



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# **THE FAILURES & FUTURE OF FOSTER CARE**

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# FOSTER CARE

Foster care (also known as out-of-home care) is a temporary service provided by States for children who cannot live with their families. Children in foster care may live with relatives or with unrelated foster parents.

Foster care can also refer to placement settings such as group homes, residential care facilities, emergency shelters, and supervised independent living.

## FACTS TO KNOW

- In the United States, more than 400,000 children are in foster care on a given day.
- State agencies spend about \$30 billion on child welfare purposes annually.
- Roughly 5% of children in the U.S. are placed in foster care at some point during their childhood. This rate is similar to the global rate.
- According to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System's (AFCARS) latest report, the average age of foster children is 8, and about 30% of foster children are between 1 and 5 years old.
- A recent study reported that within the United States, there were 615,000 victims of maltreatment (under age 18) in 2020.
- According to the National Youth in Transition Database, almost 30% of former foster care youth experience homelessness by age 21.

# FRAMING THE ISSUE

- States are trying to reduce the number of children in foster care, and for this reason, many have focused on prevention measures. This was the idea behind the 2018 Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA). However, some states may be giving too much weight to the declining number of children in foster care and are overlooking child maltreatment numbers.
- Poverty is frequently linked to child maltreatment, such as in cases of foreclosures, evictions, housing insecurity, and food insecurity. Douglas Bersharov at the University of Maryland estimates roughly 85% of families investigated by Child Protective Services are below 200% of the federal poverty line.
- Almost every state reports a shortage of licensed foster homes; Texas and Washington have even reported children sleeping in child welfare agency offices. Overall, there is a need for more foster care; some claim training for foster parents is inconvenient or even difficult to access, and sometimes foster parents are not informed of children's histories, such as past sexual abuse.

# WHAT YOU CAN DO

**MEASURE** Find out what your state and district are doing. How many foster children are in your state? Use [this resource](#) to learn more about foster care statistics for your state.

**IDENTIFY** Who are the influencers in your state, county, or community? Learn about their priorities and consider how to contact them, including elected officials, attorneys general, law enforcement, boards of education, city councils, journalists, media outlets, community organizations, and local businesses.

**REACH OUT** All it takes is a small team of two or three people to set a path for real improvement. Connect with local community programs and organizations to see their needs in supporting foster youth in your community.

**PLAN** Set milestones based on your state's legislative calendar or local community calendar as it relates to child welfare policies.

**EXECUTE** Consider volunteering with a foster care or child welfare organization in your community. Ask yourself, are you aligned with its mission statement? What is the organization's budget? How is the organization funded?