



Understanding teen permanency

Results of a 50-state foster care policy
study

August 1, 2017

National Association for Welfare Research and

Richard Speiglman and Patricia

Johnson

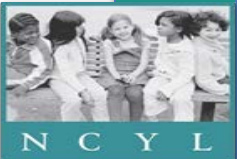
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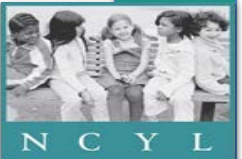
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Study funding

A grant from The Annie E. Casey Foundation to an association of scholars and legal and policy analysts

Completed with support from a consortium of law firm pro bono research attorneys



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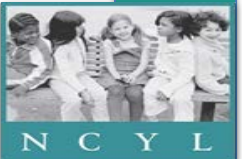
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The Annie E. Casey Foundation Request





Achieving
Permanence
for
Teens in
Foster Care

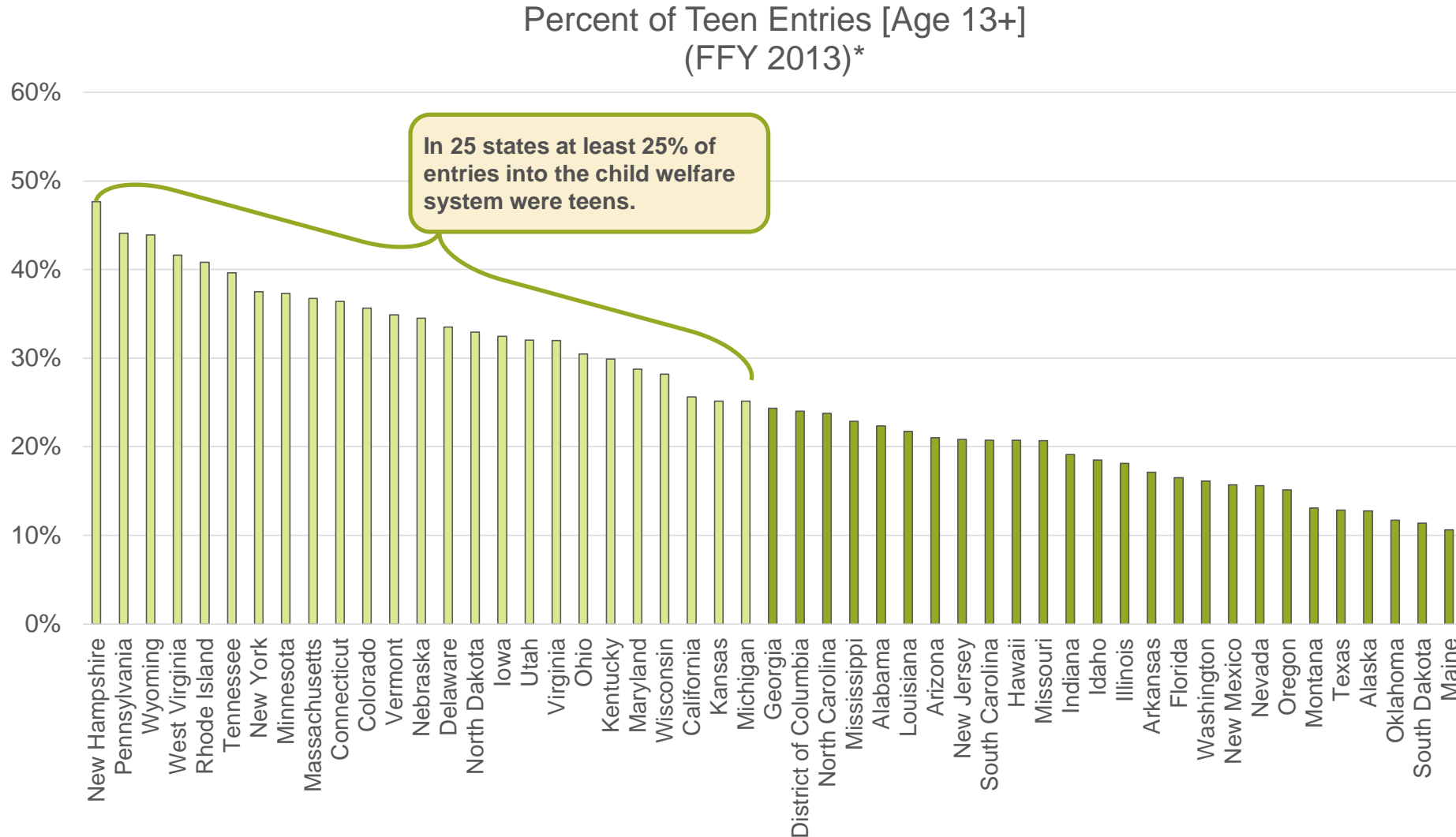
50 State Review/Survey
September 2016

THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

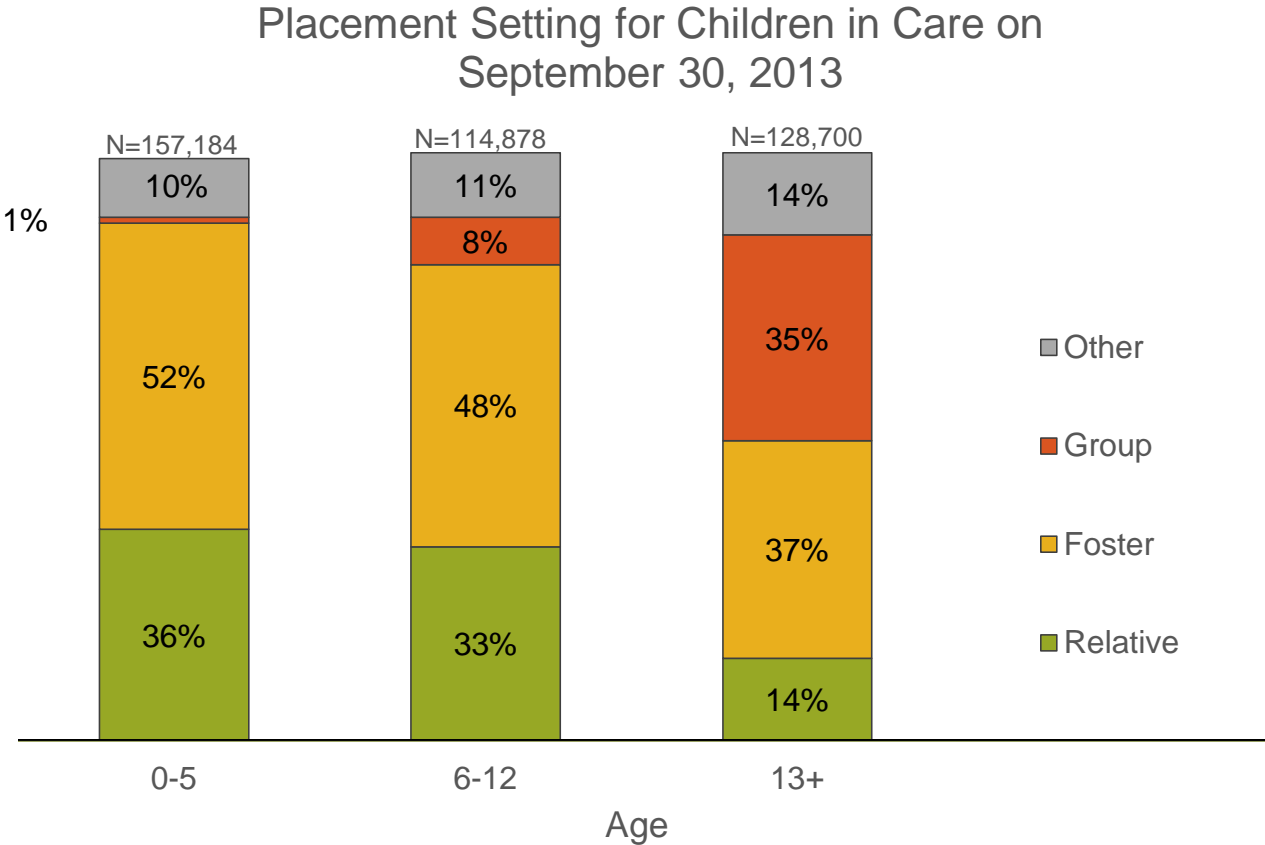
Achieving permanence for youth aging out of foster care

1 What's the problem

In half of the states, older youth represented at least twenty-five percent of the entries into the child welfare system.



