

Stability for Children and Youth in Foster Care



Background

In California, there are more than 60,000 children and youth who have been removed from their homes due to abuse and neglect and placed in foster care.ⁱ Stable placements in nurturing family homes are foundational to helping them heal from the trauma they have experienced and thrive. For instance, children and youth in stable placements experience improved emotional well-being, health, and educational outcomes. They have a greater likelihood of building enduring relationships with caring adults. Finally, children and youth in stable placements are more likely to experience continuity in services, which is important as abuse and neglect can lead to complex physical and mental health challenges that can persist into adulthood.ⁱⁱ

Unfortunately, placement stability remains elusive for children and youth in care, with close to half of the youth in care for 2 or more years experiencing multiple placements.ⁱⁱⁱ The COVID-19 pandemic has further threatened placement stability as caregivers struggle to meet the needs of the children and youth in their care while balancing increasing responsibilities and coping with severely limited access to critical supports and services. Stable placements in family homes do not just happen. Caregivers, children, and youth must have access to critical supports that are designed to stabilize placements and strengthen relationships.

California advocates, providers, the counties, and policymakers have worked to ensure caregivers have access to the supports they need to stabilize children and youth in family homes. For instance, in 2011, the California Legislature enacted legislation called Continuum of Care Reform (CCR) to ensure that all children and youth in foster care are raised in stable, supportive homes with families that love them. Since then, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) has worked collaboratively with stakeholders to institute meaningful systemic change, including reforming the caregiver approval process and the rate system to be more family-friendly and child-centered and developing Intensive Services Foster Care (ISFC) to stabilize children and youth with more intensive needs in smaller, specialized family homes.

Additionally, policymakers established the Emergency Child Care Bridge Program for Foster Children (Bridge program, 2017) and the Family Urgent Response System (FURS, 2019), two innovative programs designed to support caregivers in their efforts to care for children and youth. The Bridge program mitigates one of the top barriers to finding and maintaining stable family homes for children in care, lack of access to affordable child care, by providing child care vouchers and navigation support to access the state's subsidized child care system. FURS is a 24/7 statewide hotline and county mobile response teams designed to provide trauma-informed support during critical moments that might otherwise derail caregivers' relationships with youth and disrupt nurturing placements.

Next Steps

Significant work remains to be done to support children and youth in family homes. In the coming year, Children Now will build on the progress made and collaborate with state and county partners, advocates, caregivers, and other stakeholders to ensure:

1. The Bridge program remains an essential support during these uncertain times and vouchers continue to be available to caregivers if their voucher is set to expire during the state of emergency;
2. Effective implementation of FURS to support children and youth in foster care and their caregivers as they struggle with the severe stress brought on by the pandemic and to stabilize placements;
3. The Home-Based Family Care Rate structure is informed by a standard assessment of child and youth needs so the appropriate resources are provided to families in their efforts to stabilize of children and youth in their homes; and
4. Children and youth in foster care and their caregivers receive additional resources to support placement stability during the COVID-19 pandemic and distance learning.

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ⁱ Webster, D., Lee, S., Dawson, W., Magruder, J., Exel, M., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Putnam-Hornstein, E., Wiegmann, W., Saika, G., Chambers, J., Hammond, I., Ayat, N., Misirli, E., Hoerl, C., Yee, H., Flamson, T., Carpenter, W., Gonzalez, A., & Briones, E. (2020). CCWIP reports. Retrieved Nov 17, 2020, from University of California at Berkeley California Child Welfare Indicators Project website. URL: <https://ccwip.berkeley.edu>

ⁱⁱ 2020 California Children's Report Card: A Survey of Kids' Well-Being and Roadmap for the Future, available at <https://www.childrennow.org/portfolio-posts/20-report-card/>

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