

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 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.

Finally, policymakers recognized the threat pandemic-driven limitations on supports and services posed to youth stability in family homes. Therefore, they included \$80 million in the 2021-22 state budget for \$1,500 per foster child pandemic assistance payments to address needs that arose during the 15 months of the Stay-at-Home Order.

Next Steps

Significant work remains to be done to support children and youth in family homes. Moving forward, it will be important to ensure:

1. The Bridge program is adequately resourced to fully meet the child care needs of all foster families and program time limits are extended to ensure children maintain consistent child care until their families can access long-term care through the subsidized system;
2. The effective implementation of FURS to support children and youth in foster care and their caregivers during situations of instability; and
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 home.

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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., Gomez, A., Misirli, E., Hoerl, C., Yee, H., Flamson, T., Gonzalez, A., & Ensele, P. (2021). *CCWIP reports*. Retrieved Oct 6, 2021, 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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