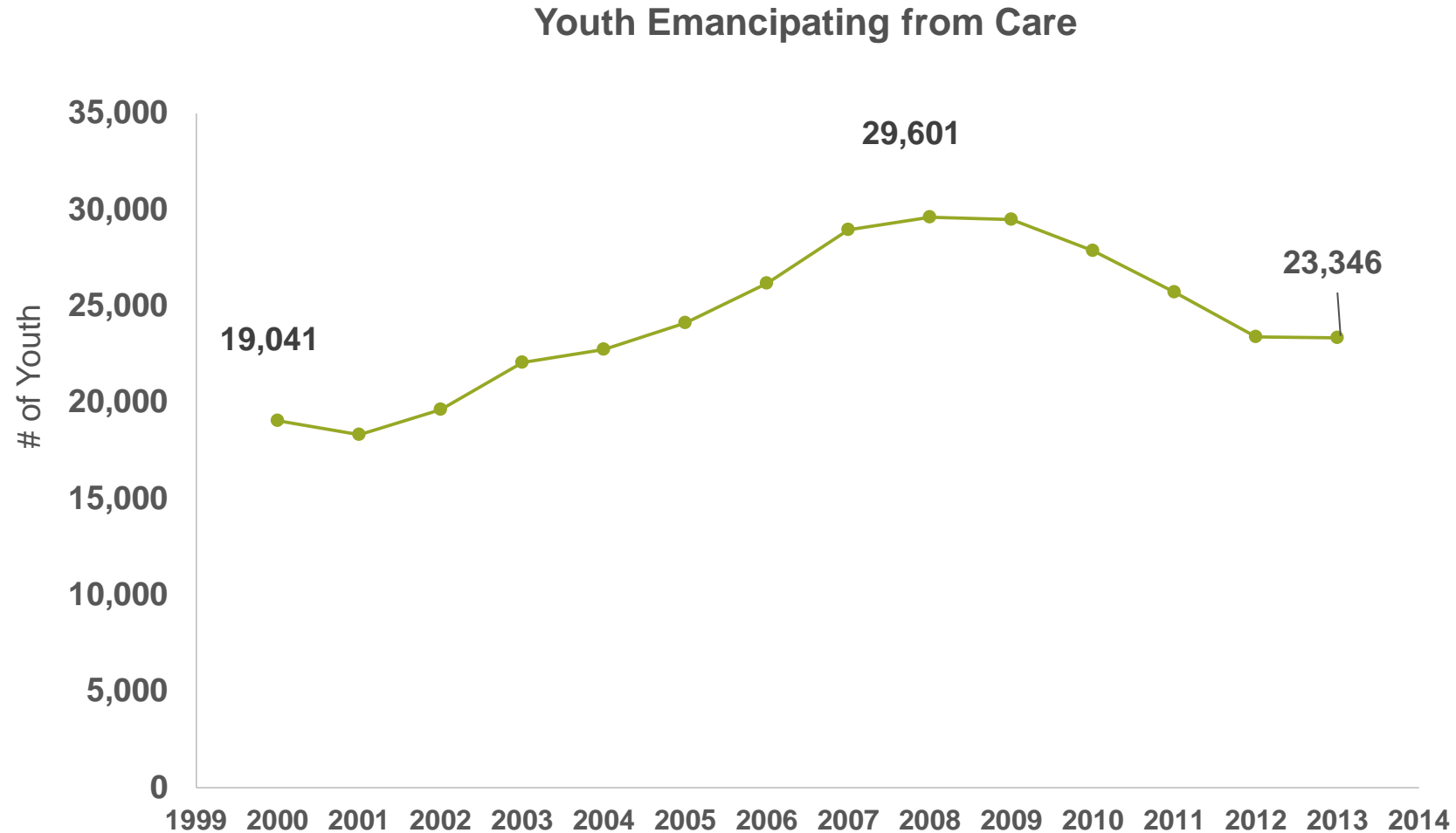
Youth who enter foster care as teens are more likely than younger children to be placed in a group setting



Note: "Other" includes Supervised independent living, runaway, pre-adoptive home, and trial home visit.

