



National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information National Adoption Information Clearinghouse



Gateways to Information: Protecting Children and Strengthening Families

Foster Care National Statistics

Introduction

How many children are served by the foster care system? Who are they? What are their experiences in foster care?

Foster care is defined in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Title 45, Volume 4, Part 1355, Section 57 as "24-hour substitute care for children outside their own homes. The reporting system includes all children who have or had been in foster care at least 24 hours. The foster care settings include, but are not limited to family foster homes, relative foster homes (whether payments are being made or not), group homes, emergency shelters, residential facilities, childcare institutions, and pre-adoptive homes." The CFR citation can be accessed online at <http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/get-cfr.cgi?TITLE=45&PART=1355&SECTION=57&TYPE=TEXT>.

This fact sheet provides the most recent national statistical estimates for children in foster care (from fiscal year 2001) and also provides earlier data (from fiscal year 1998¹) to allow for some estimate of trends over time.² Data were obtained from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). AFCARS collects case-level information on all children in foster care for whom State child welfare agencies have responsibility for placement, care, or supervision and on children who are adopted under the auspices of the State's public child welfare agency. States are required to submit AFCARS data semi-annually to the Administration for Children and Families. The AFCARS report periods are October 1 through March 31 and April 1 through September 30.

The data presented for FY 2001 are from *The AFCARS Report: Preliminary FY 2001 Estimates as of March 2003 (8)* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003a) (www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/publications/afcars/report8.htm). The data presented for FY 1998 are from *The AFCARS Report: Interim Estimates for Fiscal Year 1998—April 2000 (3)* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000) (www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/publications/afcars/ar0400.htm).

For more information on AFCARS, visit the Children's Bureau Web site at www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/dis/afcars/about.htm.

Within each section, data estimates are presented for three time frames detailed below; however, data are not available for all time frames for all variables:

- **Point in Time** refers to information about the population of children in foster care on a given day, specifically on September 30, the end of the Federal fiscal year.
- **Entries** refers to information about children entering foster care during a given time frame, specifically October 1 through September 30 of the Federal fiscal year.
- **Exits** refers to information about children exiting foster care during a given time frame, specifically October 1 through September 30 of the Federal fiscal year.



The Clearinghouses are services of the Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Some percentages do not add up to 100 percent and/or the estimated numbers do not add up to the total number in the category due to rounding of the original AFCARS source data.

Placement Statistics

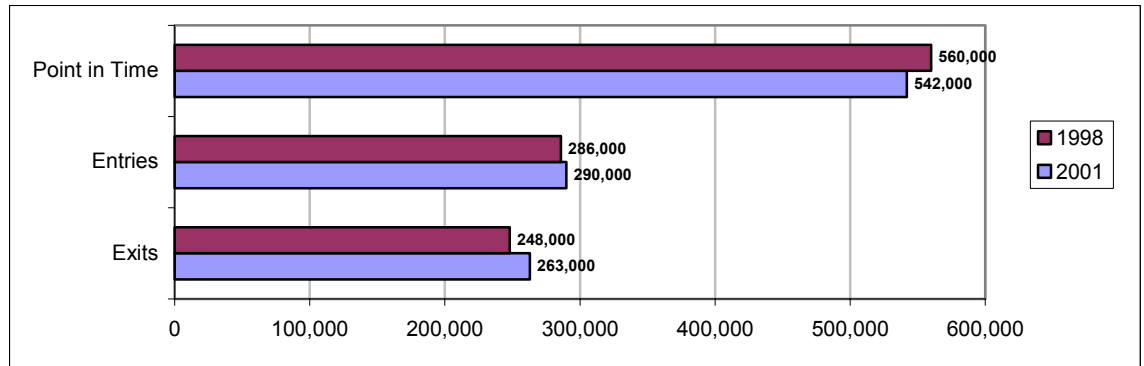
Children in, entering, and exiting care

Point in Time. As of September 30, 2001, there were an estimated 542,000 children in foster care.

Entries. During FY 2001, 290,000 children entered foster care.

Exits. During FY 2001, 263,000 children exited foster care.

