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Michigan Makes Progress Finding Families for Foster Kids



A new study shows that African-American foster children, especially teens, are far less likely than white kids to find a family placement. (Becky Shink)



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LANSING, Mich. - Michigan is making a big effort to keep foster kids in family settings, with a 9% improvement over a 10-year period, according to [a new report](#).

Michigan is home to almost 12,000 foster children, and researchers from the Annie E. Casey Foundation found the percentage being placed with families increased from 80% in 2007 to 89% in 2017.

While the overall trend is positive, said Rob Geen, director of policy and advocacy reform for the Casey Foundation, the numbers still are stubbornly low for teens and children of color.

"While I'm talking about a 10-year trend to show a fairly significant increase in placing kids in families, we're seeing much greater gains for white children than we are for African-American children," he said. "So, there's more that we can do for African-American children that we need to work on."

The report recommends continuing to prioritize family placements over group settings, because children in a stable, family setting are more likely to finish school and get jobs, and less likely to become early parents. Last year, President Donald Trump signed the Family First Prevention Services Act, which set limits on funding for group homes, giving agencies more incentive to place children in foster families or with relatives.

Just this month, the state of Michigan began paying a monthly stipend to unlicensed relatives who rescue kids from abusive situations. Bobby Dorigo Jones, policy and outreach associate for the group Michigan's Children, said the new program costs the state about \$20 million a year, which he sees as a good investment.

"We are expecting that, now that there is some actual support finally available for relatives caring for young people, that we're going to see more families enter the system," he said. "And so, the cost to the state will likely increase over time, but the benefits of having a young person not lose all of their connections to their family and stay in a supportive space will outweigh those costs to the state."

Right now, just 40 percent of Michigan's foster children graduate from high school, which is about the same rate as homeless kids. Dorigo Jones said that's because in the past, foster kids often had to move frequently. He said he expects that graduation rates will rise with this new program, as more kids have stable home lives with their new families.

The report is online at aecf.org.

Suzanne Potter, Public News Service - MI

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