Source: AFCARS A/B File Submissions

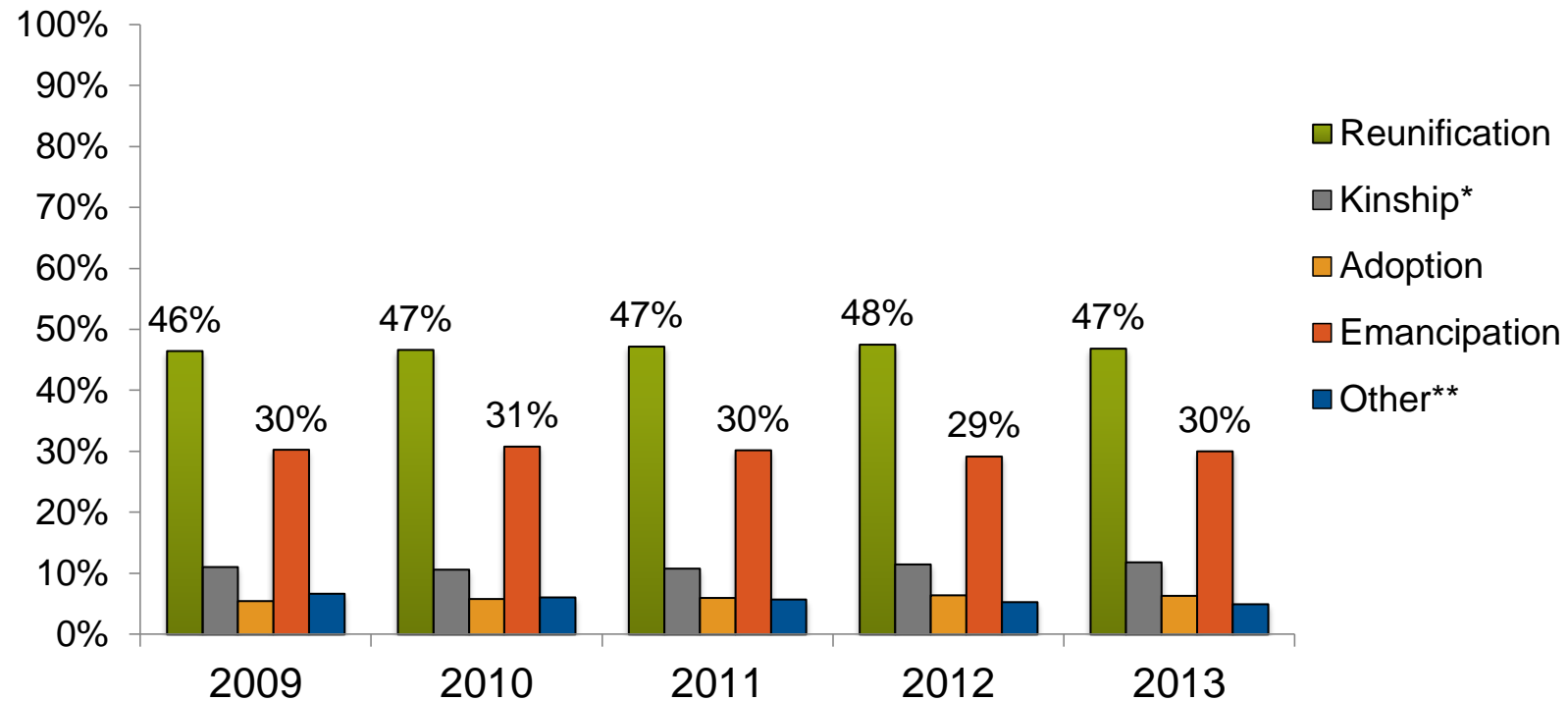
In 2016, we will work to address youth permanency, which has not improved over the last 13 years



Source: Kids Count Data

The percentage breakdown for the reasons teens exit care has remained constant over the last 5 years

Discharge Reasons for Teens



Source: Analysis of AFCARS data

*Kinship includes Living with other relative(s) and Guardianship,

** Other includes Transfer to another agency, Runaway, Death of child

Family, and the support and nurturing it is meant to provide, matters greatly to many youth aging out of foster care; the stakes are high

Youth speak out: Why do you want permanence?*

- “No one can make it completely on their own.”
- “I want family life; I need to be cared about.”
- “It is linked to everything else that is required to have a successful and satisfying adulthood.”
- “I feel alone. The system does not give enough help..., so this kind of permanence is what I need.”
- “They were like, you’re 16. You’re going off to college in a couple of years. Why do you want a family?’ It’s about my entire life. It’s not just about my childhood. I want to know that I’m going to have a place to come home to during Christmas breaks. I want to know that I’m going to have a dad to walk me down the aisle—that I’m going to have grandparents for my children.”

Youth who age out, are more likely to experience:

- Homelessness
- Unemployment
- Incarceration.**

*Source: CWSG survey of youth.

