

## Placement Stability in Foster Care August 1, 2005 – May 31, 2008

This brief summarizes data on placement stability for youth placed in foster care between the period of August 1, 2005 and May 31, 2008. Data from the Rhode Island Children’s Information System (RICHIST) was examined for 5,586 youth experiencing a total of 6,445 episodes of care open to foster care during the identified period (25% of youth had two or more episodes of care during the observation period). Analyses were conducted at the episode level. To mirror federal standards for foster care, analyses focused specifically on youth who experienced a total of 3 or more placements during the first 12-months in care. The focus of these analyses was on reason for placement transitions and whether youth moved to placement settings with greater or lesser levels of restrictiveness. Placement transitions resulting in a move toward lesser restrictiveness or a move toward greater permanency (e.g., placement with a relative) were rated as a potentially positive placement transition for purposes of the present analyses.

### What is the rate of placement change among Rhode Island youth in foster care?

Improvement in foster care placement stability is measured by **Child Welfare Outcome 6.1** – *Of all children served during the reporting period who had been in foster care for less than 12 months from the time of latest removal from home, what percentage had no more than two placement settings during that time period?* The national standard for this performance element (based upon data from the Adoption and Foster Care Reporting System [AFCARS]) is 86.7%.

RICHIST data indicated a total of 6,445 episodes of foster care occurred during the period of August 1, 2005 to May 31, 2008. Placement records in which a transition was indicated as resulting from a contract/rate change or a change in address were excluded from analyses; the former represents an administrative change to the contract or billing instructions rather than an actual change in placement, and the latter represents a change in address but a continuation of the current placement. Table 1 summarizes the number of placements experienced by youth during their first 12-months in care. Less than one-fifth (17.5%) of youth experienced three or more placements during the first 12-months in care; **82.5% of youth have two or fewer placements during the first 12-months in foster care.** It is important to note that the methodological approach used for the current analyses differs from calculation of the Federal Standards for Child Welfare Outcome 6.1. The Federal Standard is based upon AFCARS data and includes only those youth with a total length of stay of less than one year; for the current analyses we examined all youth in placement (regardless of total length of stay), but focused on placements occurring in the first year of placement.

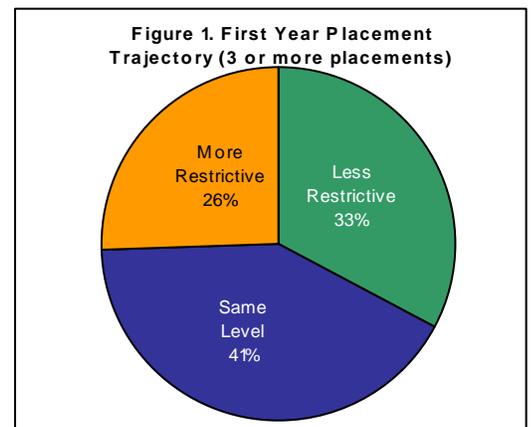
Table 1: Number of Placements during First Year in Foster Care (Percentages)

Placement Count	%
1	58.4
2	24.1
3	10.7
4	4.1
5	1.4
6 or more	1.3

Kaplan-Meier analyses examined time to first placement change for the total sample of youth in foster care during the study period. The median time to initial placement change was approximately 4.8 months, after accounting for changes resulting from contract/rate change or change in address. Nearly one-quarter of youth experienced a placement change during the first month in placement, and likelihood of having a change in placement decreased the longer a youth remained in foster care. Risk of experiencing a placement change is strongest for youth who enter foster care placed in an emergency shelter setting, followed by placement in a non-relative foster home or group home/residential facility. Children placed in a relative foster home at entry to care have the lowest rate of placement changes.

### What was the impact of placement changes on restrictiveness of foster care placements?

The Restrictiveness of Living Environment Scale (ROLES) was used to measure the restrictiveness of placement settings and the impact of changes in placement on restrictiveness. The ROLES rates living arrangements on a scale from 1 to 10, with higher scores indicative of more restrictive settings. Less restrictive settings included independent living (ROLES = 0.5), pre-adoptive placements (ROLES = 2.6), and supervised apartments (ROLES = 3.6). Foster home placements were moderately restrictive, with relative placements (ROLES = 3.7) rated as slightly less restrictive than non-relative placements (ROLES = 3.8). Group home (ROLES = 5.5), shelter (ROLES = 6.0), and residential treatment placements (ROLES = 6.5) were more restrictive; and inpatient assessment or psychiatric hospitalization placements were rated as most restrictive (ROLES = 8.4).



