



Vulnerable Children and Youth Depend on Us Child Welfare and Foster Care 2010 Facts at a Glance

Millions of California children, youth and families are depending on us to help them improve their lives and futures. The public expects and increasingly demands accountability from its leaders for the safety and care of abused and neglected children and youth. Families that come into contact with the child welfare system present a myriad of issues. Early intervention and support services can significantly improve the lives of children, reunify families and address problems before they become crises.

- More than half a million (600,000) children come into contact with California's child welfare system every year, requiring some level of response and investigation.
- Most children entering foster care (80%) are removed from their homes for neglect-related reasons, such as inadequate food, shelter or medical care. Often these families are struggling with unemployment, substance abuse, mental health issues or other stressors.
- Of children in foster care, roughly 21,000 (32%) will reunify with their parents and nearly 7,000 (11%) will be adopted over the course of a year.

Children and youth who enter foster care represent the most special and vulnerable populations who fall under the responsibility of the Governor and state. Unlike any other group of children in California, children and youth who have been abused and neglected rely solely on state and county agencies for their care and safety.

- Most of the children who enter foster care for the first time are very young and especially vulnerable – approximately 55% are under the age of 5.
- Many children cycle through the foster care system more than once and experience multiple placements.
- Nearly half (45%) of the children in California's foster care system have been in care for more than two years. The longer these children remain in care, the lower their likelihood of reunification. For these children, other forms of permanency such as adoption and legal guardianship are often necessary. Of those children who emancipate or turn age 18 while still in foster care, more than 60% have been in care for three years or longer.
- Research has shown that former foster youth do not fare as well as their peers. Former foster youth are more likely to face economic hardships, be arrested and spend time in jail or prison, and be without a high school diploma or GED. They also are less likely to attend college, be employed, or have a checking or savings account. Outcomes are improved for youth who remain in care until the age of 21, as compared to those who emancipate at age 18.

Significant progress has been made to improve the lives of children in foster care but more needs be done to ensure safety, permanency and well-being for all children and youth.

- A decade ago, 115,000 children lived in foster care. Today, approximately 65,000 children are in care, reflecting a staggering reduction of nearly 44%. This includes children who are in both child welfare supervised care (59,868) and those who are supervised by probation departments (4,640).
- Innovative state programs such as KinGap – a practical, cost-effective program that places foster children with relatives – and other public-private collaboration endeavors have led to California’s progress in moving children into permanent, loving homes.
- One in three children (33%) in foster care is placed with a relative. Children placed with relatives are more likely to be placed with their brothers and sisters and less likely to have multiple placements. Children, relatives and families need continued support to provide care in their homes and ensure the safety, permanency and well-being of children in crisis.
- Approximately 6 % of California’s children are African American, yet they represent nearly 26% of children in foster care. Once in care, African American children are less likely to be reunified with their parents than children of other races.

Stable funding and leveraging key federal opportunities are essential to improving the outcomes for children and youth, and building the better California we all so fervently want. State and federal funding need to be stable and adequate, and California has an opportunity to leverage two crucial opportunities at the national level:

- Fully implement the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act, unanimously passed by Congress and signed into law on October 7, 2008. The act provides significant new funding in numerous areas, including support of kinship care, support for older youth, improved educational stability and opportunities, and incentives and assistance for adoption.
- Provide leadership and vision to effect federal finance reform so California can more effectively use federal funding to support prevention and permanency services and better meet the needs of vulnerable children and families. Currently, the federal funding structure allows only limited flexibility in how federal dollars can be spent and does not adequately support prevention efforts that can help keep children out of the foster care system.

The foster care population includes children whose care is overseen by both child welfare agencies and probation departments. This fact sheet focuses on children in child welfare-supervised care, unless otherwise noted.