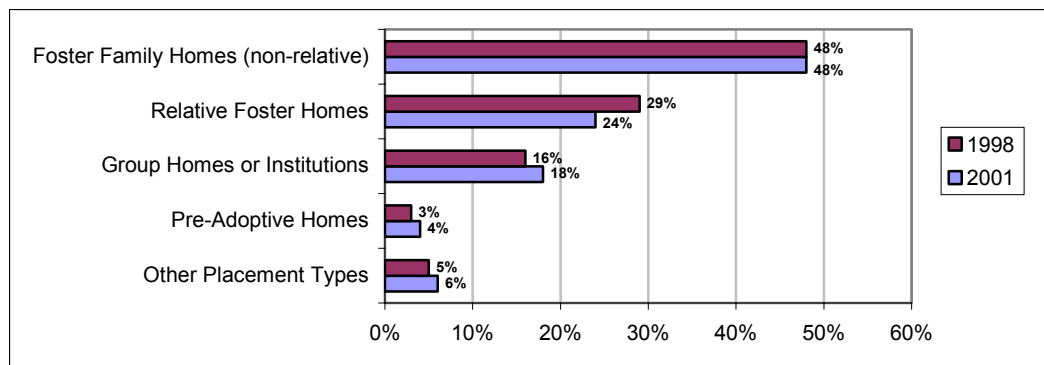
Trends. Between 1998 and 2001, entries into foster care stayed relatively stable, while exits increased slightly (15,000) and the number of children in care at any one point in time dropped slightly (18,000).



Placement types

Point in Time. Of the estimated 542,000 children in foster care as of September 30, 2001: 48 percent were in foster family homes (non-relative), 24 percent were in relative foster homes, 18 percent were in group homes or institutions, 4 percent were in pre-adoptive homes, and 6 percent were in other placement types.

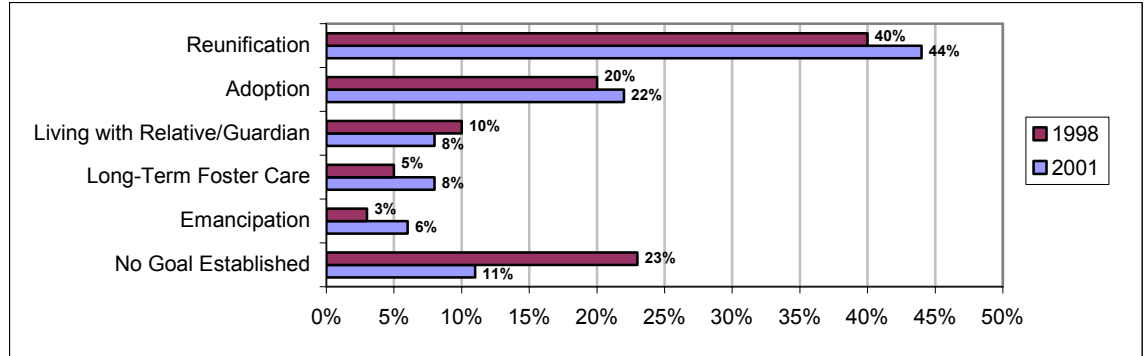
Trends. Placement type at any given point in time remained relatively unchanged between 1998 and 2001. Placement in relative foster homes showed the largest change, dropping 5 percentage points.



Permanency goals

Point in Time. Of the estimated 542,000 children in foster care as of September 30, 2001: 44 percent had a goal of reunification, 22 percent had a goal of adoption, 8 percent had a goal of living with a relative or guardian, 8 percent had a goal of long-term foster care, 6 percent had a goal of emancipation³, and 11 percent had not yet established a permanency goal.

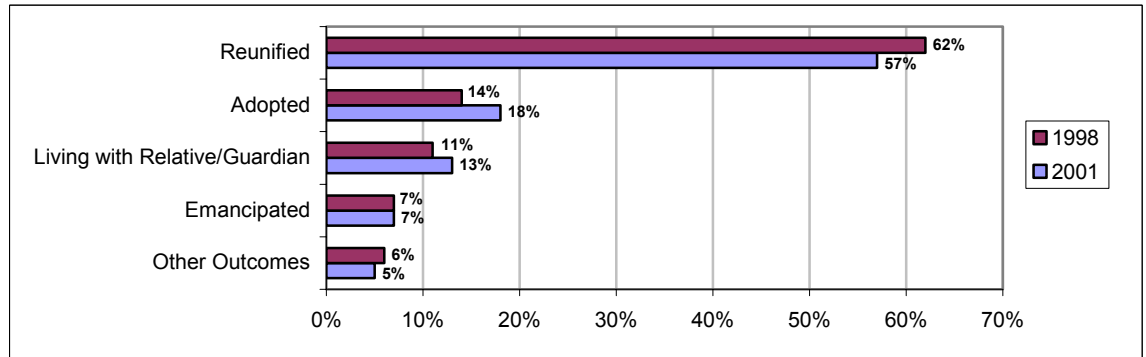
Trends. The most dramatic change between 1998 and 2001 occurred in the proportion of children in the “No Goal Established” category, which posted a decrease of 12 percentage points.