**Source: Casey National Alumni Study, Midwest study of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Outcomes at age 27, Chapin Hall.

Achieving permanence for youth aging out of foster care

2 Current efforts

Current efforts have had a positive impact, however, a more enhanced effort on permanency for older youth is critical

Existing Efforts	Focus
Independent Living	Housing & support in developing life skills
Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative	Extended foster care, sibling rights, tuition waivers, support for young parents, permanence, financial literacy, life skill development & advocacy
Medical benefits up to the age of 26	Health Care

Achieving permanence for youth aging out of foster care

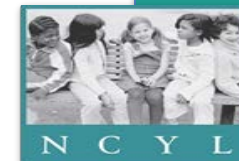
3 Our Ask

Our goal is to improve permanence for older youth by gaining a deeper understanding of the challenges

Develop and Promote New Policies and Practices

- Undertake a 50-state review of incentives to aging out/ disincentives to permanency; identify policy recommendations to address problems

BACKGROUND



Background 1

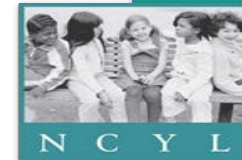
JoAnn Heffron - Hannah has 28 years of experience in the field of public child welfare, including caseworker, casework supervisor, Casework Manager, and Project Director for the Title IVE Project.

JoAnn is currently the Transition Programs Manager for Allegheny County Department of Human Services. In this role, she is responsible for programs provided to all foster care youth and foster care alumni.

JoAnn earned a B.S. from The Pennsylvania State University and an MSW from The University of Pittsburgh.

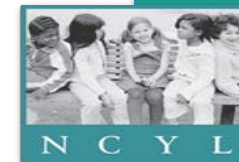
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Background 2

- **Increased national focus on permanence for youth in foster care (FC); that is**
 - reunifying with parents
 - being adopted, or
 - joining guardians in a formal arrangement
- **National and state law related to permanency for young people has not led to overall decreases in the percentage of teens running away or aging out of care rather than entering a status considered permanent**



Background 3

Having loving, consistent caregivers as well as stable consistent school, peer, and work involvement are critical for healthy teen development. Yet FC entry removes teens from families, peers and community at the time when they desperately need someone to push against, to be flexible, to help shape and mold ideas and decisions.

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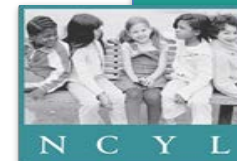
Background 4: Potentially perverse incentives

- **Diverse state policies and practices address the needs of FC teens in two potentially competing areas**
 - for a permanent connection to a family (either birth family or an adoptive or guardian family)
 - independence and self-efficacy in transitioning to adulthood
- **In the context of these concurrent goals, incentives can prove to be unclear if not contradictory**



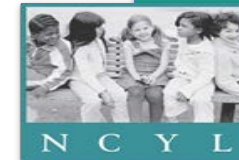
Background 5

While some aspects of policy incentivize permanency, others serve to disincentive it.



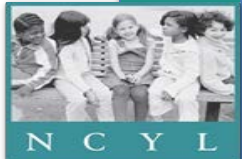
Background 6: Incentives and disincentives to permanency

- **Many incentives but as many competing barriers or disincentives to permanency once teens enter foster care**
 - Loss of financial payments for caregivers
 - Payment rates vary by placement type rather than teen or family need
 - Potential loss of eligibility for education, health, mental health and substance use services
 - Potential loss of independent living skills programming and funds



Background 7: Incentives and disincentives to permanency, continued

- **Many incentives but as many competing barriers or disincentives to permanency once teens enter foster care**
 - Nature, intensity and duration of supportive services available to teens or caregivers vary not by family and teen need but by placement type
 - Moving from placement to placement can mean disruption and loss of relational permanence in school, community, sports, work, and other formative connections for teens
 - High social worker caseloads & staff turnover lead to an inability to specialize for teens

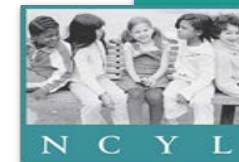


Study rationale 1

The main objective is to identify policies, practices, and programs that can serve as incentives or disincentives to teen permanency, including the policies and practices that guide placement decisions.

