



Kinship Care in Allegheny County: Recent Trends and Child Experiences

October 2026

The Allegheny County Department of Human Services (ACDHS) is mandated by law to protect children under the age of 18 from abuse and neglect. When ACDHS finds that a child cannot continue to reside safely in their home, a judge may determine that a temporary home, called an out-of-home placement, is necessary. ACDHS prioritizes placing children in family settings, such as in the home of a relative or family friend (known as kinship care) or in non-relative foster home, whenever possible. In recent years, we have established a particular emphasis on kinship homes and have created a “kin-first culture”¹ within our child welfare office. We are supported in this effort by A Second Chance, Inc., a placement provider agency with which we have had a decades-long partnership. A Second Chance, Inc. provides nearly all of the County’s kinship services.

We prioritize kinship care because of its potential benefits compared to other placement settings. Living with relatives or a family friend can reduce a child’s anxiety and the trauma of having been removed from biological parents; it can also help children maintain relationships with their family and cultural identity. Kinship care performs better than other placement types on key child welfare metrics: increased placement stability; higher rates of desirable permanent exit types; and lower rates of subsequent re-entry into care.

Our commitment to kinship care was years in the making; rates of kinship care in Allegheny County are now twice what they were in 2010 and significantly above state and national averages. This document examines the data during our significant transition toward kinship care since 2010, including trends in the utilization of kinship care as a placement setting across demographic groups and the associated child experiences and outcomes for Allegheny County’s children in out-of-home placement.

Among the key findings:

- Kinship care was the entry type for more than 60% of Allegheny County placements since 2017.
- Prior to 2018, the proportion of White children placed in kinship settings for their first placement was consistently higher than the rate for Black children; since 2018, Black children entered kinship settings at a rate slightly higher than that of White children.
- Rates of kinship placement rose among all age groups — but especially for youth ages 12 through 17. In the early years of this analysis (2010 through 2013), these youth were entering congregate settings about 70% of the time; by 2023, they were entering kinship care a majority of the time and at rates comparable to other age groups. This increase was consistent for teens at all levels of need.
- When placed in congregate or non-relative foster settings, younger children were more likely than older children to be moved to a less restrictive/more desirable setting. Youth with complex care needs of all ages were significantly less likely to have experienced this positive type of move.
- Among all youth who did not experience a positive placement move, older youth in all settings were more likely to experience a disruptive move; youth with more complex care needs were particularly likely to have experienced a disruptive move. Kinship care had the lowest placement disruption rate within all age and care-complexity groups.

1 [Raising Hope in Allegheny County](#)

- Since 2010, youth in kinship care with one or more siblings also in placement were more likely to spend time placed with their sibling(s) than youth in other settings.
- Child welfare abuse or neglect allegations in which the caregiver was the perpetrator occurred at a similarly low incidence rate in both kinship and non-relative foster care (about one instance per 3,000 days of care). Substantiated allegations were also uncommon. Dating back to 2015 data, fewer than two percent of kinship or non-relative foster care placements incurred a substantiated allegation with the resource caregiver as perpetrator.
- Youth in kinship and non-relative foster care experienced similar rates of parental reunification and overall exits to permanency. However, kinship placements were much more likely to end with a permanent legal custodianship (PLC) arrangement than with formal adoption.
- Among reunification exits, youth exiting from kinship placements experienced the lowest rates of re-entry into care within the following year, holding constant for age and care complexity. Congregate care exits experienced the highest rates of re-entry. Fortunately, overall re-entry rates following reunification have been trending downward.

PROMOTING KINSHIP CARE IN PRACTICE

Allegheny County's culture of kinship care was built through conscious institutional investment and business process design. For example:

- We largely consolidated kinship care under a single, specialized provider—A Second Chance, Inc. (ASCI). ASCI handles kin licensing, training and case management and provides a 24/7 support system for kinship caregivers.
- ACDHS leadership deliberately sought buy-in from child welfare staff and local judges,² using data to make the case that kinship placements yield better outcomes than congregate or non-relative foster care.
- ASCI employed “kinship navigators” to conduct family finding activities (i.e., locating and engaging kin and close family friends who might serve as a support or resource home for a child entering care).
- Payments for kinship providers were increased to match the rates paid to non-kin foster care providers.³ Kin resource homes also receive concrete goods such as diapers, formula and other tangible supplies.⁴

MEASURING OUTCOMES: METHODOLOGY

This data brief draws largely on administrative child welfare records from Allegheny County's case management system (Key Information and Demographics System or KIDS) and, unless otherwise indicated, covers the period from 1/1/2010 through 12/31/2025. The main analytic sample includes 16,773 distinct child welfare home removals—children from birth through age 17 at entry with an initial placement in child welfare care from 2010 through 2025. Juvenile probation involvement and Medicaid-paid mental health and/or substance use services data were incorporated from the [Allegheny County Data Warehouse](#) to provide insight into different subpopulations.

2,3 [How Did Allegheny County Advance a Kin-First Approach?](#)

4 [How did A Second Chance Inc. transform kinship care in Allegheny County?](#)

Because the goal of this publication is to communicate clear, accessible insights on Allegheny County's child welfare system to a broad public audience, these analyses are descriptive and stratified by somewhat broad age and care type groupings, rather than utilizing more sophisticated and technical approaches such as multivariate regression with statistical significance testing.

