorder Diagnoses, Youth Who Accessed Substance Use Disorder Services**

	NUMBER WHO EVER ACCESSED SUD SERVICES	PERCENT WHO EVER ACCESSED SUD SERVICES	NUMBER WHO ACCESSED SUD SERVICES AFTER EXIT	PERCENT WHO ACCESSED SUD SERVICES AFTER EXIT
Substance Use Disorder (SUD) Diagnosis	1,574	100%	1,356	86%
Cannabis Use Disorder	1,181	75%	1,004	64%
Alcohol Use Disorder	403	26%	333	21%
Opioid Use Disorder	194	12%	185	12%
Non-Opioid – Other	193	12%	161	10%

### Criminal Justice Involvement

Data were analyzed to examine the group's involvement with the criminal justice system, specifically whether youth were charged with a crime or incarcerated in the Allegheny County Jail. Charge data prior to 2011 were excluded due to data quality issues, so the cohort was changed to 2011–2016 exits for this portion of the analysis.



Some research suggests that while foster youth do not actually exhibit criminal behavior at rates significantly higher than their peers, they are significantly more likely to be arrested, convicted and incarcerated.<sup>12</sup> Several studies have documented that foster youth are more likely to experience the criminal justice system than the general population. Among participants in the longitudinal “Midwest Study,” more than 50% of women and 80% of men were arrested at least once between ages 17 and 26.<sup>13</sup>

### Charged with a Crime

Data indicate that an average of 63% of youth in the group had been charged with a crime before they turned 21. The percentage of youth charged with a crime ranged from 54% to a high of 71%.

The percentage of youth convicted on those charges decreased from 61% for youth who exited in 2011 to 45% for youth who exited in 2016.

**TABLE 11: Youth Charged and Convicted of a Crime Before Age 21, by Year of Exit, 2011 through 2016**

EVER CHARGED WITH A DISPOSED CRIME BEFORE 21**					
YEAR OF EXIT	COHORT	CHARGED		CONVICTED	
		#	%	#	%
2011	294	159	54%	97	61%
2012	255	158	62%	78	49%
2013*	260	169	65%	81	48%
2014*	203	144	71%	63	44%
2015*	115	78	68%	37	47%
2016*	70	42	60%	19	45%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,197</b>	<b>750</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>50%</b>

\*Youth in the group who exited child welfare from 2011 through 2012 had all turned age 21 by the time of analysis. For 2013 through 2016, the cohort will grow as the remaining youth turn 21.

\*\*Includes any criminal, traffic and non-traffic charge.

While there have been some variations in the charge grades by year, felonies have remained the largest percentage of the highest charge grade for every exit year, followed by summary charges, then misdemeanors. The only exception was for youth who exited in 2016, for whom misdemeanors represented a slightly higher percentage than summary offenses as the highest charge.

12 Cusick, Gretchen R., Judy Havlicek, and Mark E. Courtney. 2012. “Risk for Arrest: The Role of Social Bonds in Protecting Foster Youth Making the Transition to Adulthood.” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 82 (1): 19–31.

13 Courtney, Mark E., Amy Dworsky, Adam Brown, Colleen Cary, Kara Love, and Vanessa Vorhies. 2011. *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 26*. Chicago: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

**TABLE 12: Highest Disposed Charge Grade, by Year of Exit, 2011 through 2016**

YEAR OF EXIT	FELONY	MISDEMEANOR	SUMMARY	TOTAL	COUNT
2011	48%	20%	30%	100%	159
2012	39%	24%	35%	100%	158
2013	40%	25%	35%	100%	169
2014	43%	27%	29%	100%	144
2015	49%	23%	27%	100%	78
2016	52%	24%	21%	100%	42
<b>Total</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>750</b>

Data were further analyzed to examine the categories of the lead charges for the youth, using the definitions found in the **Appendix**.

The most common category of crimes was Crimes Against Person (50%), followed by Public Order Crimes (25%), Crimes Against Property (19%) and Drug Charges (6%). As with charge grade, there have been some variations in the category proportions by exit year, but the only time they have changed order was for the 2016 cohort, when Crimes Against Property was the highest charge category for 21% of the cohort, and Public Order Crimes was the highest charge category for 17% of the cohort.

**TABLE 13: Highest Charge by Category, by Year of Exit, 2011 through 2016**

YEAR OF EXIT	PERSON	PUBLIC ORDER	PROPERTY	DRUG	TOTAL	COUNT
2011	48%	23%	23%	6%	100%	159
2012	45%	27%	19%	9%	100%	158
2013	46%	29%	21%	4%	100%	169
2014	56%	24%	17%	4%	100%	144
2015	54%	26%	12%	9%	100%	78
2016	60%	17%	21%	2%	100%	42
<b>Total</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>750</b>

### Incarceration

The percentage of youth who were booked in the Allegheny County Jail remained relatively consistent by exit year from 2006 through 2016. Approximately 25% of youth in the group had been incarcerated by age 21.

TABLE 14: Bookings in the Allegheny County Jail Prior to Age 21, by Year of Exit, 2006 through 2016

YEAR OF EXIT	NUMBER OF YOUTH IN COHORT	NUMBER OF YOUTH WITH ONE OR MORE JAIL BOOKINGS	PERCENTAGE OF YOUTH WITH ONE OR MORE JAIL BOOKINGS
2006	399	88	22%
2007	364	89	24%
2008	372	101	27%
2009	332	81	24%
2010	365	102	28%
2011	294	88	30%
2012	255	60	24%
2013*	260	63	24%
2014*	203	58	29%
2015*	115	31	27%
2016*	70	17	24%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,029</b>	<b>778</b>	<b>26%</b>

\*Youth in the group who exited from 2006 through 2012 had all turned age 21 by the time of analysis. For 2013 through 2016, the cohort will grow as the remaining youth turn 21.

