

THE BENEFITS OF ADOPTION

Outcome Differences for Former Foster Youth



INTRODUCTION

In FY 2021, there were 391,098 children in the U.S. foster care system, many of whom are available and waiting for adoption. While many children in foster care will likely be reunified with their families, there are thousands that are waiting for adoption, meaning they have had their parental rights terminated and/or have a case plan goal of adoption. In FY 2021, over 54,000 children were adopted into a family, leaving 113,589 children waiting for adoption. Additionally, approximately 20,000 youth "age out" of foster care each year without a stable connection to a permanent family.^[1]

Social science research has consistently shown adoption to be a positive intervention for foster youth that are not reunified with their families, allowing these youth to achieve better outcomes compared to those who stay in long-term foster care and those who age out of the child welfare system without a permanent family.^[2, 3, 4, 5]

IMPACT OF ADOPTION

Increases

- Educational Achievement ^[6, 7, 8, 9, 10]
- Employment Rates ^[8]
- Wage Earnings ^[8]
- Housing Security^[11]
- Mental Health ^[8, 12]
- Role Model Exposure
- Tax Revenues^[8]



Decreases

- Homelessness ^[11]
- Joblessness ^[8]
- Poverty ^[2, 8]
- Public Assistance ^[2, 6]
- Addiction^[8, 12]
- Unplanned Pregnancy
- Incarceration Rates ^[6, 8]
- High School Dropout Rates ^[6, 7, 10]

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Outcome Differences: Youth adopted from foster care vs. those who "age out"

EMPLOYMENT

Adopted youth are more likely to be employed and achieve higher income levels.^[8] Half of young people who age out of foster care were unemployed by age 24, with 16% of young men who age out excluded from the labor market due to incarceration.^[13]

HOUSING



Adopted youth were less likely to experience homelessness^[11] and fared better on housing and economic outcomes.^[14] 39% of youth who aged out of foster care had experienced homelessness by age 24.^[15]

CRIMINALITY



Adopted youth were less likely to be convicted of any crime, as well as a serious criminal offense,^[6, 8] and are also less likely to be incarcerated.^[8]

HEALTH OUTCOMES

Adopted youth were less likely to misuse drugs or alcohol, or undergo hospitalization for substance use. They were also less likely to be institutionalized in a psychiatric institution. [8, 12]

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EDUCATION



Youth adopted from the child welfare system show consistently better educational outcomes and are two times more likely to attain a university degree by age 26, when compared to youth who age out. ^[6, 7] Additionally, when compared to youth currently in foster care, adopted youth academically outperform them on academic achievement testing. ^[9, 10]

COMMUNITY IMPACT



Citizens and communities pay about \$300,000 in taxpayer-funded costs for each child who ages out of foster care at age 18. These foster youth have increased rates of incarceration, public welfare participation, and other poor outcomes that create direct costs to communities. ^[3] With over 20,000 youth emancipating each year, adoption could have an \$8 billion total positive community impact on each annual foster cohort. ^[2]

Sources: 8. Outcomes in Adulthood of Adoption After Long-Term Foster Care: A Sibling Study, A. Hjern, B. Vinnerljung & L. Brännström, 2019 | 9. Developmental Outcomes After Five Years for Foster Children Returned Home, Remaining in Care, or Adopted, E. C. Lloyd & R. P. Barth, 2011 | 10. The Invisible Achievement Gap Part 2: How the Foster Care Experiences of California Public School Students are Associated with Their Education Outcomes, W. Wiegmann, E. Putnam-Hornstein, V. X. Barrat, J. Magruder & B. Needell, 2014 | 11. Post Permanency Outcomes of Youth Adopted Out of Foster Care: Implications on State and Federal Policy, C. M. Baker-Scott, 2022 | 12. Alcohol and Drug Abuse Among Young Adults Who Grew Up in Substitute Care, A. von Borczyskowski, B. Vinnerljung & A. Hjern, 2013 | 13. Employment of Former Foster Youth as Young Adults: Evidence from the Midwest Study, J. L. Hook & M. E. Courtney, 2010 | 14. Outcomes for Young Adults Who Experienced Foster Care, B. Kerman, J. Wildfire & R. Barth, 2002 | 15. Assessing the Impact of Extending Care beyond Age 18 on Homelessness: Emerging Findings from the Midwest Study, A. Dworsky & M. E. Courtney, M. E., 2010

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PURPOSE

Gift of Adoption and National Council For Adoption evaluated and compiled research findings on outcomes of adoption from foster care compared to youth who experienced long-term foster care or aged-out (emancipated) from the child welfare system without a permanent family. The purpose was to better understand the impact of adoption on the well-being of youth who have experienced foster care. We wanted to know what research had been done to understand the difference adoption makes in the lives of those who are adopted, compared to those who emancipate without a permanent, legal family. This can help us better answer: *“How does adoption impact foster youth who are not able to find a permanent home?”*

When seeking to understand the impact of adoption, we purposefully avoided comparisons to those who were reunified with their families. Since reunification is the primary goal of foster care, adoption is not pursued until a determination is made that reunification is not possible in a timely manner. Though there are a number of studies that have compared outcomes for youth who reunify to youth adopted from foster care, we thought the most appropriate comparison would be foster youth with extended time in care and those who "aged out".

METHOD

The research was conducted in two stages. The first step was to conduct a systematic literature review (utilizing the PRISMA protocol) of all academic manuscripts with empirical findings comparing outcomes for former youth in foster care who were adopted to those who aged out or experienced long term foster care. From there, a shorter executive summary was created that pulled findings from this literature review as well as other studies that identified specific outcomes on the populations we studied. Overall, the findings demonstrate that youth adopted from foster care have more positive outcomes based on the measures studied, when compared to youth who age out or experience long-term stays in foster care.