Types of Care

The three primary placement types are defined as follows:

- **Kinship care:** Placement with relatives, extended family or close family friends (sometimes known as fictive kin)
- **Non-relative foster care:** Placement with licensed foster parents who are not related to the child
- **Congregate care:** All other care types in supervised, non-family settings (e.g., group home, independent living, residential treatment facility, hospital)

Limitations: Included and Excluded

- Children entering care voluntarily after age 18 (resumption) were not included in our analyses.
- Home removals entirely under the purview of juvenile probation were not included. While we included removals with both child welfare and juvenile probation placements, for entry analyses the first child welfare placement was used as date of entry.
- We did not disaggregate kinship care by type of relationship to the child; i.e., differentiating between fictive kin and legal or biological relationships.

Accounting for Selection Bias in Care Types

The placement settings available and appropriate for a given child are not determined by chance. Factors that influence placement—demographic categories (e.g., age, race, sex), behavioral health needs, trauma history, family dynamics and/or the availability of a supportive kin network—also may influence perceptions of the child themselves, and these factors differ, on average, in children placed with relatives and those placed with unrelated foster families or in group settings. As a result, *selection bias* may occur, meaning that observed differences in outcomes across placement types may reflect these preexisting characteristics as much as, or more than, the effects of the placements themselves. To account for some of these key factors—and to achieve a more nuanced understanding of placement dynamics across children with different experiences and circumstances—we disaggregated many of the following analyses by intuitive age groupings as well as by relevant pre-placement histories indicative of children with more complex care needs.

Age Groups

Three age groupings were utilized in the analyses:

- Birth through 4: Infants, toddlers and young children typically not yet in K-12 school
- Age 5 through 11: Young children and youth who are typically in elementary school or early middle school, a group that has historically been unlikely to experience congregate care settings or juvenile probation issues in large volume
- Age 12 through 17: Older youth and teens, a group within which juvenile probation and congregate care settings have historically been more prevalent

Complex Care Needs

Four data points were selected as possible indicators of more complex care needs.

- *Juvenile probation* history within the five years prior to entering care
- *Mental health crisis service* history within the five years prior to entering care
- *Mental health inpatient service* history within the five years prior to entering care and
- *Substance use* history within the five years prior to entering care

Complex Care Needs Indicator: A Rough Proxy

It should be noted that the identified data points are not a comprehensive list of scenarios that may comprise complex care needs. It is also not the case that all children with a history of involvement in these services are similar to one another, nor would they all be uniformly considered to have complex care needs. Rather, we selected these indicators to present a simple and interpretable grouping of youth who, on average and historically, were less likely to be placed in a family setting. Future analyses might consider incorporating additional factors and/or weighting underlying factors differently to generate a more child-specific complexity score.

Due to limitations in historic completeness of juvenile probation data, analyses disaggregating by complex care needs were conducted only from 2012 entry cohorts onward (a slightly shorter time horizon than some of the other analyses). Additionally, because there has been essentially no prevalence of children in the youngest age range with any of the complex care need indicators identified, analyses that compare children with and without complex care needs were only conducted for the older two age groups.

As seen in **Table 1**, there were significant differences in the prevalence of complex care needs in different placement settings. In the oldest age group (12 through 17), those without any of the four indicators were placed in kinship or non-relative foster care 72% of the time, compared to only about 44% of youth with one or more indicators. In the five-through-11 age group, in which the vast majority entered into a family setting, a gap of nine percentage points still existed.

TABLE 1: Initial Placement Setting, by Age Category and Presence of Complex Care Needs, Number and Percent, 2012 through 2025

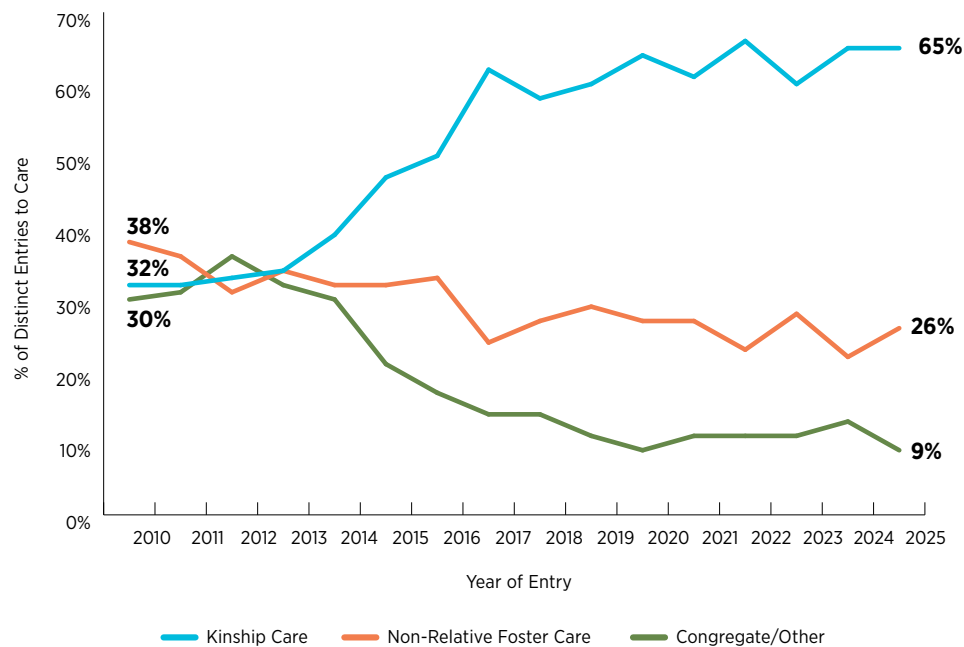
			AGES 5 THROUGH 11 ENTERING CARE		AGES 12 THROUGH 17 ENTERING CARE		ALL CHILDREN 5 THROUGH 17
			ANY COMPLEX CARE NEED IN 5 YEARS PRIOR TO REMOVAL	NO COMPLEX CARE NEED IN 5 YEARS PRIOR TO REMOVAL	ANY COMPLEX CARE NEED IN 5 YEARS PRIOR TO REMOVAL	NO COMPLEX CARE NEED IN 5 YEARS PRIOR TO REMOVAL	
Setting	Family Setting	Kinship Care	421	2,006	1,048	979	4,454
		Foster Care	236	945	352	310	1,843
	Congregate Settings		78	59	1,817	502	2,456
	All Child Welfare Entries		735	3,010	3,217	1791	8,753
Setting	Family Setting	Kinship Pct.	57%	67%	33%	55%	51%
		Foster Pct.	32%	31%	11%	17%	21%
		Family Setting Pct.	89%	98%	44%	72%	72%
	Congregate Settings		11%	2%	56%	28%	28%

