
National CASA Evidence Bank Resource Guide



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OVERVIEW

Introduction

Recognizing the importance of supporting and serving children and families with data-informed and researched practice is of paramount importance to the National CASA Association CASA/GAL network. Supplying recent and relevant research facts and data that describe the population of children and families we serve provides a robust overview of our impact and helps all of us become more data driven and research minded. These steps will ultimately support safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for children and families.

This resource provides a comprehensive review of data and research, laws, and promising programs (bright spots) affecting the safety, permanency and well-being outcomes of children and families impacted by abuse

and neglect. Each targeted issue area includes information that can individually or collectively inform advocates, policymakers, network staff and leaders as well as other key stakeholders.

CASA/GAL Numbersⁱ

- 261,000 Children Served
- 85,000 Volunteers
- 936 Programs
- 5,672,600 Volunteer Hours
- 1,453,800 Training Hours

Key Numbers (2017)

- Number of children in foster care (at point of time): 442,995ⁱⁱ
- Number of children in foster care (over a year): 700,000+ⁱⁱⁱ
- Number of children who experience abuse or neglect annually: 676,000^{iv}
- In 2017, 5.8 of every 1,000 U.S. children were in foster care.
- After declining nearly 20 percent from 2007 to 2012, the number of children living in foster care increased to more than 433,000 in 2016.^v
- One-third of children and youth in foster care are under the age of 5.^{vi}
- In 2016, 18 percent of all children living in foster care were less than one year old.^{vii}
- Abuse and Death Statistics (2017): American-Indian or Alaska Native children had the highest rate of victimization at 14.2 per 1,000 children of the same race or ethnicity.^{viii}
- African-American children had the second highest rate of 13.9 per 1,000 of the same race or ethnicity.^{ix}
- The greatest percentages of children suffered from neglect (62 percent) and parental substance abuse (34 percent).^x
- A nationally estimated 1,750 children died from abuse and neglect in 2016.^{xi}
- The rate of African-American child fatalities is 2.2 times greater than the rate of White children and almost three times greater than the rate of Hispanic children. Seventy-eight percent of child fatalities involved at least one parent.^{xii}

- In 2016, a nationally estimated 1,750 children died of abuse and neglect at a rate of 2.36 per 100,000 children in the national population.^{xiii}
- Approximately 50 percent are less than one year old and 75 percent are under the age of 3.^{xiv}
- Children ages 0-1 had the highest rate of victimization through abuse and neglect at 24.8 per 1,000 children.^{xv}
- An estimated four to eight children die every day from abuse or neglect.^{xvi}

Outcomes of Children and Youth Served by Volunteer Advocates

While research on youth who have been abused and neglected demonstrates that this population is among the most high-risk, CASA/GAL volunteers serve children characterized by the highest levels of risk among children in the child welfare system.

The Packard Foundation-funded external evaluation of the impact of CASA/GAL volunteers included studying 5,500 youth in foster care in 100 communities around the country.^{xvii} This study found:

- CASA/GAL volunteers actively connect children to appropriate wraparound services and children with a CASA volunteer receive significantly more services than children without a volunteer.
- CASA/GAL volunteers commonly interview the families of foster children, and the parents of children with a CASA volunteer receive a significantly greater number of services than parents of a child without a CASA volunteer.
- CASA/GAL volunteers spend the largest proportion of their time in direct one-on-one contact with their assigned youth.

A University of Houston and Child Advocates, Inc. longitudinal research study^{xviii} demonstrated the effectiveness of the CASA model in meeting the needs of children in foster care. This study used mixed methods, including: comparison groups; descriptive, survey and interview data; and caregiver and foster youth perception data. It found that children with CASA volunteers:

- Are more likely to pass all courses in school, less likely to have poor conduct in school and less likely to be expelled.
- Score better on nine protective factors, including neighborhood resources, interested adults, sense of acceptance, controls against deviant behavior, models of conventional behavior, positive attitude toward the future, valuing achievement, ability to work with others and ability to work out conflicts.

Additional resources

Several of the topics referenced in this document are also covered through Issue Briefs on the National CASA [Advocacy in Action resource website](#) (please note that your member portal log-in is required to access these briefs).

And an Evidence Bank Bibliography is posted on the Research page in the member portal along with this main document.

SAFETY

Ensuring the safety of children and youth is the number one concern of Child Protective Services (CPS). Helping keep families safely intact and preventing children from entering the foster care system is the primary form of prevention. But safety also means preventing children who have found permanency through reunification, adoption or guardianship from re-entering foster care.

Key Numbers

- During 2016, CPS agencies received an estimated 4.1 million referrals involving approximately 7.4 million children.^{xx}
- In 2016, the percent of cases that were substantiated was 17.2 percent.^{xx}
- The national victim rate was 9.1 victims per 1,000 children.^{xxi}
- The national estimate of children who received a CPS investigation response or alternative response increased 9.5 percent from 2012 (3,172,000) to 2016 (3,472,000).^{xxii}

Key Legislation

In 2018, President Trump signed into law the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA). This law provides long-overdue reforms to help children stay safely with their families and avoid the trauma associated with being separated from their parents when placed in out-of-home care. The bill aims to prevent children from entering foster care by allowing federal reimbursement for mental health services, substance use treatment and in-home parenting skill training. Federal reimbursements also will be used to prioritize placement of children in families. In contrast, reimbursements will not be available for placement of children in group facilities when such a placement is not warranted.

Resources and Programs for Supporting Safety (please reference the related Evidence Bank Bibliography document available on the Research page in the member portal)

Improving Safety Outcomes

Alternative Response

Alternative response (AR)—also called differential response (DR), dual or multitrack response—is a strategy employed to support families known to child welfare that uses comprehensive assessments to identify strengths and needs of families, resulting in an individualized response to that family.

Key Numbers

- Research indicates that AR leads to improvements in family engagement and subsequent reductions of children entering foster care.^{xxiii}
- As of 2014, AR was being used in at least 20 statewide programs as well as several county and tribal programs.^{xxiv}
- AR strategies can be used effectively to prevent re-entry into foster care post-reunification.

