

Stability for Children and Youth in Foster Care



Background

In California, there are more than 55,000 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 nearly 40% 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, in 2022, policymakers provided \$1.7 million ongoing to help stabilize emergency placements for children and youth until the Resource Family Approval (RFA) process is completed. Prior law stated that, starting in 2022-23, foster care resources, supports and services would no longer be available to children and youth in the care of emergency caregivers if RFA was not completed within 90 days. Given that it can take more than 90 days to approve a home, this ongoing funding is critical to ensuring stable placements for up to 365 days under certain circumstances.

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 effective implementation of FURS to support children and youth in foster care and their caregivers during situations of instability; and
2. Reforms to the Home-Based Family Care Rate structure to ensure the appropriate resources are provided to families in their efforts to stabilize of children and youth in their homes.

For more information, contact Susanna Kniffen at skniffen@childrennow.org.

ⁱ Webster, D., Lee, S., Dawson, W., Magruder, J., Exel, M., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Putnam-Hornstein, E., Wiegmann, W., Saika, G., Courtney, M., Eastman, A.L., Hammond, I., Gomez, A., Prakash, A., Sunaryo, E., Guo, S., Berwick, H., Hoerl, C., Yee, H., Flamson, T., Gonzalez, A., Ensele, P., Nevin, J., & Guinan, B. (2022).

CCWIP reports. Retrieved Oct 11, 2022, 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/>

ⁱⁱⁱ ibid