MEASURING OUTCOMES: UTILIZATION OF KINSHIP CARE

Rates of Initial Placement

Not long ago, Allegheny County youth entering out-of-home placement were placed in kinship care, non-relative foster care and congregate care settings in approximately equal proportions. From 2010 through 2013, about one-third of all children entering care were placed initially into a kinship setting (**Figure 1**). Beginning in 2014, the County's use of kinship as a child's initial placement setting began to increase dramatically. Since about 2017, upwards of 60% of youth have consistently been placed in kinship care.

FIGURE 1: Initial Child Welfare Placement Type, Percentage by Removal Year, n=16,773



Prior to about 2017, significant racial disparities were observed in Allegheny County's kinship care placement rates. From 2010 through 2017, the proportion of White children initially placed in a kinship setting after home removal was higher than the proportion of Black children by an average of 10 percentage points each year (**Table 2**). Since 2017, these disparities have lessened significantly. From 2018 through 2025, the differences by race have narrowed and the direction of the gap has reversed: Black children entering care have been placed in kinship settings more often than White children by an average of about three percentage points.

TABLE 2: Initial Placements to Kinship Care, by Race Group⁵ and Year of Entry, Number and Percent

ENTRY YEAR	BLACK/AFRICAN-AMERICAN		WHITE		WHITE VS. BLACK DISPARITY (%)	ALL CHILDREN	
	ENTRIES (N)	% KINSHIP	ENTRIES (N)	% KINSHIP		ENTRIES (N)	% KINSHIP
2010	540	30%	345	37%	8%	1162	32%
2011	594	29%	343	40%	11%	1237	32%
2012	572	28%	436	40%	13%	1288	33%
2013	538	34%	353	41%	7%	1175	34%
2014	505	38%	332	42%	4%	1139	39%
2015	516	43%	352	57%	14%	1172	47%
2016	471	44%	414	61%	17%	1188	50%
2017	570	57%	459	71%	15%	1322	62%
2018	477	59%	424	63%	4%	1129	58%
2019	501	63%	399	59%	-5%	1201	60%
2020	414	68%	284	60%	-8%	869	64%
2021	403	62%	307	63%	1%	923	61%
2022	362	69%	215	63%	-6%	748	66%
2023	334	64%	210	57%	-7%	670	60%
2024	313	65%	269	68%	3%	721	65%
2025	437	69%	251	60%	-10%	829	65%

Variation by Age

A child's age can factor significantly into the types of placement settings that are available and appropriate. Both kinship and non-relative foster homes may have greater capacity—and are often more willing—to care for younger children than for older children. Historically, teens often ended up in congregate setting. However, as the County's kinship rates increased, relative progress was made across all age groups (**Figure 2**). In 2010, youth ages 12 through 17 entered into kinship care about 23% of the time, while the two younger age groups entered kinship settings in about 38% and 43% of removals, respectively. By 2025, incoming youth in all three age categories were entering into initial kinship care placements more than 60% of the time.

⁵ Due to low sample size and how data were collected, we did not include children identifying as another race or multi-racial.

FIGURE 2: Initial Child Welfare Placements to Kinship Care, Percent, by Age Group and Year of Entry, n=16,773

For youth ages 12 through 17, the rise in kinship placements tended to displace use of congregate settings. From 2010 through 2013, about 70% had entered placement into an initial congregate setting; annually since 2022, fewer than 25% have been in a congregate setting. The rates are practically reversed in kinship settings, with utilization increasing from approximately 21% to 61% over the same time period.