Domestic Violence and Child Welfare Involvement

Domestic violence—also known as Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), or Relationship Abuse among teens—is a pattern of behaviors used by one partner to maintain power and control over another partner in an intimate relationship.

Key Numbers

- According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV), one-fourth of all women and one out of 10 men will experience IPV at some point in their lifetime. An average of 20 people are physically abused by intimate partners every minute—equating to more than 10 million victims of abuse annually.^{xxv}
- Estimates of the number of children who have been exposed to domestic violence each year vary, with research suggesting that nearly 30 million children in the United States will be exposed to some type of family violence before the age of 17.^{xxvi} Furthermore, researchers estimate 30–60 percent of families with child welfare involvement also experience IPV.^{xxvii}
- Exposure to both domestic violence and child maltreatment can have immediate and often long-term impacts on children and youth. *Family Preservation Services*

Effective prevention of child abuse and neglect requires both primary and secondary prevention approaches. Primary prevention programs, often called universal prevention programs, are directed at the general



population with the goal of preventing child abuse and neglect from occurring in the first place. Secondary prevention programs focus on individuals or families who are at high risk of maltreating their children.

Home Visiting Programs

Generally used for parents with infants and newborns, evidence-based home visiting programs have been shown to improve child and family outcomes in child welfare settings as well as reduce and prevent future child maltreatment. Home visiting programs can contribute significantly to effective and safe reduction of the use of out-of-home placement.

Key Numbers

- Children who die from abuse or neglect are very young; approximately 50 percent are less than one year old and 75 percent are under the age of three. An estimated four to eight children die every day from abuse or neglect.^{xxviii}
- Evidence-based home visiting programs have demonstrated improved outcomes for children and families in a number of areas, including infant and child health and development, reductions in child maltreatment, family economic self-sufficiency and positive parenting practices. These programs also have the potential to realize cost savings due to improved parenting capacity and reduced involvement with CPS.^{xxix}

Preventing the Intergenerational Transmission of Child Welfare Involvement

Each year, over 20,000 youth age out of the child welfare system without reaching a permanent placement in a family. They too often have significant challenges, including homelessness, failure to complete high school, early and unplanned pregnancy as well as criminal convictions. There are protective factors that can prevent many of these outcomes from happening or happening to a lesser degree. They fall into broad categories: educational achievement, living wage employment, avoidance of too early and unintended pregnancy, access to parental supports and access to effective mental health services.

PERMANENCY

Introduction

The goal of foster care is to provide safe, temporary, out-of-home placement while working swiftly to achieve permanency for children through reunification, adoption and/or guardianship with relatives or others emotionally connected to the child. Unfortunately, too many children linger in foster care and too many never achieve legal permanence, but instead age out of foster care.

Key Numbers

- After declining nearly 20 percent from 2007-2012, the number of children living in foster care increased to more than 433,000 in 2016.^{xxx}
- Most children in foster care are reunified with their parent(s) or primary caretaker (51 percent). A smaller percent (23 percent) are adopted.^{xxxi}
- The mean amount of time spent in care is 19 months.^{xxxi}
- Most children are placed in non-relative foster family care homes (52 percent) even though evidence points to better outcomes for children who live with relatives, including being more likely to reunify with their parents and more likely to achieve permanency faster.
- Most parents who adopt children living in foster care are foster parents (52 percent), a relative (34 percent) or a non-relative (14 percent).^{xxxiii}
- Ninety-two percent of parents who adopt receive an adoption subsidy.^{xxxiv}
- Each year, 20,000 youth age out of the child welfare system without reaching a permanent place in a family and have significant challenges.^{xxxv}

Cost of Foster Care

- It is estimated that the cost of foster care is \$29.4 billion annually.^{xxxvi}
- A recent economic analysis estimated the national lifetime cost of maltreatment resulting from new cases that occurred in just one year at \$124 billion.^{xxxvii}

Resources and Programs for Supporting Permanency (*please reference the related Evidence Bank Bibliography document available on the Research page in the member portal*)

Improving Permanency Outcomes

With the increasing trend in the number of children entering foster care, the time to react urgently to help children and youth find forever homes is now.

Addressing the Permanency Needs of Babies and Young Children

When it comes to advocating for children, it is important that decisions are made in the context of the child's developmental stage. For infants, babies and toddlers, their healthy development is contingent on their relationship with their primary caretaker. Supporting this relationship in the context of a young child's developmental stage is critical.

Key Numbers

- Children under age six represent nearly 41 percent of all children in foster care and 44 percent of all children waiting to be adopted.^{xxxviii}
- Twenty-five percent of children waiting to be adopted entered foster care before their first birthday.^{xxxix}
- Babies are the least likely of all age groups to exit care within six months.^{xl}
- Many infants in care have been prenatally exposed to alcohol or dangerous drugs and were born with low birth weight or prematurely. Many also suffer from serious physical health problems.^{xli}
- Developmental delays occur at a rate that is four to five times greater than that of children in the general population.^{xlii}
- Evaluations show that early childhood and safe babies courts work. One study found that more than 99 percent of infants and toddlers served were protected from maltreatment following the original case closure.^{xliii}
- One study found that increasing the attendance of birth parents from low to average levels in parenting classes resulted in the reduction of recurrence of child maltreatment by 35 percent.^{xliv}

Child Trafficking

Children in foster care are disproportionately victimized by human trafficking. Despite widespread acknowledgment of the connection between foster care and human trafficking, it remains a significant issue.