Outcomes

Exits. Of the estimated 263,000 children who exited foster care during FY 2001: 57 percent were reunified, 18 percent were adopted, 13 percent went to live with a relative or guardian, 7 percent were emancipated, and 5 percent had other outcomes⁴.

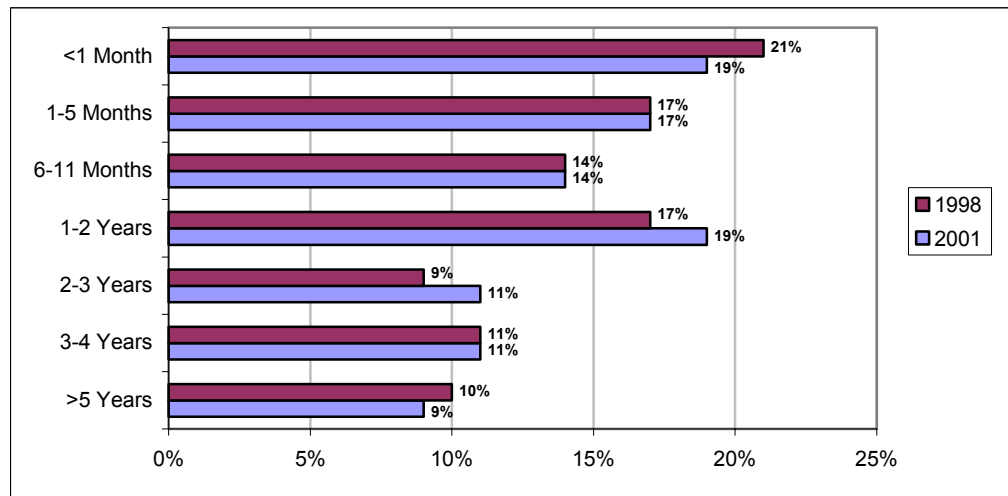
Trends. The percentages of children leaving foster care to live with relatives, guardians, or adoptive families increased slightly between 1998 and 2001, while exits to reunification decreased by 5 percentage points.



Length of stay

Exits. Of the estimated 263,000 children who exited foster care during FY 2001: 19 percent had been in care less than 1 month, 17 percent had been in care for 1 to 5 months, 14 percent had been in care for 6 to 11 months, 19 percent had been in care for 1 to 2 years, 11 percent had been in care for 2 to 3 years, 11 percent had been in care for 3 to 4 years, and 9 percent had been in care for 5 or more years.

Trends. The time children spent in foster care remained relatively unchanged between 1998 and 2001.



Descriptive Information

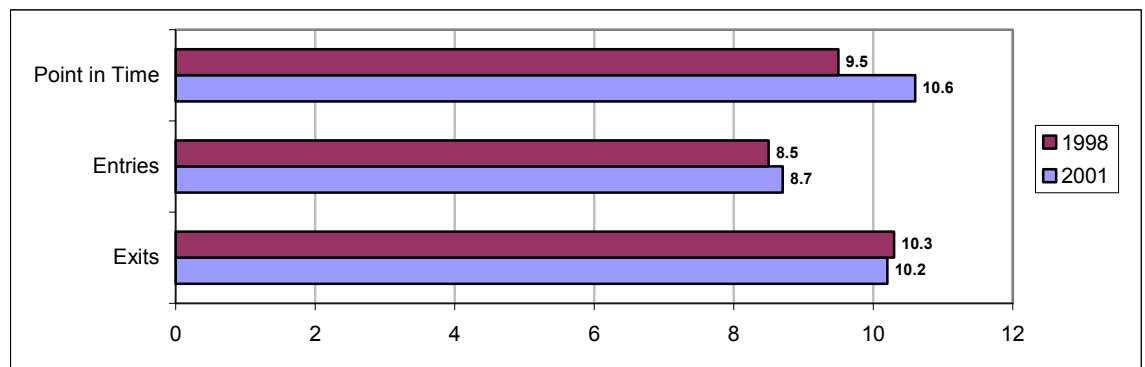
Age

Point in Time. The median⁵ age of the children in foster care on September 30, 2001 was **10.6 years**.

Entries. The median age of children entering foster care during FY 2001 was 8.7 years.

Exits. The median age of children exiting foster care during FY 2001 was 10.2 years.