### Violent Deaths

There are 68 autopsied deaths among the 3,029 youth who exited from 2006 through 2016. These numbers come from the Allegheny County Medical Examiner's Office, which reviews all non-natural deaths, typically an average of 13% of all yearly deaths in Allegheny County. Of those deaths, 32 were from homicides, 10 from drug overdose, seven from suicide and 19 from unspecified causes. The following table shows the time from exit to death for each of these categories.

TABLE 15: Time from Exit to Death, 2006 through 2016

TIME FROM EXIT TO DEATH	HOMICIDE	OVERDOSE	SUICIDE	UNKNOWN	COUNT	PERCENT
Under 1 year	7		1	2	10	15%
1 to 2 years	7		1	3	11	16%
3 to 5 years	9	4	3	6	22	32%
6 to 8 years	5	4	1	7	17	25%
9 to 11 years	4	2	1	1	8	12%
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>100%</b>

## SUMMARY

The data analyzed for this report indicate mixed outcomes for Allegheny County's population of youth transitioning out of foster care. An average of 37% exited without achieving permanency, with fluctuation over the 11-year period ranging from a high of 51% in 2012 to a low of 29% in both 2006 and 2016. Both median and average length of stay increased over the same period. The rate of early parenthood reflects significantly better outcomes in recent years.

The analysis suggests that the majority of young adults in the group faced behavioral health challenges, measured by analyzing whether the youth accessed publicly funded mental health and/or drug and alcohol services. Eighty percent accessed mental health services, and over half accessed drug and alcohol services. In general, accessing treatment and services is a positive decision; the relative stability of the crisis mental health service utilization over the 11-year timeline could indicate that youth are consistently receiving the kind of ongoing mental health treatment that prevents a crisis from developing. Of the more than half of the group with a diagnosed substance use disorder, cannabis use was the most common diagnosis.

These youth faced consistent challenges with the criminal justice system. Approximately 63% of the youth had been charged with a crime by age 21. About a quarter of the youth had one booking in the Allegheny County Jail by age 21. However, the majority of charges were for non-violent offenses and often related to substance use.

Violent deaths totaled 68, with homicide accounting for almost half, drug overdose for 15% and suicide for 10%; more than 30% of all unexpected deaths occurred within two years of exit. We expect to get a clearer picture of the outcomes of youth exiting in recent years as the younger members of the group turn 21.

## RESOURCES

In response to the national and local data showing that young adults transitioning from foster care to adulthood need extra support, Allegheny County has invested in programming specifically tailored to this population. Allegheny County has developed an array of services for youth ages 16 through 24 who are or have been in foster care, including:

- One-stop comprehensive drop-in center, called the 412 Youth Zone, that works with 80+ partners to serve youth both on-site and in the community to meet their goals for transitioning to adulthood
- Department of more than 40 peer-support staff, called Youth Support Partners, who use their lived experience in the child welfare, behavioral health and juvenile justice systems to mentor youth and engage them in appropriate services
- Specialized education staff located in each child welfare office throughout the County who support young adults' educational needs during and after foster care
- Specialized "Kinship Navigators" in each child welfare office to assist caseworkers in finding family supports for youth
- An array of housing options, including state-of-the-art supervised living apartments, transitional housing, and a homeless shelter for young adults

- Mental health services specifically tailored to young adults, including Mobile Transition Age Youth treatment teams
  - Workforce development opportunities for youth in partnership with Partner4Work, including the Learn & Earn Summer Youth Employment Program
  - Drop-in center for youth and young adults who have been sexually exploited
  - Unit of specialized attorneys for legal representation to overcome barriers related to housing, credit, health care access and coverage, driver's license issues, Social Security Disability, mental health and intellectual disability, and expungement of juvenile court records
  - Intensive service coordination for youth who are charged with a crime and/or are booked in the Allegheny County Jail
  - Financial literacy training with opportunity to earn match funds for youth who have successfully saved money to purchase an asset, such as a car, to help them transition to adulthood
  - Enrichment activities, Youth Advisory Board and Youth Speakers' Bureau where youth can connect with other young people and share their feedback directly with DHS systems
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**APPENDIX****APPENDIX: DEFINITIONS OF CRIMINAL CHARGES****Public Order Crimes:**

- Motor Vehicle–DWI/DUI: Cases alleging driving a motor vehicle while intoxicated (DWI), driving under the influence of either alcohol or drugs (DUI), or driving while impaired
- Public Order: Cases alleging violations of liquor laws, drunkenness, disorderly conduct, vagrancy, gambling, prostitution and commercial vice (also called public nuisance or quality-of-life offenses and crimes against society)
- Motor Vehicle–Other: Cases involving the operation of a motor vehicle
- Weapon: Cases alleging violations of regulations or statutes controlling the carry, use, possession, furnishing and manufacture of deadly weapons or silencers

**Crime Against Person:** Murder/manslaughter, sexual assault (including rape and sexual battery), robbery and assault (including simple assault)

**Crimes Against Property:** Burglary, larceny, auto theft, arson, forgery and counterfeiting, fraud, embezzlement, stolen property (buying or receiving), and vandalism

**Drug Charges:** Illegal possession, sale, use or manufacture of drugs. The following drug categories are included: opium or cocaine and their derivatives (e.g., morphine, heroin, codeine); marijuana; synthetic narcotics — manufactured narcotics (e.g., Demerol, Methadone); and dangerous non-narcotic drugs (e.g., barbiturates, Benzedrine).