- It is estimated that 60 percent of child sex trafficking victims have a history in the child welfare system.^{xlv}
- Children and youth who are trafficked are vulnerable to severe sexual, physical and emotional injuries that can lead to life-long consequences. They are more likely to experience depression, anxiety, substance abuse, unplanned or forced pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, suicide, incarceration, failure to complete school, unemployment, and revictimization.^{xlvi}
- One study found that in a one-year review of 149 local trafficking victims from Alameda County, California, 55 percent of the victims were from group homes for youth in foster care, and 82 percent had previously run away from home multiple times.^{xlvii}

Children and Youth Living in Congregate Care

Reducing the use of congregate care as a best practice is supported by research showing that children and youth do better emotionally, physically and educationally when placed in home-based settings. The

Family First Prevention Services Act also addresses the importance of reducing the number of children living in congregate care. Key Numbers

- Young adults who have left group care are less successful than their peers in foster care.
- Youth with at least one group home placement were almost 2.5 times more likely to become delinquent than their peers in family-based foster care.
- Youth placed in group homes have poorer educational outcomes, including lower test scores in basic English and math.
- Youth in congregate care are more likely to drop out of school and less likely to graduate high school.
- Youth who have experienced trauma are at greater risk of further physical abuse when they are placed in group homes compared with their peers placed with families.

Cultural Awareness and Bias: Reducing Disproportionality and Disparity

Research has long shown the overrepresentation of certain racial and ethnic populations—particularly African Americans and Native Americans—in the child welfare system when compared with their representation in the general population. Children and youth who identify as LGBTQ also are more likely to be child welfare involved and more at risk of poor outcomes.

Key Numbers

- Not only are there more children and youth of color in foster care, but they are more likely to remain in care for longer periods of time, re-enter care and age out of care without permanency.^{xviii}
- In 22 states, the percent of African-American children in foster care is more than two times that of the African-American children in the overall child population.^{xix} This despite no relationship found between race and the incidence of child maltreatment after controlling for poverty and other risk factors.

For a comprehensive list of resources to address cultural awareness and bias, please reference the related document available on the Research page in the member portal).

Kinship Care

One of the most pressing goals of public child welfare services is to ensure that children rapidly and safely achieve permanency. For many children, reunification with parents is the primary goal. But when reunification

is unsafe or not in the child's best interest, living with relatives whom the child knows is a critical alternative.

Key Numbers

- Thirty percent (approximately 139,000) of children in foster care are placed with a relative. In 2014, over 40 percent of children in relative foster homes were there because of substance abuse.ⁱ
- In 2016, 7.5 million children were living in households headed by grandparents or other relatives, most often with their parents also present. But most recent data suggest about 2.6 million are being raised in kinship families without family present.ⁱⁱ
- Large numbers of children are diverted from the child welfare system by agency staff or judges to live with grandparents or other relatives. Many receive no help in caring for the child.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Evidence reveals that children in foster care who live with relatives or kin providers experience fewer placement changes, fewer school moves, and are less likely to re-enter the foster care system after reunifying with their parents.ⁱⁱⁱⁱ
- Living with relatives helps reduce the impacts of abuse and neglect trauma, resulting in better behavioral and mental health outcomes.^{lv}
- Children and youth living with relatives are less likely to run away from their placement.^{lv}

Parental Incarceration

Children who are child welfare involved are more likely to have a parent who is incarcerated than children who are not child welfare involved. There are additional risks to permanency and well-being outcomes for these children and it is necessary to secure them the right kinds of support and resources.

Key Numbers

- Approximately 15-20 percent of children entering the child welfare system have a parent who is incarcerated.^{lvi}
- Children and youth who have a parent who is incarcerated are at a greater risk of staying in foster care longer than children without an incarcerated parent (an average of 3.9 years).^{lvii}
- The majority of incarcerated parents (93 percent) are those convicted for nonviolent crimes.^{lviii}
- Children and youth who are African American are more likely to have incarcerated parents than White children. This puts their parents at greater risk of having their parental rights terminated because many are single-parent families in the African-American community.^{lix}

- Poor children are more than three times more likely to have incarcerated parents than children in families with incomes at least twice the poverty level (12.5 percent versus 3.0 percent).^{lx}
- Children and youth living outside metropolitan areas (e.g., rural areas) also are more likely to have an incarcerated parent than those living in metropolitan areas (10.7 percent versus 6.3 percent).^{lxi}

Parental Incarceration

As research asserts, changing home placements usually is associated with poor outcomes in permanency, safety and well-being. Placement stability is the foundation for children to develop healthy and secure relationships. It also serves to reduce the potential stressors that arise from being displaced multiple times. As more is learned about the impacts of trauma, it's important to know that placement changes can trigger traumatic experiences and reduce a child's ability to build resilience.

Key Numbers

- According to the 2016 *AFCARS Report*, the majority of children and youth (ages 5 to 17) in foster care experienced at least one placement change:
 - Thirty-five percent experienced one placement change.
 - Thirty-seven percent experienced two to three placement changes.
 - Thirteen percent experienced four to five placement changes.
 - Fourteen percent experienced six or more placement changes
- The more placement changes a child or youth has, the greater the likelihood that they will experience increased school absences, be retained a grade, be identified as having special needs, be more likely to have school discipline issues leading to suspensions and expulsions from school, and be more likely to drop out of school without a diploma or GED equivalent.^{lxii}

Older Youth

Many youth who age out of foster care report that they lacked the opportunity to learn the skills they need to thrive in the world. Once they leave foster care, they often are required to depend fully on themselves. Helping all youth find permanency before they age out should be a priority. Providing them with the skills, encouragement and support to navigate the adult world is also a priority role that advocates working with older youth can fulfill.

Key Numbers

- Every year, approximately 20,000 young people age out of the foster care system without achieving legal permanency.^{lxiii}
- In 2015, the percent of youth who had aged out and entered foster care at 14 years or older was 77.7 percent.^{lxiv}
- Over half will leave foster care without a high school diploma. Many will experience homelessness in the first year after leaving care and a disproportionate number will be unemployed, involved in the criminal justice system and/or living in poverty. The likelihood that their own children will be child welfare involved is significant.^{lxv}
- A cost/benefit analysis study in 2013 estimated that in the past decade over 300,000 youth have left foster care without the supports needed to transition successfully from adolescence to adulthood.^{lxvi}
- They also estimated the cost of youth achieving less-than-average academic outcomes, experiencing too early pregnancy and getting involved in the criminal justice system at \$226 billion or just under a quarter of a trillion dollars.^{lxvii}
- One cohort year (of students in foster care) graduating at the rate of the general population would increase earnings over a working life by \$1,867,000,000 and increase taxes paid by \$430,000,000.^{lxviii}

Substance Abuse

With substance abuse being one of the primary reasons for removal of children from their homes (accounting for up to a third of all removals in 2015)^{lxix}, it is important that advocates understand the challenges facing children and families impacted by substance abuse.