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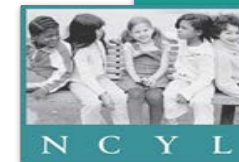
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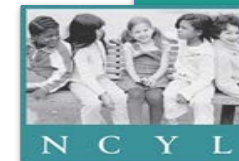
Study rationale 2

“Emancipation” exits, only available to older teens, accounted in 2015 for 9% of all foster care (FC) exits but an estimated 45% for the oldest group of adolescents

- How many emancipation exits are problematic? We guess many.
- How many reunifications, the majority of exits, are the best option for the teen? Maybe one-quarter return to FC.
- **FC returns can follow from any “permanent” status.**



METHODS

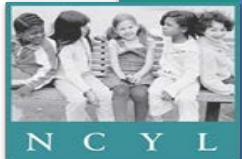


Multiple methods

To understand nuances of state policy and practice that may – or may not – promote successful reunification, guardianship, and adoption outcomes for teens in foster care

#1. Publicly available administrative data on state practices

#2. Legal research documenting state permanency policies and practices (statutes, child welfare regulations, handbooks, and federal reports under Titles IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act)



Methods, continued

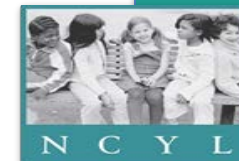
#3. Confidential phone interview surveys with 48 of 50 state child welfare administrators with statewide overview and direct responsibility for teen permanency.

- 46% of state primary respondents were the chief, administrator, or executive director, deputy director, or assistant director
- 90-question instrument covered 7 topic areas: Fiscal, Services, Reunification, Caseloads/Specialized Units, Reentry, Run away, and Diversion
- Interview call length averaged 72 minutes (median 69.5 minutes)

#4. Surveys with additional state key informants (10 states).



FINDINGS



FINDINGS

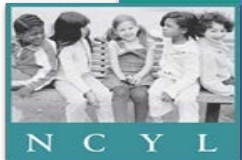
Cost of raising teens vs. size of benefits

Basic state-paid FC payment rate for a 16-year-old, by quartiles for 45 states

Quartile	Monthly payment rate range
1	\$300 to \$511
2	\$530 to \$676
3	\$681 to \$815
4	\$866 to \$1,311

Actual monthly cost to support a teen, 2017

- **Rural area USDA estimate = \$1,056**
- **Urban or suburban estimate varies regionally from**
 - \$1,070 in the South to
 - \$1,282 in the Northeast,

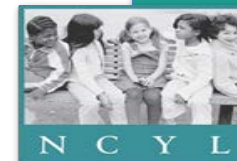


Finding 1: Foster Care rates

**Number of states that pay
daily/monthly FC payment rates
at or above the cost of raising a
teen in their region: 1**

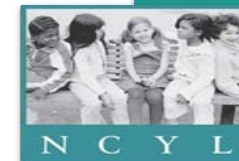
FINDINGS

*Other disincentives to teens
(and caregivers)*



Post FC: Financial support

State policy	Number of states
Provide payments to adoptive parents past the teen's age of 18 (to age of 21)	2
Pay kin/non-kin guardians the same amount as foster parents when permanency through guardianship is achieved	24
Pay kin/non-kin adoptive parents the same amount as foster parents when permanency through adoption is achieved	32



Post FC: Medicaid

State policy to expand Medicaid coverage until age 26 to include teens who have . . .	Number of states
Been reunified	3
Been adopted	4
With guardian	6

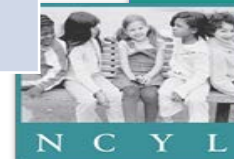
Post FC: Education, Tuition, Independence

State policy expands eligibility to include more teens who have been in foster care and exited to permanency	Number of states
Education and Training Voucher	7
Tuition Fee Waivers	18
Chafee and Independent Living Services (for all teens who exit FC to permanency or age out)	18



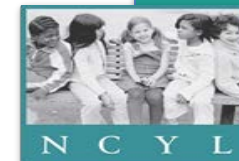
FC: Units, Workers, Programs

State policy or practice specific to teen permanency	Number of states
Aftercare for at least 1 year post- reunification	9
Specialized permanency program (statewide)	12
Workers or programs for teens who have run away or are missing (statewide)	5



FINDINGS

Reasons for reentry

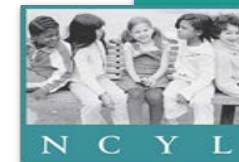


Reasons for teens' reentry into FC 1

Reason for reentry	for teens who have reunified (# of states)	for teens who have been adopted (# of states)
Teen delinquent behavior	17	9
Teen mental health	12	17
Parent/guardian substance use	11	
Repeated maltreatment	9	3
Teen behavior	9	14