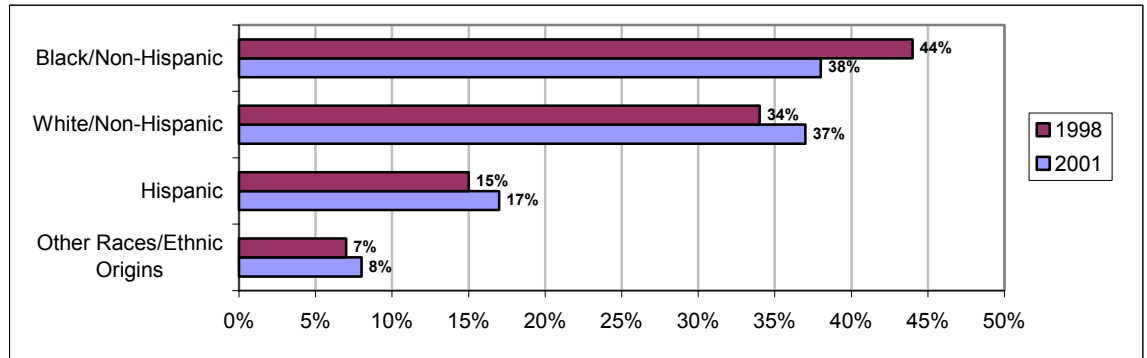
Trends. The age at entry and exit stayed relatively stable between 1998 and 2001, while the median age of all children in care at a given point in time increased by 1.1 years.



**Race/
Ethnicity**

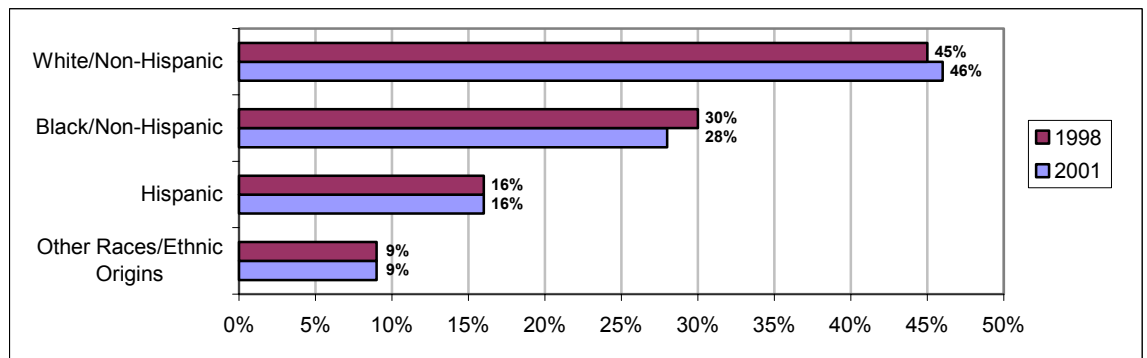
Point in Time. Of the estimated 542,000 children in foster care as of September 30, 2001: 38 percent were Black/Non-Hispanic; 37 percent were White/Non-Hispanic; 17 percent were Hispanic; and 8 percent were other races/ethnic origins.⁶

Trends. The percentage of Black/Non-Hispanic children in care at any given time dropped 6 percentage points (from 44 to 38 percent) between 1998 and 2001; rates for all other race/ethnicity categories increased slightly.



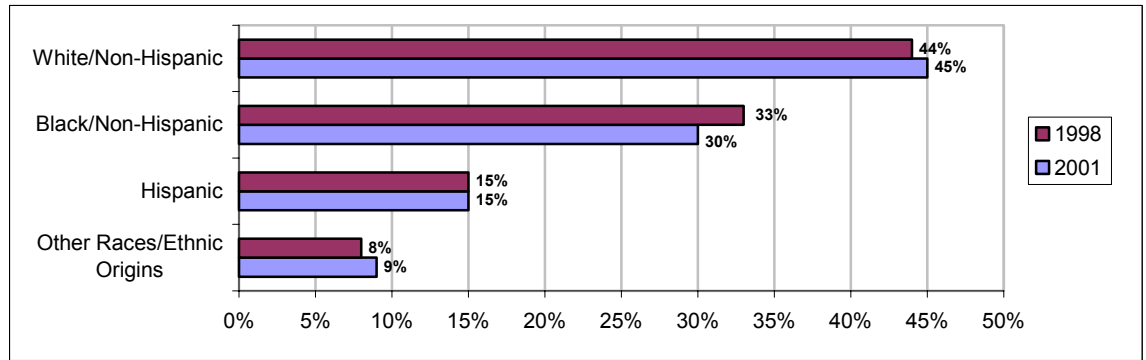
Entries. Of the estimated 290,000 children who entered foster care during FY 2001: 46 percent were White/Non-Hispanic; 28 percent were Black/Non-Hispanic; 16 percent were Hispanic; and 9 percent were other races/ethnic origins.