Key Numbers

- Up to 80 percent of child welfare cases involve allegations of substance abuse by a parent or guardian.^{lxx}
- In 2014, over 40 percent of children in relative foster homes were there because of substance abuse.^{lxxi}
- Substance abuse is one of the primary reasons for removal from homes (accounting up to one-third of all removals in 2015).
- Nationwide, 8.7 million children have a parent who suffers from a substance abuse disorder.^{lxxii}

- In 2016, there were over 45,000 deaths due to mental and substance abuse use disorders, compared to only 13,000 in 1990.^{lxxiii}

WELL-BEING

Introduction

Children and youth in foster care face long-term risks from their exposure to violence, child maltreatment and other adverse childhood experiences. The good news is that there is an increasing body of evidence-based programs that state child welfare systems can develop to improve children's well-being.

Key Numbers

- More than one in five alumni of care will become homeless after age 18.^{lxxiv}
- Only 58 percent will graduate high school by age 19.
- Seventy-one percent of young women are pregnant by 21, facing higher rates of unemployment, criminal conviction, public assistance and involvement in the child welfare system.
- At the age of 24, only half are employed.
- Fewer than 3 percent will earn a college degree by age 25.
- One in four will be involved in the justice system within two years of leaving foster care.
- Youth in foster care graduate at relatively lower rates and are less likely to complete high school than their non-foster care peers, including peers who are homeless.

Resources and Programs for Supporting Well-Being *(please reference the related Evidence Bank Bibliography document available on the Research page in the member portal)*

Improving Well-Being Outcomes

Attaining well-being outcomes is critical to maintaining safe permanency or reduction, especially in reducing the cyclical nature of child welfare.

Child Development and Education Supports

A quality education with positive outcomes helps reduce the number of children in the foster care system at each of the critical junctures: entry, duration and exits to permanence. For the long-term benefits, the

outcomes of someone with minimally a high school diploma and ideally with college or career training degrees will be far better than someone who has not completed high school.

Early Intervention for Young Children

When quality early intervention is provided to young children in need, the return on investment is significant. Ensuring that young children receive the most effective interventions begins with assessing them early and often.

Key Numbers

- According to recent national estimates, children ages zero to five years represent 41 percent of the total foster care population, and the largest percentage of children entering foster care in 2016 was babies younger than one year old (18 percent).^{lxxv}
- Infants and toddlers are more likely to experience recurrent maltreatment and remain in out-of-home care longer than older children.^{lxxvi}
- Developmental delays occur at rates that are four to five times greater than that of children not in the child welfare system.^{lxxvii}

School Attendance

Key Numbers

- Studies show that children who enter foster care often have missed a substantial number of school days^{lxxviii, lxxix} and that once in foster care, children and youth often have higher school absence rates than their non-foster care peers.^{lxxx, lxxxi, lxxxii}
- The extent to which children experience absences from school appears to be influenced by the child's age, their pre-foster care experiences and their experiences while in care.^{lxxxiii}
- Children who have early placement stability have been shown to have less absenteeism than other children in foster care.^{lxxxiv}

School Placement Stability

School changes are a significant problem for children and youth in foster care.^{lxxxv} These school changes often occur when children are initially removed from home, returned home or when they move from one foster care living arrangement to another.^{lxxxvi}

Key Numbers

- The rate of school mobility for children in foster care is greater than for their non-foster care peers.^{lxxxvii, lxxxviii, lxxxix}
- Black and Hispanic students in foster care are more likely than their White peers to experience school changes.^{xc}
- School mobility has negative effects on academic achievement, including lower scores on standardized tests^{xcii, xciii, xciv} and greater risk of dropping out.^{xcv}
- In a national study of 1,087 foster care alumni, youth who had even one fewer change in living arrangement per year were almost twice as likely to graduate from high school before leaving foster care.^{xcvi}
- Children who experience frequent school changes also may face challenges in developing and sustaining supportive relationships with teachers or with peers.^{xcvii, xcvi}

Special Education

Research indicates that children in foster care experience rates of emotional and behavioral problems impacting their education at higher rates than their peers who have not been involved in the child welfare system.^{xcix} Studies consistently document that significant percentages of children in foster care have special education needs and/or are receiving special education services.^{c, ci}

Key Numbers

- Several studies showing that children and youth in foster care are between 2.5 and 3.5 times more likely to be receiving special education services than their non-foster care peers.^{cii}
- Research suggests that children in foster care who are in special education tend to change schools more frequently, be placed in more restrictive educational settings, and have poorer quality education plans than their non-foster care peers in special education.^{ciii}
- Studies conducted with California caregivers and school liaisons indicate that children in foster care need more intensive educational and support services to succeed in school.^{civ, cv}
- While screening foster youth for special education needs has been shown to increase the chance that youth receive needed services, one study showed that 84 percent of youth in foster care whose screenings indicated potential special education needs did not receive related services within 9-12 months.^{cvi}

Suspensions and Expulsions

A growing body of research documents the behavioral problems that children and youth in foster care experience—issues that impact their prospects for academic success—in the form of disciplinary infractions and other offenses.^{cvii}

Key Numbers

- Children and youth in foster care experience school suspensions and expulsions at higher rates than non-foster care peers.^{cviii}
- Educational experts believe that failure to address the needs of children in foster care leads to behavioral problems at school.^{cix} Furthermore, the impacts of childhood maltreatment that remain unaddressed can impact mental health and manifest in behavioral problems.^{cx}
- In addressing behavioral problems with students in foster care, schools need to understand the impact of trauma on their lives. Research suggests that between half and two-thirds of all children are exposed to one or more adverse childhood experience that can be trauma-inducing.