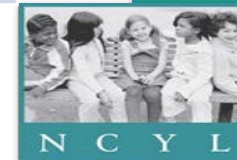
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Reasons for teens' reentry into FC 2

Reason for reentry	for teens who have reunified (# of states)	for teens who have been adopted (# of states)
Conflicting values	6	5
Caregiver mental health	4	
Other disabilities of teens		3
Caregivers' lack of access to services	3	3
Poverty generally, parent employment / job loss, inadequate or unstable housing	4	2

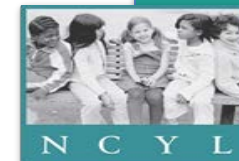


FINDINGS

Extensive need for post-FC services for both teens and caregivers

Needed supports for caregivers that are hardest to fund

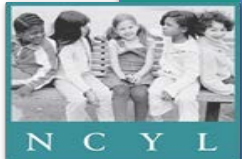
Policy or practice	Number of states mentioning each support
Behavioral health services for parents	21
Housing	11
Respite	8
Subsidy or post-permanency supports for adoption or kinship equivalent to foster care board rate	6
Funding for services for biological parents	6
Training for parents	4
Transportation, drivers' education, drivers' insurance	4



Policies / practices that would make most difference getting teens into and keeping teens in stable permanent settings 1

Policy or practice	Number of states mentioning policy or practice	
	Getting into	Keeping in
Access to expanded array of behavioral health services	12	24
Fund caregiver services	15	19
Permanency support services (caregiver recruitment, counseling, relationship development)	16	7
Pay, caseload, and training enhancements for staff working with teens	8	5

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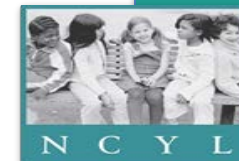
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Policies or practices that would make the most difference for getting teens into and keeping teens in stable permanent settings 2

Policy or practice	Number of states mentioning policy or practice	
	Getting into	Keeping in
Increase kinship and non-kinship guardian subsidies	9	2
Identify qualified foster parents for teens	9	2
Provide teen permanency trauma education for caregivers	3	6

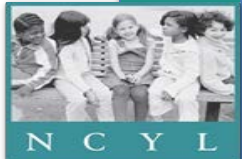


CONCLUSIONS



Conclusions 1

- **The child welfare system lacks sufficient care providers, training, specialization, and programming that are developmentally and culturally appropriate for teens and families.**
- **Youth returning home or aging out of the FC system face difficult odds.**
- **More must be done to provide stable services in families prior to entry & during reunification, guardianship, and adoption for teens.**

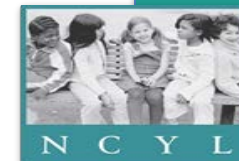


Conclusions 2

- **Unfortunately, current practice can often force teens and families into making decisions that have competing interests for the teen.**
- **Rarely can the teen choose permanence and simultaneously receive supports for independence.**
- **This creates a perverse incentive to remain in foster care.**



RECOMMENDATIONS



Recommendations 1

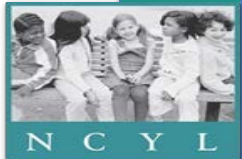
1. Provide caregivers an amount that supports the cost of raising a teenager.
2. Provide stipends to caregivers that, in size, are equivalent, independent of permanency type.
3. Provide support to get guardians through licensing process quickly to qualify for a full subsidy rather than child-only TANF benefits.
4. Use state funds to make payments equitable until licensing goes through.
5. Extend subsidies for adoption and guardianship to age 21.



Recommendations 2

6. **Continue aftercare or post-permanency services until the teen is 18 or 21 rather than just a few months.**
7. **Make teens and families automatically eligible for Medicaid and other services until ages 21 or 26 independent of permanency type.**
8. **Create tuition fee waivers and expand eligibility to include all teens who have been in foster care for any length of time.**
9. **Broaden the definition of relatives eligible for relative caregiving.**

10. . . . and others

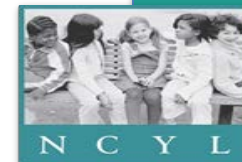


DISCUSSION

***JoAnn Heffron - Transition Programs
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***-- responsible for programs provided to all
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Q & A



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