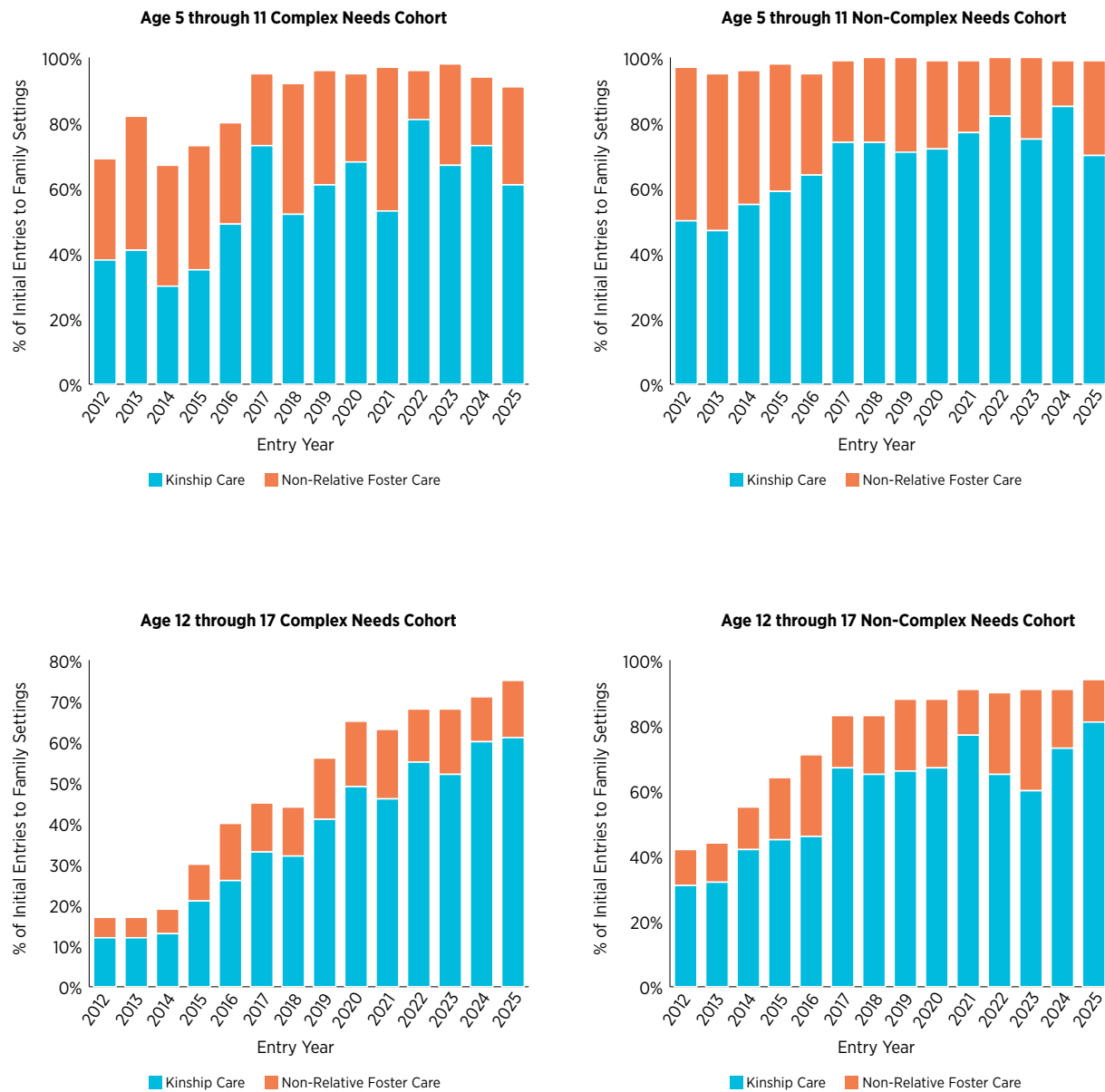
For youth 11 and under, use of congregate care is nearly non-existent, so the rise in kinship placement has offset use of non-relative foster care. In 2010, a slight majority of youth in this age group entered into non-relative foster care upon entering placement; by 2025, about two-thirds were entering into kinship care.

Complex Care Needs

Disaggregating the data further by youth with and without perceived complex care needs shows that the increase in family placement settings was experienced by both groups, especially among the oldest youth (**Figure 3**).

In 2010, about 17% of youth ages 12 through 17 in the complex need population and 41% of those in the non-complex need group entered into kinship or non-relative foster care upon home removal. By 2025, these rates had increased to approximately 75% and 94%, respectively.

The changes for youth ages 11 through 15 were less drastic but still notable. The non-complex care group were placed in family settings somewhat uniformly (over 95% of the time) each year, although the proportion of placements in kinship care increased. Prior to 2017, the complex care group were placed in family settings around 70-80% of the time; from 2017 onward, this rate increased to upwards of 90% (with kinship care accounting for most of the increase).

FIGURE 3: Initial Child Welfare Placements to Kinship Care and Non-Relative Foster Care, by Age Group and Care C

Exploring Possible Constraints and Further Opportunities in Kinship Care Rates

The dramatic increase in kinship care entries between 2010 and 2017, followed by a steady rate of kinship utilization in the years since, invites a subsequent question: does the placement system have room for additional growth in kinship rates, or has it reached an approximate “ceiling” in the data? Do more willing and appropriate kinship settings exist for the roughly one in three children who do not initially enter kinship care?

KEY FINDINGS

Delayed Identification of Kinship Options

For some youth, kinship options emerge after entering care. Family-finding research and outreach efforts may continue beyond the point of entry into placement and, as a result, some children initially placed in settings other than kinship move to a kinship placement later in the removal episode.⁶

From 2018 through 2025, this was the experience for an additional 12% of children. While an average of 62% of children placed during that time entered directly into kinship care, an average of 74% actually had some kinship support during their placement episode.

Secondary placement into kinship care is also increasing, indicating that post-removal family finding is continuing at a higher rate.

Secondary placement into kinship care is also increasing, indicating that post-removal family finding is continuing at a higher rate. From 2010 through 2017, 27% of children initially placed in a setting other than kinship moved to at least one kinship setting before exiting placement; from 2018 through 2025, this rate increased to 32%. Further analysis will help us understand the factors affecting kin identification and availability at the point of entry and identify opportunities for practice improvement.

