

CHILD WELFARE

1,825

THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN
CONFIRMED ABUSED OR
NEGLECTED EACH DAY.

Child abuse and neglect continue to harm too many children. While poverty is the single strongest predictor of child abuse and neglect, most poor parents do not abuse or neglect their children. Child maltreatment occurs in families of all income levels, especially when parents face challenges such as substance abuse, untreated mental health problems, and domestic violence and don't have access to the services and treatment they need.

The goal must be to keep children safely with their families and to reduce the number of children involved in the child welfare system. More appropriate supports can help keep children and families safely together and out of foster care, and can also help promote timely reunification, adoption, and other permanent family connections for children in foster care. Preventing children from bouncing between foster homes or other placements and aging out of foster care without permanent families will reduce their risk of falling into the Cradle to Prison Pipeline™ and increase their chance of having a successful adulthood.

The good news is that over the last decade, the number of children in foster care has declined by 24 percent from 523,616 children in 2002 to 399,546 in 2012. While all racial and ethnic groups experienced declines, Black children experienced the largest declines during that period. The number of Black children in foster care was nearly cut in half, accounting for almost three-quarters of the overall decline in the number of children in foster care. However, Black children are still overrepresented in the system: 26 percent of children in foster care were Black in FY2012, nearly double the percent of the Black child population.¹

A small number of states drove the national trend. Between 2002 and 2012, 10 states accounted for over 90 percent of the overall decline, and three states (California, Florida and New York) accounted for 50 percent. Twelve states experienced increases between 2002 and 2012, with large increases in Arizona and Texas.¹ (See Table I-2)

Key facts about child welfare:

- A child is abused or neglected every 47 seconds; nearly 80 percent are victims of neglect (See Table I-1). Infants and toddlers are most likely to be victims of abuse or neglect.²
- Nearly 40 percent of child abuse and neglect victims receive no post-investigation services and many more receive far fewer services than they need.²
- Even though foster care is supposed to be temporary, the average length of stay for children exiting foster care in 2012 was nearly two years (22.7 months).³
- In 2012, 101,719 children in foster care were waiting to be adopted.³
- Nearly 5.5 million children are living in households headed by grandparents, most often with their parents. About one-third of these children are living with grandparents who say they are responsible for them. More than 958,000 of this group have no parent present in the home. Many have been diverted from the child welfare system to live with their grandparents or are living with grandparents who are their foster parents or legal guardians (see Table I-5).

Born into Poverty

When Arianna was in sixth grade, her mother attempted suicide and survived but continued to suffer from depression. After Arianna was bullied in school for being bi-racial, poor, and smart, with little support from home, she began missing school and crying out for help. She was removed from her home and placed in an alternative residential treatment program. Arianna moved into foster care, and with adult support, began to thrive in school. She became a gifted student who excelled in science and math and whose paintings, photography, and jewelry were featured in shows across the region when in high school.

— Arianna McQuillen, 2010 CDF Beat the Odds® scholar,
Massachusetts Institute of Technology undergraduate student

- In 2012, more than 23,000 youth aged out of foster care at age 18 or older without being returned home, adopted, or placed with a permanent legal guardian.³ These vulnerable youth are at increased risk of not graduating from high school and ending up unemployed, homeless or in the juvenile or criminal justice systems.
- Children and youth in foster care are at high risk of poor school performance due to challenges associated with maltreatment, unaddressed special needs, frequent changes in foster family homes or group homes, and poor school attendance. These factors increase the risk of lower test scores, grade retention, and school dropout.⁴
- Child abuse and neglect cost our society \$80.3 billion each year — \$33.3 billion in direct costs (i.e. hospitalization, childhood mental health care costs, child welfare system costs and law enforcement costs) and \$46.9 billion in indirect costs (i.e. special education, adult homelessness, adult mental and physical health care, juvenile and adult criminal justice costs and lost work productivity). The average lifetime cost of child maltreatment in a single nonfatal case is \$210,012, and most of this total — \$144,360 — is due to lost productivity. The average lifetime cost of fatal child abuse and neglect is \$1.27 million, due largely to lost productivity.⁵

Find state data in Child Welfare tables in Appendix.

