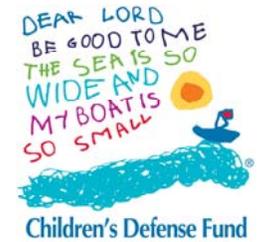


Children's Defense Fund

The Number of Children in Foster Care Continues to Decline



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The Children's Bureau's latest Adoption and Foster Care Reporting and Analysis System (AFCARS) data for fiscal year 2010 shows the continued decline in the number of children in foster care. AFCARS is a national data system operated by the Children's Bureau in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that tracks the number of children who entered and exited foster care, demographics of the children in care (such as age, race, ethnicity, and gender), and other characteristics, such as length of time in care, placement type, and the number of children who are adopted.

Policy and practice improvements, prompted by the new Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (Fostering Connections), likely contributed to decreases in the number of children in foster care, but the challenges that remain highlight the need for vigorous implementation of the new reforms and additional reforms. Although Fostering Connections was enacted in 2008, there were several provisions that were not implemented until 2009 and 2010, which may account for the continued decrease in the number of children in care. For example, effective October 1, 2010, states had the option to use federal funds to extend supports and services to youths and young adults in foster care, in adoptive homes, or who are living with permanent legal guardians up to age 21. This allowed states additional time to identify permanent families for these youths. In October 2009, more older youths with special needs also became eligible for the first time for federal adoption assistance payments. Although this trend is encouraging, many challenges remain that highlight the need for vigorous implementation of the new reforms and additional reforms. There needs to be continuing efforts to prevent children from entering foster care and to move children out of foster care and into permanent families.

Improvements and Encouraging Trends:

- **Decrease in the number of children in foster care.** The number of children in foster care dropped to 408,425 in 2010. This is a four percent drop from the 423,773 children who were in foster care in 2009, and a 26 percent drop in the number of children who were in foster care a decade ago (552,000 in FY 2000).
- **Decrease in the number of children entering foster care.** The number of children entering foster care dropped slightly from 255,418 in 2009 to 254,375 in 2010. This follows a five year trend in decreasing entries into foster care.
- **Decrease in time spent in foster care.** The length of time (mean months) a child stays in foster care dropped to 25.3 months in 2010, compared to 26.7 months in 2009. The length of time a child spends in foster care has been declining since FY 2001 when the average length of time in care was 32.5 months.
- **Decrease in the number of Black children in and entering foster care.** Between 2009 and 2010 there was a eight percent decrease in the number of Black children in foster care and a five percent decrease in the number of Black children entering foster care. In 2010 there were 117,610 Black children in foster care and 61,375 Black children who entered care; in 2009, 127,821 Black children were in foster care and 64,690 Black children entered care. The number of Black children in foster care generally has been declining since FY 1998 (except for an increase in FY 2000). However, the overall percentage of Black children in foster care is still double the percent of all Black children in the general population. Continuous work needs to be done to ensure Black children are not overrepresented in foster care.
- **Decrease in the number of children waiting to be adopted and an increase in the percent of children adopted.** The number of children waiting to be adopted decreased from 114,556 to 107,011 between 2009 and 2010. While the number of children adopted decreased from 2009 to 2010, which may reflect the overall lower number of children in care, the percentage of children who exited care into adoption increased from 21 in 2010, slightly up from 20 percent in 2009.

Continuing Challenges:

- **The number of older youths aging out of foster care remains too high.** Although the actual number of youths who aged out of foster care decreased in 2010 to 27,854 from 29,471 in 2009, the percent of youth aging out of care remained at 11 percent. This continues an alarming trend of youths aging out of foster care without permanent families, which has increased by 61 percent since FY 1998.

For More Information:

- [Read the full AFCARS Report #18](#)
- [Analysis of the Trends in Foster Care and Adoption – FY 2002 – FY 2009](#)
- [For a State-by-state comparison of the number of children in foster care, entries and exits between FY 2002 to FY 2009](#)