Depletion of Past Caregiving Resources

Some children entering care have been in placement previously; this was the case for at least 26% of youth entering care from 2010 through 2025.⁷ For children with prior placement episodes, kin may have already provided support or, even without prior involvement, may have concerns about taking on placement when circumstances have persisted or recurred across placement episodes. These considerations may influence their ability or willingness to serve as a placement resource. Placement data show that prior kinship placement has become more common among children ages six and older entering non-kinship care, increasing from about

⁶ Note: These figures are “to date” as of September 15, 2026 administrative data, and could rise if additional youth still in care from these cohorts experience kinship settings prior to exiting.

⁷ The administrative data underlying this finding only goes back through mid-2008, when Allegheny County’s current child welfare case management system was implemented. It is likely that some children in the cohort had child welfare history pre-dating 2008, so this figure is a probable undercount.

12% from 2010 through 2017 to an average of 22% from 2018 through 2025. If this does indicate hesitation on the part of some past kin caregivers, it raises questions about whether additional or improved supports could help preserve caregivers as lasting family connections and ensure they feel adequately equipped and supported in their role as a placement resource.

Challenges with Young Children

Notably, recent placement data show that the youngest children (five and younger) now have the lowest rates of initial kinship placement relative to other age groups. Two factors may help explain this pattern. First, the placement system may have more non-relative foster homes available for younger children than for older children. Second, some kin may face practical challenges providing the intensive care and supervision that infants and young children require. Furthermore, identifying placement for youth may involve some urgency, giving kin limited time to prepare. Ultimately, because available data do not identify specific factors that contribute to placement decisions for young children, further analysis is necessary to determine whether this pattern reflects caregiver availability, placement practices, time pressures at removal, and/or insufficient supports and services for kin to provide and sustain kinship care.

Notably, recent placement data show that the youngest children (five and younger) now have the lowest rates of initial kinship placement relative to other age groups.

Other Constraints

Beyond the factors described above, the reality is that some children have caregiving needs that necessitate more specialized placement environments, while others may not have any locatable relatives who are available, willing and/or appropriate to act as kinship resources. As such, it stands to reason that there is some limit to how high rates of kinship placement can go. The considerations above suggest avenues of investigation that could help the agency address barriers to continued growth in kinship care and expand opportunities for children to experience the stability, continuity and connection it can provide. As the agency continues to advance a kin-first culture, thoughtful, individualized placement decisions can ensure that kinship receives full consideration without presuming kinship care remains the best option for all children and their families.

MEASURING OUTCOMES: EXPERIENCES IN CARE

Placement Stability

Children placed in kinship settings tend to incur fewer moves from one placement setting to another. From 2010 through 2024, children in initial kinship settings averaged about 0.6 removal episodes/moves per year of placement (the equivalent of one placement disruption every ~637 days). By contrast, children entering into non-relative foster care incurred about 0.8 moves per year, while those in congregate settings averaged about 2.1 moves per year (an average of one placement disruption every 172 days).

However, not all moves can be interpreted equally. For example, if a youth is placed in a congregate setting and a suitable kinship or non-relative foster home is found, this move to a less-restrictive family setting is desirable. We also view a move from a non-relative foster placement to a kinship setting as a positive move.

With this in mind, Table 3 illustrates how often youth in each age and care complexity group experienced positive placement changes within a year of entering care. Younger children in both the congregate care and non-relative kinship care populations were more likely to experience a placement move to a less restrictive/more desirable setting. Youth in the complex care needs population, in every age group, were less likely to experience a positive change in placement.

TABLE 3: Positive Placement Changes⁸ Within 1 Year of Initial Placement Type, by Age Group and Complex Needs (as Applicable), 2012 through 2024

AGE GROUP	COMPLEX CARE NEEDS GROUP	MEASURE	INITIAL PLACEMENT TYPE		
			CONGREGATE CARE	NON-RELATIVE FOSTER CARE	KINSHIP CARE
Ages 0 through 4	N/A	Total Placement (n)	166	2138	2,622
		% with positive move	87%	28%	N/A
Ages 5 through 11	Non-Complex	Total Placement (n)	67	885	1,684
		% with positive move	55%	30%	N/A
	Complex Care Needs	Total Placement (n)	67	206	337
		% with positive move	34%	18%	N/A
		Difference: Complex vs. Non-Complex (%)	-21%	-13%	N/A
Ages 12 through 17	Non-Complex	Total Placement (n)	580	286	784
		% with positive move	21%	24%	N/A
	Complex Care Needs	Total Placement (n)	1,619	306	814
		% with positive move	12%	19%	N/A
		Difference: Complex vs. Non-Complex (%)	-9%	-5%	N/A

⁸ "Positive placement changes" defined as Congregate Care moves to either Foster or Kinship care, or Non-Relative Foster Care moves to Kinship care; No move from Kinship Care is categorized as positive.

Placement moves that do not fit into the category of a positive change to a more desirable setting are disruptive and systematically avoided. Setting aside the youth in **Table 3** who experienced a positive placement move, **Table 4** examines how often the remaining youth instead experienced a placement *disruption* rather than their ongoing placement setting remaining stable. Older youth, regardless of placement setting, were generally more likely to experience disruptive moves. Disruptive moves were also more likely for youth with complex care needs across each age group and care type combination—often by 15% or more. For example, 65% of youth ages 12 through 17 with complex care needs experienced a negative disruption, compared to 36% of the non-complex group. Holding age group and care complexity group constant, kinship care placements had the lowest placement disruption rates among each combination.