Supporting Students to Succeed and Graduate

Researchers have found that youth in foster care graduate high school at relatively low rates and are less likely to complete high school than their non-foster care peers,^{cxii, cxiii} including peers who are homeless.^{cxiv}

Key Numbers

- When foster youth do complete high school, they often graduate later than expected.^{cxv, cxvi} Studies consistently show that children in foster care tend to experience high levels of grade retention^{cxvii} and are more likely to be retained.^{cxviii, cxix}
- Because of grade retention, children in foster care are more likely to be old for their grade and under credited compared to their peers who have not been involved with the child welfare system.^{cxx}
- Children in foster care are significantly more likely than their peers to do less well on standardized math and reading tests.^{cxxi}
- Evidence suggests that young people in foster care are less likely to graduate from high school if they experience repeated changes in their foster care living arrangements,^{cxxii, cxxiii} and when they experience repeated school changes.^{cxxiv}

Supporting Transitions to College

Although youth in foster care often indicate that they have college aspirations, numerous studies have found lower college enrollment rates^{cxxv} and lower college completion rates^{cxxvi, cxxvii, cxxviii} among young people who have been in foster care than among other young adults.

Key Numbers

- Although one study suggests that former foster youth who do enroll in college are confident about their academic abilities and optimistic about their chance of success in college, the same study indicates that former foster youth lag behind their college peers in academic performance.^{cxxix, cxxx}
- Research suggests that enrollment in college is more likely when young people are allowed to remain in care until age 21^{cxxxi} and/or receive mentoring services.^{cxxxii}
- Graduation from college is more likely when young people have had fewer foster care living arrangement moves.^{cxxxiii}
- One study found that foster care alumni were more likely to stay in a postsecondary program if they had independent living stability and tangible supports (e.g., tutoring, help with paper work).^{cxxxiv}
- Studies have found that financial difficulties, the necessity to work, and concerns about housing are among the barriers that prevent former foster youth from pursuing postsecondary education.^{cxxxv, cxxxvi}
- One study found that increased levels of education have larger benefits for youth who exited care than youth^{cxxxvii} from the general population. At higher levels of attainment, the two groups also have similar employment rates and earnings become less pronounced.

Supporting Physical, Social, Emotional and Mental Health

Traumatic events associated with abuse or neglect can have lasting physical, emotional and behavioral effects that can lead to poor outcomes for these children and youth, including early pregnancy, homelessness, unemployment, incarceration and poor educational outcomes. Ensuring that children and youth are provided with protective factors that promote well-being and buffer against risk is an important role of everyone involved in a child's life, including the CASA/GAL volunteer.

Independent Living

Each year, approximately 20,000 youth ages 18 and older transition, or age out, of foster care and find themselves on their own. Without adequate support networks, independent living skills, resources or safety nets, too many of these young people struggle with their early independence.

Key Numbers

- Studies have found that by age 26, only 3-4 percent of youth who aged out of foster care will have a college degree.^{cxxxviii}
- One in five alumni of foster care will become homeless before turning 18.^{cxxxix}
- Only 50 percent of youth who age out of foster care will obtain employment by age 24.^{cxl}
- Young adults from foster care will experience trauma, resulting in post-traumatic stress disorder.^{cxli}
- Researchers have indicated that older youth who receive financial management education, postsecondary education and employment as part of their experience in independent living programs had significantly better outcomes than those who did not receive any training in these areas.^{cxlii}

Mental Health and Substance Abuse

Children and youth who have been abused or neglected are at a heightened risk of experiencing mental health issues, such as disruptive behavior disorder, bipolar disorder, depression, anxiety and substance abuse disorders. As risk factors accumulate and go unaddressed, a youth in foster care is more likely to suffer from mental illness or substance abuse disorders.

Key Numbers

- Between 50-80 percent of children in foster care suffer from moderate to severe mental health problems.^{cxliii}
- Research also indicates that children in foster care experience rates of emotional and behavioral problems impacting their education at higher rates than their peers who have not been involved in the child welfare system.^{cxliiv}
- Research shows that risk of substance abuse is highest during transition periods and periods of emotional or physical turmoil.^{cxliv}
- The Health Foster Care American Initiative by the American Academy of Pediatrics has stated that mental and behavioral health is the greatest unmet health need for children and teens in foster care.^{cxlvi}

Preventing Too Early Pregnancy^{cxlvii}

While teenage pregnancy and birth rates have hit historic lows, the number of pregnant and parenting youth in foster care continues to remain at disproportionately high rates.

Key Numbers

- The rate of unintended pregnancy by age 21 among young people who are in foster care and/or transition from foster care is 71 percent.
- Repeat pregnancies are also common with 62 percent of this population.
- Research reveals that 33 percent of females in foster care have been pregnant by age 17 or 18, compared to just 14 percent of their peers in the general population.^{cxlviii}
- Teenage mothers in foster care are twice as likely to be reported for abuse and neglect as well as have their children removed from their care when compared to older mothers.^{cxlix}
- The children of teen mothers are more likely to drop out of school and become incarcerated at some point during adolescence. They also are more likely to have young children themselves.^{cl}

i
Data reported from the 2017 National CASA Annual Survey

ii
[AFCARS Report #25](#)

iii
Ibid.

iv
National Foster Care Coalition, 2015

v
Children's Defense Fund, *State of the Children Report* (2017)

- vi Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University: *The Science of Early Childhood Development* (2011)
- vii Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University: *The Science of Early Childhood Development* (2011)
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lxxvii

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lxxviii

A Chapin Hall study of children in Illinois who enter foster care without first receiving in-home services found that about one-third (30.2 percent) of the 6- to 10-year old children entering foster care missed more than 10 days of school during the past semester or grading period. Some had missed as many as 40 days. Family problems were the principal reasons that children of this age group missed school. Poor school attendance was more prevalent than for younger children. Over half of the children ages 11 to 17 who were enrolled in school at the time they entered foster care had experienced excessive absences (10 days or more) during the previous semester or grading period. The principal reasons for school absences were family problems, running away and hospitalizations (Smithgall, Jarpe-Ratner, & Walker, 2010).

lxxix

The CSAW study in Philadelphia showed that students had an average 31 percent daily absence rate in the two months leading up to placement in foster care (Zorc, O'Reilly, Matone, Long, Watts, Rubin, 2013).