Trends. The racial composition of children entering foster care stayed relatively stable between 1998 and 2001.



Exits. Of the estimated 263,000 children who exited foster care during FY 2001: 45 percent were White/Non-Hispanic; 30 percent were Black/Non-Hispanic; 15 percent were Hispanic; and 9 percent were other races/ethnic origins.

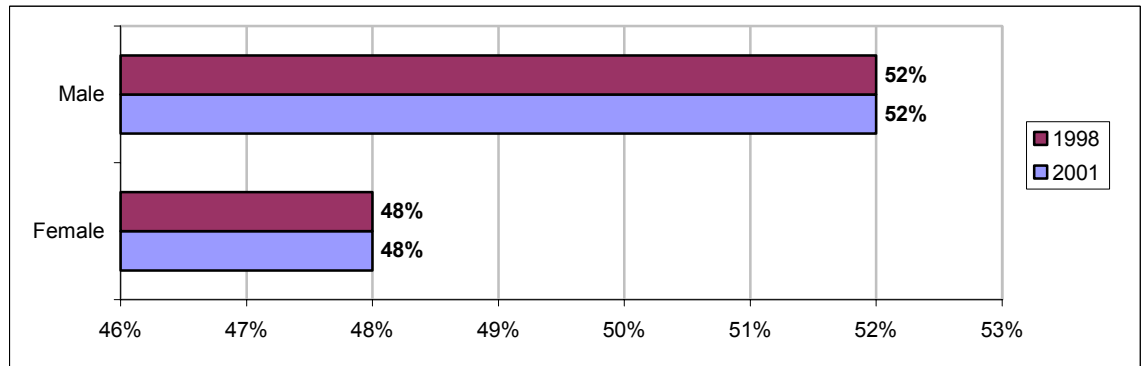
Trends. The racial composition of children exiting foster care stayed relatively stable between 1998 and 2001.



Gender

Point in Time. Of the estimated 542,000 children in foster care as of September 30, 2001, 52 percent were male and 48 percent were female.

Trends. Gender demographics were unchanged between 1998 and 2001.



OTHER INFORMATION

Re-entries	A median 10.3 percent of children who entered foster care in FY 2000 were re-entering the system within 12 months of discharge. (Page III-2, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003b).
Abuse and neglect by foster parents	As reported in <i>Child Maltreatment 2001</i> , 0.5 percent of the perpetrators of abuse or neglect were foster parents. This translates into an estimated 4,239 perpetrators and 5,133 instances of abuse or neglect in 2001. (Page 49, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003b).
Cost	The Urban Institute estimates in FY 2000, total spending (Federal, State, and local) for out-of-home care was at least \$9.1 billion (Page 8, Bess, Roseana, et al., 2002).
References	<p>Bess, Roseana, et al. (2002). The cost of protecting vulnerable children III: What factors affect states' fiscal decisions? Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.</p> <p>U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2000). The AFCARS report: Interim estimates for Fiscal Year 1998—April 2000 (3) [online]. Available at www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/dis/afcars/publications/afcars.htm. Retrieved 5/06/03.</p> <p>U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2003a). The AFCARS report: Preliminary FY 2001 estimates as of March 2003 (8) [online]. Available at www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/dis/afcars/publications/afcars.htm. Retrieved 5/02/03.</p> <p>U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2003b). Child welfare outcomes 2000: Annual report. Safety, permanency, well-being. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.</p> <p>To find out more about foster care statistics in your State, refer to <i>Child Welfare Outcomes 2000: Annual Report. Safety, Permanency, Well-being</i>. This report is available online (in pdf and html format) from the Children's Bureau at www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/publications/cwo.htm. Print copies are available from the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information by calling (800) 394-3366 or e-mailing nccanch@calib.com.</p>

¹ 1998 was chosen as the baseline year because it is the first year in which 85 percent of all States/jurisdictions submitted AFCARS data.

² AFCARS data from other years are available online from the Children's Bureau at www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/dis/afcars/publications/afcars.htm.

³ Emancipation refers to aging out and leaving the foster care system; this occurs between the ages of 18 and 21, depending on State policy.

⁴ Other outcomes include being transferred to another agency and runaways.

⁵ The median refers to the number in the middle when all numbers are placed in order. In this case, it means that an equal number of children are older and younger than this age.

⁶ Using U.S. Bureau of Census standards, children of Hispanic origin may be of any race. Beginning in FY 2000, children could be identified with more than one race designation.