TABLE 4: Negative Placement Disruptions⁹ Within 1 Year of Initial Placement in Care (Among All Placements Not Ending in a Positive Placement Change), by Age Group and Complex Needs, 2012 through 2024

AGE GROUP	COMPLEX CARE NEEDS GROUP	MEASURE	INITIAL PLACEMENT TYPE		
			CONGREGATE CARE	NON-RELATIVE FOSTER CARE	KINSHIP CARE
Ages 0 through 4	N/A	Total Placement (n)	22	1,545	2,622
		% with positive move	50%	24%	27%
Ages 5 through 11	Non-Complex	Total Placement (n)	30	616	1,684
		% with positive move	40%	36%	27%
	Complex Care Needs	Total Placement (n)	44	170	337
		% with positive move	55%	57%	37%
		Difference: Complex vs. Non-Complex (%)	15%	21%	10%
Ages 12 through 17	Non-Complex	Total Placement (n)	456	218	784
		% with positive move	38%	36%	32%
	Complex Care Needs	Total Placement (n)	1,421	249	814
		% with positive move	55%	65%	51%
		Difference: Complex vs. Non-Complex (%)	17%	28%	19%

Sibling Connection

One of the conceptual benefits of kinship care is that it is best able to help maintain a child's relationships to their family and cultural identity. One dynamic is that kinship caregivers are often more willing and able to care for groups of siblings, thus allowing children to better maintain their familial connections during placement. Since 2010, among children in placement with at least one sibling currently in care, those in kinship care were placed with a sibling 78% of the time, compared to 71% of children in foster placements and 17% of those in congregate care.

Safety While in Kinship and Non-Relative Foster Care

Child welfare agencies are legally and morally responsible for a child's safety once the child has been removed from home and taken into state custody. Unfortunately, abuse or neglect while a child is in a home-based placement, while uncommon, does occur.

⁹ **Table 4** denominators represent all remaining placements (excluding placements in **Table 3**) where the placement did not experience a positive placement move. (i.e., the remaining options for this group of placements are negative placement disruptions or the placement remaining stable as is). "Placement disruptions" defined as Congregate Care lateral moves, Non-Relative Foster Care moves to either another Non-Relative Foster Care or Congregate setting, and any Kinship Care move (lateral or otherwise).

Table 5 provides a breakdown of these incidents. Overall, without controlling for length of stay, a child welfare referral (a call or other communication alleging abuse or neglect) was received in about 22% of kinship placements and 28% of non-relative foster care placements. The resource caregiver was the alleged perpetrator of an allegation in about seven percent of kinship placements; the allegation was substantiated in fewer than two percent of placements. In non-relative foster care, these rates were six percent and slightly over one percent, respectively. Longer placements inherently present a greater opportunity for these incidents to occur. Looking at maltreatment events relative to days in care, as shown at the bottom of **Table 5**, we see that kinship settings had the fewest referrals over time (1.13 per 1,000 days of care in aggregate, compared to non-relative foster care (1.69) or congregate care (1.39).

Incidents in which the resource caregiver was the perpetrator (about one instance per over 3,000 days of care) occurred at almost identical rates in kinship and foster care, and both had extremely small rates of substantiated maltreatment reports. From 2015 through 2025,¹⁰ there were 243 substantiated referrals in which the kinship caregiver was the alleged perpetrator. Given that there were 3.2 million care days over that time period, this translates to about one incident per 13,326 care days. For non-family foster care, there were 90 such instances across about 1.6 million care days (about one per 17,340 care days).

TABLE 5: Number and Rate of Maltreatment Incidents during Kinship and Non-Relative Foster Care Placement, by Placement Type, 2015 through 2025

	KINSHIP CARE	NON-RELATIVE FOSTER CARE
Counts per distinct placement episode		
Distinct placement episodes	12,944	6,572
% with at least one referral in range	21.6%	27.6%
% with any allegation with resource caregiver(s) as alleged perpetrator(s)	6.8%	6.0%
% with any substantiated allegation with resource caregiver(s) as alleged perpetrator(s)	1.7%	1.3%
Incidence Rates: Controlling for length of time in care		
Aggregate days of care	3,216,352	1,560,556
Distinct referrals	3,739	2,640
Incidence rate per 1000 days of care	1.16	1.69
Referrals with resource caregiver(s) as alleged perpetrator(s)	1,057	478
Incidence rate per 1,000 days of care	0.33	0.31
Substantiated referrals with resource caregiver(s) as alleged perpetrator(s)	243	90
Incidence rate per 1,000 days of care	0.08	0.06

¹⁰ Prior to 2015, County Child Protective Services data were subject to expungement that limits the ability to comprehensively assess maltreatment prevalence before that year.

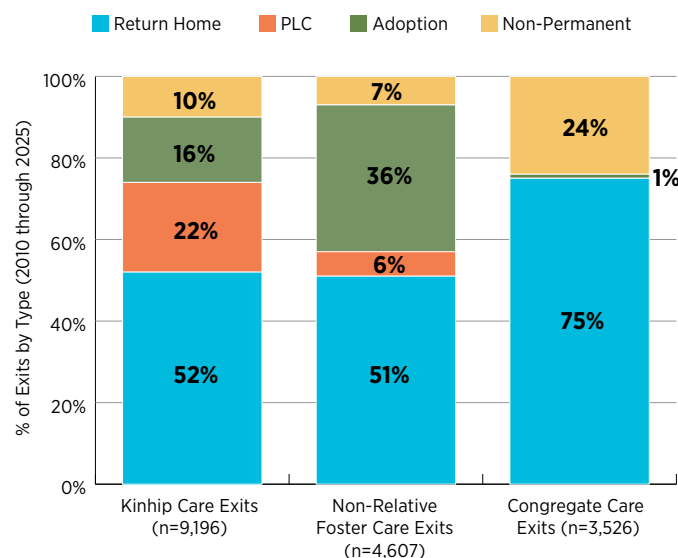
MEASURING OUTCOMES: EXITING CARE

Permanent Exits

The principal goal of any placement episode is for the child to return as quickly as possible to a stable, long-term family situation. Exiting to “permanency” most commonly means reunification with the child’s parents but also includes exits to a permanent legal custodianship (PLC) arrangement or adoption.¹¹ Non-permanent outcomes include aging out of care and running away.