lxxx

A study in San Mateo County, California, found that the average absence rate for children and youth in foster care was 12 percent compared to only 6 percent for non-dependent youth. The percentage leaving school mid-year was 17 percent for children and youth in foster care compared to only 2 percent for non-dependent youth (Castrechini, 2009).

lxxxi

Children participating in the CSAW study were absent for twice as many days during the school year as the overall student body (Zorc, O'Reilly, Matone, Long, Watts, Rubin, 2013).

lxxxii

A study by the PolicyLab at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) was commissioned by the Mayor's Office of Education and others to examine the outcomes of students involved with the child welfare and/or juvenile justice system. The study found that ninth graders with DHS involvement were absent two to four weeks more than students who were never involved during the school year. (Hwang, Griffis, Song, & Rubin, 2014).

lxxxiii

Among participants in the CSAW study, children who found permanent placement within 45 days of entering foster care were absent less than other foster children. Children with unstable placements after nine months in care were absent 38 percent more than children who found permanent placement within 45 days (Zorc, O'Reilly, Matone, Long, Watts, Rubin, 2013).

lxxxiv

The CSAW study recognized four categories to describe a child's placement pattern in foster care: early stable, late stable, unstable and reunified with a birth parent. The study found that unstable placement in foster care increased children's absences from school by 38 percent compared to early stable children. (Rubin, O'Reilly, Zlotnik, Hendricks, Zorc, Matone, & Noonan, 2013).

lxxxv

A focus group consisting of school liaisons from one California school district identified the lack of stability in the lives of foster children, including school stability, as the most serious problem facing students in foster care (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Shea, 2010).

lxxxvi

A study by the Center for Social Services Research and the Institute for Evidence-Based Change showed that three-quarters of California foster youth changed schools the year that they entered foster care compared to only 21 percent of the comparison group (Frerer, Sosenko, Pellegrin, ManChik, Horowitz, 2013).

lxxxvii

During the 2001-2003 school years, elementary school-aged foster children in Chicago Public Schools were more than twice as likely to change schools as students who had no history of child welfare services involvement. School mobility was especially high among children who entered foster care during the school year, with over two-thirds experiencing a school change. Among those children who entered foster care in 2008 without first receiving in-home services, over one-half of the 6- to 10-year olds and almost two-thirds of the 11- to 17-year-olds had changed schools at least once within the past two years (excluding normative transitions from elementary to high school) (Smithgall, JarpeRatner, & Walker, 2010).

lxxxviii

In a study conducted in San Mateo County, California, between the 2003-2004 and 2007-2008 academic years, 17 percent of the dependent youth (i.e., youth in foster care and youth who remained in their home or were returned to home while in the court's custody) left school midyear compared to only 2 percent of non-dependent youth in the same school districts (Castrechini, 2009).

lxxxix

In a WestEd study of California foster youth, two-thirds of foster youth stayed in the same school during the course of a school year compared to 90 percent of non-foster youth from low socioeconomic backgrounds. In addition, approximately 10 percent of foster youth went to three or more schools during the course of the school year as opposed to only 1 percent of non-foster youth from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Barrat & Berliner, 2013).

xc

A study conducted in Colorado by the University of Northern Colorado between the 2007-2008 and 2013-2014 academic years found that Black and Hispanic students are more likely than their White peers to change schools. Black students also were more likely to change schools more than once in the same school year (Clemens & Sheesley, 2016).

xc1

Dependent youth (i.e., youth in foster care and youth who had remained in their homes or been returned to homes while in the court's custody) in the San Mateo County study were more than twice as likely not to be proficient in the English language and more than twice as likely not to be proficient in math as their non-dependent peers. The dependent youth also earned, on average, 14 fewer credits per year (Castrechini, 2009).

xcii

A study by the Center for Social Services Research and the Institute for Evidence-Based Change showed that during a three-year period, California foster youth performed worse than a comparison group on standardized tests in math and English, and saw fewer gains during this period (Frerer, Sosenko, Pellegrin, Manchik, Horowitz, 2013).

xciii

A California study conducted by WestEd showed that the standardized testing achievement gap between foster youth and the general population is similar to that seen with English language learners and students with disabilities. Furthermore, the test scores for foster youth were consistently worse than those of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Barrat & Berliner, 2013).

xciv

The academic achievement data of over 26,000 homeless and highly mobile students (including students in foster care) across third through eighth grades were compared with other students, including those who participated in the federal free meal program or reduced meals and a group of students who participated in neither. For students who fell into the homeless or highly mobile group, their math and reading achievement was lower than the other groups and growth in math was slower. However, the researchers found that 45 percent of the homeless and highly mobile students scored within or above the average range, suggesting the impact of academic resilience (Cutuli, et. al., 2013).

xcv

Researchers studied the relationship between school mobility for Colorado students in foster care and their ability to earn a high school diploma or high school equivalency diploma. Results revealed that students in foster care changed public schools an average of 3.46 times during their first four years of high school. As the number of school changes increased, so did the likelihood that the student would not be successful in earning a high school diploma or equivalent (Clemens, LaLonde, Sheesley, 2016).

xcvi

This analysis was limited to youth in foster care for one year or more who were at least 17 years and 3 months old when they left care (Pecora et al., 2006).

xcvii

Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, (2012).

xcviii

A study that asked students in foster care about their educational experiences found that many of those interviewed discussed how the discontinuity and instability in their educational experiences negatively impacted important social relationships. Most youth identified disruptions in social relationships and school placements due to the involvement in child welfare and the corresponding placement disruptions in school as an important and negative factor in their educational well-being and progress (Levy, et. al. 2014).

xcix

A study found that special education students in one large city and 32 county school districts were over three times more likely to be diagnosed with an emotional disturbance if they had a history of foster care placement than children who were poor but had no child welfare services involvement (Lee & Jonson-Reid, 2009).

^c Just over half of the 11-14-year-old foster youth and 45 percent of the 15-18-year-old foster youth in Lucas County (Toledo, Ohio) were identified as having special education needs. Just under one-fifth of the 5-10-year-olds were identified as having special education needs, but data were missing for nearly one-third of the youth (Theiss, 2010).