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Initial mean ROLES scores did not vary between youth with 1-2 placements versus 3 or more placements in the first 12 months. The mean ROLES score for initial placement of youth with 3 or more placements in the first 12 months was 5.1 (s.d. = 1.3). For these youth, approximately 33% of placement changes in the first 12 months resulted in placement in a less restrictive setting, 26% in a more restrictive setting, and 41% in a setting with the same level of restrictiveness (see Figure 1). Approximately 4% of cases experienced only changes in placement to less restrictive settings, though 45% of cases experienced only a mix of changes in placement that were the same or less restrictive.

**What was the relationship between number of placements and case characteristics?**

Chi-square analyses and analyses of variance examined differences in demographic characteristics among children with 1-2 placements versus 3 or more placements during their first 12 months in care. Table 2 presents characteristics that significantly differed between placement groups. The average age of children included in the analyses was 10.1 (s.d. = 6.2), and the average number of episodes in care was 1.4 (s.d. = 0.7). Groups did not differ in family structure or history of adoptions. Overall, compared with children with 1-2 placements during the first 12 months of care, children with 3 or more placements were more likely to be female, between the ages of 2 and 5 years, Hispanic, and placed in non-relative foster care or emergency shelters. They were also more likely to have a primary removal reason of maltreatment or neglect and to have an identified emotional or behavioral diagnosis or disability.

Table 2: Relationship of Number of Placements in First 12 Months in Care and Child Characteristics

Variable		Total Placements (N=6,297)	1-2 Placements (N=5,193)	3 or more Placements (N=1,104)
Gender	Male	54%**	55%	49%
	Female	46%**	45%	51%
Age	0-1 year	18%	18%	17%
	2-5 years	14%*	13%	16%
	6-10 years	13%	13%	14%
	11-15 years	35%	35%	37%
	16 or older	20%**	21%	15%
Race	Caucasian (Non-Hispanic)	49%*	50%	46%
	African American (Non-Hispanic)	17%	17%	18%
	Hispanic	25%*	24%	28%
	Asian/Pacific-Islander	2%*	2%	1%
	Native American	1%	1%	1%
	Bi/Multi-Racial	6%	6%	6%
Placement Type	Relative Foster Care	21%**	24%	9%
	Non-Relative Foster Care	25%**	23%	32%
	Group Home	26%**	29%	15%
	Emergency Shelter	27%**	24%	44%
Primary Removal Reason	Maltreatment	9%**	8%	13%
	Neglect	32%**	31%	36%
	Parent Alcohol or Drug Use	12%	13%	11%
	Child's Behavior	39%**	40%	33%
	Other	8%	8%	8%
Emotional/Behavioral Diagnosis (Child)	Yes	23%*	22%	26%
Identified Disability (Child)	Yes	32%*	31%	35%

\*\* p<0.01, \*p<0.05; Highlighted areas indicate significantly higher percentages

**Summary of Major Findings**

- The majority of youth in foster care (58.4%) experience no changes in placement during the first year, and approximately 82.5% of youth in foster care placement experience two or fewer placements during the first year in care; 17.5% of youth experience 3 or more such placements during the first 12 months in care.
- The median time to first placement change is 4.8 months; approximately 25% of youth experience a placement change in the first month of foster care placement.
- Of those youth with three or more placements in the first year, approximately 33% of placement changes were to a less restrictive setting, 26% to a more restrictive setting, and 41% to a setting with the same level of restrictiveness.
- Approximately 4% of cases experienced only changes in placement to less restrictive settings.
- Youth with three or more placements in the first year differed from those with fewer placements on a number of demographic and case-related characteristics. Placement types (i.e., non-relative and emergency shelter placements) appear to be a significant risk factor.