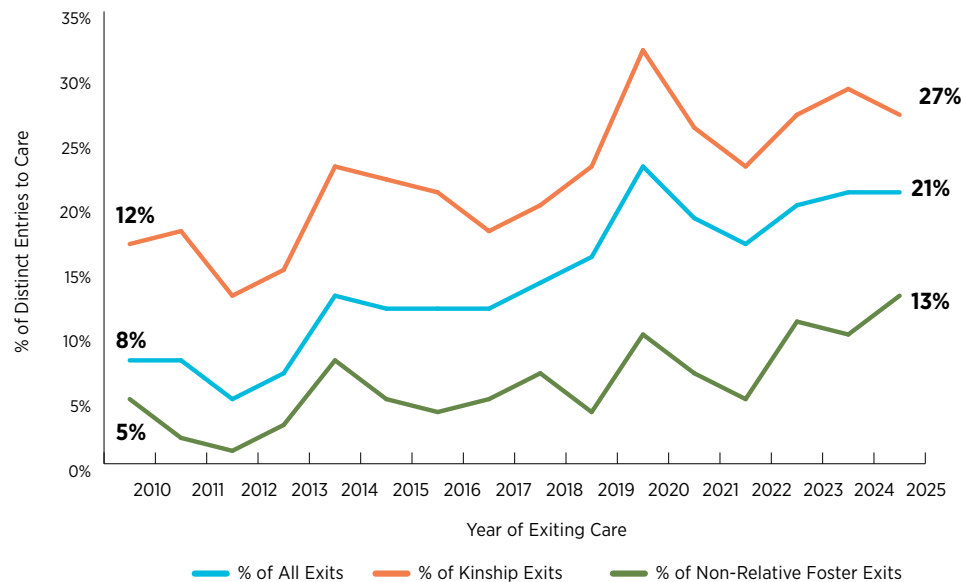
Youth concluding their placement episode in a family setting exited to permanency more than 90% of the time (**Figure 4**); reunification with parents was the outcome in the majority of cases. However, compared to non-relative foster care, kinship placements were much more likely to end with a permanent legal custodianship arrangement and much less likely to end in formal adoption. A factor in this dynamic may be that kinship caregivers are inherently more likely to have a relationship with a child’s birth parents, making the legal weight of severing parental rights and formally restructuring the family feel like a significant barrier.

FIGURE 4: Exit Type by Last Placement Setting Prior to Exit, 2010 through 2025



The permanency outcome of PLC increased over time for both kinship and non-relative foster care, from eight percent in 2010 to 21% by 2025. As shown in **Figure 5**, the increases were comparable in kinship exits (17% to 27%) and non-relative foster exits (5% to 13%).

¹¹ Unlike in adoption, PLC transfers custody of the child to another caregiver without terminating parental rights.

FIGURE 5: Exits to Permanent Legal Custodianship (PLC), Overall and by Foster Care Type

Child age was also a significant factor in determining exit type. As **Table 6** shows, adoption was relatively more common at younger ages and declined in older age groups, while PLC increased proportionally with age. For example, children under five were adopted 23% of the time while youth ages 12 through 17 were adopted only nine percent of the time.

TABLE 6: Exit Type by Care Type and Age, 2010 through 2025

		EXIT TYPE				
		EXITS FROM KINSHIP CARE	RETURN HOME	PLC	ADOPTION	NON-PERMANENT
Exit Age	0 through 4	3,234	58%	17%	23%	2%
	5 through 11	3,070	55%	25%	18%	2%
	12 through 17	2,100	55%	32%	9%	4%
	Age 18+	792	10%	5%	2%	83%
	All Exits	9,196	52%	22%	16%	10%

		EXIT TYPE				
		EXITS FROM NON-RELATIVE FOSTER CARE	RETURN HOME	PLC	ADOPTION	NON-PERMANENT
Exit Age	0 through 4	2,144	52%	1%	43%	3%
	5 through 11	1,479	53%	7%	38%	2%
	12 through 17	752	57%	17%	21%	4%
	Age 18+	232	8%	4%	2%	86%
	All Exits	4,607	51%	6%	36%	7%

These age distributions are not surprising. Studies have shown that prospective adoptive parents have a disproportionate preference for younger children.¹² Additionally, older children have more agency and are likely to have their own preferences regarding their care and their relationship with their birth parents; PLC by nature may be more accommodating to those preferences.

The vast majority of youth exiting after age 18 were documented as aging out of care, although adoption or PLC still occurred in a single-digit percentage in both kinship and non-relative foster placements after this age.

Subsequent Re-Entry

Occasionally, children who leave placement may experience new instances of maltreatment or abuse and need to return to out-of-home placement. Overall, re-entry was significantly more common after reunification with parents than after a child was adopted or finalized a PLC arrangement. From 2012 through 2024, about 23% of children exiting to reunification re-entered placement within one year of leaving care, compared to fewer than two percent of PLC exits and less than one percent of adoptions (**Table 7**). Only 44 one-year re-entries were recorded in total across all PLC and adoption exits in the thirteen-year period analyzed.