^{ci} Although limited in scope (data were not available for 10 percent), a study of foster children in seven states found that two-thirds of the children with special education needs were receiving special education services (National Foster Care Review Coalition, 2010).

^{cii} Dependent youth (i.e., youth in foster care and youth who had remained in their homes or been returned to homes while in the court's custody) in the San Mateo County study were 2.5 times more likely to be receiving special education services as non-dependent youth in the same school districts (Castrechini, 2009).

^{ciii} Children in foster care and special education in a large urban Oregon school district changed schools more frequently and were in more restrictive settings than special education students who were not in foster care. Moreover, the Individualized Education Plans for the foster youth were of poorer quality and less likely to include goals related to postsecondary education or to the development of independent living skills than those of special education students not in foster care. The foster youth also were less likely than other special education students to have an advocate present during their transition planning meetings (Geenen & Powers, 2006).

^{civ} Two focus groups consisting of California foster parents and relative caregivers identified the failure of schools to acknowledge their children's needs for services to address learning or behavior problems and provide their children with more intensive supports for ongoing problems (Zetlin, Weinberg & Shea, 2010).

^{cv} California school liaisons who participated in the focus group suggested that some of the problems that resulted in foster children being referred for special education services may be due to the emotional trauma or frequent school changes they have experienced rather than to learning disabilities (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Shea, 2010).

^{cvi} Petrenko, Culhane, Garrido, Taussig (2011).

^{cvi} A study of Illinois children who entered foster care without first receiving in-home services found that nearly half of the 6-10-year-olds demonstrated behaviors that were deemed problematic by the school. Two-thirds of the 11-to-17-year-olds exhibited problem behaviors, received disciplinary action or both (Smithgall, Jarpe-Ratner, & Walker, 2010).

^{cvi} A study in San Mateo County found that close to one-third of youth in foster care for more than two years (31.8 percent) had experienced a suspension and 4.1 percent of these youth had been expelled. Children in foster care for shorter (less than six months) and longer (more than two years) periods of time were more likely to be suspended or expelled (Castrechini, 2009).

^{cix}

One focus group consisting of educational advocates and another consisting of school liaisons, all from California, suggested that failure to adequately address the needs of foster children led to emotional and behavioral problems with which schools did not know how cope (Zeitlin, Weinberg & Shea, 2010).

^{cx} A literature review examined the relationship between childhood maltreatment and educational outcomes and found that children with maltreatment histories often experience impairments in both their academic performance—including special education, grade retention and lower grades—and their mental well-being. Researchers found that these impairments were particularly likely to be identified amount maltreated children in foster care. When maltreatment histories are not addressed adequately, there is a greater likelihood that a child will express anxiety, low mood, aggression, deficits in social skills and poor interpersonal relationships. These behaviors often are disruptive to their learning and potentially disruptive in a classroom setting. Many schools are not equipped adequately to address the impacts of trauma on learning, although there is a promising movement of schools becoming better “trauma informed” (Romano, et. al., 2015).

^{cx} By age 21, 77 percent of the Midwest Study participants had a high school diploma or GED compared to 89 percent of 21-year-olds in a nationally representative sample (Courtney, et al., 2007).

^{cxii} A California study conducted by WestEd shows that the graduation rate for 12th-grade foster youth was 58 percent compared to 84 percent for all 12th-grade students in the state. The graduation rate for foster youth is the lowest of any at-risk group examined in the study (Barrat & Berliner, 2013).

^{cxiii} The Washington State Institute for Public Policy has been tracking student progress since 2005 and has identified educational outcomes for students in foster care, including school retention, behind grade level, adjusted cohort graduation rate and the annual graduation rate. A 2013 updated report revealed that the longitudinal (four-year) graduation rate for youth in foster care was between 35-55 percent (compared to non-foster youth whose rate was between 70-75 percent). The annual graduation rate, measured on an annual basis, was 48 percent for youth in foster care compared to 72 percent of non-foster youth (Burley, 2013).

^{cxiv} In 2014, the Colorado Department of Education began reporting on graduation, completion and mobility rates for students in foster care. The primary way that this was accomplished was by the completion of a five-year trend study (2007-2012) conducted by the University of Northern Colorado. The researchers describe the purpose of their study as comparing statewide averages for students across three demographic characteristics and unique populations. Students were placed in three different groups: students who had been or were in foster care during the 2007-2008 to 2011-2012 fiscal years, students who were homeless during this same time period, and students who were neither homeless nor in foster care during this fiscal period. All students were in ninth grade at the start of the 2007-2008 school year. The report served primarily as a measure of whether students graduated within four years of entering ninth grade. The study found that although the on-time graduation rate for Colorado students as a whole has steadily improved, the rates for students in foster care remained stable (no improvement) and well below their non-foster care peers. Students in foster care dropped out one or more times and they dropped out earlier in their educational careers than other populations of students (e.g., students who were homeless). The graduation rate for students in foster care included in the Class of 2013 was 27.5 percent. This rates compares to the state graduation rate of 76.9 percent and the rate of students who are homeless who had a 42 percent graduation rate (Clemens, 2014).

