Foster care: Temporary out-of-home care for children

Children who cannot safely remain in their familial home may be placed in family foster care or a group residential facility. In Minnesota, about 16,500 children and young adults experienced out-of-home care in 2018. On an average day, there were approximately 10,050 children and young adults in care, based on preliminary 2018 data.

Children enter foster care for a variety of reasons

During 2018, about 6,700 children and young adults entered out-of-home placement due to a number of reasons, including the three most common primary reasons for removal from the home:

- 32% due to parental drug abuse
- 23% due to allegations of neglect
- 10% due to allegations of physical abuse.

Due to the recent rise in opioid and methamphetamine addiction, removing children from home for parental drug abuse has increased from 17% of all new placements in 2013 to 32% of all new placements in 2018. As of 2016, parental drug abuse has become the most frequently identified primary reason for children to be placed in out-of-home care.

Family foster homes are urgently needed

The number of children in Minnesota’s foster care system on an average day has increased by 14% in the last two years, from approximately 8,850 in 2016 to 10,050 in 2018. Some of these individuals are in group residential settings, but about 83% are in family foster care. Because of this increase, many county and tribal agencies have a shortage of family foster homes and urgently need additional families to be licensed to care for Minnesota’s children.

Foster families provide critical temporary care and nurturing to children in crisis; they come from all walks of life and may be single, married, with or without children, renters or homeowners. Foster parents play a role in recognizing the trauma children may have experienced and help give them the structure, nurturing and stability they need every day.

The Minnesota Department of Human Services’ website provides steps to becoming a foster parent. Those interested can contact their county, tribal social service agency or licensed child placement agency for more information about the need for homes.
Placement options available for children

Children thrive in stable, nurturing, permanent homes. As part of an effort to preserve family connections while children were in foster care, 49% of those in foster care spent time with relative caretakers. Removing children from the people they love and the environments that are familiar to them can be an emotionally traumatizing experience. When children must leave their homes, placement in foster care with relatives is considered first. Children may be placed in:

- Emergency foster care when removed from their homes by law enforcement. This immediate care may be provided in a shelter facility or in a nonrelative foster home.
- Family foster homes, which offer a temporary substitute until children can be safely reunified with their families, placed permanently with relatives or adopted; foster homes are licensed by counties, tribal or private agencies.
- Group residential settings, which provide structured, temporary care. Many group settings offer intensive treatment for children with serious emotional disturbances or chemical dependency.

Most children reunited with families, some adopted, some age out

For children who left out-of-home placement in 2018:

- 58% were reunited with their birth parents or legal guardians
- 18% were adopted
- 11% achieved permanency with a relative or other caregiver
- Others left foster care without the benefits of a permanent family.

Collaboration speeds permanency outcomes for many

Concurrent Permanency Planning is a process for children in foster care, where caseworkers pursue family reunification at the same time as they develop alternative permanency plans. By moving concurrently, rather than sequentially, temporary foster care placements can be shortened, and children and youth can thrive in safe, stable, permanent families. Concurrent Permanency Planning goals are best achieved when child welfare agencies, community partners and the court system work together with children’s birth parents, extended families and foster parents.

Disproportionality in Minnesota’s foster care system

Younger children, children from rural counties and children of color and American Indian descent are disproportionately represented in the foster care system. Of children in foster care in 2018:

- About 31% were 3 years old or younger, while this age group represents 22% of the child population in Minnesota
About 61% were children living in Greater Minnesota (outside the seven-county metro area), while children in this region represent 44% of the child population in Minnesota.

Children of color were overrepresented compared to the number in the general population; American Indian children were around 17 times more likely to experience out-of-home care; those of two or more races were five times more likely; and African American or black children three times more likely than their white counterparts.

Asian Pacific Islander children were less likely to experience out-of-home care compared to their white counterparts.

**Forgotten Children’s Fund helps with one-time expenses**

The Forgotten Children’s Fund, established more than 75 years ago by the American Legion Auxiliary and now administered by the Minnesota Department of Human Services, provides up to $300 per child, one time, so foster families can purchase special items and services for children. County and tribal foster care workers can apply to the fund on behalf of foster children. To donate, send a check and letter specifying the contribution amount to the Forgotten Children’s Fund, Minnesota Department of Human Services, P.O. Box 64943, St. Paul, MN 55164-0943. Email dhs.forgottenchildrensfund@state.mn.us for information.