Table 7 illustrates how one-year re-entry rates varied by care type and by complexity of care needs. Within any given exit type, youth exiting from congregate care or with complex care needs had re-entry rates that were significantly higher than youth leaving kinship care or non-relative foster care.

TABLE 7: 1-Year Re-entry rates, by care type and by complexity group (2012-2024 exits from care, youth ages 0 through 17)

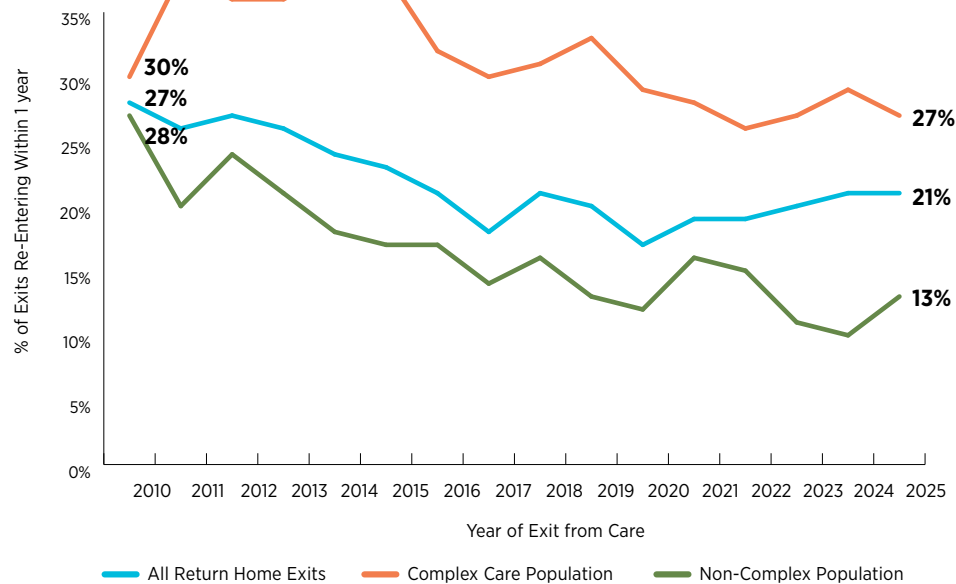
OVERALL RE-ENTRY RATES BY EXIT CARE TYPE	EXITS TO PLC			EXITS TO ADOPTION			EXITS TO REUNIFICATION		
	EXITS	1-YEAR RE-ENTRIES	1-YEAR RE-ENTRY %	EXITS	1-YEAR RE-ENTRIES	1-YEAR RE-ENTRY %	EXITS	1-YEAR RE-ENTRIES	1-YEAR RE-ENTRY %
Congregate Care	13	1	7.7%	15	1	6.7%	1,843	674	36.6%
Non-Relative Foster Care	194	5	2.6%	1,244	3	0.2%	1,782	358	20.1%
Kinship Care	1,643	28	1.7%	1214	6	0.5%	3,914	686	17.5%
Non-Complex Care Needs	1,533	16	1.0%	2,337	7	0.3%	5,386	998	18.5%
Complex Care Needs	317	18	5.7%	136	3	2.2%	2,153	720	33.4%
Overall Re-entry rate by Exit Type	1,850	34	1.8%	2,473	10	0.4%	7,539	1,718	22.8%

For reunification exits between 2012 through 2024, 37% of youth exiting congregate care re-entered within a year, compared to those leaving non-relative foster care placements (20%) and kinship placements (less than 18%). Approximately 33% of youth with complex needs re-entered placement within a year, compared to less than 19% of the non-complex care group.

¹² [2022 US Adoption Attitudes Survey](#), conducted by The Harris Poll on behalf of The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, found that over half of prospective adoptive parents preferred youth either under 2 (30%) or 2 through 5 (29%); only 27% were willing to adopt a child 13 or older.

Notably, re-entry rates from reunification exits have been trending downward systemwide in recent years, overall and within both the complex care and non-complex care populations (**Figure 6**). In 2012, almost 28% of all reunification exits resulted in a re-entry within a year; re-entry occurred in less than 19% of 2024 reunifications.

FIGURE 6: Re-entry Rates Within 1 Year of Reunification Exit, Overall and by Complex Care Status, by Year Exiting Care



LOOKING FORWARD

The data presented in this brief illustrate how Allegheny County's child welfare landscape has evolved into a system where a strong majority of children entering out-of-home placement are placed with relatives or family connections—a transformation that spans age group, race and level of care complexity.

Child experiences and outcomes associated with this shift are broadly encouraging. Children placed in kinship settings experienced fewer negative placement disruptions, maintained stronger connections to siblings and, once reunification occurred, re-entered care at lower rates than those exiting from non-relative foster or congregate settings. The safety profile of kinship care was comparable to non-relative foster care. The rate of maltreatment in both settings, particularly maltreatment by resource caregivers, was very low. Many of these findings held even when disaggregating by age and care complexity, suggesting that the benefits of kinship care are not limited to children with the least challenging histories and needs.

The analysis suggests that Allegheny County's commitment to kinship care has produced measurable improvements in the placement experience and outcomes for children in child welfare care.

AUTHORS

Kyle Jennison, Allegheny County Department of Human Services (ACDHS)

REVIEWERS

Allegheny County Department of Human Services (ACDHS)

Kathryn Collins, Alex Jutca, Julia Reuben

Casey Family Programs

Kristen Rudlang-Perman

Chapin Hall

Stephanie Armendariz, Margaret Smith, Krista Thomas

Washington University in St. Louis

Sarah A. Font