^{cxv}

Twelve percent of Washington State students who had been in foster care at any time after their 16th birthday and were expected to graduate at the end of the 2004-2005 to 2006-2007 school years graduated from high school one year later than expected (Burley, 2009).

cxvi

The Colorado Department of Education reported in their 2013-2014 State Policy Report that although there was improvement in graduation and completion rates for students in foster care compared to the 2014 graduation rate of 30 percent (which was 2.5 percentage points higher than the Class of 2013), the graduation rates are still significantly below that of their peers in all other “special population” groups, including students who are homeless and students with disabilities in the state of Colorado (Parra, & Martinez, 2015).

cxvii

More than one-third of the Casey National Alumni Study participants reported that they had repeated a grade (Pecora, et al., 2006).

cxviii

Dependent youth (i.e., youth in foster care and youth who had remained in their homes or been returned to homes while in the court’s custody) in the San Mateo County study were twice as likely to be retained as non-dependent youth in the same school districts (Castrechini, 2009).

cxix

The 17- and 18-year-old Midwest Study participants were 1.7 times more likely to report that they had repeated a grade than a nationally representative sample of 17- and 18-year-olds (Courtney, et al., 2004).

cxx

Burley (2013).

cxxi

Findings of a study completed by the Center for Advanced Studies suggest that an achievement gap exists for youth in child welfare as compared to youth who haven’t had child welfare involvement. The proportion of youth proficient on the Minnesota Comprehensive (MCA-II) math and reading tests was consistently lower in the child welfare populations than in the general population, even after controlling for race and socioeconomic status (Piescher, Colburn, LaLiberte, & Hunt, 2014).

cxvii

The odds of completing high school were 1.8 times higher for foster care alumni in the Casey National Alumni Study if they had experienced one fewer placement change per year and 3.1 times higher if they had experienced two fewer placement changes per year. This analysis was limited to foster youth who were at least 17 years and 3 months old when they left care (Pecora et. al., 2006).

cxviii

Researchers reported that the odds of graduating from high school among foster care alumni in the Northwest Study were 4.6 times higher if they had experienced a low rate of placement change (i.e., less than .5 per year) and 2.7 times higher if they had experienced a moderate rate of placement change (i.e., .50 to .99 per year) than if they had experienced a high rate of placement change (i.e., at least one per year). In addition, their odds of graduating from high school were twice as high if they had experienced six or fewer school changes than if they had experienced 10 or more (Pecora et al., 2009).

cxvii

Students in foster care drop out of school at three times the rate of their non-foster care peers. This is despite national data indicating that the overall high school dropout rate is declining steadily (Clemens, 2014).

cxxv

Only 11 percent of the youth in foster care in Washington State who were in the high school classes of 2006 and 2007 were enrolled in college during both the first and second year after expected high school graduation. By comparison, 42 percent of Washington State high school students in the Class of 2006 enrolled in college during the first year after they were expected to graduate from high school. Thirty-five percent were enrolled in college during both the first and second year after graduating from high school (Burley, 2009).

^{cxxvi} Forty-three percent of foster care alumni in the Northwest Alumni Study and almost half of the foster care alumni in the Casey National Alumni Study had completed any postsecondary education. But only 2 percent of the former and 9 percent of the latter had at least a bachelor's degree (Pecora, et al., 2006; Pecora, et al., 2005).

^{cxxvii} Forty-seven percent of participants in the Midwest Study had completed at least one year of college at age 26, but only 8 percent had obtained a postsecondary degree. By comparison, 46 percent of 26-year-olds in the nationally representative National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health sample had obtained a two- or four-year degree. (Courtney et al., 2011).

^{cxxviii} Foster care alumni who entered postsecondary education in 1995 and were first-time undergraduates were as likely to attend four-year institutions as other first-time undergraduates and more likely to be enrolled full-time. But they were half as likely to have earned a degree or certificate during the six-year study period as their non-foster peers (Davis, 2006).

^{cxxix} One study using administrative data from Michigan State University showed that former foster youth were more likely to drop out of college compared to a comparison group of youth who were never in foster care but were from low-income backgrounds and were first generation college students. The study showed that 34 percent of former foster youth dropped out before earning a degree compared to 18 percent for the comparison group (Day, Dworsky, Fogarty, Damashek, 2011).

^{cxxx} In this exploratory cross-sectional survey, 81 former foster youth were evaluated on their readiness for college and their first-semester academic performance (Unrau, Font, Rawls, 2011).

^{cxxxi} Midwest Study participants from Illinois, who were allowed to remain in foster care until age 21, were 1.7 times more likely to have completed at least one year of college by age 23 or 24 than their counterparts from Iowa and Wisconsin, where that option did not exist. But the Illinois study participants were no more likely to have a college degree (Courtney et al., 2010).

^{cxxxii} The odds of enrolling in college were 4.6 times higher for Washington State foster youth who participated in a mentoring program than for non-mentored peers with similar characteristics even after controlling for other factors (Burley, 2009).

^{cxxxiii} The odds of graduating from college were 3.7 times higher for foster care alumni in the Northwest Study if they had experienced six or fewer school changes than if they had experienced 10 or more (Pecora, et al., 2009).

^{cxxxiv} Survey data from a cross-sectional sample of 329 foster care alumni who received a national scholarship to various colleges provided by the Casey Family Scholarship Program studied two sets of factors that examined predictors of postsecondary retention: factors that have been found to be related to retention in the general population and factors that were hypothesized to be more unique to the foster care population. Four factors emerged as having indicators with

significant relationship to college retention and graduation. Two were general population factors: institutional commitment and social involvement. The remaining two factors were from the foster care specific group: independent living stability and tangible support (Salazar, 2011).

cxxxv

A study of former foster youth participating in eight campus support programs in California and Washington State found that although former foster youth clearly appreciated the concrete services and supports that they received—such as having someone to turn to or someone who believed in them and feeling understood or part of a family—it was the less-tangible benefits that they valued most. Moreover, some of the challenges participants reported were not unlike those faced by many young people from low-income families when they go away to school. But other challenges, particularly their concerns about having a stable place to live, were probably related to their status as former foster youth (Dworsky & Perez, 2010).

cxxxvi

A study examining the testimony of 43 high school and college-age foster youth in front of panels of policymakers in Michigan identified a lack of supportive relationships with caring adults as the most frequently cited impediment to graduating from high school or applying to/attending college (Day, Riebschleger, Dworsky, Damashek, Fogarty, 2012).

cxxxvii

Among youth formerly in care, results from regression analyses indicate that, compared to individuals with no high school credential: a GED or certificate of completion predicts no benefits in earnings or likelihood of being employed; a diploma predicts an earnings benefit; and some college, a two-year degree, and a four-year degree or greater predict large benefits in earnings and likelihood of employment (Okpych & Courtney, 2014).

cxxxviii

Statistics available at <http://www.childrensrights.org/newsroom/fact-sheets/aging-out>

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